

THE LADY IN THE VAN

BY ALAN BENNETT



MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

Welcome



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 *Così*, 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 *Così* are now on general sale.

For now, on with the 2019 celebrations!

Brett Sheehy AO
Artistic Director & CEO

Virginia Lovett
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.

MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne.



MTC is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria.



MTC is a member of Live Performance Australia and the Australian Major Performing Arts Group.



MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

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

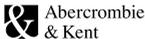
For information regarding running time, please see a member of the Front of House team.

The Lady in the Van was first performed at The Queen's Theatre, London on 19 November 1999

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The Lady in the Van is published by Faber & Faber

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MARKING TIME

Alan Bennett discovered much more about himself than he could have imagined when a homeless woman set up camp in his driveway.

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

James Millar and Daniel Frederiksen; (opposite, from left) James Millar, Daniel Frederiksen, Stage Manager Christine Bennett and Miriam Margolyes



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' ▶



*(Clockwise, top from left)
Fiona Choi, Dalip Sondhi,
Daniel Frederiksen, Richard Piper,
Jillian Murray, Claire Healy and
Director Dean Bryant.*

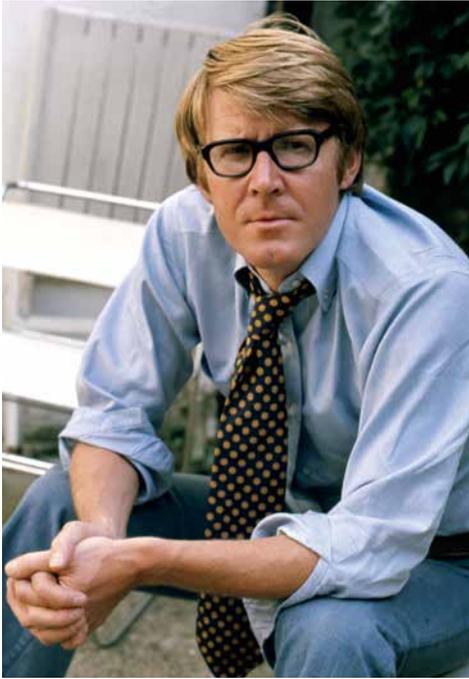
by how cross this eccentric lodger made me and that took pleasure in Miss Shepherd's absurdities and her outrageous demands.'

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.





Alan Bennett, 1973
Photo by Allan Warren



Miss Mary Shepherd (Margaret Fairchild), 1980
Photo by Tom Miller

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. — Alan Bennett

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

Cast



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 Krack!n* and *Back in Very Small Business* (ABC) as well as *True Story with Hamish & Andy* (Channel 9).



DANIEL FREDERIKSEN

Alan Bennett 1

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*.

Cast



CLAIRE HEALY

Social Worker / Pianist /
Hooligan

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

Alan Bennett 2

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); *Snugglepot 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

Wam / Interviewer

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 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

Richard Piper's theatre credits include *Twelfth Night*, *Born Yesterday*, *Double Indemnity*, *Ghosts*, *Music*, *Queen Lear*, *The Gift*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Rockabye*, *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, *The Give and Take*, *Dumb Show*, *The Daylight Atheist*, *Coup d'Etat*, *Betrayal*, *Man the Balloon*, *Life After George*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy of Errors* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *The Black Rider*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (Malthouse Theatre); *Competitive Tenderness*, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, *A Happy and Holy Occasion* (Playbox Theatre); *The Secret River*, *Gross und Klein*, *Great Expectations*, *Moby Dick* (Sydney Theatre Company); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The War of the Roses*, *Henry V*, *Henry IV* (Bell Shakespeare); *Moby Dick*, *Marat Sade*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Restoration*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *What the Butler Saw* (STCSA). Musical theatre: *Oklahoma!*, *King Kong*, *Billy Elliot*, *The New Rocky Horror Show*. TV includes: *Wentworth*, *Tangle*, *Underbelly*, *City Homicide*, *Satisfaction*, *Blue Heelers*, *Crashburn*, *Stingers*, *Good Guys*, *Bad Guys*, *Correlli*, *Snowy River*, *Wedlocked*, *Mission Impossible*. Film includes: *Locusts*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*. Awards: Green Room Awards for *The Daylight Atheist*.



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 STC season), *Hitchcock Blonde* 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.

Creative Team



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 is Head of Voice and Movement for the Theatre Department at the VCA.

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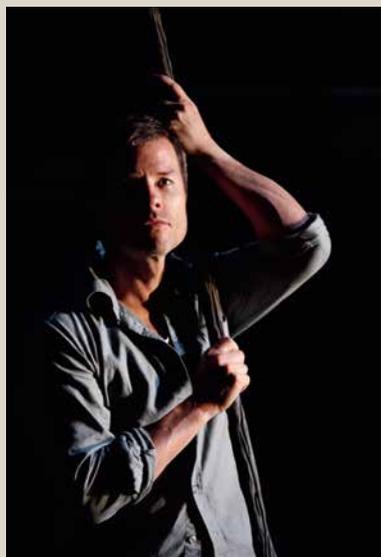
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