



FAITH HEALER

by Brian Friel

MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

Welcome



MTC is delighted to present Melbourne audiences with this exceptional production, which arrives in the Summer after an award-winning season at Belvoir in Sydney.

As with many great productions it begins with an astonishing and uniquely structured play, built around an arresting story that takes hold of you and draws you in. Then it is placed safely in the hands of an immensely talented cast and creative team who add all the elements required to give it life, meaning and presence. *Faith Healer* ticks all these boxes, and then some.

Faith Healer is considered Irish playwright Brian Friel's masterpiece. With a mythic resonance and the drama of Gaelic folklore woven through four captivating monologues, it is a story of great power that I'm sure will stay with you long after the curtain call, as it did with me.

Under the direction of Judy Davis, the production has been crafted by artists of the highest calibre in the country and, following the acclaimed season at Belvoir, Colin Friels and Alison Whyte received Sydney Theatre Awards as Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor for their performances. When the stars align like this, you know you're in for something special.

Faith Healer is the first of three collaborations with interstate theatre companies in this year's season. Such collaborations are at the heart of the modern theatre industry, opening doors to new artists, ideas, resources and audiences. Combining forces with our interstate colleagues makes for a richer cultural landscape across the country and, ultimately, the chance for more people to see extraordinary theatre, such as this very special production of *Faith Healer*. Enjoy!

Brett Sheehy AO
Artistic Director



Programmes can be downloaded for free at mtc.com.au/backstage

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand, and we pay our respects to Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors past and present, and to our shared future.

MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne.

MTC is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria.

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MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

FAITH HEALER

by Brian Friel

4 MARCH – 8 APRIL

Southbank Theatre, The Sumner

— Cast —

Teddy Paul Blackwell
Frank Colin Friels
Grace Alison Whyte

— Production —

Director Judy Davis
Set Designer Brian Thomson
Costume Designer Tess Schofield
Lighting Designer Verity Hampson
Associate Lighting Designer Daniel Barber
Composer & Sound Designer Paul Charlier
Stage Manager Whitney McNamara
Assistant Stage Manager Roxzan Bowes
Production Photographer Brett Boardman

— About the play —

From church hall to church hall, from one remote and dying village to the next, Francis Hardy, faith healer, works his magic, curing the sick and the lame, giving strength to the weak. He can tell of nights when miracles were conjured as fast as he could place his touch, but his powers have never been reliable. More of a mystery is why Grace and Teddy stay with him.

This performance runs for approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes, including a 20 minute interval.

A Belvoir Production



Media Partner



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Faith Healer was first produced at the Longacre Theatre, New York on 5th April 1979

Cover photo: Justin Ridler

From the Director

Judy Davis

It's all about language, he said to me. The play, I asked?
The theatre? The whole thing, he said.

Stephen Rae on Brian Friel

Born Catholic in County Omagh, Northern Ireland in 1929, Brian Friel's understanding of both his country and his own identity was shaped by being, as he termed it, a member of the minority.

'I certainly think we're a maimed people in this country,' Friel once said. 'We're a maimed people to the extent that there was once a language in use in this country; this language is gone. When we say we're trying to identify ourselves, I'm not quite saying that we're trying to identify a national identity, that's a different kind of thing. When you talk about a national identity, I'm not quite sure what that means. But when you're trying to identify yourself, that means you've got to produce documents, you've got to produce sounds, you've got to produce images that are going to make you distinctive in some way. If there's a sense of decline in this country, it's because we can't readily produce these identification marks.'

Written in the midst of the Troubles, *Faith Healer* (1979) is in part a complex study of identity and sense of place. All three characters are outsiders, itinerants: Frank Hardy the faith healer; Grace his wife, or perhaps mistress; and Teddy, Frank's cockney manager. As they trawl the dying Welsh and Scottish villages of the Celtic fringe of Britain in search of audiences, Teddy refrains: 'We are going to make a killing this time, dear hearts.' We meet

them later, isolated, haunted by anguished memories, searching for reconciliation with the past, for an understanding of the lives they once shared and who or what they might be. But the characters' control over their lives is fragile.

