BY ALAN BENNETT

THE LADY IN THE VAN

BY ALAN BENNETT
2019 is a year of celebration. A celebration of stories filled with adventure, love, tenacity, drama and discovery; of ten years at our home, Southbank Theatre; and of theatre made with passion and incredible artistry for 21st century Australia.

To mark the beginning of this celebration, we welcome the inimitable Miriam Margolyes back to MTC as Miss Shepherd in our moving new production of The Lady in the Van.

Directed by Dean Bryant, Alan Bennett’s classic story details both his fondness and frustration in navigating a most peculiar situation in his life, and the unlikely bond he forms with this mysterious itinerant.

The variety of productions that follow include recent international hits Photograph 51 and Heisenberg, Australian classics such as Storm Boy and Cosi, and some of Australia’s best new writing with Black is the New White and Golden Shield.

If you’re thinking about a subscription but haven’t got around to it yet, we urge you to get your booking in quickly before seats are snapped up, especially as tickets to upcoming productions Arbus & West, A View from the Bridge and Cosi are now on general sale.

For now, on with the 2019 celebrations!

Brett Sheehy AO  Virginia Lovett
Artistic Director & CEO  Executive Director & Co-CEO

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, and we pay our respects to all of Melbourne’s First Peoples, to their ancestors and Elders, and to our shared future.
THE LADY IN THE VAN
BY ALAN BENNETT

2 FEBRUARY — 6 MARCH 2019
Arts Centre Melbourne, Playhouse

— About the play —

The Lady in the Van is a mostly true story of the fascinating relationship between award-winning British writer, Alan Bennett, and his long-term guest, Miss Mary Shepherd. Was she a fugitive on the run? A talented pianist? A nun? Or just an old lady struggling with mental health and homelessness?

— Cast —

Miss Mary Shepherd (Margaret Fairchild)
Miriam Margolyes
Pauline / Hooligan Fiona Choi
Alan Bennett 1 Daniel Frederiksen
Social Worker / Pianist / Hooligan Claire Healy
Alan Bennett 2 James Millar
Mam / Interviewer Jillian Murray
Underwood / Leo Fairchild /
Doctor / Garden Workman Richard Piper
Rufus / Ambulance Worker Dalip Sondhi

— Creative Team —

Director Dean Bryant
Set & Costume Designer Alicia Clements
Lighting Designer Matt Scott
Composer & Sound Designer Mathew Frank
Voice & Dialect Coach Leith McPherson
Fight Choreographer Lyndall Grant
Stage Manager Christine Bennett
Deputy Stage Manager Lisette Drew
Assistant Stage Manager Pippa Wright
Stage Management Secondment Zsuzsa Gaynor Mihaly
Rehearsal Photographer Deryk McAlpin
Production Photographer Jeff Busby

For information regarding running time, please see a member of the Front of House team.

The Lady in the Van was first performed at The Queen’s Theatre, London on 19 November 1999
Copyright agency for works by Alan Bennett: United Agents LLP
The Lady in the Van is published by Faber & Faber

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When the real life Miss Mary Shepherd died in 1989, her author neighbour, Alan Bennett, set about writing a lengthy article for the London Review of Books to document the 15 years in which she commandeered his Camden driveway. It’s unlikely Bennett knew it at the time, but his diary entries over that decade and a half would end up forming the basis of a novel, a hit radio and stage play, and 16 years later, a feature film.

Bennett was raised by conservative, hard-working parents in Leeds, not long before the dawn of the Second World War. Despite the hardships of the day, he was a diligent student and worked methodically to win a scholarship to Exeter College at the University of Oxford, where he earned a history degree with first-class honours.

It was at the University in the late ‘50s that he befriended Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller and Dudley Moore while performing in the Oxford Revue. The foursome garnered instant fame at Edinburgh Fringe Festival with their revue show Beyond the Fringe, which they...
then toured to London and New York in 1960, setting all four young men up for illustrious careers in the performing arts.

Bennett’s first full-length play, *Forty Years On*, premiered at the Apollo Theatre in 1968, proceeded by a large body of radio, TV, stage and screen plays, as well as numerous short stories, novellas and a vast collection of non-fiction prose. Despite his self-proclaimed shyness, Bennett also continued to make appearances as a broadcaster and actor.

