

Mr BURNS

A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY



19 MAY - 25 JUNE 2017

LEARNING RESOURCES

BELVOIR



Belvoir and State Theatre Company South Australia presents

Mr BURNS

A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY

Writer **ANNE WASHBURN**
Score by **MICHAEL FRIEDMAN**
Lyrics by **ANNE WASHBURN**
Director **IMARA SAVAGE**

This production of Mr Burns, a post-electric play opened at State Theatre Company South Australia on Wednesday 26 April and Belvoir St Theatre on Saturday 20 May 2017.

Musical Director **CAROL YOUNG**
Set and Costume Designer **JONATHON OXLADE**
Lighting Designer **CHRIS PETRIDIS**
Sound Designer **JEREMY SILVER**
Choreographer **LUCAS JERVIES**
Dialect Coach **PAIGE WALKER**
Stage Manager **NATALIE MOIR**
Assistant Stage Manager **VANESSA MARTIN**
Fight Choreographer **SCOTT WITT**

With
PAULA ARUNDELL
MITCHELL BUTEL
ESTHER HANNAFORD
JUDE HENSHALL
BRENT HILL
EZRA JUANTA
JACQY PHILLIPS

"Mr Burns, a post-electric play" is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.
Additional music composed by Carol Young.



Paula Arundell & Esther Hannaford in rehearsals for *Mr Burns*

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ABOUT BELVOIR



One building.

Six hundred people.

Thousands of stories.

When the Nimrod Theatre building in Belvoir Street, Surry Hills, was threatened with redevelopment in 1984, more than 600 people – ardent theatre lovers together with arts, entertainment and media professionals – formed a syndicate to buy the building and save this unique performance space in inner city Sydney.

Thirty years later, under Artistic Director Eamon Flack and Executive Director Brenna Hobson, Belvoir engages Australia's most prominent and promising playwrights, directors, actors and designers to realise an annual season of work that is dynamic, challenging and visionary. As well as performing at home, Belvoir regularly takes to the road, touring both nationally and internationally.

Belvoir Education

Our Education Program provides students and teachers with insights into the work of Belvoir and first hand experiences of the theatre-making process.

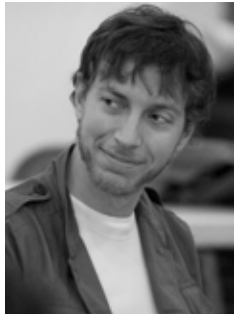
Belvoir Education offers student workshops, teacher professional development workshops, work experience, VET placements, archival viewings and a wealth of online resources designed to support work in the drama classroom. Our arts access programs assist schools in Regional NSW and Western Sydney to access the company's work.

Explore our education pages at www.belvoir.com.au/education

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM



Anne Washburn
Writer



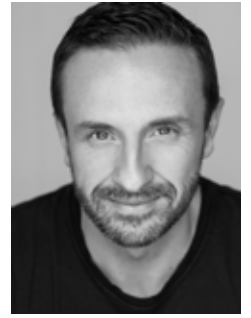
Michael Friedman
Composer



Imara Savage
Director



Paula Arundell
Marge/Quincy



Mitchell Butel
Gibson / Mr Burns



Esther Hannaford
Jenny/Marge/Bart



Jude Henshall
Colleen/FBI Agent
Lisa



Brent Hill
Matt/Homer



Lucas Jervies
Choreographer



Ezra Juanta
Sam/Bart/Scratchy



Vanessa Martin
Assistant Stage
Manager



Natalie Moir
Stage Manager



Jonathon Oxlade
Set and Costume
Designer



Chris Petridis
Lighting Designer



Jacqy Phillips
Maria/Lisa
FBI Agent/Itchy



Jeremy Silver
Sound Designer



Paige Walker
Dialect Coach



Scott Witt
Fight Choreographer



Carol Young
Musical Director

WRITER'S NOTE: ANNE WASHBURN

This play comes from an idea which had been knocking around in my head for years: I wanted to take a pop culture narrative and see what it meant, and how it changed, after the fall of Civilisation.

I knew I wanted to start with an act of recollection, with a group of survivors trying to piece together a TV episode. And to do that, I wanted to work with a group of actors; remembering is complicated; I could make remembering up, but it would never be as rich and complex as the real thing.

In 2008, Steve Cosson of The Civilians, an investigative theatre group of which I am a member, approached me about applying for a commission. I suggested this project – which had now somehow become about *The Simpsons*; as I remember it, *Friends*, *Cheers*, *Seinfeld*, were all in the mix – any show with a large and dedicated viewership.

