

**MALTHOUSE  
PROMPT**

# GOOD WORKS

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BY NICK ENRIGHT

PROMPT PACK / EDUCATION RESOURCE

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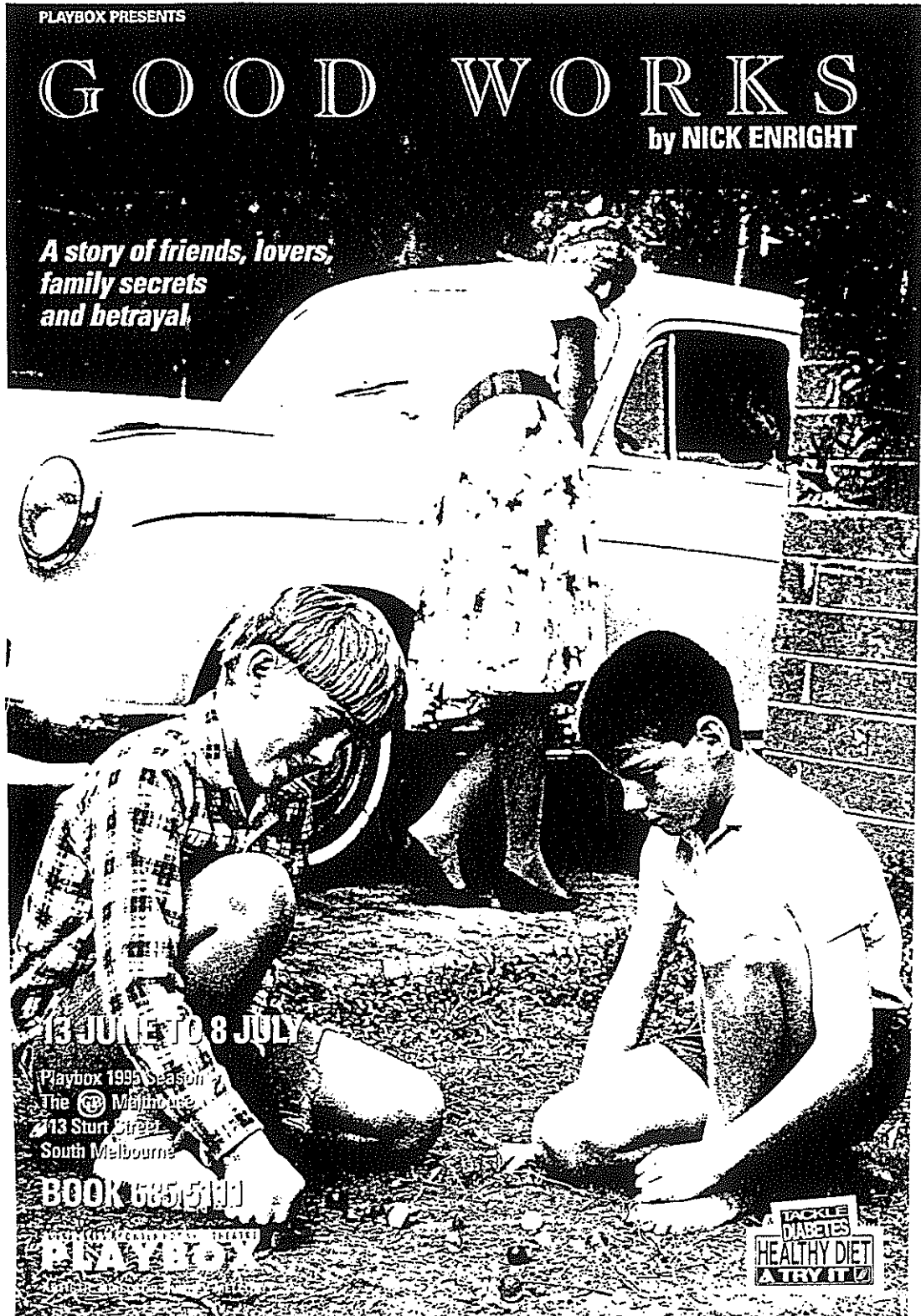
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## GOOD WORKS

by NICK ENRIGHT

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## GOOD WORKS

### INTERVIEW WITH NICK ENRIGHT

WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT FOR WRITING GOOD WORKS?

I suppose it a was desire to understand the past which, as you move into middle age, becomes increasingly important. I think when I was in my twenties, I didn't give that a lot of thought. Now I'm in my forties and my life seems to fall into discernible patterns, I'm interested in understanding how we all got to be where we are.

One of the things that the play attempts to do is to trace impressionistic scenes; the passage of people's lives over 20 or 30 years. And crucially, of course, the difference between childhood and adult years. While a novel might show the character moving steadily from 12 to 30, the play works in sharp, quite separate units, so that you see someone at 12 then you see them at 30, and all you have is the behaviour. The question (and I hope the pleasure) for the audience is working out how the characters got to be where they are. So, it's that question of why are we here, and how did we get to be the way we are.

The first version of this play was a very naturalistic, linear, straightforward play called Vestments which took place in a room under a church. There was a group of women who would meet every month to mend and look after the vestments of this church. So, it was the notion of a group of women dedicated to service. It was the kind of environment that I grew up in, very much, as a child and this would be what Catholics and some other Christians call "good works".

There is a doctrine in the Catholic Church called "Salvation by Good Works", and that essentially means that you can't simply be saved by fate. To believe in God enough you have to live in such a way that your goodness is manifested in actions. And it means that, if you're very severe about this, (as a lot of people were in my childhood) every action is being assessed for its function in terms of faith and one's belief. And so people are constantly doing good works.

I suppose one of the things I feel is that we often don't understand our motivations for doing good works and in this play people are doing good works which cause extraordinary damage to other people.

FROM THOSE INITIAL CONCEPTS TO THE FINISHED PLAY, WHAT SORT OF PROCESS DID YOU UNDERGO?

Well, the naturalistic play didn't seem to me to be very interesting because it didn't actually explore (except by implication) the past and the present. And I wanted to arrive at a form that expressed the simultaneous presence of the past (or various moments of the past) in any present action. So that when people have any kind of emotional connection with each other, at one level they are in the present and dealing with the present, but in any present moment their past, their shared past (and their shared and sometimes quite different memory of the past) is also involved - and that's crucial.

So, of course, in the case of parents and children, or siblings who in adulthood are dealing with their own childhoods, they will have different memories of certain focal incidents. The truth is that whatever you remember is the truth for you.

SO THAT'S HOW THE PARTICULAR STYLE OF THE PLAY EVOLVED?