Of his many works, few have struck as deep a chord as his autobiographical texts. *The Lady in the Van* is a prime example of Bennett’s capacity to tap into the psyche of his own character, and the characters of those who circle around him. In the instance of *The Lady in the Van*, he splits his focus between his frail and elderly mother, and his belligerent, troglodyte tenant, Miss Shepherd.

Bennett writes himself into the play by incorporating both his literal self, ‘A. Bennett’, and his subconscious self, ‘A. Bennett 2’ or ‘The Writer’. These versions of Bennett represent starkly different aspects of his personality. Indeed, A. Bennett is critical of A. Bennett 2’s motivations to journalise Miss Shepherd at all. In the forward of his script Bennett notes, ‘the device of having two actors playing me isn’t just a bit of theatrical showing off and does, however crudely, correspond to the reality. There was one bit of me (often irritated and resentful) that had to deal with this unwelcome guest camped literally on my doorstep, but there was another bit of me that was amused...”
by how cross this eccentric lodger made me and that took pleasure in Miss Shepherd’s absurdities and her outrageous demands.’

At the heart of Bennett and Shepherd’s real-life relationship, though, we find a message of tolerance and humanity; a melancholic reflection on Britain’s class system as it examines the cruel grip of poverty and the vicious spell mental illness can cast on society’s most forgotten inhabitants.

Like most writers, Bennett could see the wider story in the events unfolding around him. Writing Miss Shepherd’s narrative was effortless, he says, because of the vast amounts of material she provided him. However, finding the arc of his own character, and the journey he had been on in those 15 years, was much more challenging. As he explored the relationship between these two versions of himself, he discovered that A. Bennett 2, ‘The Writer’, became more exploitative in defiance to A. Bennett’s solicitousness: ‘In some sense the division between them illustrates Kafka’s remark that to write is to do the devil’s work.’ Though, write he did, despite consistently claiming it was never his intention to do so.
At the heart of Bennett and Shepherd’s real-life relationship ... we find a message of tolerance and humanity.
Looking back on this time in Camden Town, Bennett laments that he could have been more venturesome. Towards the play’s end, A. Bennett 2 reflects, ‘I learned there is no such thing as marking time, and that time marks you. In accommodating her and accommodating to her, I find twenty years of my life has gone.’ ‘The Writer’ admonishes his conscious self for skipping some of life’s great chances. He says, while he was busy caring for a ‘bigoted, blinkered, cantankerous, devious, unforgiving, self-centred, rank, rude, car-mad cow,’ others were journeying across Tibet or Patagonia, or engaging in salacious relationships.

Through the lens of Miss Shepherd, The Lady in the Van becomes an increasingly self-reflective and autobiographical play for Bennett. By looking at the moral implications and ethical complexities of telling someone else’s story, the writer ultimately peers into his own story and considers how one day it might be told. ■

Words by Sarah Corridon
MIRIAM MARGOLYES
Miss Mary Shepherd

For Melbourne Theatre Company, Miriam has appeared in Blithe Spirit, Realism and I’ll Eat You Last. After performing repertory in Edinburgh and Leicester, she has worked in theatre in London’s West End in The Killing of Sister George, She Stoops to Conquer, The Threepenny Opera, Cloud Nine, Orpheus Descending and played Madame Morrible in Wicked in London and on Broadway. In 2010, she won the Theatregoers Choice Best Supporting Actress Award for Nell in Endgame. Her one-woman show, Dickens’ Women was nominated for an Olivier Award and toured Australia in 2012 as part of a triumphant world tour for Dickens’ bicentenary. In 2015, Margolyes toured Australia with her one woman show The Importance of Being Miriam. In 1993 she won the BAFTA for Best Supporting Actress in Martin Scorsese’s The Age of Innocence. She was appointed an OBE for Services to Drama in 2002. In 2013, she became an Australian citizen.

FIONA CHOI
Pauline

Fiona Choi first appeared for Melbourne Theatre Company as Eurydice in Mary Zimmerman’s Metamorphoses. A graduate of WAAPA, Fiona’s musical theatre highlights include the original Australian casts of RENT (Cameron Mackintosh); Mamma Mia! (Littlestar/Dainty) and Plainsong (Black Swan State Theatre Company) as well as creating roles in Off-Broadway productions of Apathy – The Gen X Musical; Insecurity; The Street; and FAMBAM360. In New York Fiona also appeared on stage in The Tempest, A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Manhattan Repertory Theatre); The Silken Phoenix (Core Ensemble) and guest-starred on television in Homeland, Law & Order, Person Of Interest, Unforgettable and The Newsroom. Back in Australia, Fiona is best known these days for her role as the irrepressible Jenny Law in Benjamin Law’s award-winning SBS comedy The Family Law, for which she has received an AACTA nomination for Best Performance in a Television Comedy. Fiona can also be seen on screen in Mustangs FC, The Letdown, Harrow, Get KrackIn and Back in Very Small Business (ABC) as well as True Story with Hamish & Andy (Channel 9).

