

An actor's life and backstage strife during WWII

Melville Theatre Saturday, June 26th, 2021

INSPIRED by memories of his years working as a dresser for actor-manager Sir Donald Wolfit, Ronald Harwood's evocative, perceptive and hilarious portrait of backstage life comes to Melville Theatre this July.

Directed by Jacob Turner, *The Dresser* is set in England against the backdrop of World War II as a group of Shakespearean actors tour a seaside town and perform in a shabby provincial theatre.

The actor-manager, known as "Sir", struggles to cast his popular Shakespearean productions while the able-bodied men are away fighting.

With his troupe beset with problems, he has become exhausted - and it's up to his devoted dresser Norman, struggling with his own mortality, and stage manager Madge to hold things together.

The Dresser scored playwright Ronald Harwood, also responsible for the screenplays *Australia*, *Being Julia* and *Quartet*, best play nominations at the 1982 Tony and Laurence Olivier Awards.

He adapted it into a 1983 film, featuring Albert Finney and Tom Courtenay, and received five Academy Award nominations.

Another adaptation, featuring Ian McKellen and Anthony Hopkins, made its debut in 2015.

"*The Dresser* follows a performance and the backstage conversations of Sir, the last of the dying breed of English actor-managers, as he struggles through *King Lear* with the aid of his dresser," Jacob said.

"The action takes place in the main dressing room, wings, stage and backstage corridors of a provincial English theatre during an air raid.

"At its heart, the show is a love letter to theatre and the people who sacrifice so much to make it possible."

Jacob believes *The Dresser* has a multitude of challenges for it to be successful.

"It needs to be cast perfectly - which I think we've done - and the technical elements need to blend just right," he said.

"The cast have to work hard to make each individual moment perfectly truthful to really draw the audience into this incredible story."

Previously taking part in school productions and drama classes, Jacob has since appeared in several productions with Limelight, Stirling and Melville Theatres, including *Sunset Boulevard*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Two Weeks With The Queen*, *The Real Housewives of Perth* and *Veronica's Room*.

In 2018, he turned his hand to directing with *Pygmalion*.

"I stumbled on to *The Dresser* completely by accident when I found the film starring Ian McKellen and Anthony Hopkins a few years ago," Jacob said.

"I was completely absorbed and immediately wanted to bring the show to a local audience."

Contact Profile

Melville Theatre

The Melville Theatre Company was the brainchild of David J. Burton who, in 1982, called a meeting for interested people in the community to form a theatre company in the Melville area. As a result, the Melville Theatre Company was born. The newly formed company's first production was the farce, *Not Now Darling*. With its second production, *The Sound of Music*, the young company won the Finley Award for best production of the year. Since then, actors and directors have consistently featured in the list of awards at the annual State Drama Festival, now known as Dramafest. Initially, performances were in the Melville Civic Centre but, since 1987, the venue has been the Roy Edinger Centre, on the corner of Stock Road and Canning Highway, Palmyra.

Jacob Turner

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The Dresser plays at 8pm July 8, 9, 10, 15, 16 and 17 with a 2pm matinee July 11. Tickets are \$23, \$18 concession – book at www.TAZTix.com.au.

Melville Theatre is at 393A Canning Highway (corner of Stock Road), Palmyra.

CAPTIONS

dresser1: *The Dresser* features James Hagan, left, as “Sir” and Peter Neaves as his dresser Norman.

dresser2: Vee McGuire, left, Greg Ross, Esté Breytenbach, Kate Elder, James Hagan, Peter Neaves and Andrew Brown are appearing in *The Dresser*.

dresser3: Norman (Peter Neaves, right) tolerates an outburst from Sir (James Hagan) in *The Dresser*.

dresser4: Madge (Vee McGuire, left) and Geoffrey Thornton (Greg Ross) in *The Dresser* working things backstage.

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