'I think, when the possibility of being able to control, or determine what you should do, or what you must do, is no longer in your hands and can no longer be summoned, I think in that case death occurs. Maybe not necessarily a physical death but a spiritual death occurs.' Brian Friel on *Faith Healer*.

These issues of identity, of the importance of a sense of place, of foreign conquest, and of the damage done when one's destiny is out of one's control – all strike a familiar and profound note beyond the shores of Ireland. *Faith Healer* could be described as a memory play: 'while memory is about what has happened in the past, it's also about what might have happened but never did.' That the characters' troubled memories are often in conflict is unsurprising – we remember differently, sometimes what we need to remember, to create a coherent narrative for ourselves perhaps; at times, perhaps, to hide.

Ballybeg, Friel's imagined town, is a place of haunting memory that often appears in his plays, notably in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Irish writer, Frank McGuinness, once said about ▶



the fictional town: ‘Most Irish people would love to live in Ballybeg, for there is one extraordinary characteristic about this small Donegal town: in Brian’s plays it is always very good weather. In fact, it is almost Mediterranean weather – volcanic weather. Because he does see it as a place of passion, and he does see it as a place of revelation; brilliant light.’

So, as August yields to September, Frank Hardy makes his fateful journey to Ballybeg. Autumn: harvest season, time of reapers, time of offerings. This is not a simple play; another quote from Friel may be helpful: ‘I gave up my study for the priesthood out of conflict with my belief in paganism.’

Brian Friel died on 2 October, 2015. His great friend, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, had evocatively described the spirit of this great dramatist a few years before: ‘What I remember best, I suppose, about the seventies, is the visits in the summertime up to Donegal. First of all to Brian’s own house in Moft, just outside Derry, but particularly the summer visits to his house in Mollyduft. I associate those summers with the light coming off the sea, with big windows, with a great freshness, with a sense of being in the Gaeltacht almost, in the ‘old dream Ireland’. This lighthouse, a house full of sea light, full of conversation, full of energy, full of irony. It was displaced and elsewhere, and Brian was at the centre of it as a focus and a stimulus.’

References:

- S. Rea, ‘Stephen Rea’s tribute to Brian Friel: a shy man and a showman’, *The Irish Times*, 2nd October 2015
‘Brian Friel’, RTÉ, 2000
B. Nightingale. ‘Brian Friel, Playwright Called the Irish Chekhov, Dies at 86’, *The New York Times*, 2nd October 2015

GRACE’S JOURNEY



Alison Whyte

Grace travels from Norfolk to Glasgow, takes the night-crossing and a bus from Glasgow to Omagh, before walking three miles to Knockmoyle to see her father. She makes the journey, which is at least 703 miles each way, and returns to Frank in Norfolk by the following evening; making her version of accounts virtually impossible.





Colin Friels and Alison Whyte



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

Brian Friel

After a brief and conflicting period studying for the priesthood, and a decade working as a school teacher like his father before him, Brian Friel went on to become one of Ireland's most celebrated dramatists of the 20th century.

Bernard Patrick Friel was born near Omagh, County Tyrone, in Northern Ireland, on January 9 in 1929. He never strayed far from these roots all his life.

He was an artist who let his work speak for itself. Famously reclusive when it came to the media, and deeply modest about his own talents, Friel scripted over 30 plays in a spectacular career that spanned over four decades.

The majority of his plays were set in Ballybeg (from the Irish word for 'small town'), a fictitious place in the town Donegal, where Friel spent his holidays as a child. It was a setting that was local and specific, but also universal – as evidenced by the way that Friel's plays have found a home on stages all over the world.

Often through the prism of family, the playwright explored themes of cultural identity and social change, as well as the desire for self-realisation and transcendence. Always balancing his sharp observations with humour and warmth, Friel repeatedly explored the slippery nature of language and memory, perhaps most starkly in his world famous play, *Faith Healer*.

