

## **PRE SHOW NOTES – Bliss**

Welcome to the pre-show notes for Bliss, by Peter Carey, adapted for the stage by Tom Wright and directed by Matthew Lutton. The described performance is taking place at the Coopers Malthouse on Sunday May 20.

The tactile tour will begin at 4pm, and the show will begin at 5pm. The show will run for approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes including one 20 minute interval.

The show contains strong adult themes, sexual and drug references and coarse language.

If you would like to be met near the venue, get lost or are running late, please call or text describer Will McRostie on 0405 725 423. What follows is a description of the set, characters and costumes.

### **SET**

The Merlyn theatre is a flexible, black box theatre space. For Bliss, the flat stage occupies one corner of the space, 12 metres deep and 10 metres wide, and raised a metre off the ground. The audience wraps around two edges of the rectangular playing space in an L-shape.

The stage is covered in natural pine floorboards, the grain of the wood glowing under the stage lights. Walls of timber paneling a shade darker than the floor form a corner behind the stage. A thin strip of moulding wraps around the walls about 2 metres off the

ground, made of the same light timber as the floor. Two cutout entranceways provide access to the stage from each side.

The only structure on stage is a small glass room, about the size of a garden shed, three metres by three metres, with a slanted roof two metres off the ground. The walls and roof of the room are made of smoky, reflective glass that is opaque or transparent depending on the lighting. Each wall is divided into two segments which can slide open or closed, and there is an open square skylight in the roof.

The glass room is set on the edge of circular revolve about 6 metres in diameter, which frequently spins the room, the actors, and other props around the stage at walking pace.

Scene changes are done by the actors, with assistance from one black-clad stagehand.

## **LIGHTING AND EFFECTS**

The show makes extensive use of complex lighting effects. The stage is often washed in bright white during scenes. During scene changes or movement sequences, washes of colour blanket the stage in blue, red or pink. There is a strip of bright light-rope set into the edge of the stage, facing back toward the actors. This rope can shift through different colours and brightness levels, casting long, unnatural shadows on the actors and the stage. The line of light is often visible in the reflective walls of the glass room.

Inside the room, every edge is lined with the same light rope, creating an intense chamber of light. When lit from outside, the

walls turn opaque and reflective like a mirror. When lit from within, they are see-through, but still impart a smoky hazy on everything inside.

## **CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES**

Bliss features eight actors playing 29 different characters across the course of the show. The play is loosely set in Australia in the 80s, and the costumes reflect the era – shoulder pads, tennis shoes and polyester. Three actors play only one character for the entire show, and we'll begin with them.

Toby Truslove plays Harry Joy. Harry is a white man, the quintessential white man, in his early 40s. He is of average height and build, with a round face framed by short brown hair. Harry wears a creamy white suit for the most of the play, his shirt collar open and the trousers cut straight and loose. In the Hilton hotel, he wears a thick white bath robe. After his cardiac episode, Harry has a “zipper”, a thin red scar straight down the centre of his chest, visible because of his perennially open collar.

Amber McMahon plays Bettina McPhee Joy, Harry's wife. She is white and in her mid-30s, with long, curly brunette hair which falls to mid-back. She has a severe, feathery fringe which hangs over piercing blue eyes. In heels, Bettina is just a smidgen taller than her husband. Her outfits are always exceptionally well put-together – first a loose white chiffon tucked into a black pencil skirt, then a white, long sleeve shirt with a high collar and black buttons tucked into high-waisted black trousers. In the second act, she wears a black velvet blouse with a plunging neckline and a quilted black skirt made of sateen with a dull shine.

Anna Samson plays Honey Barbara. Barbara is white, in her early 30s. She is slender, with a strong jaw, high cheekbones and blue eyes. She has dirty blonde hair which falls to her shoulder when loose, but it's usually tied back with a few tendrils left loose, framing her face. She moves and interacts with an insistent energy, locking eyes with whomever she's talking to. Barbara wears earthy, flowing clothes made from brown, undyed muslin and linen, and flat soled, camel brown work boots.

The remaining actors play multiple parts in the play. We will explore the rest of Harry's family first, then finish with others.

Charlotte Nicdao plays Lucy Joy, Harry and Bettina's daughter. She is of Asian descent, in her mid-teens, with long black hair. She has wide, dark eyes that gleam as she hectors her family about her various causes. Lucy wears a loose t-shirt with  $\frac{3}{4}$  length sleeves and a dense floral print, a pastel pink skirt with a ruffled hem, and pink tennis shoes. Charlotte also plays a cop, a doctor, a businessman, and an apiarist.

Will McDonald plays David Joy, Harry and Bettina's son. David is in his late teens and is extremely uptight, standing with tense shoulder, and arms pressed at his sides. He is skinny, with olive skin, a strong jaw, and finger-length dark hair parted and slicked back off his forehead. David wears a white polo shirt with black and tan stripes around the ribs, tucked into navy blue, knee-length shorts. He wears white tennis shoes and white ribbed socks pulled up to mid-shin. Will also plays a businessman, and a waiter.

Mark Coles Smith plays Joel Davis, a subordinate of Harry's at the ad firm in his late 20s. Joel is of aboriginal descent, with black hair that falls just past his ears when it's loose, but usually worn slicked back. He is broad and muscular, and wears a grey, double-breasted power suit over a black shirt and a grey paisley tie. Mark also plays Brush-hook Harry – an apiarist, a cop, a doctor, and a business executive.

Marco Chiappi plays Alex Duvall, a work associate of Harry's. Alex is white, tall and slender, in his 40s, with a strong nose and dimpled chin. His salt-and-pepper hair is curly and unruly, sticking straight out from his head. Alex has a world-weary posture, with rounded shoulders and slow gait. He wears a white business shirt with an open collar, no jacket, and dark grey trousers. Marco also plays a Reverend, a Hematologist, and Harry's nosy neighbor.

Finally, Susan Prior plays a wide range of characters from Harry's life. She is white, in her 30s with an expressive face and dark hair with blonde highlights which falls to shoulder length. Some of her characters are: Aldo, a boisterous Maître D', wearing a white apron with her hair pulled back. Mrs. Rothwell, Harry's busybody neighbor, wearing a blue gardening apron. And finally Mrs. Dalton, a callous and condescending hospital administrator in a shin length blue dress with white and pink pin stripes, and wire-rimmed glasses.