

**MALTHOUSE  
PROMPT**

# **NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN**



PATRICK WHITE

## AUSTRALIAN SCRIPT CENTRE

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# **MALTHOUSE** **PROMPT**

Prompt Pack // an educational resource.



**Malthouse Theatre presents**

## **Night on Bald Mountain**

**By / Patrick White**  
**Direction / Matthew Lutton**

**The Coopers Malthouse, Merlyn Theatre**  
**5 - 25 May 2014**

Prompt Pack compiled by Emily Atkins for Malthouse  
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**MALTHOUSE**  
**THEATRE**

// what happens next.

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## VIDEO LINKS

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### WATCH

- [Director Matthew Lutton talking about the script and his interpretation of \*Night on Bald Mountain\*](#)
- [Ida Duelund Hansen, Composition & Double Bass and her role as the Mountain](#)
- [David Miller, Malthouse Theatre Production Manager talk about the staging of \*Night on Bald Mountain\* in the Merlyn Theatre](#)
- [A time lapse of the Merlyn Theatre during the set construction of \*Night on Bald Mountain\*](#)
- [The Trailer for \*Night on Bald Mountain\*](#)

## ABOUT MALTHOUSE THEATRE

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Malthouse Theatre is at once a treasured building, a theatre company, a creative site and an engine for change. It is also the imaginative expression of a committed team of artmakers reaching out to an even larger number of local, national and international artists. All are dedicated to an ongoing conversation with audiences of exciting diversity and character.

This conversation chooses contemporary theatre as its vehicle: a compelling annual program of adventurous, multi-disciplinary work inspired by writers, directors, designers, choreographers, audio artists and performers. Here, the combined possibilities of all theatre arts are offered centre stage – for entertainment, for inspiration, and even for fun.

# CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

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**By /** Patrick White

**Direction /** Matthew Lutton

**Set & Costume Design /** Dale Ferguson

**Lighting Design /** Paul Jackson

**Sound Design /** David Franzke

**Composition & Double Bass /** Ida Duelund Hansen

**Cast /** Syd Brisbane, Peter Carroll, Julie Forsyth, Ida Duelund Hansen, Sue Jones, Melita Jurisic, Luke Mullins, Nikki Shiels

**Stage Manager /** Lisa Osborn

**Assistant Stage Manager /** Caitlin Byrne

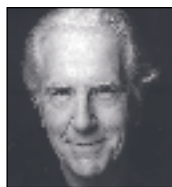
**Rehearsal Photography /** Pia Johnson



SYD BRISBANE



CAITLIN BYRNE



PETER CARROLL



DALE FERGUSON



JULIE FORSYTH



DAVID FRANZKE



IDA DUELUND  
HANSEN



PAUL JACKSON



SUE JONES



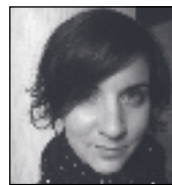
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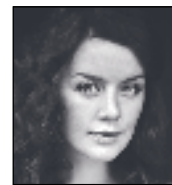
MATTHEW LUTTON



LUKE MULLINS



LISA OSBORN



NIKKI SHIELS

# PROMPT – CUE, INDUCE, MAKE, MOTIVATE, PERSUADE, ENCOURAGE, STIMULATE, IMPEL, INSPIRE.

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Welcome to the Malthouse Theatre Prompt Pack for *Night on Bald Mountain*. When an actor forgets a line in rehearsals they may call for a prompt to provide a clue or a cue so that they can keep telling the story. This document aims to provide just that – a next step, a reminder, a series of provocations. It is full of information but also poses many questions of the audience. The Prompt Pack invites us to see how relevant and exciting contemporary theatre can be. As a resource, these pages are by no means definitive but we hope they'll take you on an interesting journey and keep you travelling through the world of the play well after the curtain call. Who knows where you'll end up?

## BACKGROUND TO 1964

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*Night on Bald Mountain* was written in 1964 during a particularly tense period in Australian society where the Cold War had reached fever pitch following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The spectre of the atomic bomb was at the forefront of many people's minds at the time and, whilst this political context is not mentioned explicitly within the play, it almost certainly informs the anxious, barren and measured tone of the writing.

*Night on Bald Mountain* could be described as one of Patrick White's most divisive works. Following its debut at the Adelaide Fringe Festival in 1964, and the poor reviews that followed, White declared that he did not wish to see the play performed again during his lifetime.

*Night on Bald Mountain* was revived in 1996 by Belvoir Company B, with Neil Armfield directing the production and receiving far better reviews than the South Australian premiere. A number of critics at the time alluded to the idea that this may be due to Armfield's 'tactical ignoring' of some of White's more impenetrable stage directions and expositions.

Similarly, the 2014 production at Malthouse Theatre simplifies the set and stage directions to a point where, in parts, they are almost entirely ignored. This creates an entirely new performance framework from that described in the text and one where dramatic elements and stagecraft are more transformative than ever.

# PROGRAM NOTES, WRITTEN BY MALTHOUSE THEATRE'S ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MARION POTTS

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## OURSELVES IN FIFTY YEARS

In the last three years of programming, we've attempted to represent the wealth of creative expression that has contributed to our cultural identity. A part of our dedication to creating new Australian work involves celebrating those great playwriting pioneers who helped anchor us within a strong writing tradition and cut the path for contemporary self-scrutiny. We felt it was time that once again Patrick White, perhaps our most prestigious of writers, should return to the Merlyn Theatre. Undeniably, Patrick White captured the Australian psyche and exposed some of the unique tensions within it. He made us see ourselves in a different light – probed our discomfort, tapped our anxieties. It is a

happy coincidence that this year is the fiftieth anniversary of *Night on Bald Mountain's* premiere.

Here Patrick White meets an utterly contemporary mind in Matthew Lutton. The world of 2014 is very different to the one that Patrick White knew but there would appear to be enduring truths about our relationship to our environment and the ways in which this has defined us. I'm looking forward to seeing how these two creators meet, span their generational perspectives and shape this particular incarnation of *Night on Bald Mountain*.

**Marion Potts** / Artistic Director



# PROGRAM NOTES, WRITTEN BY DIRECTOR MATTHEW LUTTON

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## GRASPING AT GREAT TRUTHS

*'I have known them, and shall again, but only intermittently, the result of a daily wrestling match, and then only by glimmers, as through a veil. None of the great truths can be more than half-grasped. I doubt I should have arrived anywhere near my inklings of them if it weren't for what I sense as links with a supernatural power.'*

– Patrick White, from his 1983 speech, 'Australians in a nuclear war'.

When I first read *Night on Bald Mountain* I had the sensation of emerging from a dream. The aura of the play, of the people and the mountain they clung to, haunted me. The characters were all preoccupied with daily tasks yet were simultaneously yearning for something more, desperate to pull back the veil to see something more truthful, something possibly more real.