It's with *Faith Healer* that Friel expresses most powerfully a theme that has always lingered in his work – that our memories and stories only reveal partial truths about ourselves. The story of a gifted rogue and his tragic entourage comprises of four monologues, with each testimony calling into question what we have heard before.



'To remember everything is a form of madness.'

Brian Friel

While dedicating over four decades of his life to the art form, Friel remained humble about his own powers as a playwright. He once said: 'At the end of any night's experience in the theatre, all that any writer can hope for is that maybe one dozen people have been moved ever so much or ever so slightly, and that the course of their lives may be enriched or altered by a very fine degree.'

References

Brian Friel: Theatre and Politics by Anthony Roche, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Brian Friel, playwright – obituary, *The Telegraph*, 2015



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Cast & Creative Team



PAUL BLACKWELL

Teddy

Paul Blackwell's appearances for Melbourne Theatre Company include *The Chairs*, *When the Rain Stops Falling* (Brink Productions) and *The Popular Mechanicals* (Company B Belvoir). Recent appearances for State Theatre South Australia include *Tartuffe*, *Things I Know To Be True*, *Eh Joe in the Beckett Triptych*, *Volpone*, and *Vere*, a co-production with Sydney Theatre Company. Other highlights include Brink Productions' *The Aspirations of Daise Morrow* and *Moliere's The Hypochondriac*. For Company B Belvoir productions include *Antigone*, *Ubu*, *The Underpants*, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and *Up The Road*. For Windmill Performing Arts he has appeared in *The Composer is Dead*, a co-production with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and in *The Clockwork Forest* a co-production with Brink. Musical theatre credits include *Dusty* for The Production Company, *South Pacific* for Gordon Frost/Adelaide Festival Centre Trust, *Jonah* and *The Venetian Twins* for STCSA, and *Die Fledermaus* for Opera Australia. Film credits include *Red Dog*, *Dr Plonk*, *Candy*, *The Quiet Room*, *Charlie's Country* and *The Boy Castaways*.



COLIN FRIELS

Frank

For Melbourne Theatre Company, Colin Friels has starred in *Skylight*, *Endgame* and *Red*. His other theatre credits include *Mortido* and *Death of a Salesman* (Belvoir); *Hamlet*, *Zebra*, *Victory*, *Copenhagen*, *The School for Scandal*, *Macbeth*, *The Temple* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Shadow* and *Splendour*, *The Cherry Orchard* (Royal Queensland Theatre Company); *The Incorruptible* (Playbox Theatre); and *Cloud Nine*, *Miss Julie*, *The Bear* (Nimrod Theatre Company). Colin's television credits include *The Secret Daughter*, *Jack Irish: Bad Debts*, *Wild Boys*, *Killing Time*, *Bastard Boys*, *Blackjack*, *Temptation*, *My Husband My Killer*, *The Farm*, and *Water Rats*. His film credits include *The Eye of the Storm*, *A Heartbeat Away*, *Tomorrow When the War Began*, *Matching Jack*, *The Informant*, *The Nothing Men*, *Solo* and *Monkey Grip*, amongst many others. Colin received a Helpmann Award for Best Male Actor for *Copenhagen*, a TV Week Logie Award for Best Actor in *Water Rats*, an AFI Award for Best Actor in a Television Drama for *Water Rats*, a Best Actor AFI Award for *Malcolm*, and a 2016 Sydney Theatre Award for *Faith Healer*.



