

The Habit of Art: meeting of minds in WA premiere by acclaimed UK playwright

AN IMAGINED meeting between English composer Benjamin Britten and poet WH Auden form the basis of the Old Mill Theatre's latest play.

Written by Alan Bennett, one of the UK's most prolific living playwrights, *The Habit of Art* sees the two men meet for the first time in 25 years with Britten seeking advice from Auden – his former collaborator and friend – about his new opera *Death in Venice*.

During the 1973 meeting, they are observed and interrupted by, among others, their future biographer and a young man from the local bus station.

The play-within-a-play looks at the unsettling desires of two difficult men and the ethics of biography, reflecting on growing old, creativity and inspiration and persisting when all passion is spent – the habit of art.

Director Anthony Howes described *The Habit of Art* as one of the finest comedy-dramas of the past decade.

"It takes two great men of the arts and, through much laughter and a few tears, shows them to be fallible human beings with a passion for the arts," he said.

"The play articulates that passion for the ordinary theatre-goer, enabling them to feel and understand.

"The main challenge is probably the same for all directors of any production – to work towards assisting the cast to arrive at a common vision of the author's creation."

Perth-born Anthony Howes has directed several Alan Bennett plays in Australia, including a Sydney tour of *Forty Years On*, *The Madness of George III* and the critically-acclaimed *The History Boys* at the Playhouse Theatre, featuring Edgar Metcalfe and Jenny McNae.

He holds the Pen International Salute for direction, Advance Australia Award for the Arts, Centenary Medal for Theatre and Freedom of the City of London (for youth and the arts in Britain and Australia).

For many years, Anthony directed for the ABC in radio and television and also founded the Midnite Youth Theatre Company, where he was artistic director for 25 years.

His productions have been seen in Australia, the UK (at



WH Auden (Dene Irvin, left), Benjamin Britten (Justin Freind) and Donald (Barry Park) – playing comic female impersonator Douglas Byng – in *The Habit of Art*.

the Royal Opera House, Sadler's Wells Theatre and in the provinces), Canada, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam and Thailand.

"*The Habit of Art* appealed because Alan Bennett is one of the finest writers of human comedy of the age," Anthony said. "To direct the West Australian premiere of the work is exciting."

The cast features Dene Irvin, Justin Freind, Barry Park, Cal Silberstein, Brendan Ellis, Paul Bray, Sally Barendse, Brandon Orgill, Matthew Han and Surjo Mazhar Sahid.

The Habit of Art plays at 8pm April 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29 and 30 with a 2pm matinee April 17. Please note: the play features adult language and themes.

Further note: yes, you are reading correctly. The production was originally due to open on April 8 but has now been pushed back a week to open on April 15. Apologies to those who received the print version of the newsletter without this update.

Tickets are \$25, \$20 concession – book at <http://oldmilltheatre.com.au/tickets> or call 9367 8719 or oldmilltheatre@inet.net.au



Paul Bray, left, and Sally Barendse play assistant stage manager George and stage manager Kay in *The Habit of Art*, which features a play-within-a-play.



Welcome to the world...



CONGRATULATIONS to Old Mill Theatre board member Mary Wolfla and her husband Graham on the birth of their child Sterling.

He was born 8.55pm February 17 at St John of God Subiaco Hospital, weighing 3.6kg (8lbs).

The Old Mill Theatre wishes the trio all the very best. We're sure he'll be treading the boards - or helping out backstage - in no time.

Changes to 2016 line-up



DUE to the complexities of staging the production *Last Cab To Darwin* in August, it has been decided the short timeframe does not enable the theatre to do justice to the play.

As a result, it has been postponed to a later date.

However, we are sure our audiences will enjoy another episode with the unconventional nuns of *Our Lady of The Vines*.

What's that, you say? Yes, the confirmed replacement for the August season is *Hail Mary II*, again penned by Noel O'Neill.

He seems to be making a habit of these sequels...

Review: IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME TOO! “...even funnier than the original...”

Extract by **GORDON THE OPTOM**

Source: www.ita.org.au

IT'S All Greek to Me Too! is Noel O'Neill's magnificent sequel to the play he wrote just over two years ago, *It's All Greek to Me*. This is even funnier than the original and that was a sell-out!

Even though Noel writes about two or three plays a year, the standard of his writing, dialogue and the superbly constructed script ensures a happy audience.