Yes, yes. You could order the scenes in this play in chronological order and they would be much more - in a narrative sense - explanatory because you would start with the women in childhood and you would end with the men in adulthood who are their sons. And you would have that timespan of fifty-odd years. But it would be a much less interesting piece in the theatre because it would not deal with the effect of the past on the present nearly as vividly. One of the things that happens to us, of course, is that we live our lives in the present but we keep being impelled to go back into the past. There's a great moment at the end of Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, (and I'm paraphrasing) but I think the last line is something like "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past". It's that image of sailing one way ..... the boat going one way and the current going the other. And you think you're going in one direction but the strength of what's coming against you overpowers you, makes you change direction.

If you want an image for the play, then the focal image is probably that of the snow dome, and the way in which the snow flurries and causes obscurity and chaos. And ultimately, at the end of the play, it all settles.

If you like, it's like the Hans Christian Anderson story, *The Snow Queen*, where what's flying around in the air with the snow are all these pieces of glass which look like snow but are actually quite dangerous. In this play, everyone's pasts - the bits of everyone's pasts - are sort of circling them. And sometimes they don't know what's hitting them, you know? All of those memories are assailing them.

TIM is at a point in his life where he needs to resolve certain things about the past or he will, I think, be dead - emotionally dead. And the inciting incident of the play is the entry of this stranger into the pub. That entry means that he has a choice either of confronting the past or going back to the barstool and "drinking 'til I'm anaesthetised". He's reached that point where he can live a life without connection with the world. He can play the piano for the opera company or he can face who he is and what he is.

There's another thing about the form: that one feels that all of the time frames are just, sort of, colliding with one another. There's probably some theory of time where that's true, where the various bits of your life are all floating around there in the ether. But there are quite deliberate choices about when two timeframes can join and it happens very rarely in the play. It feels like it's happening a lot because they're passing but there are only, in fact, two or three moments where two different timeframes are simultaneously present for any period of time. Obviously, the first one which is a focal point at the end of the first act, where the crisis between the women about the possession of the child and the crisis between the men about the direction of the evening, all comes to a head. And what unites them is the question "Why am I here, why are you here?" And that's as close as the time frames get until the river scene near the end of the play where the characters are actually all in the river at the same moment, even though the women are in 1938 and the boys are in 1962. But they're all in the water at the same time.

HOW MUCH DID YOU DRAW ON YOUR OWN MEMORIES IN WRITING THE PLAY?

The play is, in a deep sense, based in realities that I know. In this instance, I grew up in a small country town which had a very powerful and dominant Catholic community. And I grew up in roughly the same time as the boys, in the sense that I was eleven in the beginning of the sixties. But none of the events in the play actually happened [to me] and I don't particularly identify myself with any one character. I mean, I suppose because I am a gay, middle-aged man that I could be seen as identifying with TIM but I don't feel any stronger identification with TIM than with any of the others. In fact, I find myself identifying with all of them at various levels. In a way I think I probably feel most for MARY MARGARET because I think her pain is the greatest.

SO IT IS MORE ABOUT MEMORIES OF A PLACE AND A TIME, RATHER THAN OF SPECIFIC EVENTS?

Yes. I'm a writer who likes to anchor things in a specific social reality, even when very little of that is used. And I chose periods that I felt comfortable with - either that I knew or, by research, I could place for myself. There are various sign posts along the way in the play about where the characters are: the culture - and the characters' experience of popular culture, whether it's movies or music, or whatever; and then there are the manners and the social customs of the day.

I feel very comfortable in that small-town world. Even though I wasn't actually at the victory celebrations in 1945 (because I wasn't born!) I have a very good instinct of what they would have been like in the town that I came from. So it's easy to reconstruct that. And then, the sixties' stuff - that world's very familiar to me.

When you line up all the things that are similar in my background to the world of the play, it sounds as though it's autobiographical. I'm aware that it's an irony because my father was a lawyer, I grew up Catholic and I ended up gay, you know, all of those things. But, in fact, it's not about my life because all the characters are me, you know? SHANE is as much me as any of them. People think that (playwright) Tennessee Williamson is BLANCHE DU BOIS (in *A Streetcar Named Desire*), but Tennessee Williamson is also STANLEY KOWALSKI. You can't write the characters if you can't share their experience.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE PLAY COMMENTING ON CATHOLICISM?

I think it's a play where the polarities are unconditional love, and the structures of institutions and what those institutions represent - which is fear, mostly. The institutions happen to be Catholic but, in a sense, that's irrelevant. It's not about Catholic doctrine, and it's not particularly about sexual repression, which is what we always think of as being the great Catholic thing. Instead it's about the institutions and their effect on human relations: that they make people less loving; that they make people more fearful. And when people are fearful they do stupid things. I used Catholicism because it's the system that I know. But I think it could just as easily have been something else - it could have been a political system. So, it both is and isn't a Catholic play. That's the truth.

We had an actor in Brisbane who didn't want to be in it because the church has changed so much that he felt it was representing a version of Catholicism which was no longer current. And I respected that, I thought that was fine, but I can only write about my experience of religion. And particularly of religious institutions.

The central fact in the play which creates the dramatic situation is that those teachers have absolute authority. When TIM is ordered into the room by THE BROTHER, you think "Why does he go?" Well, he goes because the guy is wearing a uniform. I wouldn't have dreamed of disobeying a brother or a nun because they wore those outfits. It's the nature of that iconic presence that you obeyed. When MARY MARGARET talks about the murder she says "Not any man, a religious brother".

And those religious brothers could be brutal beyond belief. That's the truth, and it's so much a part of people's experience. It's interesting that when people start - even the younger people - to respond to the play, they always start talking about their own experience of childhood, saying "Yes, it's just like Brother So-and-so". Another story of human misery.

We're only beginning to face the truth. These abuse cases are always about sexual abuse and, hideous as that is, I would have thought that the incidents of general violence and pain were much, much wider.



YOU HAVE HAD GREAT SUCCESS IN WRITING SCREENPLAYS FOR FILMS. HOW HAS WRITING FOR FILM INFLUENCED YOUR WRITING FOR THE THEATRE?

I suppose people could look at this play and say that it has a cinematic structure, in the sense that it cuts very abruptly from scene to scene as does film, which is all about juxtapositions. Film is all about one image being juxtaposed - transposed - against another and, in a way, it's the effect of the two images on each other that is telling the story.

For example, in film, you can shoot a look of surprise and then cut in before it a shot of a smelly old bit of rotting dung by the roadside; or you can show the same look of surprise followed by a shot of a newborn baby. The look of surprise is the same but it will be read differently each time because of the image that's preceded it. We project onto the image the previous thing.

