

## Hope, courage and mother's love in WA premiere of murderous musical

ONE of Australia's darkest child murder cases seems an unlikely topic for a musical – but despite its macabre origins, *The Hatpin* is a story of hope, courage and a mother's undying love for her child.

Written by WA Academy of Performing Arts graduates James Millar and Peter Rutherford, the musical makes its WA premiere at the Old Mill Theatre this July directed by Graeme Johnson with musical direction from Paul Lawrence Olsen.

Inspired by the true story of Amber Murray, *The Hatpin* tells of how she unwittingly gave up her son in 1892 to a notorious Sydney "baby farming" family, giving them support payments while looking for work.

But they actually murdered the child and were eventually arrested and tried for killing several other infants, leading to one of the most moving criminal trials in Australian history.

"*The Hatpin* is unlike most popular musicals," Graeme said. "Deeply powerful and moving, its attraction lies not in flashing lights, catchy tunes or massive dance numbers but in the fact its story is based on one of the darkest cases in our legal history.

"It's definitely not a show for the faint-hearted – this musical makes *Sweeney Todd* look like *Annie*."

Originally, Graeme never planned to direct *The Hatpin*, although he did submit the idea for the show to the Old Mill Theatre.

Two directors earmarked for the musical became unavailable with one returning to the eastern states and the other unexpectedly dying from cancer.

"My direction of this work was born from desperation more than anything," Graeme said. "Rather than cancel the play, I took the reins myself."

Involved in theatre since 2000, Graeme first became involved when he took over as props master on a show.

He soon realised nothing in the theatrical world is what it seems when he was handed three lever-arch files full of type-written pages, highlighting what needed to be added and removed from the stage.

Since then, Graeme has built and painted sets, stage-managed, directed, acted and operated lighting and sound for the Old Mill, Stirling, Phoenix, Playlovers, Melville, Groovy Boots and Garrick Theatres, among many others.

"With two very dear friends of mine – Hywel Williams and Joe McCabe, who have both left us for the great stage in the sky – I was part of the original crew that created Phoenix Theatre in Hamilton Hill," he said.



Sarah Cosstick plays Amber Murray, a woman who unwittingly gave up her baby to a mass-murdering family, in the WA premiere of the *The Hatpin*.

"Hywel and I were the first technical excellence award recipients at the Finley Awards for our work together on the Old Mill Theatre's *Falsettos*, striking a definitive blow for the backstage ninjas of theatre."

Graeme admits directing a musical such as *The Hatpin* "scares him witless" but acknowledges his talented cast and musical director, matched with the advice, friendship and expertise of "some of Perth's best people", are guiding him along the way.

"Fortunately, my behind-the-scenes background in theatre will help me with the actual staging of the show, given it's one of the more technically challenging productions Perth has seen for some time," he said.

*The Hatpin* plays at 8pm, July 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25 and 26 with a 2pm matinee July 20. Tickets are \$30, \$25 concession – book at <http://oldmilltheatre.com.au/tickets> or on 9367 8719.

The cast features Adam Salathiel, Angelino Schintu, Andrea von Bertouch, Danni Close, Judi Johnson, Madeleine Shaw, Mitchell Crouch, Nicholas Cruse, Sarah Cosstick, Tim Prosser, Hayley Currie, Luke Heath, Sarsi Elsberry and David Cosgrove.

**REMEMBER!** Book for opening night and enjoy cheese and wine during interval, then mingle with the cast after the show

**Tickets are \$30, \$25 concession – book at <http://oldmilltheatre.com.au/tickets> or call 9367 8719.**



The murdering Makin family – played by Andrea von Bertouch, left, Madeleine Shaw and Angelino Schintu – and Amber Murray (Sarah Cosstick, right) form the story of *The Hatpin*.



# AUDITIONS

**Play:** *The Wizard of Oz*

**Director:** Maree Grayden

**Musical Director:** Bree Vreedenburgh

**Auditions:** 2pm-5pm, Saturday, August 2

**Callbacks (if necessary):** Saturday, August 9

**Location:** Old Mill Theatre

**Season:** 7.30pm November 28, 29, December 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 & 12 and 2pm November 30, December 7 & 13



**THE Wizard of Oz has been chosen as the Old Mill Theatre's last season of 2014.**

It's a pantomime version of the classic family favourite featuring the original well-loved characters of Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion but with some fun additions.

It has all the popular elements of *The Wizard Of Oz* plus extra bonuses that follow the much-loved conventions of pantomime.

Group auditions are being held 2pm-5pm, Saturday, August 2. If necessary, there will be callbacks on August 9.

For singing roles, please bring your own music/CD – prepare a song from a musical of a similar type. Also bring a photo and CV if you have one.

A detailed audition notice will be available soon at [www.oldmilltheatre.com.au](http://www.oldmilltheatre.com.au). There are parts for adults and 20 children are also needed (minimum age is 8).

Some roles are not up for audition but these will be listed.

Rehearsals start September 8 and will be Mondays, Thursdays and Saturday afternoons.

Scripts are available by emailing [oldmilltheatre@iinet.net.au](mailto:oldmilltheatre@iinet.net.au) with WIZARD OF OZ in the subject line.

