

# NOOSA LIFE

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## Don't laugh, it's serious

■ Michele Sternberg

Aussie comedian shares intense love story with raw honesty

WHEN I heard Australian comedian Rachel Berger had written and was performing in a play called *Hold The Pickle*, I smiled.

This has to be a comedy – or do I just have a dirty mind?

Apparently the latter ...

“Essentially it’s a love story. It’s my parents’ love story,” Berger explains from her Tasmanian wilderness hideaway.

Now I’m feeling embarrassed.

“It’s a kind of memoir on stage. First of all, the show isn’t funny. Parts of it are funny and parts of it are very dramatic and intense,” she says.

“It’s authentic and raw.”

Much like the pickle.

The pickle reference relates to a barrel of dill pickles in the deli her Jewish parents opened upon

their arrival in Australia, after fleeing the ravages of war-torn Europe following the Second World War.

But this is no mere sentimental nostalgia trip.

Berger creates an emotionally rich portrait of her parents’ life story in which scores of characters come to life to raise our spirits and fill our hearts.

She plays out the angst and energy of her childhood by inviting the audience into a world of completely eccentric, adorable and sometimes embittered characters.

*Hold The Pickle* shines a light on the frightening cost of war, not only on those who flee but on the generations who come after.

Despite taking on the lead roles in her own story, Berger makes it very clear

“There’s acting, but I’m not an actor. This is just me talking, telling my story.”

— Rachel Berger

she’s “a crap actor” and has no Hollywood aspirations.

“There’s a profound difference between theatre and stand-up comedy.

“When you’re on stage telling funny stories you engage the audience in a very structured kind of way, with a designated outcome – I know the audience is going to be laughing in 30 seconds and I’m in control of the response the audience is going to have.

“In this, I’m still talking directly to the audience but I don’t know what their response is going to be.

“There’s acting, but I’m not an actor. This is just me talking, telling my story. It’s an authentic performance.

“I play my mother, my father and myself as a child but I don’t change costumes, there’s just a different voice as the character from my childhood.

“But I’m always there. “I have to hope the audience is listening and that they’re keeping up with the story, because I can’t stop.”

After 30 years of making people laugh, Berger now wants them to stop and

think.

There’s a political message here, one that shines the spotlight on all the refugees in Australian detention centres now.

“It’s about hope, survival and the eternal pursuit of wanting a better life themselves ... and that hasn’t changed.

“Individual stories are the most powerful way of sending a message. It breaks down the ‘us and them’ because the minute you have that you have genocide.”

Berger is pleased her family’s story has resonated with so many people – across so many generations – through its relevance.

“I would love to take this show overseas because I think this is a universal theme that would resonate anywhere.

### HOLD THE PICKLE

**WHEN:** Wednesday, July 26

**TIME:** 1pm and 8pm

**PRICE:** \$49.50 (includes booking fee)

**WHERE:** The J Theatre, 60 Noosa Dr, Noosa  
*Warning: Contains strong language and adult themes (15-plus years)*

“I didn’t think it would be as successful as it has been. It is just one family’s story, but it is a remarkable story.”

*Hold The Pickle* makes its Queensland premiere at the Noosa alive! festival at The J Theatre, with two shows on Wednesday, July 26, at 1pm and 8pm.