So, in a sense, the play works like that. But I have an aesthetic problem in talking about writing for the theatre being "cinematic" because the things that the cinema does which makes it remarkable are the things the theatre can't do and that is, of course, to change scale. A scene in film can become a battle of eyeballs and it can also change points of view - that is, I can shoot this entire conversation from your point of view but the camera can be on me or vice versa - mostly it's alternated. How you adjust that and where you shoot from will change the emotion of the scene.

In the theatre you simply don't have that capacity. The theatre is always about the present and the audience, to some degree, choose where to look. They can be encouraged or directed to look in one place - they generally tend to look at the person who is speaking - but they don't have to. Whereas in film I can't make the camera move; I can't say "OK, show me that person". It goes in on your eyeball and that's where we are. So the theatre is not, in any deep sense, cinematic at all.

And the other thing about this play which makes it "un-cinematic" is that the actors play themselves at different times in their lives. Part of the theatricality is the non-naturalism of the characters playing themselves at different ages. If you did a film, they'd have to be different actors.

GOOD WORKS

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR, KIM DURBAN

WHAT WAS YOUR INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE SCRIPT OF GOOD WORKS?

Well, funnily enough, I got frightened. I found when I first read it, I couldn't stop reading it because it worked like a thriller. My particular interest was - I remember - in the character of SHANE because I found him very mysterious and so, through my interest in him, I became interested in all the other characters. Then I remember that my palms were sweating by the end of the reading and I was just sitting at my desk here in the office and it's really rare (with all the noise going on in the office) to have an experience where one is totally pulled in by a play. But I did feel the pull of the world of this play, and so that - apart from the fact that I also believe in what it actually has to say - that was the first response.

WERE YOU READING THE PLAY AS A DIRECTOR AT THAT POINT, OR WERE YOU JUST READING IT FOR INTEREST?

It's an interesting question because I think directors always read plays as directors; they start to make little productions in their minds. But sometimes the play takes over and that's what happened with this one. So I wasn't reading it at first thinking about a production - which is just as well because, when I found out that I was going to direct the play, my first thought was "Oh, my God! But how do you do this play?" I hadn't even thought about that until I took it on. And because the play is so like a jigsaw, one's first reading of it is literally putting the pieces together. As a director, that's what the demand is: putting the pieces together in a way that is challenging, yet understandable, for the audience.

SO, WHEN YOU THEN REALISED THAT YOU WERE GOING TO BE DIRECTING THE PLAY, AND YOU RE-READ IT, WHAT SORT OF RESPONSES DID YOU START TO HAVE THEN?

Um, thrilling ones, because it's a play that plays games with the theatre. Linear narrative doesn't exist in this play - well, there is a linear narrative within it, but it has been deliberately jumbled up. As a director, what was exciting to me was how to face the fact that time changes in the play; how to help actors play characters who age between 6 and 45. What kind of a process we would use for that was really interesting. And then, because it's a play about memory, I wanted to make sure that the production had aspects that literally allowed things to flood in and fade out, rather than just being all acted out in front of us. I was interested in trying to make some of it deliberately mysterious, so that we're not always telling the audience

what to do. I think audiences like to be teased. I'm sure they don't like to have things so difficult they can't work it out, but I think they do like a journey. So, my biggest focus has been how to make sure that the evening is a journey.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEMES THAT YOU ARE TRYING TO HIGHLIGHT IN YOUR PRODUCTION OF THE PLAY?

Well, one of the things in the play that's important is the damage that people do to other people when they think they're trying to do the best they can for them. Although the play judges the characters very harshly, it is actually a play without judgement, in the sense that it presents an audience with all the reasons why the people who do these terrible things, do them. And so, it's important to me, in supporting that theme, to make sure that the audience always understands people's motivations, and don't just give them little stereotypes of goodies and baddies, because there is no such thing in this play.

Another thing that really intrigues me, I suppose, is the theme of crossroads. If two people go through the same experience and then, as a result of that experience, go off in different directions - why is that? And that's something we're trying to support very strongly in the play through, not only the performance style, but how we use the space. There's a lot of traversing and coming and going.

The play is very complicated in its themes. If we look for example at the lives of RITA and MARY MARGARET, there are a whole lot of themes relevant to them because they're women, which are different to the ideas men wrestle with. And so for the women, the theme is partly the notion of goodness, really, in that sort of sexual and moral way - what is a good person? what is a bad person? who is a bad girl? And that's something which young women often have to wrestle with, even now, without the pressures living inside this play.

When it comes to the men as grown-ups, it's more a question of who's more dead and who's more living. I suppose that is their issue because they've survived; whether they're good or evil doesn't matter, but whether they're actually alive or not is their real issue. And I mean by "alive", that they are free to be themselves.

COULD YOU COMMENT ON THE STYLE OF THE PLAY?

This is a question that interviewers are fond of asking, and I find it a really perplexing game, because sometimes I don't think there is such a thing as style. There are historical trends in designing performance energies, and they've all got names. (Some of the people that are coming to the play will know all those names, like Naturalism and

Supernaturalism, etc.) But these days they can't be applied to the kind of theatre we're making so neatly because our theatres have changed. The architecture of our theatres has changed; the way the people understand stories has altered, purely because of video and film and the way it can reconstruct life.

So, I haven't taken one official theatrical style and applied it to the world of the play. Every artist that I know and value wants to work to what we all call "emotional truth". And so that's our, sort of, stopping station. If we can't find the emotional truth of what happens between people, we can't put a style on top of it.

But the design team and I, and the actors, have all talked about style and the words we use are things like "fluid" (which, for us, probably means something which is structurally seamless - which is not about trying to get people to go offstage quickly and come onstage quickly - but actually to deliberately use the freedom that the text gives us with time to create a style of its own). So, if you like, you probably would think, when you look at it, that it's naturalism with surprises because it doesn't follow a naturalistic pattern; it's not a world of one unity. And, if one had to ask what is the real unity of the play, where is the world happening? - it's probably happening in the bar and then, beyond that, it's probably even happening in Tim's head. We're seeing and feeling through him.

My main task, as the director of GOOD WORKS, is to design the answer to the question "when are we?" in emotional time. This means to create theatre where memories and experiences can be witnessed in theatre space. But I'd love it if people would come and tell me afterwards what style they think we're using: I'd be very keen to know!

HOW HAVE YOU APPROACHED THE PLAY IN REHEARSAL?

