



Noël Coward's HAY FEVER

Education Mini-Pack

23 SEPTEMBER – 28 OCTOBER

Southbank Theatre, The Sumner

About the Play

Although Judith, a retired actress, tends towards melodrama in her everyday affairs, and her husband, David, a novelist, can be rather reclusive and foul tempered, the Bliss family can be perfectly charming when they want to be. Their grown-up children, Simon and Sorel, are quite capable of civility too – if it suits them. It is just that, on this blighted weekend, each has invited a guest to stay at their country house without telling any of the others. So dashed inconsiderate! And for their poor guests, perfect agony.

About the Playwright

Born in 1899, Noël Coward was raised as a working class boy in the London suburb of Teddington. Encouraged by his mother to attend a dance academy in London, Coward entered into the professional world of theatre at the age of 12. From this point on his writing and acting career swiftly flourished and he gradually became acquainted with a different class of people. His breakthrough play was *The Vortex* (1924), which featured themes of drugs and adultery and made his name as both actor and playwright in the West End and on Broadway. During the frenzied 1920s and more sedate 1930s, Coward wrote a string of successful plays, musicals and intimate revues including *Fallen Angels* (1925), *Hay Fever* (1925), *Bitter Sweet* (1929), and *Private Lives* (1931). Coward's presence in the public eye turned him into a celebrity in his own right across both the UK and USA. The media avidly followed and reported on Coward's plays and public appearances, but despite his high-profile persona and arguably lavish lifestyle, Coward was fundamentally a man who loved all artistic forms and possessed a work ethic like no other. Consequently, Coward became known as 'The Master' by many of his contemporaries and fans.



Turn the page for activities, and discussions.

Cast

Simon Bliss Gareth Davies

Clara Marg Downey

Richard Greatham Simon Gleeson

David Bliss Kim Gyngell

Jackie Coryton Alexandra Keddie

Judith Bliss Marina Prior

Sorel Bliss Imogen Sage

Myra Arundel Monica Sayers

Sandy Tyrell Drew Weston

Production

Director Lee Lewis

Set Designer Christina Smith

Costume Designer Esther Marie Hayes

Lighting Designer Paul Jackson

Composer & Sound Designer Kelly Ryall

Voice & Dialect Coach Geraldine Cook-Dafner

Assistant Director Prue Clark

Piano arrangement Mark Jones

Set Design Secondment Fiona Bruce

Stage Manager Jess Keepence

Assistant Stage Manager Meg Richardson

Rehearsal and Production Photographer Brett Boardman

Genre

Classic comedy

Running Time

Approximately 2hrs 30min including two intervals

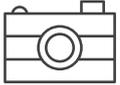
Before the show



Hay Fever sparkles with witty dialogue, but Noël Coward was also known for his unforgettable quips off stage. In regards to his infallible reputation, Coward jested ‘If you’re a star, you should behave like one. I always have.’ Learn more about Noël Coward at mtc.com.au/backstage



Hay Fever is often described as a ‘comedy of bad manners’. A comedy of manners is a performance style where the affectations of social class are satirised with stereotypical characters. What might you expect to see on stage, regarding characters, comedy, and acting styles?



See the *Hay Fever* team prepare for the show in our rehearsal gallery at mtc.com.au/backstage

Post-show Activities



Marina Prior describes Judith Bliss as ‘a delicious character, and such a big character ... Because she’s an actress, and a very entitled actress, there’s so much scope for fun’. To read the full interview with Marina Prior, head to mtc.com.au/backstage



- Have a class discussion based on this moment from the play (Act One):

SOREL: We’re so awfully bad-mannered.

SIMON: Not to people we like.

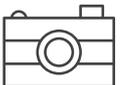
SOREL: The people we like put up with it because they like us

Do you agree with Sorel? Do you put up with behaviour from some people and not others?’

- Think about the accents used in *Hay Fever*. What dialects did you hear, and how did they communicate character, time and place? What kind of exercises might Geraldine Cook-Dafner (Voice & Dialect Coach) have done with the cast?
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- Think about the set design by Christina Smith. How did the set change during the performance? Create your own mood board with images that capture the aesthetic seen on stage.
 - Compare and contrast *Hay Fever* with similar plays by other playwrights, such as *The Importance of Being Earnest* or *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde. Examine the themes, characters, and style.
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- This production of *Hay Fever* includes over 30 unique costume designs from visionary designer Esther Marie Hayes. To see these garments up close and learn more about the Bliss family fashion, visit 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.



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