# Noni Hazlehurst stars in Daniel Keene’s poignant farewell to Melbourne’s disappearing pubs



The Lark, Daniel Keene’s elegiac monodrama, centres on Rose Grey, a 75-year-old publican bidding a final farewell to The Lark, a modest inner-city Melbourne pub facing imminent demolition amidst the tides of gentrification. The play, premiering from September 3 to 20, 2025, at Arts Centre Melbourne’s Fairfax Studio, is brought to life in a stirring solo performance by the acclaimed Australian actor Noni Hazlehurst under the direction of Matt Scholten. The setting of the play—a wood-panelled, threadbare pub bar marked by its fading glory—echoes the broader demise of traditional social spaces in an evolving urban landscape, epitomising what sociologist Ray Oldenburg termed the “third place” between home and work, where community and belonging are found.

Hazlehurst’s portrayal of Rose is a masterful blend of wistfulness and resigned toughness. Her character’s signature bilabial blow—an audible gesture of derision or dismissal—punctuates her attempts to ward off the ghosts of her past, including memories of her father, George, a war veteran who inherited The Lark through dubious means and ultimately passed it to her. Rose’s reflections reveal a life marked by loss and endurance: her mother left soon after her birth, and relationships with men were brusquely summed up. The narrative unfolds not only as a farewell to a physical venue but also as a meditation on memory’s grip and the inevitability of forgetting—a theme underscored by a poignant invocation of William Faulkner’s words: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” The play’s melancholic atmosphere is enriched by Darius Kedros’ sound design, which weaves together echoes of haunted piano, ambient city noise, and the distant toll of a Melbourne tram bell, while Richard Vabre’s lighting subtly mirrors the ebb and flow of Rose’s storytelling.

The Lark’s intimate portrait transcends the fate of a single pub to capture the broader social and cultural shifts in Australia. It mourns the disappearance of communal hubs that once served as “churches of the godless” and “Noah’s arks for the lonely,” spaces where diverse lives intersected around shared hardships and joys. As gentrification reshapes inner-city Melbourne, these bastions of community and history are vanishing, their stories at risk of being forgotten by younger generations who largely abstain from the pub culture. Through Rose’s narrative, the play also hints at the fragility of memory and identity, as her dwindling recollections sometimes blur into the realm of dementia, making the pub feel like “purgatory” where souls linger and replay their sins.

Critics have noted the play’s occasional lapses into cliché but largely praise it as an accomplished follow-up to Keene’s previous works such as Mother, which also starred Hazlehurst and examined themes of marginalisation and resilience. The Lark stands as a testament to Keene’s lyrical and existential sensibilities, and Hazlehurst’s deeply felt performance anchors the production’s emotional core. Their collaboration continues to offer moving, thought-provoking explorations of Australia's shifting social landscapes.

