

**HERALD SUN - Tuesday 05/05/09**

**Spring Awakening**

**Where:** The Hayloft Project at the Meat Market, North Melbourne, until May 10

**Reviewer:** Chris Boyd

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What could be more modern than a play which looks at the way teenagers fail to cope with the pressure placed on them to make their mark in the world? Or which looks at the way parents fail to cope with the sexual curiosity of their 14-year-olds? Parental embarrassment and denial - a blind attempt to protect the "innocence" of the children - lead to the most terrible tragedies in *Spring Awakening*.

In fact, this ultra-modern play premiered in the early 1890s. That's 1890s, not 1990s. But it's no more dead than the newspaper in your hands.

This celebrated production of Frank Wedekind's play - the first by The Hayloft Project and one of the most talked about of the past few years - premiered two years ago. This is a radically revised production, the same one that went to Sydney last year and won accolades there too. This return season is an opportunity to see the show again (if you were one of the lucky few) or to catch it for the first time.

It's a compact piece, not much more than an hour. In fact, it's a little too compact. Performances on Saturday were rushed and lacked some weight. Acting was a bit shrill. (And every one of the precocious 14-year-old boys had a full beard. Talk about early developers!)

Still, it's engrossing from start to finish. And it looks amazing. It's played out as a 3D game of noughts and crosses, a three-by-three stack of coops made out of scaffolding and chicken wire, designed by Adam Gardnir and lit by Niklas Pajanti. The individual boxes for these battery children are not much more than a metre in each dimension, but each has its own design theme and identity. One girl has mirrors, another hay, one boy has books, another planets and stars.

As our young do, when left in ignorance, they go to each other for information. Sex, scandal and suicide quickly tear the community apart.

Even with its few flaws, this is an excellent and exciting piece of theatre. Don't miss it.