Throughout the early stages of this production's development there were several key thoughts that occupied me. The first was about the dichotomy of house and mountain, of domestic versus nature. It is almost impossible to recreate nature with any naturalistic honesty in theatre, therefore a different mode of expression is required. In this instance we turned to modernist architecture, asking ourselves what was the simplest gesture we could imagine that could conjure the experience of a mountain for an audience.

The second was about performance style. Patrick White's plays (like many of his later novels) refuse to adhere to a consistent style. They mutate, usually following the instinct of the author, the 'architect' of the writing, as opposed to the needs of the characters. Therefore *Night on Bald Mountain* has moments of vaudeville and comedy, with large sections of fragmented naturalism – where you can feel the tones of the great plays by O'Neill and Ibsen – to something approaching a possible symbolist drama – Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* comes to mind. All of these

genres collectively form the style of the play, and in doing so its own unique theatre language is formed.

The third was Jung. When you turn your attention to White's novels, such as *Riders in the Chariot* and *The Solid Mandala*, you can see his characters reflecting the archetypes that the psychiatrist Carl Jung observed. Jung suggested four major archetypes (for those that need a refresher): people that engage with the world through their intellect, through their intuition, through the senses or through empathy. But while in *Night on Bald Mountain* many of these qualities are visible in the characters, White is writing something more true to life – real people contradict themselves and act without apparent reason. So there is a constant struggle between characters wanting to behave like archetypes while at the same time being unpredictably human. That said, the rehearsals for this play have been joyously and endlessly challenging, and we often found that discussions of Jung or other influences on White were not necessarily helpful. His playwriting needs to be spoken and comes to life in the body and in the voice of actors. It's only then that you start to hear the music of his writing, and see glimpses of the mysteries beneath the text.

Frequently the characters struggle to say what they mean. Finding the right words is torturous, and what they are attempting to express overwhelms them. During rehearsals we were often confronted with the humanity present in the writing – the moments of longing, dreaming and violence that sit beneath the words – but we were also frequently surprised at the humour in the scenes, to discover a comedy and playfulness.

I always knew that this was a play only to be attempted with an extraordinary ensemble of actors, but it wasn't until I started rehearsals that I realised just how difficult the play is and just how extraordinary this cast are. White's characters have their own ways of speaking and thinking that are a challenge for any actor – finding truth in what is strange and unnatural takes enormous



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skill. Every day of rehearsals has been a constant celebration of the magic of acting, of the ability to transform words on a page into living thought. It has been exceptional to collaborate with performers who dare to give so much of themselves.

I am writing this note as we are still rehearsing and some days it feels like 'all talk, talk, talk and nothing ever said,' as Mrs Sibley would say. But then I just have to sit silently for a moment, and

listen to the constant glimmers of truth shining quietly out of White's writing, watch the actors finding more and more moments of grace on a daily basis, and I begin to feel overwhelmed by the experience of it all, and I feel haunted again by desire 'to express some... thing... when you are bursting with it... the inexpressible all... or nothing. Well, that's how it is!'

**Matthew Lutton** / Director



# SYNOPSIS

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## ACT ONE

The play opens with Miss Quodling, a rough, leathery mountain woman, tending to her goats – her voice ‘tender and abusive by turns’. Miss Quodling describes the harshness of the Bald Mountain wilderness and hints at its capacity to send people mad.

She is joined by a breathless and excitable Stella Summerhayes (Stella), the new nurse employed to look after the lady of the house up the mountain, Mrs Miriam Sword (Miriam). Miss Quodling warns Stella to be wary of Miriam, referring to her dramatic moods and alcoholism. She also makes her opinion of Professor Hugo Sword (Sword) known, referring to him as ‘stuck up’ and ‘full of self-importance’.

Stella assures Miss Quodling that she has all under control and goes on to describe her deep

love for her father back home in Melbourne. Mr Denis Craig (Denis), an associate of Sword, appears, sent to fetch Stella back to the house. It is clear that Denis is pursuing Stella’s affections.

After some back and forth with Mrs Sibley, the housekeeper, Stella eventually takes breakfast with Miriam, her patient, who is both gushing and irritable by turns, discussing her relationship with her daughter, husband and the mountain as Stella listens. Meanwhile, Sword tells Denis of his wife’s past. He then decides that he would like to take both Denis and Stella for a drive to the towns that surround Bald Mountain. Miriam plays the martyr, but insists that Stella go. Whilst Stella is getting ready, there is an emotional and feverish exchange between Miriam and Sword, which leaves her unsettled.

