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[The Girl In The Yellow Dress – Live Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne](#)

Next post:

[COMPETITION: Havana Rakatan – Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield](#)

## **Yellow Moon: The Ballad Of Leila and Lee – Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney: Australia**

**Writer: David Greig**

**Director: Susanna Dowling**

**Reviewer: David Kary**

**The Public Reviews Rating:** ★★★★★



‘Samson and Delilah’, last year’s multi-award winning Australian film by Warwick Thornton, touched movie audiences with its powerful depiction of disenfranchised young people, desperately responding to their situation. Currently Scottish playwright David Greig is having a similar effect on Sydney theatre audiences with ‘Yellow Moon: The Ballad Of Leila and Lee’, his fine play on the same theme.

Here’s the play’s set-up. Lee (John Shrimpton) has stormed out of his family home

after another run-in with his mother, Jennie (Danielle Cormack), and her boyfriend, Billy (Kenneth Moraleda). On his way out, he has taken the ring the boyfriend bought for his mum, with the aim of pawning it.

Lee wanders into town and goes into the town's big store. There he spots shy, withdrawn local girl, Leila (Layla Estasy), browsing through celebrity magazines in the magazine section. Lee starts chatting to her, and then asks her if she'll hang out with him for the night. Usually Leila would have nothing to do with a known local bad boy like Lee but tonight she wants to tag along with him.

Soon after Lee and Leila go off together, Lee faces a violent confrontation with Billy who has come after him to get his ring back. Billy receives a fatal knife wound. Lee and Leila flee the scene in panic, and begin their fraught odyssey.

Greig's play proved to be in good hands with Susanna Dowling's striking production. Her creative team provides a great framework for the show.

Set and costume designer Irma Calabrese's work was excellent. The costumes were perfect for the characters, reflecting their ragged lives. The set was simple and effective, featuring a park bench sitting on top of a large plank, clusters of twigs hung from the ceiling, and a wide back wall. Teegan Lee's impressive lighting design made good use of the back wall to reflect the twigs and create the effect of the action taking place in the bush. Ekram Mulayim's atmospheric soundscape underscored the action well.

Johanna Puglisi's concise choreography contributed a great deal to Dowling's very physical approach to storytelling. Expressions, movement and mime were as important as text with this production.

The director won strong performances from her cast. John Shrimpton and Layla Estasy were great as the leads. Shrimpton's Lee depicted a young hood who softens and matures as a result of Leila's influence. Estasy captured her characters shyness and awkwardness well through tight body posture and mannerisms.

Kenneth Moraleda's work was good, doubling up in the roles of Billy and Frank, two very flawed male characters. As was the work of Danielle Cormack, a leading New Zealand actress, presently finding some work in Sydney, who doubled up as Lee's out of it mother, Jenni, and the pretentious Holly Malone.

**Photo: Patrick Boland – Runs until 26th Sept**

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