## Review: IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME “...no doubt this is a crowd-pleaser”

**Review by RICHARD HYDE**

Extract from <http://perththeatrereviews.blogspot.com.au>

**THERE** I was hanging around in the bar at the Old Mill Theatre not long after today's matinee had concluded. In strolls the writer, Noel O'Neill. We clock each other, exchange “I haven't seen you in a long time” pleasantries and I buy him a beer.

Part of the discussion is how prolific Noel is as a playwright but, more to the point, how he has two emerging strands of play – the more serious fare (*Under Any Old Gum Tree*, *Holly and Ivy*) and the kitchen table comedy of which *It's All Greek To Me* is clearly a member.

Set around the kitchen table (an excellent set), it involves the squabbles and heightened comic-drama of a family in some form of domestic flux.

Here it is the philandering Nicky Plankos (Kim Taylor) who cheats on his wife Athena (Vivienne Marshall) with the seemingly insatiable Circe (Nada Dilevska).

His life is complicated by dim-witted son Dimitri (Cameron Leese), pregnant daughter Jenna (Valerie Dragojevic) and the antics of the suspicious Athena who has a propensity for flinging herself off the roof.



**Emilio Evans and Valerie Dragojevic in *It's All Greek To Me*.**

Add a curse put on him by Circe and the arrival of his cousin Stavros (Emilio Evans) from Greece, expecting to find a beautiful wife waiting for him, and Nicky has his hands full.

There's nothing for it but to call in the shonky oracle Andronikus (Rex Gray) to help find the girl of Stavros' dreams.

Will it be Katarina (Jessica Stenglein) who arrives to tell Nicky she doesn't want to be there?

Well, no, it won't – but everything is tied up neatly, the curse is lifted and everyone lives happily ever after while dancing off stage to the exit.



**Celebratory drinks in the bar after the show on opening night.**

If you're looking for a searing exploration of the human spirit then this ain't it.

But if you're after a couple of hours of fun entertainment then you've come to the right place.

It's no doubt this is a crowd-pleaser as the happy murmur of the audience attests to after the play finished.

The comedy has very much a '60s-'70s English vibe to it – a mix of *Benny Hill*, and *Morecambe and Wise* with Kim Taylor compared to Michael Caine's *Alfie* by more than one person and Stenglein inadvertently creating a female Frank Spencer character.

There's no doubt Taylor works hard in the lead role given he's rarely off stage, using constant asides to the audience and flourishes of physical comedy especially when mocking his son.

Marshall is suitably shrill and melodramatic as the neglected wife and has some lovely sight gags with Leese as the son who struggles to do basic tasks such as washing his hands or feeding himself.

Evans adds a shot in the arm with his stammering, lovelorn Stavros while Stenglein's brief appearance is amusing.

I went back inside to be greeted by the director who demanded: “Did I hear you laugh?” Given I am known for my distinctive laughter and propensity to use it I was somewhat taken aback.

The aforementioned person is Valerie Dragojevic who I know as a talented actor but is forging a career in directing with *Holly and Ivy*, *Snow and Ash* and now *It's All Greek To Me* under her belt.

I also had a chance to chat with cast members Vivienne Marshall and Jessica Stenglein – lovely people who, along with their fellow cast members, put on a fun show.

*NOTE: The season proved so popular an extra show was added a week after the originally scheduled final night to meet ticket demand.*

**Colour your world: check out the colour version of this edition at [www.oldmilltheatre.com.au](http://www.oldmilltheatre.com.au)**

# Champers all right for you chaps?



OLD Mill members and friends were orange juice (for the teetotallers), out in force on the Anzac long tea and coffee to give everyone weekend for the annual champagne enough sustenance to get through breakfast.

Even though there was a touch of rain, it couldn't dampen the spirits Phil Barnett and Rex Gray battling it (or should that be champagne?) of out to be the alpha male, everyone those who attended.

There was plenty of bacon, eggs, Chaney saying cheers and David toast, fruit salad (for the healthy ones), Nelson and Bronwyn Hammond.

## Turning the tables...

SO what's going on here, do you think?

No, Emma and Ben Davis aren't taking their favourite table for a walk.

But they were taking it

back to the Windsor Hotel after the popular pub lent it to the theatre for one of our recent productions.

Sincere thanks are expressed to Windsor Hotel management for the loan. Cheers!



# Constance Ord honoured



"This is a first move in commemorating the State's artistic heritage in this way," Dr Shepherd told *The West Australian*.

"I see it as a forerunner of similar memorials to musicians and 'fine art' creators."

For newer or perhaps younger Old Mill members, they may not be aware of Constance Ord's legacy.

Originally conducting play readings with the South Perth Community Association after World War II, this evolved into the South Perth Dramatic Club.

Originally they performed one-act plays in the Mechanics Institute Hall on Mends Street - the building we all know now as the Old Mill Theatre.

They soon staged full-length productions with Constance performing on stage while also being artistic director, treasurer and secretary.

South Perth Council was going to demolish the hall in 1959 to pursue new developments after the Narrows Bridge opened.