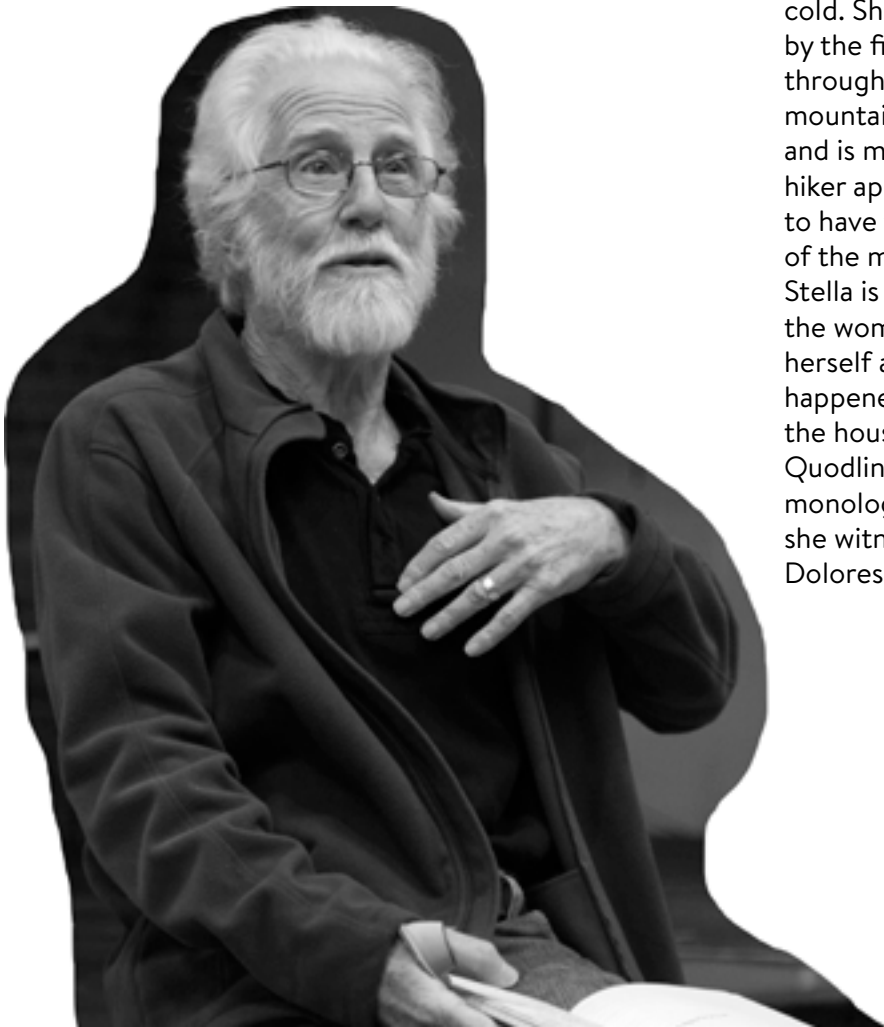


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## ACT TWO

Despite instructions to watch over Miriam, Mrs Sibley is convinced to leave her to seek help with a runaway goat. Miriam strikes a deal with Mr Cantwell, the local grocer to deliver a case of whiskey in exchange for a priceless family heirloom. Mrs Sibley returns with Miss Quodling who shares a drink with Miriam, the two women having parallel conversations about their pasts. After Miss Quodling leaves, Mrs Sibley returns to discover that Miriam is drunk. She panics and tries to send a telegram to her daughter to pick her up and take her away from Bald Mountain.

Sword and Stella appear, flushed and exhausted from their drive. Stella describes her close relationship with her father and tries to find similarities with Professor Sword, despite their very different backgrounds. Stella returns to Miriam's room to find her collapsed in a drunken stupor. Meanwhile, Sword is in his office leafing through a manuscript. Denis enters and Sword reveals a secret. He then discovers the evidence of Miriam's drinking and flies into a rage. A fierce argument follows.



## ACT THREE

Later that evening, after a tense dinner, Stella returns to Miriam's side and attempts to fortify her will to become well. Miriam reminisces with her. Downstairs, Sword does the same, describing a beautiful dress she used to wear. Stella retires to her bedroom and begins to write to her father. Denis visits her room and they kiss. Sword visits Miriam and sees that she has put on the dress he was describing. Another feverish and passionate exchange occurs, after which Sword leaves the room to pray. Miriam leaves the house in a state of anguish, still wearing her dress.

Sword visits Stella's room and makes advances. She initially rejects them, but becomes more compliant as Sword is compared to her father. As she realizes the hidden meaning of her attraction to Sword, she is horrified and leaves the house in a state of shock.

Miss Quodling is looking for a goat that she believes has given birth (kidded) and comes across a hiker looking for directions. She then comes across Miriam who is wandering in the cold. She ushers her into her house to warm by the fire. Stella appears and begins to climb through the wilderness to the top of the mountain. Sword appears looking for Miriam and is met with hostility from Miss Quodling. A hiker appears and describes how a woman seems to have thrown herself from the cliff at the top of the mountain. Denis arrives and reveals that Stella is missing, at which point all realize that the woman is likely to be her. Miriam shows herself and is shocked to discover what has happened to Stella. She follows Sword back to the house, resigned. The play finishes with Miss Quodling delivering an emotional yet pragmatic monologue about death and nature before she witnesses the death of her favourite goat, Dolores.

# CHARACTER STUDIES

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## STELLA SUMMERHAYES

Stella bounces into the play full of the joy of nature and enthusiasm at her new role. She is unsure about, yet flattered by the affections of Denis Craig, a colleague of Professor Sword who accuses her of primness: 'is the body something to be ashamed of in a nurse's world?' She mentions often mentions her closeness with her father, describing him as 'near to perfect as anyone will get' and someone who 'doesn't know much but ... understands'. Her admiration for Professor Sword is clear, but as the play continues, the parallels she draws between him and her much-loved father become increasingly close, leading her to a realisation that ultimately leads to her downfall.

What do you think Stella's gluttony represents? Consider the description: 'an orgy of kippers'

Where is Stella's demise foreshadowed early in the play? What effect does this have on your opinion of her?

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## MISS QUODLING

Described as a 'large old woman with a leathery brown face' whose voice is 'abusive and tender by turns', Miss Quodling is not shy about professing her love for her goats, explaining that you 'can't trust anythun but goats and silence'. She is proud of her knowledge of Bald Mountain, telling a hiker that she knows the mountain 'like the back of me 'and'. She is dismissive of other humans, particularly Professor Sword, who she thinks is 'stuck up'.

Do you think Miss Quodling truly hates all other humans? Why or why not?

What do you think she means by the line 'only the barren can understand the barren'.

## PROFESSOR HUGO SWORD

Sword is an older literature academic who is fond of appearing intellectual and scorning even the most established writers: James 'tried very hard didn't he?', Trollope is 'intolerably... flat'. He is entirely damning of his students' work, accusing one poem (which we later discover is his colleague Denis Craig's) of 'prim licentiousness'. Hugo seems unfairly dismissive of his wife, referring to her 'delusions about her family' and portraying her sensuality as unreasonable. He is revealed to be a religious man who appears unable to reconcile sexuality and love with his faith.

What do you think the hidden manuscript that Hugo refers to as 'evidence' is? What does it show about his character?

Do you think Hugo loves his wife? How do you know?

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## MIRIAM SWORD

Miriam is the invalid wife of Professor Sword, who is referred to as a 'dyed in the wool dipso' by Miss Quodling early in the play, her alcoholism later confirmed by Professor Sword in a conversation with Denis Craig. Her moods are highly unstable, veering between passionate affection for those around her, to aggravation at her lot. She is paradoxically dependent on her alcoholism for creativity and confidence, saying that 'after the first glass, one's thoughts flow so brilliantly'. She feels neglected by her husband: 'it was the first time you've let me touch you in I don't know how many years. How did I suddenly become less disgusting?'

What do you think Miriam ultimately wants from life? How do you know?

Why do you think Miriam becomes so fond of Stella in particular? What about her may appeal to her particularly?

## MOTIVES

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The characters in *Night on Bald Mountain* display a range of motivations in the way they relate to one another, affecting and influencing each other throughout the play. For example, Professor Sword's ego interplays with Miriam's desperate need to receive love, which feeds Stella's desire to be needed and helpful.

Make a list of characters and, for each, list their primary motivations in the play. You may wish to position characters in a circle and draw lines between them noting how their motives affect others.

Is there anyone in the play for whom a change in motive would significantly alter the outcome of the play?

How do the actors show their characters motives through use of expressive skills?



## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR: MATTHEW LUTTON

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Matthew has been Malthouse Theatre's Associate Artist in Directing since 2011. For Malthouse Theatre he has directed *The Bloody Chamber*, *Dance of Death*, *Pompeii*, *L.A.*, *On the Misconception of Oedipus*, *Die Winterreise*, *The Trial* and *Tartuffe*. Other directing credits include *The Mysteries: Genesis* for Sydney Theatre Company; *The Duel* for Sydney Theatre Company/Thinlce; *Love Me Tender* for Belvoir/Thinlce; and *Don't Say the Words* for Griffin Theatre Company. In 2011 he directed the new contemporary opera *Make No Noise* for the Bavarian State Opera, and in 2012 Strauss's *Elektra* for West Australian Opera/Thinlce/Opera Australia/Perth International Arts Festival. From 2002 to 2012 Matthew was the director of Perth-based theatre company Thinlce.

### ACTIVITY: MEET MATTHEW LUTTON

Matthew Lutton has achieved a huge amount in a relatively short period of time. Explore the following articles and discuss the variety of work he has produced to date and how they compare to *Night on Bald Mountain*.

- 'The Face: Matthew Lutton', *The Australian*, 21 February 2009
- Australian of the Year Entry 2011
- 'The Play Maker', *The Weekly Review*, 9 August 2012
- 'Schubert with a difference: Matthew Lutton's *Winterreise*', *Limelight Magazine*, 12 July 2011



## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: PATRICK WHITE

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Patrick White is perhaps best known in Australia for his work as a novelist and essayist, winning the first ever Miles Franklin Literary Award for in 1957 for his novel *Voss*.

Born in London in 1912, White moved to Australia in infancy, growing up in New South Wales. He showed an early love of theatre, with some of his earliest writing a series of plays he wrote whilst at boarding school in the early 1920s. Whilst studying at Cambridge in the 1930s, White grappled with his sexuality, painfully aware that the society of the time was not particularly forgiving of same-sex attraction, he feared that he would be destined for a lifetime of loneliness. This was not to be the case, as he was to meet his lifelong partner, Manoly Lascaris, during World War II, and lived with him up until his death in 1990. Sexual awakening, shame and confusion is a notably common theme in his work, including in *Night on Bald Mountain*, where a number of characters struggle to understand or accept their desires and attractions.

During his life, White's plays were not overly well-received, with *Night on Bald Mountain* panned by critics and rejected by White himself. Despite this, he went on to write and publish four more

plays, ending his life with a catalogue of 11 plays, 13 novels, two volumes of poetry, three short story anthologies, a screenplay and an autobiography.

He was much awarded during his lifetime, although he did not accept accolades easily. After winning a second Miles Franklin Literary Award in 1961, he decided he was no longer going to accept prizes, declining a third Miles Franklin award and a \$10,000 Britannia Award in 1968. In 1973, White was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the only one awarded to an Australian to date, using the prize money to set up the Patrick White Award to recognize little-known writers. He was also named Australian of the Year in 1973, using the opportunity to deliver a caustic speech about the state of the nation. In 1986, just four years before his death, White refused to attend the premiere of an opera interpretation of *Voss*, objecting to the fact that Queen Elizabeth II had been invited.

Patrick White's work continues to be recognised both in Australia and internationally, with *The Vivisector* receiving a posthumous shortlisting in the Lost Man Booker Prize in 2010. Many of his novels, most notably *A Fringe of Leaves*, *The Solid Mandala* and *Voss*, are considered Australian classics and are widely studied in schools and universities.

### ACTIVITY: EXPLORING PATRICK WHITE

Use the following resources as a starting point to researching Patrick White. How would you describe his significance to Australian literature? What is your impression of him as a person / artist?

- [Auslit: Biographical entry](#)
- ['Why Bother with Patrick White?', ABC](#)
- [National Library of Australia: Guide to the Papers of Patrick White](#)
- [Stephen Crittenden, 'How to Beat your Patrick White Phobia', \*The Global Mail\*, 28 May 2012](#)



# DESIGN

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Patrick White's original design directions for *Night on Bald Mountain* were naturalistic and very specific. For example, the opening description for Act One, Scene One, call for 'a goatyard made of saplings lashed together with wire and patched with rusty corrugated iron' and 'a faint feather of smoke from the shack chimney'. It also calls for naturalistic sound: 'goat-bells are heard intermittently from the yard, and a bleating of does'.

The 2014 production with design by Dale Ferguson, Paul Jackson and David Franzke, as well as composition and live sound by Ida Duelund Hansen, notes these requirements, then ignores them completely. The 'mountain' set is raw, untreated plywood – no paint, no colour: even for the goats. Period set pieces are dotted where absolutely necessary: a desk here, a dressing table there. Lighting is sculptural and evokes feelings as well as worlds, transforming the pale timber of the set into whatever it needs to be. The sound is abstract and visceral: panting, glitches and a thundering double bass create a soundscape that moves from claustrophobic to frightening to eerily calm and back again.

It could be said that the design of *Night on Bald Mountain* reinvents the piece entirely. What do you think? Does the set liberate the play and transform it into the work that it should have been in 1964?

## WATCH

Malthouse Theatre's Production Manager, David Miller, discuss the staging implications of the design (set, props, lighting, sound and costumes) and how they transform the Merlyn Theatre

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## LIGHTING DESIGN BY PAUL JACKSON

Paul has designed lighting for Malthouse Theatre, The Australian Ballet, Royal New Zealand Ballet, Melbourne Theatre Company, West Australian Ballet, Victorian Opera, West Australian Opera, Sydney Theatre Company, Bell Shakespeare, Belvoir, Ballet Lab, Lucy Guerin Inc., World of Wearable Art New Zealand, La Mama, not yet it's difficult performance group, Chamber Made Opera and many others. His work has featured in festivals in Asia, Europe and the United Kingdom, and he has lectured in design at the University of Melbourne, RMIT University and Victorian College of the Arts. Paul has received a number of Green Room Awards and nominations for design, as well as receiving the 2012 Helpmann Award for Lighting Design. He was named in The Bulletin's Smart 100 for 2004 and was the Gilbert Spottiswood Churchill Fellow for 2007. Paul was an Artistic Associate at Malthouse Theatre from 2007-2013.





ARTIST  
BIO

SET & COSTUME DESIGN BY DALE FERGUSON

Dale graduated from NIDA. For Malthouse Theatre Dale has worked on *Dance of Death*, *Exit the King*, *Woman Bomb*, *Rapture* and *Nightfall*. For Melbourne Theatre Company he has worked on *The Crucible*, *Top Girls*, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *Don Parties On*, *Life Without Me*, *God of Carnage*, *The Sapphires*, *August: Osage Country* (for which he received the Helpmann Award for Best Design), *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* and *The Drowsy Chaperone*. For Sydney Theatre Company he has worked on *Les Liaison Dangereuses*, *The Convicts Opera*, *Summer Rain*, *Howard Katz* and *A Cheery Soul*. Dale redesigned his sets for the production of *The Judas Kiss*, originating at Belvoir, for the Hampstead Theatre and later for the West End in 2013. Other works at Belvoir include: *Neighbourhood Watch*, *The Seagull* and *Measure for Measure*. His recent opera work includes *Othello* (Cape Town Opera/Western Australia Opera/Queensland Opera); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Houston Opera/Chicago Opera); and *Ariadne of Naxos* (Welsh National Opera/Canadian Opera). His musical theatre credits include: *An Officer and a Gentleman* (GFO); and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Dainty). Dale received Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations for *Exit the King's* 2009 Broadway tour.