ALISON WHYTE

Grace

Alison Whyte is one of Australia's most accomplished actors across theatre, film and television. Her recent theatre credits at Melbourne Theatre Company include *The Last Man Standing*, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *Clybourne Park* and *All About My Mother*. Other theatre credits include *The Testament of Mary*, *Love and Information*, *Travelling North* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Australia Day* (Sydney Theatre Company/Melbourne Theatre Company); *Rising Water* (Black Swan Theatre Company); and *The Bloody Chamber*, *Tartuffe*, *Eldorado*, *Optimism* (Malthouse Theatre). Television credits include *The Kettering Incident*, *Glitch*, *The Doctor Blake Mysteries*, *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, *Tangle*, *Satisfaction*, *City Homicide*, *Marshall Law*, *Sea Change*, *Good Guys Bad Guys*, *G.P.* and *Frontline*. Her most recent film was *The Dressmaker*. Alison is the recipient of numerous awards: a 2016 Sydney Theatre Award for *Faith Healer*, a Green Room Award and a Helpmann Award in 2010 for *Richard III*, and a 2013 Green Room Award for *The Bloody Chamber*. She has also won an ASTRA Award, two TV Week Silver Logie Awards, and a Green Room Award.

Cast & Creative Team



JUDY DAVIS

Director

Judy Davis graduated from NIDA in 1977. As an actor, her theatre credits include *Hapgood* (Ahmanson Theatre, Los Angeles); *The Seagull* (Belvoir); *Hedda Gabler*, *Victory* (Sydney Theatre Company); *King Lear*, *Miss Julie*, *The Bear*, *Inside the Island* (Nimrod Theatre Company); *Insignificance* (Royal Court); *Visions* (Paris Theatre Company); and *Piaf* (Perth Playhouse). As a director, her productions include *Victory*, *The School for Scandal* and *Barrymore* (Sydney Theatre Company). Judy's extensive film credits include *My Brilliant Career*, *The Dressmaker*, *The Young and Prodigious T.S. Spivet*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *The Break-Up*, *Marie Antoinette*, *Swimming Upstream* and *The Man Who Sued God*, amongst many others. Judy has won or been nominated for over 50 awards around the world, including an Emmy, an American Screen Actors Guild Award and a Golden Globe. Judy won two BAFTAs for her performance in *My Brilliant Career*. She has received two Academy Award nominations and has won an AACTA Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role in *The Dressmaker*.



BRIAN THOMSON

Set Designer

Brian Thomson received an Order of Australia, AM in 2005 for services to the arts and received the 2012 Helpmann Award for *La Traviata* – the first opera on Sydney Harbour. Other awards include a Tony award for *The King And I* on Broadway, as well as some Green Room and AFI Awards. He designed *Dame Ednas's Glorious Goodbye*, Barry Humphries' farewell US tour, *Keating!* and *Shane Warne The Musical*. He has worked extensively for all the major theatre companies in Australia, and internationally on musicals, films and opera productions. Operas include *La Traviata*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, *Bliss*, *Billy Budd*, *Voss*, *Death in Venice*, *The Eighth Wonder* and *Sweeney Todd*. He was production designer of the cult film classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and Melbourne's 2006 Commonwealth Games Closing Ceremonies. Brian also designed *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* in Australia, on Broadway and London's West End. Most recently, he designed Hugh Jackman's *From Broadway to Oz* and *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* on the Norwegian Epic cruise ship.



TESS SCHOFIELD

Costume Designer

Tess Schofield was awarded an Australian Production Designers Guild Lifetime Achievement for Outstanding Contribution to Design in Australia in 2015. Her costumes have toured internationally and include *A Streetcar Named Desire* (BAM and Washington), *The Secret River* (STC and upcoming Adelaide Festival), *The Wild Duck* (Barbican and European festival tours), *Cloudstreet* (national and international tours), and *The Diary of a Madman* (Brooklyn Academy of Music transfer). Tess's opera work includes costumes for *Sweeney Todd* (ENO/Lyric Opera Chicago), *Peter Grimes*, *La Traviata*, *Jenufa* (Opera Australia). Other theatre projects include *The Drover's Wife*, *Miss Julie*, *Namatjira* (with Big hART), *Toy Symphony*, *As You Like It*, *The Judas Kiss*, *The Governor's Family*, *The Seagull*, *Night on Bald Mountain* and *Hamlet* (Belvoir); *Spring Awakening*, *Tot Mom*, *Elling*, *The Great*, *Riflemind*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Woman in Mind*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Far Away* and *Victory* (Sydney Theatre Company). Tess has received five AFI/AACTA Awards for Best Costume Design in a Feature Film for, among other films, *The Water Diviner*, *The Sapphires* and *Spotswood*.