This play has a laugh in every line. It is wonderful to see so many of the original actors returning.

The setting is a northeast London suburb at Christmas 1960. The scenery (designed and built by Noel O'Neill) is that used in the first play, comprising the kitchen and lounge room of the crazy Greek clan - the Pilancous 'Plank' Family.

The music from *Zorba the Greek* is playing as the house lights dim. Very good lighting and sound effects, thanks to John Spurling and his occasional helper John Woolrych.

Jenny Prosser's costumes reflected the era perfectly, in both style and the materials used. The hairdos brought a smile, too. Well stage-managed by Melissa Munoz Escobar.

In the first play, *It's All Greek To Me*, Nicky Plank arranged for his cousin Stavros, living in a dump somewhere in Greece, to get married to his unsuspecting London neighbour, Circe.

Only months after the wedding, disillusioned Circe (Nada Dilevska) leaves her husband Stavros (Andre Balzelli) and returns to London.

Because Nicky (Kim Taylor) and his long-suffering wife Athena (Vivienne Marshall)



Cast and crew of *It's All Greek To Me Too!* - would you buy a used car from any one of them?

\$2000 raised for bushfire appeal

YOU may remember proceeds from the February 21 matinee of *It's All Greek To Me Too!* were to be donated to the South West Bushfire Appeal.

We can report \$2000 was sent off to help those affected by the devastating bushfires.



Backstage selfies during *It's All Greek To Me Too!* with Aimee Nicholls, Charlotte Weber, Vivienne Marshall, Sofie Reidy-Crofts, Nada Dilevska and Valerie Dragojevic (apologies to Ellen DeGeneres).

generously paid for the couple's wedding, Circe blames them for her misery and places a curse on the family.

Nicky and Athena's daughter Jenna (Valerie Dragojevic) is due to have her baby any day now - perhaps even Christmas Day.

The family friend Andronikos (Rex Gray), who is a potent oracle and surrounded by a powerful aura, is summoned to help them.

The youngest Plank son, Dimitri (Cameron Leese), is well-named because his IQ is probably negative.

Nicky, now with two unmarried relatives again, re-commences the matchmaking routine.

He brings around a friend's beautiful daughter, Christiana (Sofie Reidy-Crofts), in a desperate attempt to marry off Dimitri but the son seems quite interested in the even-more brainless, Katarina (Aimee Nicholls).

Will Athena discover Nicky's misdemeanours? Will anyone become wedded or even remain married?

Director Noel O'Neill and his assistant Valerie Dragojevic both have a wealth of experience in comedy direction: what a magnificent show they have given us.

The multitude of laughs was perfectly delivered by the wonderful cast. Each actor had a rich character to portray and they did this with superb team chemistry.

A special mention for Kim Taylor and Vivienne Marshall's performances. Kim with his hilarious lack of conscience and Vivienne's desperate desire to advance the family's welfare.

A really good, side-splitting start to the Old Mill's 2016 season.



If you would still like to donate, go to www.appealswa.org.au.

Colour your world: check out the colour version

May 18 play reading... a beaut from Neil LaBute!

THE first play reading of the year – *August: Osage County* in March – was a resounding success with 19 people in attendance, our best numbers yet.

Get ready for the next one on **Wednesday, May 18**, where the play of choice will be *Fat Pig* by Neil LaBute.

It won the 2005 Outer Critics Circle Award for outstanding off-Broadway play and Laurence Olivier Award for best new comedy in 2008.

Fat Pig is a romantic comedy with a cruel edge and has been described by critics as provocative.

The comedy challenges our perceptions and assumptions about physical appearance and how we stereotype people.

Neil LaBute is a US playwright, screenwriter and film director. He based his first film, *In the Company of Men*, on one of his plays which won a raft of awards.

Other plays include *The Shape of Things* (previously seen at the Old Mill Theatre) and *The Break of Noon* (starring Tracee Chimo and David Duchovny).

Fat Pig has been submitted to the Old Mill Theatre to be considered for the theatre's 2017 seasons.

While they have not yet been finalised, this is an excellent opportunity to hear the play read and chat with the director if you are interested in auditioning for a part.

The cast consists of two males and two females, all in their late 20s to mid-30s. One female must be



The March play reading brought together an enthusiastic bunch in the theatre's Constance Ord room.

heavy and wear a larger dress size.

