SEASON 2018

4 MAY - 2 JUN
MERLYN THEATRE

A SUSTAINED AND SARDONIC FABLE
ON THE FOLLY OF BEING WISE
– NEW STATESMAN

BY / Peter Carey
ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY /
Tom Wright
DIRECTION /
Matthew Lutton
CAST /
Marco Chiappi
Will McDonald
Amber McMahon
Charlotte Nicdao
Susan Prior
Anna Samson
Mark Coles Smith
Toby Truslove

SET & COSTUME DESIGN /
Marg Horwell
LIGHTING DESIGN /
Paul Jackson
SOUND DESIGN &
COMPOSITION /
Stefan Gregory
STAGE MANAGER /
Kirsten Marr
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER /
Lauren Frahamer
BESEN PLACEMENTS /
Eloise Kent
Glenn Saunders
MONASH PLACEMENT /
Talia Zipper

BELVOIR | Art Series Hotels

A Malthouse Theatre and Belvoir production. Proudly supported by Art Series Hotels.
We are in the middle of the fourth week of rehearsal for Tom Wright’s adaptation of Bliss, and every day we uncover further layers of resonance and more madcap humour in Peter Carey’s 1981 novel.

This is a story about Harry Joy. He is awakening to the hell he has been complicit in creating and he is only just starting to realise its vastness. He is beginning to understand the destructiveness of historic patriarchy and observe how it is failing and falling. He is desperate to change (he wants to be ‘good!’) and searching for ways to survive.

The story is also about Bettina Joy and Honey Barbara. We experience the rise of Bettina’s genius and her rebellion against mediocrity. We journey with Honey Barbara as she straddles both the country and the city, seeking alternativeness, time that flows like honey, and an understanding of what is beyond the veil of death.

It is also the story of an Australian city. A city longing to be great, and American. One that is full of ambitions and diseases that make beautiful sunsets.

Bliss is also a story about stories; about why we tell them, which ones we value, and how truth and lies blur in the creation of a memorable tale.

The more we rehearse, the more we discover how prophetic Peter Carey’s novel is. The hellish Australia he observed in the 1980s is now in full swing in the 21st century.

We tell this story on the Malthouse Theatre stage with an extraordinary ensemble of eight, who play out the five chapters as five different layers of hell. With each chapter we descend deeper and deeper—as Harry evolves and devolves—but the more we rehearse the more wildly we laugh.

Within Peter Carey’s story is a humour ignited from recognising our own flaws and grotesquery, of knowing that there is pleasure in hell, that others have already found ways to survive, and that there is a place for all of us here.
ON THE TV, ADS FLICKER GRAVELLY MASCULINITY, FLOGGING BEER, LEMON SQUASH, AND A NEW NATIONALISM

It’s the early 1980s in Australia. On the TV, ads flicker gravelly masculinity, flogging beer, lemon squash, and a new nationalism for the bigger world we are about to enter.

We’re gonna have to wake up sometime that everything’s not OK warns a Mojo-style eructation on the commercial airwaves. In Fremantle a ‘national hero’ wins a rich man’s yacht race and the country loses its bearings. Everywhere there seemed to be these men; entrepreneurs, raconteurs, filling up space, Good Blokes. One of them was PM. One of them had a resort in Queensland, his ad would croon Too Good to Be True. And of course it was. These Good Blokes were shysters.

Bliss feels like it’s from a vanished Australia in some ways. Carey wryly portrays an Aussie masculine yarn-spinning tradition that wakes up and realises somewhere along the way it became sloganeering for economic nationalism. Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy have become ponytailed copywriters, fashioning stories that—in the end—celebrate waste, vapidity, and worse. There’s a danger with this book.

A privileged man, who has sailed through life as an indulged mediocrity, realises he’s in a Hell, but he can’t see it’s a Hell of his own making. He attempts to find redemption and like Voltaire’s Candide he finds it tending his own garden. It’s a sprawling, two-steps-forward-one-step-back shaggy-dog story, with a strong pulse of romanticism. But when it all boils down, it’s still a story of that Good Bloke. And Good Blokes don’t represent humanity.

Dig a little deeper though and there’s other voices, whispering under the big story. Bettina, born in the smell of fossil fuels, who buys the American dream only to find out it’s a crock, and that it leads to folly. Barbara, who lives off the grid, but has to walk into the Underworld to stare down demons. And a panoply of slightly-crazed voices that are both familiar and strange.

Perhaps the questions they ask along the way are the point. Of Hell, of cancer, of stories, of cities, of what it is to die. A country, in the early days of rubbing its sleep from its eyes.
Tom Wright

Tom has written a number of award-winning plays and adaptations, including The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, The Real and Imagined History of the Elephant Man, Picnic at Hanging Rock, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The War of the Roses, The Lost Echo, Larrikin, Medea, Babes in the Wood, Baal, Optimism, On the Misconception of Oedipus, The Histrionic and Black Diggers. He was Associate Director of Sydney Theatre Company from 2004 to 2012. He is currently Artistic Associate at Belvoir (Sydney) and has worked as an actor and director at Playbox (now Malthouse Theatre), MTC, State Theatre Company SA, La Mama, Company B (now Belvoir), Anthill, Gilgul, Mene Mene, Bell Shakespeare, Chunky Move, Black Swan, and Chamber Made Opera.