SOUND DESIGN BY DAVID FRANZKE

David Franzke composed and designed sound for *The Beast*, *Elling*, *Australia Day*, *The Joy of Text*, *The Grenade*, *August: Osage County*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *Birthrights* and *The Recruit* (Melbourne Theatre Company). Other theatre credits include *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Venus and Adonis* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Intimacy* and *Holiday* (Ranters Theatre); *Aviary* (Balletlab); and *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (Melbourne Festival). David won the 2012 Green Room Award for Composition and Sound Design for *Pompeii L.A.* (Malthouse Theatre).

ARTIST  
BIO

## NATURALISM VS NON-NATURALISM

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Patrick White's original script described a play performed with a high degree of naturalism, including a detailed set, soundscape and dialogue that accurately reflected the language of the time. This production could be described as quite non-naturalistic, with an abstract set, representative sound and dialogue (in the third act) that is delivered with a reduced physicality and without direct relationship to other actors.

What do you think the elements of non-naturalism add to or subtract from the play?

Do you think you enjoyed it more or less as a result? Why?

What other elements of non-naturalism do you think could work in this play? How would they change the meaning or impact on the audience?

### WATCH

Director Matthew Lutton's analysis of naturalism in Patrick White's writing

## AN AUSTRALIAN TRAGEDY

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'Tragedy' has been a recognized theatrical style since Ancient Greeks identified the desire of audiences to experience an emotional release (or 'catharsis') whilst viewing theatre. Through the work of Shakespeare to August Strindberg and Arthur Miller, tragedy has become a key part of the drama that we experience and study today.

*Night on Bald Mountain* has been said – including by Patrick White himself – to be the first true Australian tragedy, with its characters following a similar arc as some of theatre's most famous tragic characters.

Consider Stella Summerhayes, who arrives on Bald Mountain full of enthusiasm and confidence, only to have her psyche crushed by the harsh realisations that grow through her encounters with the Swords. This could certainly be said to have its partial parallels with Shakespeare's Juliet or Ophelia (or even a combination of both!) Miriam Sword's fragility is somewhat reminiscent of Blanche Dubois in all her lost beauty and desperation to be loved. Professor Sword appears to be guilty of as much 'hubris' (or extreme pride) as any character in Greek Tragedy, using his over-inflated sense of his own capabilities to shame those around him. Miss Quodling too, dares to compare herself to the mighty mountain with tragic consequences. Which character commits hubris and what is their resulting nemesis?

### ACTIVITY: SPOT YOUR TRAGIC CHARACTERS

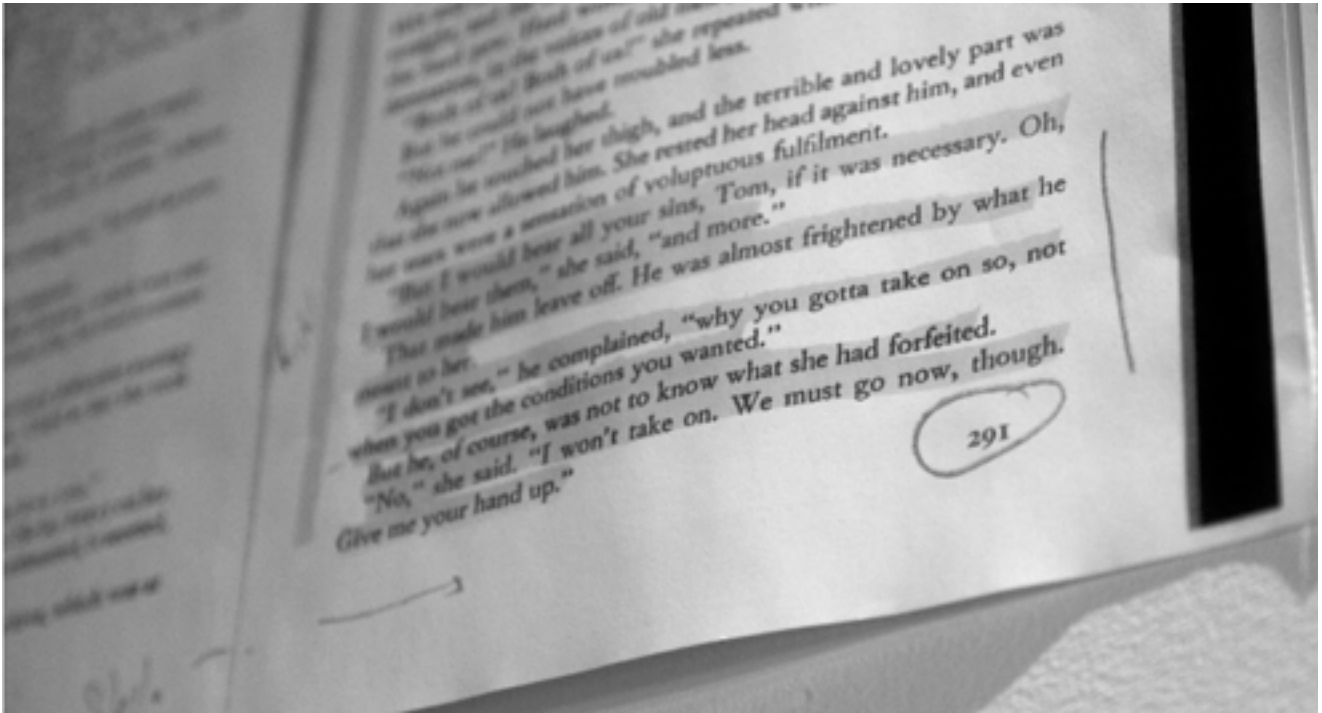
Take a look at the following features of tragic characters and see if you can identify who fits which profile in *Night on Bald Mountain*:

Tragic Character Types: [Changing Minds](#)

You may also like to check out this comparison of tragedy vs. comedy for further exploration:

[Dallas Baptist University via John Morreall](#)





## A WELL-MADE PLAY

*Night on Bald Mountain* is very traditionally structured in three acts and largely follows the form of the ‘well-made play’: its first scenes contain a great deal of exposition about events prior to the beginning of the play, followed by a series of causally-related plot complications leading to a climax that takes place close to the end of the play.

Can you think of any other works that fit into the ‘well-made play’ structure?

Try to identify the specific line where the ‘climax’ occurs. Why did you choose the line you did?

Do you think there is any action in the play that does not ‘point’ directly to the final scene? Why or why not?