I have a very complex and detailed rehearsal method which is based on layers of exploration. So I will start off at the very beginning of rehearsal dealing with the text - primarily using processes of analysis; looking for units of action, that kind of thing. And we spend a lot of time round the table - especially with this play - trying to unpick all the seams and work out why things went with other things, etc. I tend to use the same kind of work with every play. Every play is anchored by the characters' objectives - that is what they want, which may or may not be revealed to other characters.

But what I have noticed through my career as a director is that each play will determine its own stopping-off points. So, for this play, we've done a lot of work on what we could call the subtext and the internal territory. We've set up lots of exercises in space to help the actors explore the pull between being afraid of, and loving the people they're talking to. So in rehearsal, we would actually try to physicalise when the characters are afraid and when they're feeling confident - those sort of things.

COULD YOU DEFINE "INTERNAL TERRITORY"? WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?

Internal territory is more the drives of the person: personality, emotions, inner thoughts, personal needs. And the other ingredient that we use quite a lot is character analysis based on physical energies and movement. So the combination of those two things - the physical life and the internal life - come together to create a real person, on top of which we then put the actions and play the text.

I think people have this traditional view that directors come in on the first day and tell everybody where to stand. Maybe I'm weird, but that's the last thing I do. We always do the "walking around" bit last because I, personally, don't know what I want to do or what I want to see until I know why things are happening and who people are. At the moment, we're very late in rehearsal, so that's exactly what we're doing now: working out what we call "traffic control". But having done all that other work first, it means that everybody knows their own character so deeply, they know exactly where they want to go and it's no problem.

It's a cheating form of directing because the characters will tell you exactly where they want to be! Characters can be very bossy!!

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MOST EXCITING AND CHALLENGING ASPECTS OF WORKING ON THE PLAY IN REHEARSAL?

Well, there are two very simple answers to that: one is that this text is so deep and so clever that nearly every line has at least eight meanings. The challenging and exciting thing about the text has been to dig around and find out what those things are, so that when you actually say them, they can echo and re-echo.

The other exciting and challenging thing is working with fantastic actors like the ones I have in rehearsal who are just so passionate and committed! It's terribly exciting to be with people who can work in a very complex way and take a lot of ideas on board and act from those, instead of working as actors in a passive way where every question is, basically, "What should I do now?" I'm working with a team of very complex and beautiful people - that's very exciting. The designers are also talented and push me to be better.

OBVIOUSLY RELIGION IS A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON THE CHARACTERS' LIVES IN THE PLAY. WHAT ROLE DO YOU BELIEVE RELIGION PLAYS IN THE PLAY, AND IN YOUR PRODUCTION?

Most of the characters in the play, even those who in the year 1981 are now probably atheists, could not be who they are if they had not experienced their religious upbringing, and the pressure that religion has put on

their lives in the past. As I've said before, I don't think the play is judging the idea of religion - it's not saying "Catholics are bad", or that one shouldn't belong to a religious system - but what it is pointing out is the awful paranoia and pain that can be created by a style of living which is oppressive. So it is, in fact, looking at the tortuous positions that people get themselves into, in their attempts to try and follow a code which either they don't really quite understand, or doesn't seem to apply to their reality.

And it poses many of the questions which any intelligent person would pose about the impact of a spiritual system which is created to make connection with one's inner life. It's not dealing with daily life but with one's inner being and soul. And, yet, the play posits very intelligent questions about the pressure that those inner realities put on daily living and the way that people watch one another. The characters in GOOD WORKS, like MRS DONOVAN, BROTHER CLEMENT and MRS KENNEDY, are always seeking physical evidence of "goodness" - such as people proving by acts of charity that they can act beyond selfishness. They watch the other people in the play for clues.

As a person who is not a Catholic (I'm actually Anglican, but I went to a Catholic school in the '70s), I know its very important that this play is pre-Vatican II, which is the time the boys are young in the play - the early '60s. Because since that time, the Catholic church has changed quite radically and the play is pointing very directly to another time, which was more saturated in tradition and resistant to change.

WHAT ABOUT IN TERMS OF YOUR PRODUCTION: HAVE YOU CHOSEN TO EMPHASISE THE RELIGIOUS THEMES IN ANY PARTICULAR WAY?

There will be symbols of religion within the play and what we've tried to do is invest them with a sense of ritual, so that just the way people endow objects or spaces should tell us something about religious life, and its atmosphere.

HOW MUCH INFLUENCE DO YOU THINK THAT THE DIFFERENT TIMES IN WHICH THE CHARACTERS ARE LIVING HAVE ON THEIR LIVES?

I would say very much, in every era of the play. For example, the 1981 scenes in the pub. It's a gay pub in 1981, so what's important to remember is that's pre-AIDS, a very important idea. Because I know there are tiny clues in the play about blood, and people who know about AIDS might get the creeps but, there was a time when blood was never perceived as spooky, but as a life-force. How time has moved!

For the people who are young in the play during the '30s and '40s - it's war time. It's the anniversary of the war now for us, but it's a very different sense of life if you look at the restrictions and the codes that applied to everybody during wartime.

It's actually not possible - despite having said what I said before about the Catholic code - to place all of the restrictions at the door of the church because, in fact,

some of the social restrictions that were around were just part of life then. And it may be that people who are younger when they're watching this play are saying, "Well, why doesn't she just do this, or walk away?" or "Why does she care about those things?" And the answers are usually in the historical period of the time: that women had far less access to education; far less mobility; they were expected much more to marry and be part of a stable family unit because that was the fabric of society. And so RITA, with journey to follow her own free spirit, is quite a radical character. Now, we'd just celebrate her and probably go round to her place and have a party! But back then, I think the things that she wants to follow are genuine drives that people have, and other people restrict.

She's living in a universe where it's far more complicated to follow those drives. Those drives to follow her free spirit; to debunk restrictions; to live for the moment; to be committed to one's ideals (whatever they might be) whether other people respect them or not; to be staunch. She's a very, very brave woman and, despite all the things that happen to her in the play, she never dobs. It's a very Australian idea but, for her not to ever spill the beans about all the things that she knows, I think she's a very wise and gracious woman and it's terribly sad what happens to her.

I also think people may find what happens in the school pretty shocking. But you've got to remember that, in those days, those sort of very strict codes of discipline within schools were the norm - I know my Dad talked about getting the strap on a regular basis when he was only eight. Now society has changed so much that we have codes about not hitting children, but this would have been a shocking idea for the characters in our play.

So what's crucial to the structure of the play is to understand what rules the people within the world of the play take for granted. And, of course, that has a profound effect also on space and costume and music. Music and sound have been very exciting and important ingredients in this production. One of the things we talked about - again referring to that idea of memory - is just how potent it can be to hear a song that you know. And for very young people most of this music won't be known but for older people in the audience it's bound to - we hope - spark off a few memories.