Logie and AFI-nominated Daniel Frederiksen has had an extensive career across film, television and theatre, and most recently starred as Mr Wormwood in the critically acclaimed Matilda, The Musical, for which he won a Helpmann Award. Daniel’s other theatre credits include After Miss Julie, The Pain & The Itch, Leaves of Glass, Fat Boy, Ruben Guthrie (Red Stitch Actors’ Theatre); Julius Caesar (Bell Shakespeare); The Good Person of Szechuan; (Malthouse Theatre and The National Theatre of China co-production) and Melbourne Theatre Company productions of Abigail’s Party, Cheech, Don Juan in Soho, Rockabye, Becky Shaw and Dead Man’s Cell Phone. Daniel is a founding member of Red Stitch, Melbourne’s highly regarded independent theatre company. After studying at NIDA, he first achieved recognition in the television series Blue Heelers, followed by a series regular role in Stingers, for which he was nominated for a Logie Award for Best New Talent. Other TV credits include roles in telemovie Underground, Underbelly: Squizzy Taylor, Redfern Now, and most recently in the ABC’s Miss Fisher’s Murder Mysteries.
Claire Healy is thrilled to make her Melbourne Theatre Company debut in *The Lady in the Van*. She has written and performed her own cabarets, touring Australia and internationally. Her recent show, *(Get a) Real Job* (Hot Mess Productions) toured Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, and *Truth or Claire* will premiere at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival in April. As an actor, Claire has appeared in *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* (Ozact) and toured throughout the UK with Frantic Theatre Company. Claire composed the original score for the Irish national tour of *Low Level Panic* (Anam Theatre) and its Sydney season at Old Fitz Theatre. She assisted on the development of *Black Balloon the Musical* (Bush Theatre, London) and composed music for *Stupid Fucking Bird*, *Venus in Fur* (Lightning Jar Theatre) and *The Tosca Project* (Australia Council). She is currently completing a Masters of Music in Interactive Composition at VCA.

James Millar studied Music Theatre at WAAPA, graduating in 2004. Most recently James toured Australia playing Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda: The Musical* (RSC/Louise Withers). Other theatre credits include *Noël and Gertie* (Christine Dunstan), the UK tour of *Chess* (Milton Morrissey); *The Ring Cycle* (Royal Opera House, Covent Garden); *Martin Short Live* (Sydney Opera House); *Grey Gardens* (The Production Company); *LoveBites* (Whitebox and Onward); *Floyd Collins, The Little Dog Laughed* (Ensemble Theatre); *Gutenberg! The Musical* (Neil Gooding Productions); *Jerry Springer – The Opera* (Sydney Opera House); *Company* (National Musical Theatre Company); *Snuggletop and Cuddlepie* (Company B); *Oklahoma!* (The Production Company); and *Eureka!* (Essgee). Film appearances include: *The Eternity Man*, *The Leaving of Liverpool*, *Naked*, *Coral Island*. Television: *Home and Away*, *Water Rats*, *Police Rescue*, *A Country Practice*. Audiobook: *1912 The Year the World Discovered Antarctica, Stranger than Fiction*. Awards: 2016 Helpmann Award Best Male Actor in a Musical, 2006 Green Room Award Best Supporting Actor in a Musical.

Jillian Murray trained at East 15 Drama School in London after completing studies at Monash University and the University of Melbourne. Highlighted theatre productions include *The Three Musketeers* and and the title role of MTC’s first *Miss Julie* (Melbourne Theatre Company). Other credits include *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, *Garden of Granddaughters* (Sydney Theatre Company) *Travelling North* (The Lyric Theatre, London) *Lovesong* (Red Stitch) *L’Amante anglaise; De Stroyed* - a solo performance based on the writings of Simone De Beauvoir (fortyfivedownstairs) *The Chairs* (La Mama) *Away; Nice Girls, Good Time, Wolf, In Male Attire, World Made of Glass* (Playbox/Malthouse Theatre). TV productions include *Jack Irish* (Series 1 & 2), *Stingers*, *Secret Life of Us*, *Embassy*, *Party Tricks*, *No Where to Hide*, *Skirts* and *Prisoner*. Film work includes *Choir Girl*, *Body Melt*, *Spotswood* and *Georgia*. Jillian received the Green Room Award in 2016 for Best Actor in an Independent Production (*L’Amante anglaise* by Marguerite Duras) and has been nominated on three previous occasions for Best Actor. *L’Amante anglaise* will tour nationally in 2019.
Cast