How has Matthew Lutton, the director of *Night on Bald Mountain*, differentiated each Act? Consider performance style and stagecraft.

## MOVING MOUNTAINS

The set for *Night on Bald Mountain* takes up only around half of the stage in the Merlyn Theatre, causing the raw timber ‘mountain’ to rise steeply above the audience. This is a huge physical challenge for the actors, who are required to make their way across the space frequently: upstairs, downstairs, uphill, downhill, inside and outside. There are also no obvious distinctions between these spaces, requiring the actors, props and the lighting to fill in a number of gaps.

What techniques did you notice the actors using to create a sense of the different spaces they inhabited during the play?

How could you tell the difference between indoors and outdoors?

How did the lighting help you understand where the characters were?

Was there anything else that helped? How?

## WHEN IS A MOUNTAIN NOT JUST A MOUNTAIN?

.....  
'Wonder if there's any life inside of a rock... for all we know... waitun to be hurt... like anythink else...'  
- Mrs Quodling

When reading Patrick White's script it becomes very clear that there is an additional character with no dialogue: Bald Mountain. From its mists to its craggy peaks, it affects the psyche of its inhabitants, evoking claustrophobia and vastness in equal measure and representing both freedom and imprisonment.

In this production, as well as representing the mountain via the set and the dialogue describing it, the place is also represented in human form by Ida Duelund Hansen, who towers over the action providing colour, texture and tone via her soundscapes and music.

What adjectives would you use to describe Bald Mountain as a character?

How does Ida, as the personification of the mountain, embody these ideas?

Can you think of any other plays or films where the setting could be considered a character in its own right?

### WATCH

[An interview with Ida Duelund Hansen in her role as the Mountain \(and Composer and Double Bass\)](#)

## WHAT YEAR? 1964 TO 2014...

.....  
Director Matthew Lutton is quoted as saying that this production is 'not an exercise in nostalgia, it's an exercise in conjuring and embodying and unearthing', suggesting that despite the fact that *Night on Bald Mountain* is set in the 1960s the play is still relevant to audiences in 2014.

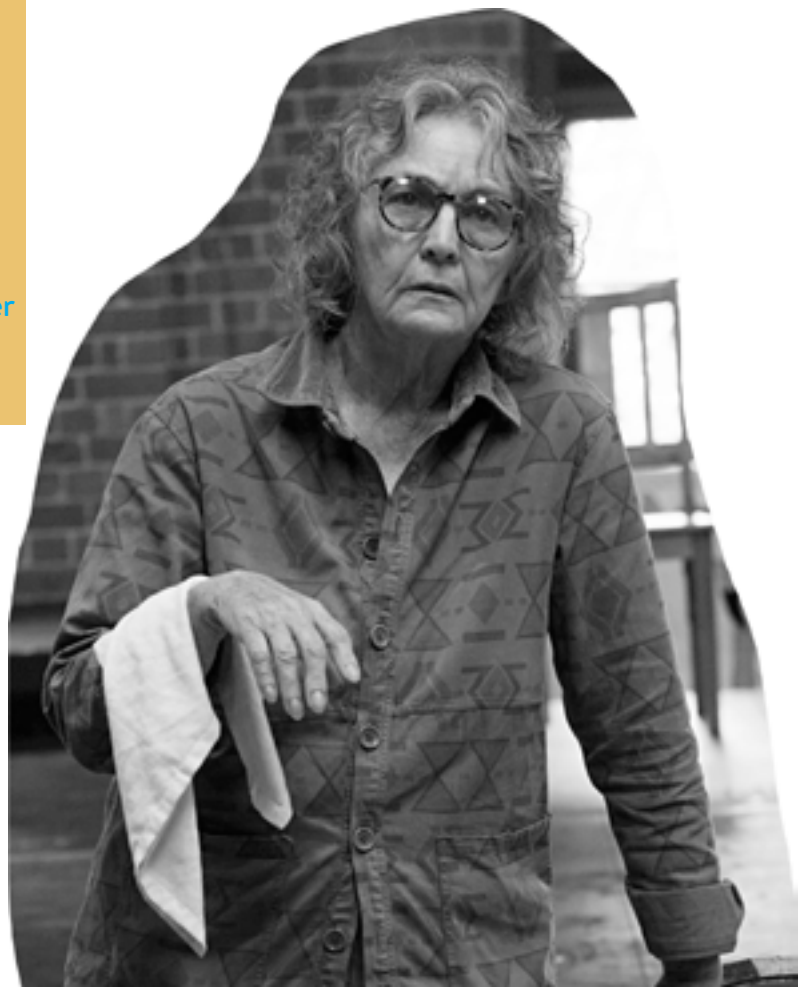
Do you think this is true? Which elements are still recognisable today?

What do you think would change if it were set in 2014?

Do you think the play would have reached the same conclusion if it were set today? Consider elements such as present day attitudes to sexuality and substance abuse.

### READ MORE

['New light cast on Patrick White's \*Night on Bald Mountain\*', \*Sydney Morning Herald\*, 26 April 2014](#)



## WHAT TIME? 24 HOURS

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The action of the play all takes place within a 24 hour period from dawn to the following dawn. There is, however, a lot of past storyline told through exposition in character dialogue.

What are the benefits of choosing to reveal the story in this way? What are the drawbacks?

How else could White have revealed the information besides through dialogue?

Why do you think White chose to end the action where he did? Why do we not see more of the aftermath of Stella's death? What do we guess happens next? How do we know?

## LANGUAGE

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The play uses a range of language and references that no longer reflect the way that we speak today.

### ACTIVITY

Consider the following phrases and discuss their intended meaning and what their modern equivalent might be:

'Dyed in the wool dipso.' – Miss Quodling

'Those first years she led me a dance.'  
– Professor Sword

'She lives in Shepherd Market with a very bossy woman friend.' – Miriam

'But high/Oh, dear!/High!' – Mrs Sibley describing Miss Quodling

Are there any others that particularly stand out to you?