It now seems like a really fortunate choice: if any show has the bones for post-apocalyptic survival, it's *The Simpsons*. So many people enjoy remembering it: retelling it, quoting it, doing the voices, the gestures; even a terribly reduced population should be able to do a reliable job of putting it back together. And the characters, when you think about them, are durable archetypes – Bart is a Trickster, Homer the Holy Fool, Marge, I suppose, is a kind of long-suffering Madonna, and then the inhabitants of Springfield are an almost endlessly rich supply of human (and non-human) personalities.

That summer, Clubbed Thumb – a downtown theatre company in New York – had gotten hold of a free rehearsal space they were loaning out – a disused bank vault in a sub-basement deep under Wall Street. We met there, far underground and out of cell phone range, in a room with thick, thick doors and those wheel handles, under a range of flickering fluorescent lights, and asked a group of Civilians actors to remember *Simpsons* episodes as best they could. We also asked them to be mindful of the necessities of storytelling; if they couldn't remember a detail, or a plot segue, they should – as one would, in the wild, in front of a small audience – make something up. The episode they remembered most vividly was "Cape Feare," a parody of the Scorsese remake of the film *Cape Fear*, with Robert De Niro playing the role originated by Robert Mitchum. The resulting narrative, which I pieced together from several attempts, is... fairly accurate, and I used it to begin the play.

There are all kinds of storytelling. There are stories we create from the air, for fun, and there are the stories which are meant to be acts of remembering. Our culture – national, family, peer, personal – is defined, not so much by what has happened to us, but by how we remember it, and the story we create from that memory. And since we don't really create stories from the air – since all stories, no matter how fanciful, are in some way constructed from our experiences, real or imagined – all storytelling is a remaking of our past in order to create our future.



Jude Henshall, Jacqy Phillips, Ezra Juanta, Paula Arundell, Esther Hannaford, Brent Hill & Mitchell Butel

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: IMARA SAVAGE

After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world.
Philip Pullman

How to begin to write about the 'play' that is *Mr Burns*. Perhaps I'll start by saying that I'm not sure it is a 'play' at all, but rather an investigation piece that seeks to answer the question: what happens to a story if it's pushed past the point of the apocalypse? In a world devoid of Google and Wikipedia, how do our stories endure and change? How does the popular culture of one time become the high art and mythology of another? And how do we use the popular entertainment of our time to make sense of our past in order to heal for the future?

As stand-alone acts in a traditional three-act structure, the work has little pay off; it is the cumulative effect of Anne Washburn's work where the magic and the power lie. In Act 1, a group of survivors in a post-electric age try to reconstruct *The Simpsons* episode "Cape Feare" from memory. By Act 2, this episode is being performed as a live stage show complete with commercials of products from a bygone era and mashups of chart hits. Act 3 takes what was once popular entertainment and/or advertising, and is now staged as something akin to a medieval Passion Play, with familiar narratives of good versus evil, and tropes that interweave pantomime, religious ceremony, ritual, Greek chorus, the American Broadway musical, science fiction and more. Leitmotifs from Act 1 and 2, snatches of commercials and pop songs, and quotes from popular movies, have become part of a ceremonial drama by Act 3. Eminem is elevated to the heights of a Hamlet soliloquy. And so the web of what one journalist described as a "Russian doll of meta intertextuality" begins...

The work speaks to the unreliability of memory and how ideas, sounds, colours, text and images are filtered through time. As such I imagine Washburn's intent was about the sharing of a cultural nostalgia where we (the audience) gain joy from seeing how an idea morphs, changes, fragments and takes on different meanings and layers through time and circumstance, and also due to the needs of the tellers and observers. It also seeks to answer the question, 'what is the role of the artist and storyteller in a time of crisis?' It was after all Anne Washburn's response to September 11.

Never have I had more difficulty trying to explain what something is about, perhaps in even doing so it reduces the enormous scope and complexity of what the writer is investigating. *Mr Burns* is not a play of plot or even characters, it's a play of ideas, and there are a lot of them. At its heart it speaks to me of the enduring power of stories, their ability to lift us up and cleanse our spirits in times of confusion and chaos. From the humble beginnings around a campfire to the Greek amphitheatre and beyond. This is Washburn's love letter to the theatre and ours too.

We hope you enjoy.