Matthew Lutton

Matthew Lutton is Malthouse Theatre’s Artistic Director and Co-CEO. Prior to this, he was Malthouse Theatre’s Associate Director, and the Artistic Director of Thincin in Perth. For Malthouse Theatre, he has directed Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets, The Real and Imagined History of the Elephant Man, Away, Edward II, Picnic at Hanging Rock, I Am a Miracle, Night on Bald Mountain, The Bloody Chamber, Dance of Death, Pompeii, L.A., On the Misconception of Oedipus, Die Winterreise and Tartuffe. For STC he has directed The Trial, The Mysteries: Genesis, and The Duel. Other directing credits include Love Me Tender for Belvoir and Don’t Say the Words for Griffin Theatre Company. His opera directing credits include Make No Noise for the Bavarian State Opera, Strauss’s Elektra for Opera Australia and West Australian Opera, and Wagner’s The Flying Dutchman for New Zealand Opera.

Marco Chiappi


Will McDonald

Will McDonald is fast becoming one of Australia’s most interesting young actors. Already he has worked for renowned theatre companies, including Belvoir in The Drover’s Wife and Sydney Theatre Company in Arcadia. Will has appeared on one of Australia’s most popular television shows, Home and Away as ‘Jett James’ for four years, and ABC’s highly anticipated telemovie Riot. He will next be seen in the independent feature The School.

Amber McMahon

Amber trained at Flinders University Drama Centre and won the Adele Koh Scholarship to study at the Stella Adler Company & SITI Company in NYC. Her theatre credits include Picnic at Hanging Rock, Optimism (Malthouse Theatre), North by Northwest (MTC/Kay & McLean), Atlantis, Twelfth Night, Angels in America, The Power of Yes (Belvoir), Windmill’s Girl Asleep, School Dance and The Popular Mechanicals (STC/STSA). Amber was also a founding member of STC’s Actors Ensemble, appearing in productions including The War of the Roses, Season at Saraparilla, and The Lost Echo. Amber’s screen credits include the film of Girl Asleep, and a host of short films. Amber has two Helpmann Awards for Best Supporting Actress for her work in School Dance and Girl Asleep.

Charlotte Nicdao

Melbourne based actress Charlotte Nicdao made her television debut in 2011 as the lead in AACTA nominated children’s series A gURLs wURLd. Following supporting roles in critically acclaimed series The Slap and Time of Our Lives, in 2013 Charlotte made her debut in NBC’s Camp alongside Rachel Griffiths. Her other screen credits include Jenny in Please Like Me, and she starred as Rachel Osaka in the US sci-fi mini-series Childhood’s End. Recently focusing on comedy, Charlotte played Violet in ABC’s Trip For Biscuits, and appeared in Get Knack’d as ‘Scarlett Nicdao’. Charlotte is the voice of Baby in the animated series The Boy Castaways, Kuu Kuu Harajuku, produced by Gwen Stefani. Charlotte is very excited to be making her theatre debut in Bliss, with Malthouse Theatre and Belvoir.

Anna is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts. Theatre credits include: Pompeii, I.A. (Malthouse Theatre), Skylight, Birdland (for which she was nominated for a 2016 Helpmann Award), The Sublime and The Heretic (MTD). The Bitter Tears Of Petro Von Kant (Theatre Works), Day One, A Hotel, Evening, Wet House (for which she was nominated for a 2016 Green Room Award) and Ruben Guthrie (Red Stitch). After All This (Elbow Room). On screen Anna can be seen most recently in Wake in Fright for Channel 10 and later in the year in Dred Lucky for SBS and Jack Irish for ABC. Selected television credits include HBO drama The Leftovers, Hunters, Winners & Losers, Offspring and Little Acorns. As well as the award-winning film What If It Works. Anna was nominated for Best Actress in the 2018 Oz Flicks Film Awards and was the recipient of Best Emerging Performer for this performance.

Hailing from Broome, Mark has worked across the performing arts, first and foremost as an actor but also as a writer, producer and sound designer. He is best known for his roles in Pompeii and Last Cob to Darwin, for which he received a Best Supporting Actor AACTA nomination and a Best Supporting Actor win at the Film Critics’ Circle of Australia Awards. In 2017, Mark won the Helpmann Award for Best Male Actor in a Play for his work in Leah Purcell’s acclaimed adaptation of The Drover’s Wife. TV credits include Hunters, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Doctor Doctor, Shaun Macicall’s Mad as Hell, The Gods of Wheat Street, Old School, The Circuit, Modern Family and Canadian series Hard Rock Medical. Early film credits include Around the Block and Beneath Hill 60.