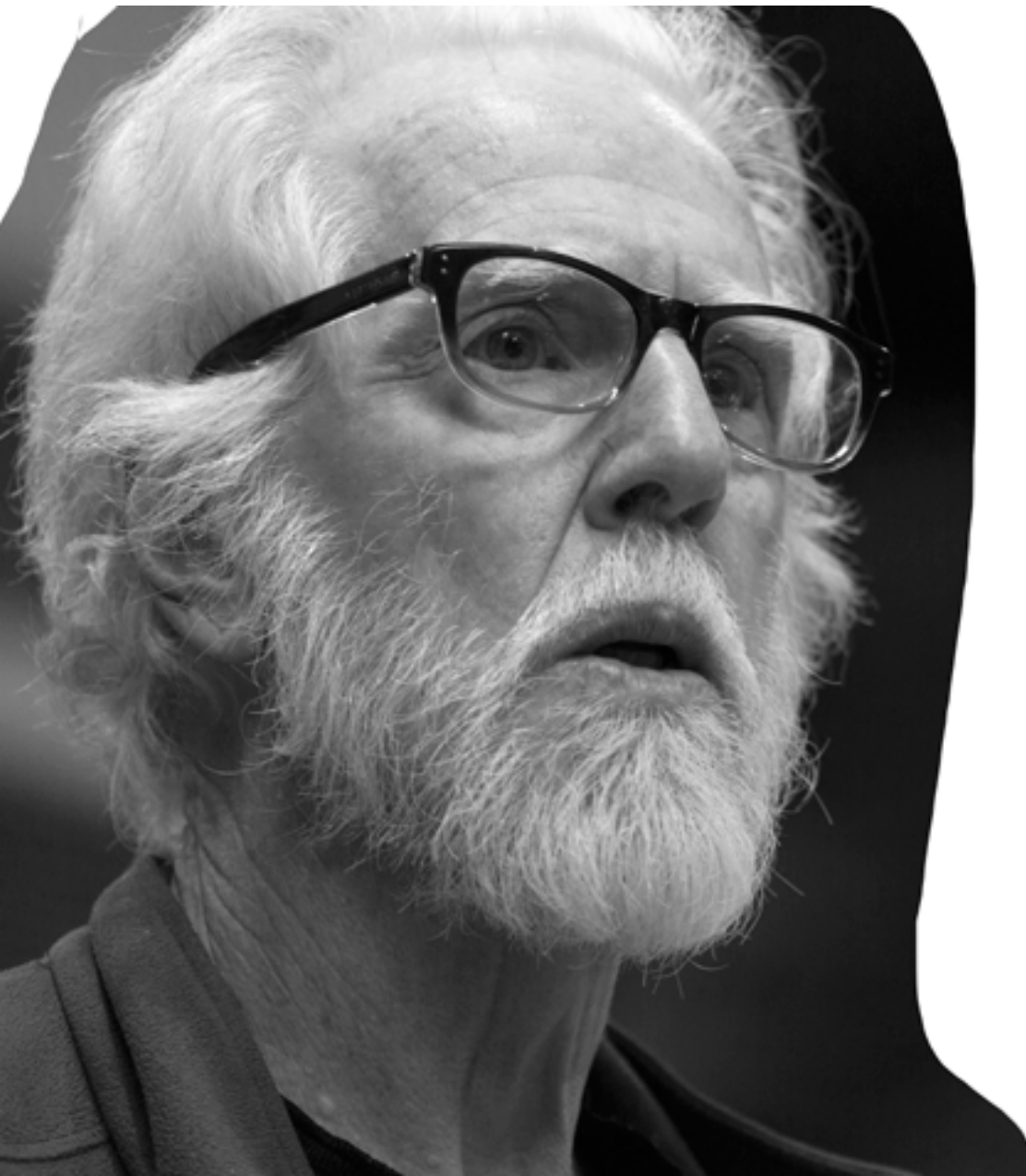
## ACTOR BIOS

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### **PETER CARROLL: PROFESSOR HUGO SWORD**

A veteran of the Australian Theatre, Peter was a member of the original Nimrod Theatre Company and recently of the Sydney Theatre Company's Actors Company. This is his third Patrick White play – the others being Sydney Theatre Company productions of *A Cheery Soul* directed by Jim Sharman and *The Season at Sarsaparilla* directed by Benedict Andrews. His Melbourne appearances include *Happy Days* (Malthouse Theatre); *Christian Brothers* (Malthouse Theatre/Sydney Theatre Company); *Hedda Gabler*, *Emerald City*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Into the Woods* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Master Class* (Stage SA/Melbourne Theatre Company); *Money and Friends* (Queensland Theatre Company/Melbourne Theatre Company); *Hamlet*, *Stuff Happens* and *Book of Everything* (Belvoir/Melbourne Theatre Company); and *King Lear* (Bell Shakespeare). And in musical theatre: *Evita* (Adelaide Festival Trust), *Les Miserables* (Cameron Mackintosh), *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* (The Really Useful Company), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Harry Miller), *Man of La Mancha* and *Doctor Zhivago* (Gordon Frost), *Eureka* (Simon Gallagher & Michael Harvey), *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (TML Enterprises). Peter is a proud member of MEAA.

**ARTIST  
BIO**



**JULIE FORSYTH:  
MISS QUODLING**

Malthouse Theatre: *Elizabeth: Almost by Chance a Woman, Happy Days, Moving Target, Exit the King* (with Belvoir), *Babes in the Wood, The Ham Funeral/Journal of the Plague Year*. Sydney Theatre Company: *Romeo and Juliet, The Metamorphosis, The Miser, Old Masters*. Bell Shakespeare: *Phèdre*. Belvoir: *The Book of Everything, Small Poppies, The Ham Funeral, The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Cloudstreet*. Melbourne Theatre Company: *Private Lives, Return to Earth, The Visit, Great Expectations, The Tempest, The Chairs, A Comedy of Errors, A Cheery Soul, After Magritte, The Real Inspector Hound, Man the Balloon*. Julie was a core member of Anthill Theatre, Melbourne, and performed in over thirty productions including *Mother Courage and Her Children, Life Is A Dream, The Force of Habit, The School for Wives, Endgame, Happy Days, The Imaginary Invalid, The Three Sisters, Uncle Vanya, The Cherry Orchard, Macbeth, The Misanthrope, Tartuffe, Hamlet machine, Don Juan, Kids' Stuff, Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, Artaud and Cruelty*. Film includes: *Feathers, Stan and George's New Life, Harvie Krumpet* (voices), *Mary and Max* (voices), *Three Dollars, Kath and Kimderella*. TV includes: *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries, Dead Gorgeous, The Brush Off, MDA, Mercury*. Awards: Green Room Award for Best Actress for *Kids' Stuff*, Helpmann Award for Best Female Actor in a Play for *Happy Days*, Helpmann Award for Best Female Actor in a Supporting Role in a Play for *Exit the King*, Individual Prize for the 2009 Sidney Myer Performing Arts Awards.



**SYD BRISBANE:  
MR CANTWELL AND HIKER**

Syd Brisbane is a graduate of Flinders University. He has trained with Anne Bogart's SITI Company in New York, and Howard Fine Acting Studio in Melbourne. In 2006 he co-founded performance group THE RABBLE. Syd's theatre credits include *Victory* (Sydney Theatre Company); *He Stumbled* (The Wrestling School UK); *Orlando* (Malthouse Theatre/THE RABBLE); *Salome* (Carriageworks/THE RABBLE); *Coranderrk* (Belvoir/Ilbijerri Theatre); *Assassins* (Flying Penguin); *Scissors Paper Rock* (45 Downstairs/Keene/Taylor); *The Lower Depths* (45 Downstairs); *Macbeth* and *Henry V* (Theatre iNQ); *Comedy of Errors*, *Henry IV Part One*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Romeo and Juliet* (Australian Shakespeare Company). Syd's television credits include *Wentworth*, *Mr & Mrs Murder*, *The Doctor Blake Mysteries*, *Conspiracy 365*, *Beaconsfield* and *City Homicide*. Syd's film credits include *Sucker*, *Cut Snake*, *Fell*, *Boxing Day*, *Silent Partner* and *Dead Letter Office*.