NOTES FROM HUGH COLMAN, DESIGNER

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST RESPONSE TO THE SCRIPT?

When I first read the script, I was completely held by the story more than anything else. I had a very strange reaction for me as a designer in that as I read the script, I could only see the people, I couldn't see where they were. I knew where they were, it's very clear in the script where they are as they move from scene to scene. In my mind's eye though, as a theatre piece, I could see the people very clearly but they only seemed to be highlighted in darkness, which was fascinating for me. But it was the story that was the hook for me, particularly the four central characters.

THE PLAY IS ALMOST LIKE A THRILLER WHERE YOU GET HOOKED IN, TRYING TO PIECE IT ALL TOGETHER. FROM A DESIGN POINT OF VIEW, WAS THIS EXCITING FOR YOU, OR DID YOU THINK - HOW ON EARTH AM I GOING TO DO THIS?

A bit of both. I suppose generally I do find it easier to see the people in any production that I'm doing. I tend to start with the people that the play or opera or whatever is about, and then work out towards the set. Every now and then I have a flash of what the set might be, but this one eluded me for a very long time. I realised that what I had to do was make it very clear in my head in naturalistic terms what each scene was and what it meant, what it would look like, say, if you were filming it. Then I needed to try to pull back from that, to pare away to the minimum amount of what you would need to let the audience know what was happening from moment to moment in the scene. I talked to Kim (Durban, the director) very early on about this curious thing of just seeing people in darkness, and we realised that quite a lot of the scenes do take place at night, that you don't have a strong sense of the day. Also, it felt as if the characters all inhabited the same "world", whatever that world was.

It was interesting for me, not brought up as a Roman Catholic; I was brought up in the Church of England. Although there were certain similarities, there were also enormous differences, and I needed to talk to Nick a lot about what those differences were. There were many fascinating details about the day to day structure of Catholic schooling or the Catholic religion that I needed to get my head around to make complete sense of the people in the play.

It was an advantage to me that Nick and I are close in age, so a lot of the Australian "landscape" memories that are in the play were ones I could relate to. I'm not saying that it's autobiographical from Nick's point of view, but clearly there are a lot of remembered things from his childhood in the sixties, and I could relate to those very strongly. It was the Catholic details I felt I had to get right, so there was a lot of talk and research that had to go into that.



Slowly, out of this started to emerge a sense of what the structural area of the play could be. The thing that came to me first was that levels would not only be useful, but would also somehow help to tell the story. So the set incorporates gradations of levels. It felt to me that the world of the play was one that needed to be dominated by propriety... The Catholic life seemed to be much more structured than the kind of life that I was brought up in. There wasn't a moment of the day that wasn't to be accounted for. And so I felt that there needed to be that kind of structure in the set.

Another image that Kim gave me very early on was that the play feels like a kind of net or web. I don't mean that in a menacing way, but it is as though there is something that connects all these people and keeps drawing them together.

So, out of all this, gradually the set emerged. It's a very simple set in many ways. It has to be simple because the play requires all these split second changes; time changes and place changes, so I knew that whatever was there on the set had to stay there. You couldn't bring elements on and off; the action had to flow totally.

And I thought whatever is there that's on stage all evening, it has to be really useful to the play, as well as somehow visually suggesting what the world of the play might be.

Another thing that Kim and I had talked about as we read through the play was the notion of secrets and things being kept in places; the idea that there are parts of your life that you hide away, like the love letters that are hidden in the box. And then there are all the proper places for things.....Cupboards and wardrobes seemed to suggest themselves at an early stage.

I knew that if we did use furniture, it would need to be something that we found (in second hand shops etc) rather than something we had the workshop make, because I wanted whatever was there on the set in the way of furniture and props and costumes to be "itself" as it were, rather than something we had fabricated. In a small space like The Beckett Theatre this becomes terribly important, because there isn't that veil of illusion that a larger theatre can create.

There's also some kind of response that we have when we recognise an object. If you can really find a 1940's or a 1960's artefact, the audience will respond to that in a different way than they will to something that we've created, however well we might have made it. It's that sort of hook of recognition.

So that was the texture of the design that I was looking for... that the space would be a space in a theatre, yet the things that were in it would be very real.

It's been one of the longest working processes towards a solution for a set for me... Even though it might look as if you could have thought of it in five minutes, of course I didn't.

The other thing I had to do was to work through the play very technically. I had to work through the structure of the play and draw myself up maps and grids, particularly for the costume changes, and get that very clearly in my head: what was possible and what was not possible, so that it didn't set up too many expectations for the audience. Because if you're signalling to the audience from the start that you're going to give them a completely realised image for a character, and then you suddenly realise two pages later that you can't, that someone has to step from being a twelve year old in 1962 to a thirty year old in 1980 and there's no time to do a costume change, then the audience will become confused. But if you set up from the outset of the play the fact that all the actor is going to do is put on a jacket, or there could be a lighting change or maybe a music cue, then you've got the possibility for engaging the audience's imagination, in the kind of way that only the theatre can. With film, its not a problem (changing quickly from scene to scene), you can have everything all there; but then film is a completely different experience.

YOU'VE TALKED ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF THE SET - WAS THERE ANYTHING IN THE SCRIPT THAT STOOD OUT TO YOU IN TERMS OF STRONG VISUAL IMAGES?

Why the set was difficult for me, I suppose, was that the play is so intensely about the relationships between the people that a lot of the settings seemed to be incidental. Of course they're not; Nick has structured the play very carefully, and all the scenes and where they take place have resonance, but the overriding interest is in the people. Some of the things that stayed in my head more were the props - things like the image of the strop that BROTHER CLEMENT uses, and its resonance with the leather belt that EDDIE uses when he's beating SHANE. The flick knife of course, which is an incredibly powerful image even though its only a small thing... the brass vase in the church....

I made a list of the kind of props that I'd remembered after reading the play. In fact the list was pretty complete, and that's how powerful the images created by those props were. I realised that each one of those things, if we could find the right one, would be able to set the scene. If we could find a vase, the right kind of brass vase so that the audience thinks - oh yes, that's a church vase - then you've got the whole scene, you don't need the scenery.

The cupboards seemed to come out of that sense of a world of offices and of classrooms... its a domestic world as well where, particularly in the Donovan's world, you feel that everything is in its place. It's a world where control is very important. Both the church and the adults in the play, as far as the children are concerned, seem to feel that to have control over your life, or to control other people's lives, is of the essence.