But Constance fought tooth-and-nail, organising petitions and writing letters, and the council reversed its decision.

In 1972, she convinced the



The memorial plaque - Constance Ord's name is bottom left.

council to add a two-storey extension to the theatre, which included a changeroom and workshop.

By 1995, her persistence resulted in \$750,000 being allocated for the renovation of the theatre and surrounding Windsor Park - finally completed in 2009.

The theatre is now protected by a heritage conservation plan.

Constance left the theatre in 1999 and died in 2010, aged 92.

The Old Mill's front room is named after her, as is the annual Milly Award for best director.

To learn more about Constance's life, go to [www.oldmilltheatre.com.au](http://www.oldmilltheatre.com.au), click 'News' and then the link to the obituary.

THE driving force behind the creation of the Old Mill Theatre - the late Constance Ord - has been recognised on a special memorial at St George's Cathedral.

Unveiled as part of WA Day celebrations in early June, she was one of 30 artists, producers and patrons recognised for their contribution to the arts in this State.

Known as "Theatre Corner", Anglican Dean of Perth John Shepherd was behind the initiative, similar to Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey.

The connection stems from the fact The Playhouse Theatre was next to the cathedral for more than 50 years before it was demolished two years ago.

# WHAT'S ON ELSEWHERE?

**NUNSENSE II: THE SECOND COMING**  
Limelight Theatre, Wanneroo



Fun nuns ready to stun are back on stage in a sequel.

8pm June 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26 & 27; 2pm June 14 & 21. Book at [www.limelighttheatre.com](http://www.limelighttheatre.com).

**SEUSSICAL THE MUSICAL**  
Carine Senior High School



Lots of hoots with Dr Seuss in a stage musical.

7.30pm, June 20 and 21 and 2pm June 21 and 22. Book on 0419 246 122.

**CRANFORD**  
Garrick Theatre, Guildford



Gossip and romance in 1830s witty comedy of manners  
8pm, July 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 24, 25 & 26; 2pm July 13 & 20. Book on 9378 1990 or [bookings@garricktheatre.asn.au](mailto:bookings@garricktheatre.asn.au)

**RELATIVE VALUES**  
Melville Theatre



Noel Coward comedy delivers social snobbery satire

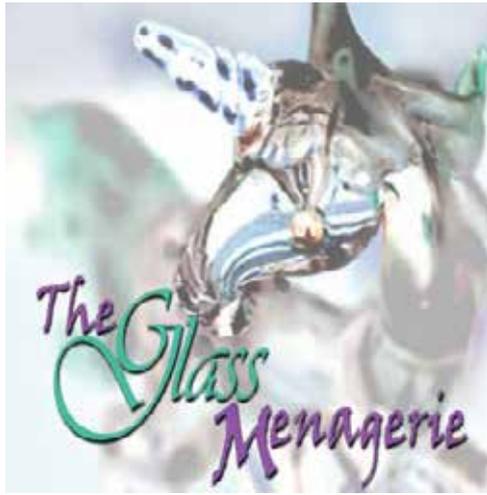
8pm, July 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 24, 25 & 26; 2pm July 20  
Book on 9330 4565 or at [www.meltheco.org.au](http://www.meltheco.org.au)

**THE GREAT AMERICAN TRAILER PARK MUSICAL**  
Roleystone Theatre



South Park meets Desperate Housewives in musical comedy.  
8pm July 18, 19, 23, 25, 26, 30, August 1 & 2; 2pm July 26. Book at [www.roleystonetheatre.com.au](http://www.roleystonetheatre.com.au)

# COMING SOON: *The Glass Menagerie*



AMANDA Wingfield wants what any fragility and innocent hope. mother would – a stable career for Director Susie Conte was responsible her wayward son Tom and a suitor for *The Dumb Waiter* last year, for her fragile daughter Laura. winner of multiple awards.

Her romantic sensibilities are captured by the idea that Tom's friend Jim might be the ideal gentleman caller. But is he simply too good to be true? *The Glass Menagerie* cast features Maree Grayden as Amanda, Aisling McGrogan as Laura, Joe Tareha as Tom and Yad Sand as Jim. The stage manager is Sally Barendse.

Widely regarded as one of Tennessee Williams' most powerful and haunting plays, *The Glass Menagerie* is a poignant reflection on the glories of times past, with echoes of loneliness,

***The Glass Menagerie* runs from September 5-20.**

**For updates, go to [www.oldmilltheatre.com.au](http://www.oldmilltheatre.com.au).**

The Old Mill Times  
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## One-act plays



A VERY short season of one-act plays will go ahead this year, presented as "club nights" over three evenings at the theatre.

Dates will be Wednesday to Friday, September 24 to 26 with titles to be announced soon – although Noel O'Neill's *Under Any Old Gum Tree* will be one of them.

It's part of the drive to help revitalise Dramafest, to be held at Playlovers in Floreat this year over the Queen's Birthday long weekend.

Further information will be posted on [www.oldmilltheatre.com.au](http://www.oldmilltheatre.com.au) and in our Facebook group at <http://tiny.cc/oldmill>.

## Old Mill Theatre 2014 Board of Management



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