**ARTIST  
BIO**



**IDA DUELUND HANSEN:  
COMPOSER AND DOUBLE BASS  
(THE MOUNTAIN)**

As a musician Ida has performed with the Australian Art Orchestra, True Strength, Heilbron.Hansen and in several smaller groups for pop and improvised music. Ida has released two albums: *Winterreise* (2013) and *Another Lament* (2012). Her theatre credits include *Another Lament* and *Small Odysseys* (Malthouse Theatre/Rawcus Theatre); *Plague Dances* (Malthouse Theatre/Four Larks Theatre); and *The Venny*, *Another Lament* and *The Minotaur* (Chamber Made Opera).

**ARTIST  
BIO**



**MELITA JURISIC:  
MRS MIRIAM SWORD**

Melita's theatre credits include *Poppea* (Sydney Opera House); *Women of Troy* (Sydney Theatre Company/Malthouse Theatre); *The Lost Breath* (Melbourne Festival); *King Lear* (Bell Shakespeare); and *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Tartuffe* (Sydney Theatre Company). In Europe she has appeared in *Medea*, *Macbeth*, *The Tales of Hoffman* and *Das Schloss* (Vienna Schauspielhaus); *Lysistrata* and *Kasimir & Karoline* (Perchtoldsdorf); *In the Jungle of the Cities* (Landestheater Linz); *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Grand Theatre Luxembourg); *Purimspil* (Linz: European Capital of Culture); *Poppea* (Berliner Ensemble/Edinburgh Festival); *The Family Table* (Vienna Festival); *Middentivity* (Nitra Festival, Slovakia); *Wiener Laecheln* (Komische Oper, Berlin); and *Das Tortenstueck* (Donaufestival, Austria). Her film credits include *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Kotlovina*, *Transatlantic*, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *The Tale of Ruby Rose* for which she won the International Critic's prize for Best Actress at the Venice Film Festival. For television Melita has appeared in *Something in the Air*, *Mercury*, *Bordertown*, *Hunger*, *The Petrov Affair*, *Land of Hope*, *Pokerface*, *The Fast Lane*, *The Flying Doctors* and *Einstein's Wife*. She has recorded with Austrian composers Bernhard Loibner and Peter Szely and is lead singer and songwriter of the Viennese band *Metalycée* whose album *It Is Not* was voted one of the ten best Austrian albums of the decade by Music Austria in 2009.

**ARTIST  
BIO**



## ARTIST BIO

### SUE JONES: MRS SIBLEY

Sue Jones has appeared in the Malthouse Theatre production *The Frail Man* and *God's Last Acre*. She has recently appeared for the Melbourne Theatre Company in *Other Desert Cities*, *Don Parties On*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *Life After George*. Her film and television credits include *The Time of Our Lives*, *Upper Middle Bogan*, *Something in the Air*, *SeaChange*, *Satisfaction*, *Blue Heelers*, *Neighbours*, *City Homicide*, *Flying Doctors*, *G.P.*, *Tea Ladies*, *Love Thy Neighbour*, *Skirts*, *Cop Shop*, *Power Without Glory*, *Correlli*, *Mull and Fell*. Sue has been nominated for three Green Room Awards. Her directing credits include Peta Brady's *Status Update* and *Strands*.

### LUKE MULLINS: MR DENIS CRAIG

Luke has performed for Australia's major professional theatre companies, as well as collaborating on new work in the independent sector. Most recently he was awarded the 2013 Sydney Theatre Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role for his role in the Sydney Theatre Company's *Waiting for Godot*. Other theatre credits include *Angels in America*, *Small and Tired*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Power of Yes* and *Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)* (Belvoir); *Little Mercy*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *The War of the Roses*, *Gallipoli*, *The Season at Sarsaparilla*, *The Serpent's Teeth*, *Tales from the Vienna Woods* and *The Duel* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Cloud Nine*, *The History Boys*, *Oedipus* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *The Eisteddfod*, *4xBeckett*, *Agoraphobe*, *Lally Katz and the Terrible Mysteries of the Volcano*, *Untitled Intentional Exercise*, *Nine Days Falling* and *The Apocalypse Bear Trilogy* (Stuck Pigs Squealing). His directing credits include *The Apocalypse Bear Trilogy* for Stuck Pigs Squealing/Melbourne Theatre Company/Melbourne Festival; and Kit Brookman's *Night Maybe* for Stuck Pigs Squealing/Theatre Works. Luke created and performed *Autobiography of Red* for Malthouse Theatre and *Irony is Not Enough: Essay on My Life as Catherine Deneuve* with Fragment 31 at Arts House. Film and television credits include *Reef Doctors*, *Satisfaction*, *Blue Heelers*, *MDA*, *Neon Skin* and *The Wilding*. Luke has received the George Fairfax Memorial Award, a Green Room Award for Best Supporting Actor for *The Season at Sarsaparilla* and was a member of the Sydney Theatre Company's Actors Company. He trained at Victorian College of the Arts.

## ARTIST BIO



**NIKKI SHIELS:**  
**STELLA SUMMERHAYES**

Nikki graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2009. Her previous appearances at Malthouse Theatre include in *The Dragon* and *Elizabeth: Almost by Chance a Woman*. Other theatre credits include *The Cherry Orchard*, *True Minds*, *Top Girls* and *Don Parties On* (Melbourne Theatre Company); as a core member of the Daniel Schlusser Ensemble; *M+M*, *The Dollhouse* and *Peer Gynt* (Melbourne International Arts Festival/Theatre Works/45Downstairs); *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* (Dirty Pretty Theatre/Theatre Works/Midsumma Festival); *The Unspoken Word is 'Joe'* (MKA/La Mama); *Madeleine* (Arts House/Black Sequin Productions); and *Romeo and Juliet* (ZLMD Shakespeare Company/45Downstairs). Nikki is a 2013 recipient of the Mike Walsh Fellowship and in 2008 received the Richard Pratt Scholarship. She has received Green Room nominations for best female performer for her work in *Madeleine* and *The Unspoken Word is 'Joe'*. Nikki's film, television and radio work include *The Eye of the Storm*, *Rush* and *Cassandra is a Waitress* for ABC/Radio National.

ARTIST  
BIO





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