In sum, The Lark is not only a farewell to a beloved pub but also a poignant meditation on memory, loss, and societal change. It resonates as a lament for disappearing communal spaces that have long provided solace and companionship, reminding audiences of the enduring human need for connection amidst the relentless march of time and transformation. Just as the magpie lark—the play’s namesake bird—is one of the few species that sings in duet, the play profoundly suggests that, like these birds, people are better off with company.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/05/the-lark-review-noni-hazlehurst-arts-centre-melbourne), [[2]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-09/noni-hazlehurst-the-lark-daniel-keene-arts-centre-melbourne/105628158), [[3]](https://www.heydowling.com.au/lark), [[4]](https://limelight-arts.com.au/event/the-lark/2025-09-20/1/), [[7]](https://www.aussietheatre.com.au/news/noni-hazlehurst-returns-to-arts-centre-melbourne-to-star-in-the-world-premiere-of-the-lark/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/05/the-lark-review-noni-hazlehurst-arts-centre-melbourne), [[5]](https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/entertainment/article/noni-hazlehurst-mourns-past-lark-powerful-one-woman-show-about-love-loss), [[6]](https://beat.com.au/noni-hazelhurst-gentrification-and-the-doomed-story-of-a-melbourne-pub/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/05/the-lark-review-noni-hazlehurst-arts-centre-melbourne), [[6]](https://beat.com.au/noni-hazelhurst-gentrification-and-the-doomed-story-of-a-melbourne-pub/), [[5]](https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/entertainment/article/noni-hazlehurst-mourns-past-lark-powerful-one-woman-show-about-love-loss)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/05/the-lark-review-noni-hazlehurst-arts-centre-melbourne), [[5]](https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/entertainment/article/noni-hazlehurst-mourns-past-lark-powerful-one-woman-show-about-love-loss)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/05/the-lark-review-noni-hazlehurst-arts-centre-melbourne), [[2]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-09/noni-hazlehurst-the-lark-daniel-keene-arts-centre-melbourne/105628158), [[7]](https://www.aussietheatre.com.au/news/noni-hazlehurst-returns-to-arts-centre-melbourne-to-star-in-the-world-premiere-of-the-lark/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/05/the-lark-review-noni-hazlehurst-arts-centre-melbourne> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-09/noni-hazlehurst-the-lark-daniel-keene-arts-centre-melbourne/105628158> - Noni Hazlehurst, renowned Australian actor, stars in 'The Lark', a new play by Daniel Keene, directed by Matt Scholten. The production, running from September 3–20 at Arts Centre Melbourne, features Hazlehurst as Rose Grey, a 75-year-old publican bidding farewell to The Lark, a small inner-city pub slated for demolition. The play explores themes of memory, loss, and change, with Hazlehurst's performance being central to its impact. The article delves into Hazlehurst's approach to the role and the play's significance in her career.
3. <https://www.heydowling.com.au/lark> - 'The Lark' is a one-woman play starring Noni Hazlehurst, written by Daniel Keene and directed by Matt Scholten. The narrative centres on Rose Grey, a 75-year-old publican who is saying her final goodbye to The Lark, a small inner-city pub in Melbourne. The pub has been closed for six months and is set to be demolished as the suburb undergoes gentrification. The play runs from September 3–20, 2025, at Arts Centre Melbourne, offering a powerful meditation on life, death, and change.
4. <https://limelight-arts.com.au/event/the-lark/2025-09-20/1/> - Limelight presents 'The Lark', a one-woman play starring Noni Hazlehurst, written by Daniel Keene and directed by Matt Scholten. The play follows Rose Grey, a 75-year-old publican, as she bids farewell to The Lark, a small inner-city Melbourne pub slated for demolition. The production runs from September 3–20, 2025, at Arts Centre Melbourne's Fairfax Studio. The play is described as a meditation on life, death, and change, with Hazlehurst's performance being a highlight.
5. <https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/entertainment/article/noni-hazlehurst-mourns-past-lark-powerful-one-woman-show-about-love-loss> - Noni Hazlehurst returns to the Arts Centre Melbourne stage in September for the world premiere of 'The Lark', a moving new play. Written specifically for Hazlehurst by Daniel Keene and directed by Matt Scholten, the play examines themes of memory, loss, and change. Hazlehurst portrays Rose Grey, a 75-year-old publican saying her final goodbye to The Lark, a small inner-city pub in Melbourne set for demolition. The article discusses Hazlehurst's approach to the role and the play's exploration of gentrification and its impact on communities.
6. <https://beat.com.au/noni-hazelhurst-gentrification-and-the-doomed-story-of-a-melbourne-pub/> - 'The Lark' is a powerful new theatrical work starring Noni Hazlehurst, written by Daniel Keene and directed by Matt Scholten. The play follows Rose Grey, a woman in her seventies, as she bids farewell to The Lark, a small inner-city Melbourne pub slated for demolition due to gentrification. The narrative explores Rose's complex relationship with the pub, her memories, and her struggle to break free from the past. The production runs from September 3–20, 2025, at Arts Centre Melbourne.
7. <https://www.aussietheatre.com.au/news/noni-hazlehurst-returns-to-arts-centre-melbourne-to-star-in-the-world-premiere-of-the-lark/> - Noni Hazlehurst returns to Arts Centre Melbourne for the world premiere of 'The Lark', a powerful, moving meditation on life, death, and change. The play, written by Daniel Keene and directed by Matt Scholten, features Hazlehurst as Rose Grey, a 75-year-old publican saying her final goodbye to The Lark, a small inner-city pub slated for demolition. The production runs from September 3–20, 2025, in the Fairfax Studio, and is described as a profoundly moving work exploring complex social issues.