RICHARD PIPER
Underwood / Leo Fairchild / Doctor / Garden Workman


DALIP SONDHI
Rufus / Ambulance Worker

Dalip Sondhi can currently be seen starring in Tidelands the first Australian Netflix Original series. He previously starred in the medical drama Pulse (ABC) and later this year can be seen in the second season of Secret City (Foxtel); The Heights (ABC); the third season of Glitch (Netflix/ABC) and the UK/Australian comedy Frayed (Sky UK/ABC) opposite Kerry Armstrong. Dalip’s feature credits include working alongside Timothy Spall in Sucker, the lead in Absolution (Official Selection Vancouver, Pasadena, Kansas) and in India the feature Half Girlfriend. Dalip is currently co-producing a film with one of Australia’s leading producers, Robyn Kershaw in collaboration with India’s acclaimed actor/director Nandita Das and Australia’s Dot West. In the UK, he toured extensively with Caught in the Act and Soapbox Theatre companies and performed numerous times at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This is his debut appearance for Melbourne Theatre Company.
Creative Team

ALAN BENNETT
Playwright

Alan Bennett has been one of the UK’s leading dramatists since the success of Beyond the Fringe in the 1960s. His television series Talking Heads has become a modern-day classic, as have many of his works for the stage, including Forty Years On, The Lady in the Van, A Question of Attribution, The Madness of George III and his adaptation of The Wind in the Willows. The History Boys won Evening Standard, Critics’ Circle and Olivier Awards, and the South Bank Award. On Broadway, it won five New York Drama Desk Awards, four Outer Critics’ Circle Awards, a New York Drama Critics’ Award for Best Play, a New York Drama League Award and six Tonys including Best Play. The film of The History Boys was released in 2006. Bennett’s other plays include The Habit Of Art, People, and the short plays Hymn and Cocktail Sticks (Untold Stories). His latest play Allelujah! opened at The Bridge Theatre in London in July 2018.

DEAN BRYANT
Director

MTC Associate Director Dean Bryant has previously directed An Ideal Husband, Wild, Vivid White, Born Yesterday, Skylight, I’ll Eat You Last and Next to Normal for the Company. He also worked on Macbeth, The Drowsy Chaperone, The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee and Urinetown (and STC season). For Hayes Theatre Company he directed Assassins, Sweet Charity (Helpmann Award) and Little Shop of Horrors (Sydney Theatre Award); for Opera Australia Two Weddings, One Bride and Anything Goes (and GFO). Other credits include The Skin of Our Teeth (VCA); Once We Lived Here (London season); DreamSong (TheatreWorks); Straight (Red Stitch Actors’ Theatre); The Last Five Years and five musicals for The Production Company. With composer Mathew Frank, he wrote Green Room Award-winning musicals Prodigal and Once We Lived Here, as well as Virgins: A Musical Threesome, The Silver Donkey and an Amy Winehouse musical for Channel 10’s Mr & Mrs Murder. Dean created verbatim piece Gaybies (Midsumma, Darlinghurst Theatre Company). Dean is Worldwide Associate Director of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert – The Musical and is a graduate of WAAPA.

