Mark Colvin’s Kidney: What to Expect

- *Mark Colvin’s Kidney* is a new Australian play by Tommy Murphy. It was co-commissioned with Playwriting Australia. The production is directed by David Berthold and opened its premier production at Belvoir on Wednesday 1 March 2017.

- This production of *Mark Colvin’s Kidney* runs for 2 hours and 20 minutes, including one interval.

- *Mark Colvin’s Kidney* is the true story of the remarkable friendship between ABC journalist Mark Colvin (John Howard) and business advisor Mary-Ellen Field (Sarah Peirse). Their friendship began when Mark interviewed Mary-Ellen for an ABC Radio report on the Murdoch News International phone hacking scandal (of which she was a victim) but took on new meaning when Mary-Ellen donated one of her kidneys to Mark. In writing this play Tommy Murphy spoke extensively with the real-life Mary-Ellen Field and Mark Colvin.

- There are twenty eight characters in *Mark Colvin’s Kidney*, played in this production by six actors. Most of the actors play multiple roles; only John Howard (Mark Colvin) and Sarah Peirse (Mary-Ellen Field) play the same character throughout the play.

- *Mark Colvin’s Kidney* is set in periods of time between 2005 (when Elle McPherson accuses Mary-Ellen of leaking private information to the press) and 2012 (when Mary-Ellen donates her kidney to Mark).

- The friendship between Mark Colvin and Mary-Ellen Field developed over email, text messaging and phone conversations. Some of their real-life correspondence is depicted by the actors speaking directly to each other across the stage, although the characters at not in the same country as each other at the time.

- The action of the play takes place in different locations: Sydney, London, the USA and France. AV projections signal the time and place in which each scene is taking place.

- Locations from Mark Colvin’s past also exist on stage during the play. When Mark Colvin is very ill we see experiences from his past represented on stage. Sometimes a scene set in the present day moves seamlessly into Colvin’s past. Other times, the world of the past exists on stage at the same time as the present day. On one occasion, while on dialysis, Colvin hallucinates that he is in Goma (near Rwanda) in 1994, where he is attacked by Charon, a Hutu man carrying a machete. On another occasion we see a young Mark Colvin telephone his father from a hotel in Tehran, Iran in 1979.

- The style of the production is naturalistic and the characters use colloquial, familiar language. Occasionally characters speak to each other in French. When characters speak French, English surtitles are projected onto the set. Students should be prepared for lengths of dialogue between adult characters, sometimes dealing with the nature of long-term marriages or other issues most pertinent to an older generation. *Mark Colvin’s Kidney* contains only very occasional coarse language. The play also uses the language of social media, notably Twitter.

- The play contains references to medical conditions and surgical procedures. During the course of the production a photo of Mary-Ellen’s kidney inside Mark Colvin’s body is projected onto the set. This photo is a real photo, provided and included in the production with the permission of Mary-Ellen Field and Mark Colvin.

- In Act One we see the character Mary-Ellen Field at a treatment facility in Arizona. During the scene a disheveled male character enters the room wearing a sign around his neck reading ‘I am a sex addict’. This scene also contains reference to addiction and drug use and a brief reference to suicide, when Mary-Ellen Field explodes, “How can someone kill themselves with a sink plug? What drown myself?”

- Schools performance tickets are not sent out beforehand, we call schools into the theatre one by one for the daytime school performances – phone our box office on 9699 3444 if you need to check your booking.

- Students need to be briefed about theatre etiquette. Please turn mobile phones off completely and refrain from eating in the theatre. Students need to know that the performance is live and that the actors see and hear them in the audience. Taking notes shouldn’t happen during performances. Schools shows are followed by a Question and Answer session with the cast. Students will have a chance to ask questions about anything they don’t fully understand afterwards.