

The Pink List



Walk into Ruby's at Holden Street Theatres and Michael Trauffer is already there, seated to your right, dressed in blue and grey striped pyjamas. He doesn't acknowledge you. He doesn't need to. The show has already begun.

If you don't know what the pink triangle means and why it matters, you need to see this show. It is precisely this kind of overlooked history that allows itself to repeat.

The Pink List tells the story of Karl, a gay concentration camp survivor navigating 1957 West Germany – still criminalised under the same Nazi-era Paragraph 175 that put him in the camps. Swiss-British writer-performer Trauffer, creator of the acclaimed *Fabulett 1933*, brings Karl's story to its SA premiere following a celebrated Edinburgh Fringe 2025 season.

The audience on opening night was not what I expected. I'd anticipated a predominantly queer crowd. Instead, the room was mostly middle-aged, apparently heterosexual couples – which, in its own way, is a quiet kind of triumph. The show earned them.

Trauffer's performance is built on restraint. His voice stays controlled, almost intimate, for the full sixty minutes – the single exception being the final song, where the volume opens up like a door being kicked from its hinges. This is not monotone; it is architecture. He is building something, and he knows exactly when to let it break.

The costume changes are doing serious work. The striped pyjamas give way to a pink and grey scout scarf. Beneath his collar throughout: a pink tie. Pink – the show's leitmotif. Later, a costume from the *Fabulett* cabaret in Berlin – an Easter egg for those who caught his previous show. Each change is a chapter. Each chapter is a decade of survival.

What struck me most was the liberation scene. When Karl walks out of the concentration camp, he doesn't feel free. He feels overwhelmed. Lost. Disconnected from a world that kept moving while he was being destroyed.

I know something about that. I escaped one person who had been using me as a sex object from the age of six, only to find myself living with another. The result was that I was always experientially older than my peers, and always disconnected from them. Survival, as Karl understands, is not the same thing as freedom.

The show resists the easy ending. There are no boys dancing as if that's all it takes to end homophobia like in the 1996 film, *Beautiful Thing*. No driving off into the clouds like the lads from the British *Queer as Folk*.

The hardwon rights of rainbow communities, Trauffer reminds us, can be stripped away as fascism rises globally – and by the 1980s, gay men were still not recognised as victims of Nazi persecution. Their crime, the law insisted, was not ideology. It was behaviour.

The show has weaknesses. The cramped rear seating reduced Trauffer at times to a floating head, and once to nothing visible at all – an effect that read less as theatrical intention than as a venue problem. The show also covers Karl's entire life through to the 1990s, but this isn't signalled at the outset.

When the timeline extended beyond the 1957 frame I'd assumed, it pulled me briefly out of the world rather than deeper into it. There are moments where Trauffer seems in danger of losing the thread of his text – he recovers each time, but you notice the tightrope.

Critics have called this a generalised queer suffering pageant, and there is some truth in that. But I think it is deliberately so. The breadth exists to map the opposite of what fascism does – which is to flatten, erase, and categorise. To show cumulative harm across a life, rather than a single incident, is a political act in itself.

The emotional weight lands. The room absorbed it in silence.

See it. Bring someone who thinks this history doesn't apply to them. Because fascism rises to power targeting the easy prey – currently immigrants and trans communities. And if you think your religion will protect you from it, you better pray your faith stays in favour with those in power.

The Pink List

Ruby's at Holden Street Theatres, 32 – 34 Holden Street, Hindmarsh (Adelaide)

Performance: Sunday 22 February 2026

Season continues to 8 March 2026

Bookings: www.holdenstreettheatres.com

For more information, visit: www.fabulett.com for details.

Image: Michael Trauffer stars in *The Pink List* – photo by Sarah Morrison

Review: Daniel G. Taylor

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