GOOD WORKS: COSTUME CHART FOR MARY MARGARET

PERFORMER:

"GOOD WORKS"



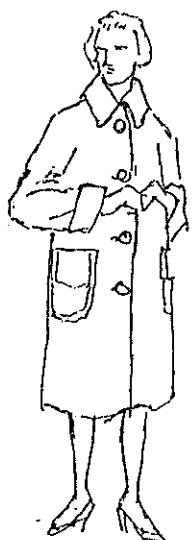


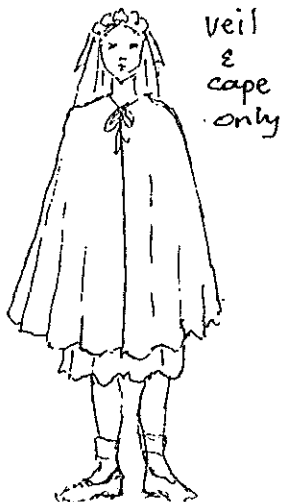


CHARACTER	PAGES	YEAR	COSTUME DESIGN NUMBER	NOTES	SETTING
MARY MARGARET					
ACT I	1	1928	E	QUICK CHANGE TO ↓	
	2-3	1962	A		DONOVAN HOUSE
	13	1962	C/B	COAT OVER B ↓	CARAVAN
	13-18	1938	B/F	CHANGE ONSTAGE TO F?	CHILDREN OF MARY
	20	1938	B	WITH APRON	DONOVAN HOUSE
	22-24	1940	B	APRON?	DONOVAN HOUSE
	25-26	1962	A		BICYCLE
	30-32	1942	B		KENNEDY HOUSE
	33-35	1962	A?		DONOVAN HOUSE
	36-37	1945	D		STATION
	40-41	1962	G	DRESSING GOWN OVER? ↓	DONOVAN HOUSE
	42	1945	D	VERY QUICK - COAT?	CONVENT
	43-45	1962	A/C	CHANGE ONSTAGE - COAT	CARAVAN NEIL'S OFFICE
	47-49	1962	A		DONOVAN HOUSE
ACT 2	50-51	1962	A		DONOVAN HOUSE
	52-53	1962	C/A	ADD COAT - ONSTAGE?	WHEELCHAIR
	56-57	1945	D		DONOVAN OFFICE
	62-65	1962	A		DONOVAN HOUSE
	66-69	1962	A		DONOVAN HOUSE
	74	1945	D/H	COAT OVER ↓	DONOVAN HOUSE
	74-76	1945	H	VERY QUICK CHANGE TO ↓	TOWN HALL VICTORY MARCH
	77-81	1962	C	ADD COAT	NATIVITY, CHURCHYARD
	81-82	1938	E	ON STAGE CHANGE?	RIVER
				F	

PERFORMER:

"GOOD WORKS" - PLAYBOX

DESIGN ~ H. COLMAN '95

GOOD WORKS: COSTUME CHART FOR MARY MARGARET

NO. A	CHARACTER	YEAR	NO. B	CHARACTER	YEAR	NO. C	CHARACTER	YEAR	NO. D	CHARACTER	YEAR
ACT 1		ACT 2	ACT 1		ACT 2	ACT 1		ACT 2	ACT 1		ACT 2
2-3 25-26? (30-32) 33-35 47-49		50-51 (52-53) (56-57) 62-65 66-69 77-81?	(13) 13-18 (40-41) 42? (43-45)?  APRON 20 22-24 30-32	+ apron 	38/40	13 43-45	COAT ONLY 	52-53  77-81	36-37  42?	COAT ONLY 	56-74
NO. E	CHARACTER	YEAR	NO. F	CHARACTER	YEAR	NO. G	CHARACTER	YEAR	NO. H	CHARACTER	YEAR
ACT 1		ACT 2	ACT 1		ACT 2	ACT 1		ACT 2	ACT 1		ACT 2
1		81-82 84-85	13-18	Veil & cape only 	1928	40-41		1962		Gorsage 	74-74

So cupboards just seemed to say a lot of those things to me. And then they have that pleasant aspect of being able to be used - they have drawers and spaces to put things in and bring things out of. We felt that quite often we didn't want the actors to have to leave the space to go off stage and change, so they could just open the cupboard door and take out their next costume piece, whatever that might be.

Then I knew that the kind of furniture that I wanted to find would be very plain, functional, well made, all purpose. I was looking for something that was neither specifically domestic nor institutional, but that could cross over between those areas, and I think we've been pretty lucky with that. You look at this furniture and to me it calls up the world that these people have come from.... It's the past, it's very Australian, it's very plain no-nonsense stuff; well-made, a little bit pre-loved, dark and polished so that you know that care and attention has been spent on these things. At the same time they also have that whole potential that any cupboard image always does - what do people put in there and why? What will come out of it?

We tried not to make too many closet jokes, because, of course, there's the gay sub-theme in the play, but its certainly not intended as a pun.

One of the pleasures I had in working through the play with Kim was that we constantly discovered these things that echoed elsewhere in the play. I think that is one of the pleasures in experiencing the play - even if you're not aware of those things as they happen, in retrospect they enrich the whole texture of the play.

It goes back to that image that Kim had of the net, or the web - everything is linked.

Its interesting, there's one point in the play - the Victory Dance - which is in a sense almost like the centre of that web... its the turning point, the point beyond which everything finally goes wrong for these people. And it comes very late in the play, because the whole time frame of the play is non-sequential.

I think that the non-sequential time frame is something that audiences now are much more attuned to, as they are familiar with all the techniques of film and editing. And yet I don't feel that this is a film pretending to be a play. I feel that its incredibly "of the theatre", this piece.

Another thing that was interesting to think about in terms of the costume side of things was the fact that the four central characters have to shift in and out of time and age so much, and that the other two actors have about seven roles between them, who are also moving in and out of age.

It became clear that it wasn't going to be possible for all these images to be fully visualised. So I go back to that earlier point that what we had to look for was the essence - what will tell the audience the difference between TIM and EDDIE, when the actor playing both characters has got only a micro-second to go from one character to the other. Can he do it all in acting; will it be too confusing if he's still in the same costume, or is there something that we can give him that will help just to clue the audience in? So that's been an interesting process, thinking that through, and talking it through with the director and the actors.

The other thing is that because the two central female characters, RITA and MARY MARGARET, leap mostly between the 1940's and the 1960's, I had to consider the possibility of finding a look that wouldn't jar with the audience in either of these. Although historically these two periods have very different silhouettes and styles, we have managed to find a couple of dresses which, with a few accessories, maybe an apron or whatever, in fact seem to cross that span of time quite convincingly. The performers are not going to be able to change their hair or their makeup; maybe even their shoes are going to have to stay the same.

