

THE LADY IN THE VAN

BY ALAN BENNETT

Education Mini-Pack

2 FEBRUARY – 6 MARCH 2019

Arts Centre Melbourne, Playhouse

About the Play

In 1974, Alan Bennett befriended Miss Mary Shepherd, an eccentric, cantankerous and rather smelly old lady. She 'temporarily' parked her dilapidated van outside Bennett's London home – and stayed for 15 years. Best-known for the celebrated 2015 film starring Maggie Smith, *The Lady in the Van* is a mostly true story of the fascinating relationship between the award-winning British writer and his long-term guest. Was she a fugitive on the run? A talented pianist? A nun? Or just an old lady struggling with mental health and homelessness?

About the 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. It also won six Tonys including Best Play on Broadway, and was released as a film 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.

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

Genre

Contemporary British memoir/comedy

Running Time

Approx. 2hrs 25min including interval

Attendance Information

Contains coarse language. For detailed information, please visit www.mtc.com.au/production-content-guide

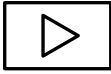


Turn the page for activities, and discussions.

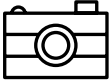
Before the show



Download the show programme at mtc.com.au/backstage to read about the playwright, Alan Bennett. *The Lady in the Van* is autobiographical (about the writer's own life). What insight does this article give you to the relationship between Bennett and Miss Shepherd?



Hear actor Miriam Margolyes discuss the play at [YouTube.com/melbtheatreco](https://www.youtube.com/melbtheatreco). Predict how Margolyes will use her expressive skills to create the character of Miss Shepherd. What will her voice sound like? How will she use gestures?



See the rehearsal gallery at mtc.com.au/backstage and make predictions about how the set will function. How might the titular van be created on stage?



What systems are in place to support homeless people in Melbourne?
Compare and contrast the social class structures of the United Kingdom and Australia.
What are the moral and ethical implications of writing about another real person?

Post-show Activities



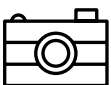
Discuss this moment in the play:

A. Bennett: How long have you been living in the van?
Miss Shepherd: Who says I live there? I may spend the night there on occasion but it's only a *piéd-à-terre*.
A. Bennett: Where do you live?
Miss Shepherd: I got it to put my things in, though don't spread that around.

What does this interaction tell you about Miss Shepherd's personality and history?

Discuss the device the playwright uses of having two Alan Bennett characters. How are they different? What is the function of A. Bennett 2?

Discuss how each character treated Miss Shepherd differently. How might her experience be similar to those of people in Melbourne?



Did you know that the vans onstage are made of timber? See a photo essay about their creation at mtc.com.au/backstage.



Consider how many actors played multiple characters in the play. How were production areas such as costume and wigs used? How did actors manipulate their expressive and performance skills?

Research the real-life Miss Shepherd, who was a gifted pianist and a nun. Has the playwright changed her character in his portrayal?

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukitj 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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MTC Education

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