Imara Savage

SYNOPSIS

Act I - Present Day (or similar)

Contemporary America as we know it has come to an end. A widespread nuclear-plant failure has destroyed the grid. After the disaster, a group of survivors huddle around a fire in the woods and console themselves by recounting a popular episode of *The Simpsons*. It's the "Cape Feare" episode, in which young Bart is stalked by the murderous Sideshow Bob. The episode is a riff on the 1991 Martin Scorsese film, which is a remake of the 1962 film starring Robert Mitchum. Struggling to remember precise details, the survivors disagree over what was said in the episode. They're interrupted by the entrance of a new survivor, Gibson, who paints a dire picture of the world outside their camp.

Act II - 7 Years Later

Seven years later, we find this same group of survivors rehearsing in an abandoned warehouse. The shared experience of recounting the "Cape Feare" episode has been formalised into something much larger. The survivors have formed a theatre company that specialises in performing a small repertoire of *Simpsons* episodes, commercials about luxury products from the past, and Top 40 singles. We learn that lines from *The Simpsons* have become currency, and the characters are competing against other touring troupes to draw an audience. In the outside world, chaos and danger reign and the troupe come under attack by a mysterious group of strangers.

Interval

Act III - 75 Years Later

75 years later, *The Simpsons* have assumed mythic proportions. The "Cape Feare" episode has been transformed into an epic opera performed in an amphitheatre without electricity. The chorus recounts the names of individuals killed in the nuclear meltdown and events of the past several decades. The musical is a mashup of hip-hop, Gilbert & Sullivan operettas and dialogue spoken by the original survivors around the campfire.

If any show has the bones for post-apocalyptic survival, it's *The Simpsons*. So many people enjoy remembering it: retelling it, quoting it, doing the voices, the gestures; even a terribly reduced population should be able to do a reliable job of putting it back together.

Anne Washburn, Writer



Mr Burns Act One: Mitchell Butel, Esther Hannaford, Jacqy Phillips and Brent Hill



Mr Burns Act Two: Mitchell Butel, Jude Henshall, Paula Arundell, Esther Hannaford, Jacqy Phillips and Brent Hill



Mr Burns Act Three: Mitchell Butel, Jude Henshall, Paula Arundell, Esther Hannaford, Brent Hill and Jacqy Phillips

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR IMARA SAVAGE

In creating *Mr Burns*, what were your main intentions?

To create something meaningful and entertaining.

What experience do you hope your audiences have?

I hope they enjoy the show and that it sparks conversation in the foyer.

What was your overall vision?

Mainly just to illuminate the ideas presented in the script. How stories change over time. How theatre progresses from the campfire storytelling to high art. How the popular culture of one age can become the myth and high art of another.

In briefing your creative and technical team, what key requests did you make?

We needed three distinct sets, outdoor (woods), indoor (warehouse) and amphitheatre/church. We needed a set that could move fluidly between the three spaces. We talked about ash as a linking theme for all three spaces. We also talked about a world devoid of colour moving through to a world of saturated colour. I didn't want it to be ugly. I specifically said 'no naff graffiti on garage walls' The designer and I talked about the second act being a DIY aesthetic and the third act being a very constructed aesthetic.

What process did you go through to bring *Mr Burns* to life?

Chats. Rehearsals. Arguments. Wrangling. Rehearsals. More chats. Rehearsals. Trying things. Throwing things out. Trying new things.

We didn't hear all the music until the third week of rehearsals, so obviously that changed everything. We had to be patient and let things evolve without feeling pressured by time constraints.

I had a musical director and choreographer in the room and there was a lot of collaboration between us all, and between the performers of course.

What were some of the main requests you had of your actors?

In rehearsals to be investigative, curious, playful and truthful. The actors needed to be actors and singers/movers. I wanted them to represent a microcosm of the United States - the last survivors, an odd assortment of different energies who were thrown together by circumstance.

What challenges did you face directing *Mr Burns*?

People think this play is a comedy. But I'm not sure it is a comedy and I think it's dangerous to play it as such. It's a story about a group of people who lose their family and community. People die. There's not much funny about that. There's joy certainly and hope and playfulness and invention.

Another challenge was that we didn't hear the music until rehearsals. Usually going in to direct an opera I'd have the music in advance and it's strange to design without music, it's a leap of faith of sorts.

What do you think are the key moments in *Mr Burns*?

Every act is a key 'moment' in time. Now. Seven years in the future. Seventy five years in the future.

Do you have a favourite quote from *Mr Burns*? Why did you choose this?

Bart, "I will live my life gloriously"... because shouldn't we all!

Is there a moral to the *Mr Burns* story?

Storytelling is vital. It lifts us up in times of crisis and heals our spirits. It's how we make sense of ourselves in the world and for future generations.