Cast & Creative Team



VERITY HAMPSON

Lighting Designer

Verity Hampson is a NIDA graduate with over ten years experience as a lighting and projection designer. She has designed over 120 productions, working with some of Australia's most talented directors and choreographers. Recent productions include *The Drover's Wife*, *Ruby's Wish*, *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, *Ivanov*, *Is This Thing On?*, *Small and Tired*, *The Business*, *That Face* and *The Gates of Egypt* (Belvoir); *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark*, *After Dinner*, *Battle of Watelloo*, *Machinal*, *Little Mercy* and *Before/After* (Sydney Theatre Company); *The Strategic Plan*, *The Bleeding Tree*, *The Boys*, *The Floating World*, *Angela's Kitchen* (Griffin Theatre Company); *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (Bell Shakespeare); and *The Literati* (Griffin Theatre Company/Bell Shakespeare). For television, Verity has been a lighting director for the ABC's *Live at the Basement* and *The Roast*. She was awarded the Mike Walsh Fellowship in 2012, as well as the 2013 Sydney Theatre Award for Best Mainstage Lighting Design for her work on *Machinal* at Sydney Theatre Company.



PAUL CHARLIER

Composer & Sound Designer

Paul Charlier's theatre credits include *Afterlife* (National Theatre); *Dreams of Violence* (Out of Joint); *Deuce* (Broadway); *The Cost of Living* (DV8 Physical Theatre); *Honour Bound* (Sydney Opera House/Malthouse Theatre); *Already Elsewhere* (Force Majeure); *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *Diary of a Madman*, *Toy Symphony*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *Buried Child*, *Aftershocks*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *The Judas Kiss* and *Hamlet* (Belvoir Street Theatre); and *Cyrano*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Tot Mom*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Ying Tong*, *Victory*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Democracy*, *Copenhagen* (Sydney Theatre Company). He was Composer for the feature films *Candy*, *Last Ride* and *Suzy & the Simple Man*, as well as Music Supervisor for *Holding The Man*, and Sound Designer and Music Mixer for *Paul Kelly - Stories of Me*. Paul received Sydney Theatre Awards for *Honour Bound*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Diary of a Madman*, a Helpmann Award for *A Streetcar Named Desire* and an Australian Screen Sound Guild Award for *Paul Kelly - Stories of Me*.



BRIAN FRIEL

Playwright (1929 - 2015)

Considered by many to be Ireland's greatest contemporary playwright, Brian Friel's plays include *Hedda Gabler* (after Ibsen), *The Home Place*, *Three Plays After* (*Afterplay*, *The Bear*, *The Yalta Game*), *Uncle Vanya* (after Chekhov), *Give Me Your Answer Do!*, *Molly Sweeney* (New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Foreign Play), *Wonderful Tennessee*, *A Month in the Country* (after Turgenev), *The London Vertigo* (Charles Macklin), *Dancing at Lughnasa* (three Tony Awards including Best Play, New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play, Olivier Award for Best Play), *Making History*, *The Communication Cord*, *American Welcome*, *Three Sisters* (after Chekhov), *Translations*, *Aristocrats* (Evening Standard Award for Best Play, New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Foreign Play), *Faith Healer* and *Philadelphia Here I Come!* among many others. Brian was a member of Aosdána, the society of Irish artists, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Companion of Literature, Royal Society of Literature and the Irish Academy of Letters. He was awarded the Ulysses Medal by University College, Dublin.



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by Rashma N. Kalsie

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4 - 20 MAY 2017



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by Joanna Murray-Smith

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18 APRIL - 27 MAY



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by Lally Katz

A brand new work from the magnificent Lally Katz, starring Nancy Hayes, Virginia Gay and Sue Jones.

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