

# LaBute beaut

## THIS IS HOW IT GOES

Darlinghurst Theatre  
Until March 22  
Tickets \$20-\$30  
Bookings 8356 9987  
Critic's rating **8/10**

PLAYWRIGHT-provocateur Neil LaBute loves to mess with your head and in this provoking – if not psychologically convincing – three-hander he does so by placing the storytelling in the hands of a charming and self-confessedly “unreliable” narrator, *The Man* (Patrick Brammall).

On the surface, it appears that LaBute is using a tale of marital strife between small-town interracial couple Cody (Wayne McDaniel) and Belinda (Rebecca Rocheford Davies) as an illustration of how racism simmers below the skins of even the most enlightened. Ever the bad-boy writer, he tosses the word “nigger” around like an unpinned grenade. But by play's end, LaBute has twisted his love triangle into something more familiar – to LaBute fans at any rate: a lacerating illustration of misogynistic game playing between men in which a woman can be traded as easily as baseball cards.

Brammall is exceptional as the narrator, combining charm with slipperiness. McDaniel is excellent as Cody, the pompous track star turned businessman, as is Rocheford Davies as the unwitting pawn. Toby Schmitz – whose writing sometimes taps into the same dirty reservoir as LaBute's – directs with confidence and great feeling for subtle shifts of unspoken tension. **JB** +