So what I've tried to do is to find solutions that will help the audience and not confuse them, so we don't set up something in one scene that makes the next scene difficult to follow. It really is a process of whittling away.

IT SEEMS FROM WHAT YOU'VE BEEN SAYING THAT THE WHOLE DESIGN PROCESS HAS BEEN ABOUT FINDING THE ESSENCE OF THINGS: FIRST OF ALL THE ESSENCE OF THE PLAY IN ITSELF FOR THE SET DESIGN, THEN FOR EACH LITTLE SCENE, WHATEVER ESSENTIAL PROP IT IS THAT MIGHT SET THE SCENE. THEN FINALLY FOR EACH CHARACTER, WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF THE CHARACTER ITSELF, AT ANY POINT IN TIME. GETTING RIGHT BACK TO THE VERY BASICS.

Yes, and if it's successful, it will be something that the audience will almost not notice.

Where you always know you've gone wrong is when people spot a mistake. One of the things I'd assumed, for example, as a non Roman Catholic, was that the teaching brother was a Christian Brother, but he's in fact a Marist Brother. That is not spelt out in the text, but for anyone who understands the way that they're named, the fact that he's called BROTHER CLEMENT (in other words he's addressed with a Christian name rather than a surname), would mean to any Roman Catholic who's been through the system that he was a Marist Brother. And there's a difference in what they wear.

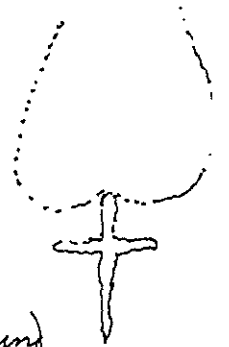
Now to me, all priests wear black soutanes, but then you start to look at the detail, and the difference might be the difference of a collar, or buttons or no buttons. It was very interesting when I'd changed the design drawing to the image of the Marist Brother and shown it to Nick, he said - well it must be right, because I feel frightened when I look at it!

GOOD WORKS: DESIGN FOR BROTHER CLEMENT  
by HUGH COLMAN



white collar - two 'tabs

crucifix on chain,  
controlled to  
soutane



black cord, twice around  
body, tied at sides,  
ends long.

Black trousers under,

black lace up shoes.

HC: 95

BROTHER CLEMENT -

The costumes of the other characters, apart from the central four, will actually be more fully realised where possible. Nick has given them more time to change, and because of that we're using them as signifiers in the play, so that even if, for example, RITA or TIM hasn't had time to do a complete transformation in terms of period, if they're in the scene with MRS KENNEDY or BARRY, then MRS KENNEDY and BARRY are pretty fully realised, and that should help the audience to know where they are.

ARE YOU INVOLVED IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS AT ALL?

I love to be, I've been in and out nearly every day, just watching how they're moving along with it. Because I know that, apart from all the acting choices that are made, we're going to have to have a very technical approach to the way that all the scenes are linked, all those transitions... The tech week leading up to the performance is going to be given over a a great deal to making final choices about where someone comes from, where a prop is set, when a lighting change occurs: all those external things that will support the actors.

Sometimes when the actors are concentrating on their acting, maybe I can see something (in terms of the use of the set or props) that they haven't considered that can help them, or I may see something that they're doing that makes me realise that something I've done needs to be changed. So it's essential to stay in touch, particularly with a play like this.

IT'S A DESIGN THAT FROM THE OUTSET WAS VERY FLEXIBLE, ISN'T IT?

Well, it had to be flexible for the play, and it had to be flexible from the point of view that the play was touring, so the set had to be able to move easily into other venues.

The aspect that I think is also going to be very interesting, and it's not specifically a design aspect, is the musical accompaniment. There's going to be a musical texture; sometimes it might be a very specific thing like a song from a certain era that will specify where we are. And sometimes it might be a sound effect: we've got the whole business of the beating of TIM and the murder of BROTHER CLEMENT to deal with, and we decided quite early on not to have a door that got kicked in, but to do it with sound.

THERE ARE A LOT OF PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS TOO, AREN'T THERE, WITH THINGS LIKE PEOPLE DIVING INTO RIVERS, THAT ARE VERY DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE ON STAGE.

Water... It's interesting that you bring up the river, because water was a very powerful image in the play from the word go. All the scenes that happen on the river bank seem to be the ones where the characters in the play are most at peace; the river seems to be a world where their dreams and aspirations are possible, and we want that to be very beautiful.



One of the first thoughts was - is there any way we can use real water - but that didn't seem to be a practical solution in the small space that we are working in. I also wanted to heighten the sense of water.... We talked about having trays of water and reflecting light off them, which can be very beautiful. But our Lighting Designer, Rachel Burke, has come up with an idea that I think is both more theatrical, and more interesting. That is to somehow immerse the characters in light, an effect which seems to be very appropriate to the feeling of the play.

I think a lot of the transitions will be affected through lighting changes, and underscored with music. That will make the need for a visual change much less. I do believe we're going to go on taking things out rather than putting things in; to see if we can get down to that absolute bare minimum of indication.

It's also a little bit difficult to make these choices when you know the play as intimately as the people who have been working on it do. You have to keep in mind that the audience who are seeing the play for the first time may need a little more help than we do. So we'll rely very much in that final week of rehearsal on other people's responses. If there are moments that are unnecessarily confusing for them, then those are the ones we want to clear up.

I think there probably still need to be those moments where people are saying: "I'm not quite sure what's happening, but I don't mind. I'll stay with it; I believe that I will find out."

You don't want to explain it all away, it shouldn't be oversimplified, because as I said, part of the pleasure of this play is in being allowed to piece it together for yourself.

It's a very open-ended play. There are a lot of things in these people's lives that we don't know about, that we can only imagine at the end of the play. And that's very moving and very beguiling. You don't want it all wrapped up and parcelled for you - I don't anyway. I love that feeling that for each of us in the audience, it will be a different experience.

# Children anew in rehearsal

Excerpts from:  
"THE ENRIGHT STUFF"  
by Sandra Hall  
The Australian  
Magazine  
11-12 June, 1995

Enright grew up in the Hunter Valley town of Maitland, north of Sydney, with the church, the priests' house, the convent and the orphanage at the end of the backyard. They loom darkly over the action in *Good Works*, which is about people who interfere in the lives of others, convinced they're only doing their duty. The piece also plays with memory, flagging a break with the naturalism that characterises most of Enright's previous work by slipping back and forth in time. He arrived at this approach quite late in the day, he says, as a way of doing away with stultifying promptings like "Do you

remember?" and "Let me remind you ..."