Time: 6:30pm for light refreshments and 7pm for the start of the play reading.

Further play readings for 2016 will be August 3, September 28 and November 16.

Keep an eye on the website, our Facebook group and *The Old Mill Times* for play titles as they are confirmed.

For enquiries, contact Siobhán O'Gara on 9361 1530, 0409 374 731 or siobhanog@westnet.com.au.

BOTTOMS UP! More things you Champagne need to know breakfast



DUE to 2016's early Easter, followed by the opening of our latest production, the annual champagne breakfast has been pushed back to a little later this year.

So make sure you're all ready for **SUNDAY, MAY 1**, to clink glasses and quaff a bit of bubbly from 9am.

Of course, there's the usual barbecue breakfast – bacon, eggs, sausage – and healthier options, such as fruit salad.

All members and friends are welcome and it's all for the low, low price of just \$6.

Please RSVP for catering purposes by April 24 to 0402 249 249 or oldmilltheatre@iinet.net.au.

WEBSITE SAGA

OUR ongoing saga with the website continues... but please understand we are doing our best to get the problem solved.

Yes, we know there's a problem. Yes, someone is working on it and doing their best to fix it. Yes, we know the problems only affect some people and not others.

Without getting into too much technical detail, it would appear that, depending on which internet service provider you are with, that will determine if you experience a problem with the website.

Firstly, we need to identify what the exact the problem is and then we need to contact the service providers themselves to gain a solution.

Unfortunately, this can all take time, so please, please bear with us.

As stated last issue, there ***are*** other ways to get into contact with the theatre, whether it's a booking or general enquiry.

Please call **9367 8719** or email **oldmilltheatre@iinet.net.au** and someone will assist you.

WHAT'S ON ELSEWHERE?

GASLIGHT

Limelight Theatre, Wanneroo



A mystery of dimming gaslight and footsteps in the night.

8pm March 31, April 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15 and 16.

Book on 0499 954 016 or at www.limelighttheatre.com.

SHREK JUNIOR – THE MUSICAL

Roleystone Theatre



Everyone's favourite ogre is back in a hilarious stage spectacle.

7.30pm April 15, 16, 20, 22 & 23; 11.30am April 17; 2pm April 16, 20, 22 & 23; 3pm April 21.

www.roleystonetheatre.com.au

DEATH AND THE MAIDEN

Melville Theatre



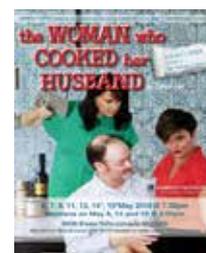
A heart-stopping psychological thriller, written in the wake of Chile's Pinochet regime.

8pm May 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20 & 21; 2pm May 15.

Book on 9330 4565 or at www.meltheco.org.au.

THE WOMAN WHO COOKED HER HUSBAND

Harbour Theatre, Mosman Park



Is the way to a man's heart really through his stomach?

7.30pm May 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14; 2pm May 8, 14 & 15.

Book on 9255 3336 or at www.TAZTix.com.au

CLOSER is getting closer



THE Old Mill Theatre's June season is Patrick Marber's *Closer*, directed by Trevor Dhu (responsible for *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* last year).

Closer follows four characters in contemporary London as their romantic lives intertwine.

Each of the characters pursues their own desires and discovers what happens when these wants come into contact with those of the other characters.

The play is set in London over a period of four years. It dramatically explores complex themes of sexual desire, jealousy and betrayal. More than anything,

Closer is a play about its characters – Dan, Alice, Larry and Anna – and what they do to each other.

We learn their most intimate thoughts and secrets but, at the same time, almost nothing about their lives beyond the time we spend with them.

What little biographical information there is lies scattered throughout the play, with truth and lies often imperceptible from one another.

Please note: the play contains strong language and sexual references.

Closer will play June 10 to 25. Go to www.oldmilltheatre.com.au for updates.

The Old Mill Times
PO Box 1390
South Perth WA 6951

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Submissions for 2017

EXPRESSIONS of interest are sought from people wishing to direct a production in 2017.

Based on audience feedback, we are particularly looking for someone to submit a well-known musical.

Call 9367 8719 or email oldmilltheatre@iinet.net.au to discuss your submission.

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