Toby is a multi-award winning designer and was the 2017 Designer In Residence at Malthouse Theatre. Marg has done seven Green Room Awards and two Sydney Theatre Awards for her work and was nominated for a Helpmann Award for Marin (MTC and Arena Theatre). Credits include: Caravan, The Real and Imagined History of the Elephant Man, Revolt. She said. Revolt again., The Homosexuals or Faggots, Edward II, I Am A Miracle, the Good Person of Szechuan, The Histrionic, Tame (Malthouse Theatre), Birdland, Peddling, Constellations, Cock, Music, The Dream Life Of Butterflies, The Water Carriers, Circle Mirror Transformation, I Call My Brothers (MTC), Eight Gigsabytes of Hardcore Pornography (Griffin), The School For Wives (Bell Shakespeare), Nora (Bell). Lilith The Jungle Girl, La Treviata, Summertime in the Garden of Eden (Sisters Grimm), Shit, Savages (Des & Cornelius), Chapters From The Pandemic, Save For Crying, Wretch, Resplendence (Angus Cerini Doubletap).

Paul is a multi-award winning designer who has worked with Australia’s leading arts organisations. Credits include: The Testament of Mary, The Real and Imagined History of the Elephant Man, Block Rider, Away, I am a Miracle, Blaque Shawgirls, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Meow Meow’s Little Mermaid, Edward II, Night on Bald Mountain, Antigone, Timeshale, Hello, Goodbye and Happy Birthday, Little Match Girl, Die Winterreise, The Threepenny Opera, Vamp, The Tell-Tale Heart, Sleeping Beauty (also co-creator), The Odyssey (Malthouse Theatre), Love and Information, The Histrionic, The Trial (STC/ Malthouse Theatre), True West, The Mysteries: Genesis (MTC). Merchant of Venice, Othello, As You Like It, Phedre, Tartuffe, Julius Caesar (Bell Shakespeare), Seventeen, Nora, Oedipus Rex, Happy Days, It Just Stopped (Bellvoir). Three Little Words, Hey Fever, Di, Viv and Rose, Private Lives, Miss Julie, Endgame, Ghosts, The Crucible (MTC). Awards: Helpmann Award (2012), six Green Room Awards, a Sydney Theatre Award and two AFGA awards. He is a Churchill Fellow and an Australia Council Fellow. Paul has lectured in design and associated studies at the University of Melbourne, RMIT and VCA.
Kirsten Marr  
**STAGE MANAGER**

Selected Malthouse Theatre shows include: *The Spook*, *Alias Grace*, *Cargo*. Kirsten has also been stage manager for *The Season* (Tasmania Performs); the Australian tours of *The Bodyguard*, *Sound of Music*, *Legends*, *Grease* (GFO); *The Addams Family*, *Jersey Boys* (New Theatricals); as well as various productions with The Production Company. She has also been a stage manager for arena performances such as *the State School Spectacular* (2008) and the 2006 Asian Games in Qatar.

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Lauren Frahamer  
**ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER**

Lauren is a freelance stage Manager based in Melbourne. Since completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Production: Stage Management) at the Victorian College of The Arts, she has worked on numerous projects. She was Assistant Stage Manager for *Away* (Malthouse Theatre), Props Assistant for *Aladdin The Musical* (Walt Disney Company), Assistant Stage Manager for *White Night Melbourne* (David Atkins Enterprises), and Assistant Stage Manager for the *Moomba Parade* (City of Melbourne). Lauren also dabbles in the event industry, working with JT. Production Management on various weddings, conferences and product launches. Lauren is looking forward to developing a diverse career in theatre and events.

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Stefan Gregory  
**SOUND DESIGN & COMPOSITION**

At Malthouse Theatre we collaborate with local and international artists to create inventive performances that cut to the core of the human experience.

Theatre has the power to interrogate, disrupt and to be an agent of change—and we think it always should. At Malthouse Theatre the work we produce explores the world personally, socially and politically.

Based in a dedicated venue, The Coopers Malthouse in Melbourne, we are a home for live experiences that entertain and provoke a dialogue with and within audiences.

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Judy Davis directs a magnetic cast – Colin Friels, Pamela Rabe and Toby Schmitz – in August Strindberg’s marriage battle for the ages. Enough said!
TIME TO TALK: BLISS

HEAR THE CAST, CREATIVES AND THE INDUSTRY EXPERTS TALK ABOUT THE SHOW, IMMEDIATELY AFTER YOU’VE SEEN IT.

Discover inspirations and learn backstage secrets. Hear what the production provoked in others, and contribute your perspective. Supported by our Major Partner Monash University.

THE TIME TO TALK FOR THIS PRODUCTION IS
6.30pm, Tuesday 15 May
Australian singer Vance Joy is named after a character in Peter Carey’s Bliss.