The resulting structure uses metaphor and association to signal time changes, and the evocative, meditative effect of this is one of the play's most powerful elements.

Enright thought of *Good Works* as being a bit gloomy for most audiences. He is astonished that it's taken on such a vigorous life, and that the roles of the two women at the heart of the action have attracted such well-known and experienced talents. In Canberra, they were played by Angela Punch McGregor and Victoria Longley; Helen Morse and Janet Andrewartha are appearing in the Melbourne production; and Cathy Downes, familiar to Australian audiences for her one-woman show about Katherine Mansfield, did the play in New Zealand.

With *Good Works* and *Blackrock* following so closely upon one another, the Enright style can at last be clearly defined. He has effectively mapped out his territory, and crucial to it is his preoccupation with individual moral values together with his critical questioning of society's accepted ideals of masculinity. The message at the heart of his work is not original. He's saying what we all know — that there may be plenty of talk about the arrival of the New Man, but there's still a lot of life in the old one. Shaped by the customs and conventions of small town life, his male characters make sure that their sons inherit their distaste for any expression of weakness or need for comfort and intimacy.

The strength of his writing lies in the thoroughness with which he knows these people. While Enright has shown that he can write funny pieces about the urban and articulate classes, his most deeply felt characters are those who use words to deflect feeling and obscure truth.

The play centres on the friendship between two girls — feckless, open-hearted Rita and shy, orphaned Mary Margaret, who betrays her friend in the course of opting for a careful, pious life as the unloved wife of the local solicitor. This pattern of closeness and betrayal is repeated in the next generation when Mary Margaret's son lets Rita's boy take the blame for a crime the two adolescents committed together. Running strongly through both strands is Enright's characteristic impatience with absolutes. What he most dislikes about the Catholic Church, he says, is its black-and-white morality.



*Good Works* director Kim Durban: "We've had a great time reclaiming ourselves."

By VICTORIA GURVICH

**D**IRECTING NICK Enright's latest play, *Good Works*, has given Kim Durban, and the cast, the opportunity to reminisce about their childhood and teenage years. "There has been a lot of discussion; that's part of the way I work," Durban says. "We've had a great time reclaiming ourselves."

*Good Works*, to start at the Malthouse on 13 June, features a series of flashbacks in which the actors play themselves as children and teenagers.

While the costumes and props change, the set does not, and Durban hopes this will encourage the audience to use its imagination as the play drifts between the 1930s, '60s and '80s.

*Good Works* is about two men who meet by chance, their mothers, and family secrets. For Durban, the play is like a jigsaw puzzle. She describes it as a thriller in which the audience plays a guessing game.

"It's about the damage that people can do to each other when they try to do 'good works'. It's about retribution

and it questions what makes a family work."

Durban says she directs by letting the actors explore ideas rather than telling them what to do. She says the actors — Janet Andrewartha, Mike Bishop, Paul English, Jan Friedl, Helen Morse and Greg Stone — "dipped into the collective memories of their childhood" during early rehearsals.

Nick Enright has twice won the Australian Writers Guild Gold Awgie for his plays *Daylight Saving* (1990) and *A Property of the Clan* (1993) and he and George Miller received a 1993 Academy Award nomination for the screenplay of the film *Lorenzo's Oil*.

*Good Works* is on the VCE syllabus and nine performances were sold out before advertising began.

"It's a wonderful piece for young people because it is about youth and experience," Durban says.

The flashbacks presented a challenge for Durban, who has been a freelance director since the 1970s (*Fairy Tales for the Future*, *Pushin' Up Daisies*, *Skins*, *Recruiting Officer* and *After Dinner*).

"It's a technical challenge to be ready for the era," she says. "(The play) is a bit of a mystery. We want the audience to be on the edge of their seats and add up the clues."

Durban says the play has some very funny moments and some very dark ones. "It never stays anywhere very long. It's a very human piece."

Durban, who received a 1994 Trainee Artistic Directors' grant from the Australia Council, is the artistic associate at Playbox Theatre. The grant was organised by the council to encourage more women to run theatre companies.

Learning about programming seasons, resources, administration and marketing, Durban says she discovered that team work was all-important in theatre companies. The trainee artistic directors' program finishes in September.

"It's a complete mystery to me what I'll do next but I'm massively encouraged about the future. Whatever I choose to do I am going to be ready," Durban says on her way back to a *Good Works* rehearsal. *Playbox presents Good Works at The Malthouse from 13 June to 29 July.*

## QUESTIONS : GOOD WORKS

1. How easy did you find it to follow the story of the play ?  
What things were helpful ?  
What things made it difficult ?
2. What do you believe that the play is saying about the nature of goodness?
3. One of the things the play is about is people trying to live by the moral codes of the times, whether they are dictated by church, family or school.
  - How do these codes change for the characters throughout the play?
  - What moral codes do you believe exist in the 90's ?
  - Who dictates what they are ?
  - How strongly do they differ from those in the 40's , 60's or 80's
4. The designer, Hugh Colman , comments that the Victory Dance scene is like the turning point in the play .
  - How do the directions of the characters ' lives change after this scene ?
5. Why do you believe that Mary Margaret is so keen to adopt Shane ?
6. Do you believe that the production has been successful in achieving smooth transitions between scenes ?
  - How exactly have these transitions been achieved ?
7. How successful do you feel the actors have been in conveying changes in the ages of their characters ?
8. For those actors playing different roles , did you feel that they succeeded in portraying completely individual characters with each role ?
9. Comment on the use of language in the play .  
How does it help to distinguish between the characters ?
10. How effective was the set in it's development and enhancement of the script ?

The following may assist you in formulating a critical response for writing your reviews :

- Did I enjoy the experience ?
- Would I recommend it to others ?
- Did the play have a message and was it clear , muddled or hidden ?
- What questions were asked and what answers were offered ?
- Was the piece designed to inform , entertain or both ?
- Was there a major theme or a series of themes ?
- Were there unexpected twists in the plot ?
- What was the mood of the piece ?
- Was the use of the language economic or extensive ?
- Were the cast organised as a strong ensemble or was individualism in evidence ?
- Did characters show evidence of research or consideration of fine detail ?
- How strong was your empathy with particular characters - how strongly did you care for them and what happened to them ?
- Did all actors make a strong offering to the audience and to other actors ?
- Did the designer achieve the plays intentions ?
- How practical was the set and the costumes ?
- Was lighting and sound integrated or intrusive ?
- Could everything be clearly seen and heard ?
- Was there evidence of successful-  
Designer/Director/Technical collaboration ?

*Background Notes*

*Compiled by Margaret Steven & Domm Camenzuli*