



ARBUS & WEST

BY STEPHEN SEWELL

Education Mini-Pack

22 FEBRUARY — 30 MARCH 2019

Arts Centre Melbourne, Fairfax Studio

About the Play

Hollywood bombshell Mae West built her career on lookin' good – walkin' the walk and talkin' the talk – while legendary photographer Diane Arbus was famous for finding beauty in the everyday. When Arbus turns up at West's glistening LA apartment in 1964 to take her portrait, tensions quickly flare. West's version of herself is very different to the one Arbus wants to catch on film. But whose version wins out when a master of illusion meets a master of truth?

About the Playwright

Stephen Sewell is well known for his film and theatre work, including his AFI Award winning script of *The Boys* (1989) as well as plays such as *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, *It Just Stopped: Myth*, *Propaganda* and *Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America*. Sewell is one of the most celebrated and experienced writers in Australia. He chaired the Australian National Playwrights Centre for a number of years and is the recipient of numerous awards, including a two year Australian Council Literary Fellowship and the prestigious ANPC Award for Significant Contribution to Australian Theatre (2004). His directorial debut, the feature film *Embedded*, premiered at the 2016 Sydney Film Festival. Sewell has been Head of Writing at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, in Sydney since 2012. He was awarded his Doctorate from Sydney University in 2017, and is currently the Chief Investigator in a research program looking at Creativity.

Cast

Diane Arbus Diana Glenn
Mae West Melita Jurisic
Ruby Jennifer Vuletic

Creative Team

Director Sarah Goodes
Set & Costume Designer Renée Mulder
Lighting Designer Paul Jackson
Composer & Sound Designer Clemence Williams
Voice and Dialect Coach Jean Goodwin
Voice of Ben Blue of the Silver Slipper Richard Piper
Stage Manager of the Silver Slipper Meg Richardson
Stage Manager Jess Keepence
Assistant Stage Manager Meg Richardson
Directorial Secondment Mary Angley
Rehearsal Photographer Tim Grey
Production Photographer Jeff Busby

Genre

Contemporary international drama

Running Time

Approx. 2hrs including interval

Attendance Information

Contains coarse language, sexual references and references to suicide. For detailed information, please visit www.mtc.com.au/production-content-guide



Turn the page for activities, and discussions.

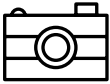
Before the show



The two main characters, Diane Arbus and Mae West, are based on real people. Research these women and compile ten interesting points about each.

Download the show programme at mtc.com.au/backstage to read about the influential women this play is named for. What was Mae West's deepest love affair? Whose work was described as 'fundamentally taboo'? Who is widely believed to have kept Paramount Studios afloat during the depression?

Diane Arbus died by suicide. Talking about suicide can be challenging, but there are helpful resources available at headspace.org.au.



'There are things nobody would see if I didn't photograph them.' – Diane Arbus. Take a photo and present it to the class in response to this quote.

See the rehearsal gallery at mtc.com.au/backstage and make predictions about how the actors will utilise the space.



Hear actor Diana Glenn and director Sarah Goodes discuss the play at youtube.com/melbtheatreco. Glenn describes the world of the play as 'dreamy', and Goodes describes Mae West's persona as 'foolproof'. Discuss each of these comments, and make predictions about the play.



Having researched Mae West or Diane Arbus, discuss how you would use your expressive skills to create this character on stage. What does their voice sound like? What gestures do they use?

Mae West is well known for crossing boundaries and speaking candidly about sex. As such, the play includes frequent sexual references. Discuss how the audience might react, and how contemporary audiences have or have not changed from Mae West's time.

Post-show Activities

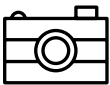


Discuss this moment in the play:

DIANE: But don't you want people to see you as you are?
MAE WEST: As I am? Are you out of your mind?

What does this interactions tell us about each character? Do we ever see Arbus or West as they really are?

Would you describe this play as feminist theatre? Why or why not?



Look at the production photos at mtc.com.au/backstage. Discuss how the set was used to create the two locations of Ravenswood and the Silver Slipper.






Recall some moments from the play that resonated with you, made you laugh, or that you didn't like. Have other people in the class chosen the same moments?

Eloise Ross (Program Manager and President of the Melbourne Cinémathèque) says Mae West's 'star persona ... was shaped more by her own fierce negotiating and business acumen than by any conservatively-angled publicity machine.' Read more at mtc.com.au/backstage.

Anne O'Hehir (Curator of Photography at National Gallery of Australia) says Arbus 'played an important role in the history of photographic practice as it developed throughout the twentieth century.' Read more at mtc.com.au/backstage.

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the First Peoples of Country on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand. We pay our respects to all of Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors and Elders, and to our shared future.

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