Love never dies in memory And I will meet life gloriously *Bart - Mr Burns, A Post-Electric Play*



Esther Hannaford

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

The elements of production are the technical and visual elements used to manipulate the elements of drama in order to effectively tell a play's story.

In these notes we are going to look at:

An interview with Jonathon Oxlade, the Production Designer
Costume Renderings by Jonathon Oxlade
Set Model Box by Jonathan Oxlade
An interview with Chris Petridis, the Lighting Designer
Lighting Design Storyboard by Chris Petridis

AN INTERVIEW WITH PRODUCTION DESIGNER JONATHON OXLADE

How did you come up with the design concept for this production?

When developing the design concept with Imara Savage, we were struck by how detailed the script is; it's quite didactic in some sections. It gives a very clear guide to the playing style of the show and lets us know, as theatre makers, what direction we needed to take. Act I is a naturalistic drama. Act II is like a video clip mixed with a travelling theatre troupe aesthetic. Act III is completely different. What this means is that the concept from act to act changes slightly each time. It's important to get the concepts clear from the get go; this is what you build the rules of the world on. Also, this helped Imara and I invent our own 'look' for the piece, we wanted a space that could morph between the three acts, but one that felt quite contemporary.



Jude Henshall, Brent Hill and Jacqy Phillips

How did you make your set design models and what materials did you use?

Imara and I looked at film references like, Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*. We liked the idea of post-apocalyptic world not having to be brown and completely broken down. We liked the idea that nuclear fallout has created a 'white/ashy' world. It's also a reference to the September 11 attacks. There are incredible images of ash and burnt matter throughout New York. It's horrific but strangely beautiful. My models are made of all sorts of materials that include cardboard, plastics, bits of old toys and scraps of fabrics. All of these things are chosen for their properties - soft, hard, metallic etc. It's a good first go at creating the set and working out what the actual materials will be.

What first appealed to you about *Mr Burns*?

The idea of everything being shut down, of what would happen if we had no electricity? Power (in all its guises) is such a huge part of our world. Theatre relies on power. Power is what makes costumes and sets look better. So that in itself is strange, because you have no barometer of how you will see or imagine the work. It's a bit like going to a folk festival. There is nothing... but everything. Also, the idea of clinging to warmth, known ideas and humans sharing. It's a strange and ultimately incredible thing how we, as a culture, cling to our popular culture. Along with that... *The Simpsons*, they are pretty engrained in my life!

The story is told in three distinct acts that span close to a century. How does the set design evolve between acts?

It's a tricky thing. It's almost like the three acts are separate plays. The set doesn't really 'change' but hopefully it feels like an 'object' that speaks to the idea of being in and out of a nuclear container. Being trapped and free.

What inspired you when designing this play?

The Simpsons and watching the specific episode "Cape Feare" were the starting point to my design. Such an incredible episode (as they all are) to glean so many pictures and references. *The Simpsons* has a clear aesthetic, and after twenty-something seasons it's hard to ignore it. Also, the characters, playing actors in the play are trying to re-imagine it, so what a great challenge that was for us. *The Simpsons* designers use heaps of teal green and pink! A favourite colour combo of mine.

***The Simpsons* have such an iconic look. What was your approach to representing these characters when it came to costume?**

It's so hard, you want to do your own thing, and you want to be true. Shapes, angles and geometry are the best place to sit in. Animation works on geometry, it works on repeated shapes. The idea that the characters in the play are 'trying' to replicate that is interesting. My brain works better when I see shapes and colours next to each other. It's pleasing.

What have been the biggest challenges so far in creating this world?

The staging is hard. While this show is written for a proscenium arch theatre, we are performing in a corner based theatre. It's technical, and quite difficult to get all of the scenic elements on and off stage. We are basically trying to fit a boat and car into a cat flap! The process is like any other show though, you start with nothing, scrape the world to find things, and then it happens.

Where does *Mr Burns* sit in your career in terms of ambition and invention?

I love inventing worlds with different artists. This one is so weird and strange that I can't see outside it right now. It is very different from act to act. Hopefully people love the work, and see it for of its "dodgy-ness" and beauty.