ALICIA CLEMENTS
Set & Costume Designer

Alicia Clements’ set and costume designs have been seen on stages across the country. Her debut production with Melbourne Theatre Company was The Father in 2017, co-produced by Sydney Theatre Company. Selected theatre credits include Muriel’s Wedding The Musical (as Associate Costume Designer) for STC/Global Creatures; Hay Fever, After Dinner (STC); Assassins, Gypsy (Hayes Theatre); Hamlet (Bell Shakespeare); In The Next Room or The Vibrator Play, Arcadia, The White Divers of Broome, Midsummer Night’s Dream, Madagascar, Twelfth Night, The Damned (BSSTC); Rameau Triple Bill, Armida, Bajazet (Pinchgut Opera); Der Kaiser Von Atlantis (Lost and Found Opera); 1507, Driving into Walls, Duck, Death and the Tulip, This Girl Laughs…, The Amber Amulet (Barking Gecko Theatre Company); The Clean House (BSSTC/QTC). Short film: Sherbert Rosencrantz, You’re Beautiful; Cold Hearts; Problem Play; Outbreak Generation. Awards: Sydney Theatre Award for Best Set Design and Best Costume Design for Assassins; Kristian Frederikson Award for Design in the Performing Arts. Training: WAAPA.
MATT SCOTT
Lighting Designer
Matt Scott has lit more than 60 MTC productions, including The Architect, An Ideal Husband, Minnie & Liraz, Born Yesterday, The Odd Couple, Jasper Jones, Skylight, The Last Man Standing, The Weir, Jumpy, The Mountaintop, Elling, His Girl Friday, Red, Tribes, Clybourne Park, Next to Normal, Blackbird, and August: Osage County. His most recent other work includes The Dance of Death for Belvoir; The Pearlfishers for State Opera of South Australia; Oklahoma! and A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder for The Production Company; Madama Butterfly for Seattle Opera; Jasper Jones for Queensland Theatre and Madame Butterfly for Opera Australia. Matt has received and been nominated for numerous awards, including a 2016 Green Room Award for The Pearlfishers (Opera Australia), a 2005 Helpmann Award for his lighting on Urinetown (MTC) and a 2003 Helpmann Award for The Blue Room (MTC). Matt is a Lecturer in Lighting Design at University of Melbourne (VCA).

MATHEW FRANK
Composer & Sound Designer
Mathew Frank was composer on MTC productions An Ideal Husband, Born Yesterday, Skylight and Private Lives; Musical Director of Next to Normal and The Drowsy Chaperone; and Associate Musical Director of Poor Boy, The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, The Sapphires and Urinetown. Other MD credits include Jerry’s Girls, La Cage aux Folles and The Pirates of Penzance for The Production Company and A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum for GFO. Mathew composed the musicals Prodigal, Virgins, Once We Lived Here and The Silver Donkey as well as the cabarets Vinyl Viagra for Rhonda Burchmore and Show People and Britney Spears: The Cabaret for Christie Whelan-Browne (recent London season at The Other Palace). He has won two Green Room Awards and is a graduate of WAAPA.

LEITH MCPHERSON
Voice & Dialect Coach
Leith McPherson has previously worked on Melbourne Theatre Company’s productions of Twelfth Night, Astroman, A Doll’s House: Part 2, An Ideal Husband, Macbeth, Melbourne Talam (MTC Education), Born Yesterday, Jasper Jones, Skylight, Double Indemnity, Peddling (MTC Education), North by Northwest, Jumpy, I’ll Eat You Last, Private Lives, Other Desert Cities, Hamlet, Richard III, All About My Mother, Dead Man’s Cell Phone, Boston Marriage, Madagascar, The Swimming Club, The Drowsy Chaperone, August: Osage County, Explorations: A Streetcar Named Desire (MTC Education), Rockabye, Songs for Nobodies, Ninety, and The Dame on the Ten Dollar Note. Leith is Voice and Dialect Coach for Harry Potter and the Cursed Child (Australia) and is Head of Voice and Movement for the Theatre Department at the VCA.
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LEGACY GIFTS
Adam and Donna Cusack-Muller
Bernadette Broberg
Mark and Tamara Boldiston
Acknowledging supporters who have made the visionary gesture of including a gift to MTC in their will.

LEGACY CIRCLE
Anne and Graham Evans ao
George and Eva Ermer

Acknowledging Donors who join together to support innovative and inspiring programs for the benefit of our community.

MARKED AS CURRENT AS OF JANUARY 2019

To find out more about supporting MTC please call 03 8688 0959 or visit mtc.com.au/support
Thank You

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If you would like to join our corporate family or host a private event, please contact partnerships@mtc.com.au
From our triumphant production of Poor Boy to the spectacular Twelfth Night, Southbank Theatre has been the home of Melbourne Theatre Company for 10 years.

Throughout 2019 we will be celebrating this milestone by looking back at our favourite moments, special behind-the-scenes stories and wonderful memories of MTC’s decade in Southbank.

Join the celebrations throughout the year at MTC.COM.AU/SOUTHBANK10
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Grazing buffet. Bountiful seafood.
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