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Russell Smith and Alex Jones ... The combination of sign language and movement is alternately gymnastic, balletic and visceral. Photo: Nick Bowers.

The Wild Boys

(Parade Theatre, Kensington, Sydney, until 29 November)

Seventy-five minutes of relentlessly energetic and powerful storytelling, with a mere handful of words uttered throughout. How is this possible?

The Wild Boys is an Australian Theatre of the Deaf production, created and directed by Caroline Conlon. She has juxtaposed the stories of two young men, centuries and worlds apart, but similar in their limited capacity to interact and relate with others as a result of disconnection from their individual communities. Both are based on true stories, making the impact of their experiences even more affecting.

The stories are told through a unique combination of movement and sign language. The four actors are almost constantly on stage, performing with astounding vigour and what seems to be intuitive physicality.

Russell Smith's *Wild Boy* is based on the story of Victor of Aveyron, a young child found in the forests of France in the late 1700s. Lacking response to his aural environment, he is believed deaf. The audience is taken through two teachers' (Darren Green and Alexandria Wailes) attempts to reach the *Wild Boy* and develop communication and understanding. Smith's portrayal is moving and nakedly honest, beautifully capturing the fear, confusion and disconnection of this lost soul.

The second boy's story is set in modern times. Alex Jones' *Deaf Boy* is a disaffected and angry young man, unable to relate to others, except in socially inappropriate ways, due to his deprived family and educational background. Again, the story revolves around two teachers' struggle to connect with him and is by turns humorous and touching.

The stories alternate in brief scenarios that enhance the energy and flow of this production. The combination of sign language and movement is alternately gymnastic, balletic and visceral. The movement is accompanied by extraordinarily atmospheric music by Rose Ertler.

Despite Caroline Conlon's assertion in the program that no information is lost due to the universality of the signs, I did find myself concentrating intensely and occasionally being confused — and the fact that this is very probably the everyday experience of deaf people in a speaking world was not lost on me.

It is a memorable and profound experience