COSTUME RENDERINGS BY JONATHON OXLADE



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Mitchell Butel



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Esther Hannaford



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



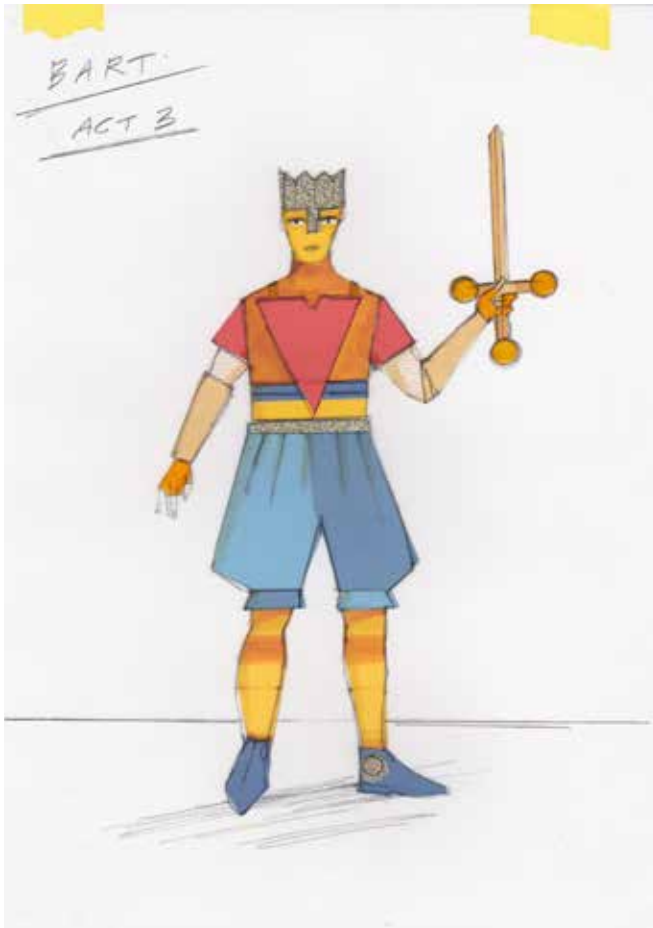
Paula Arundell



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Mitchell Butel



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)

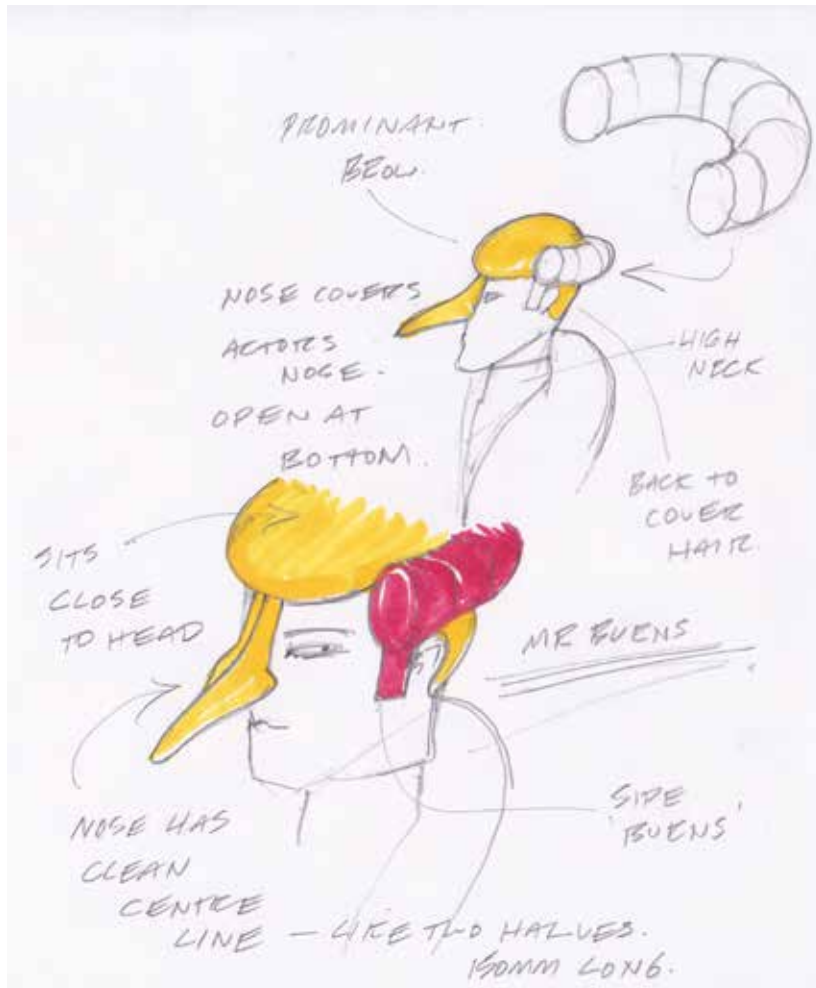


Costume rendering by Jonathon Oxlade (2017)

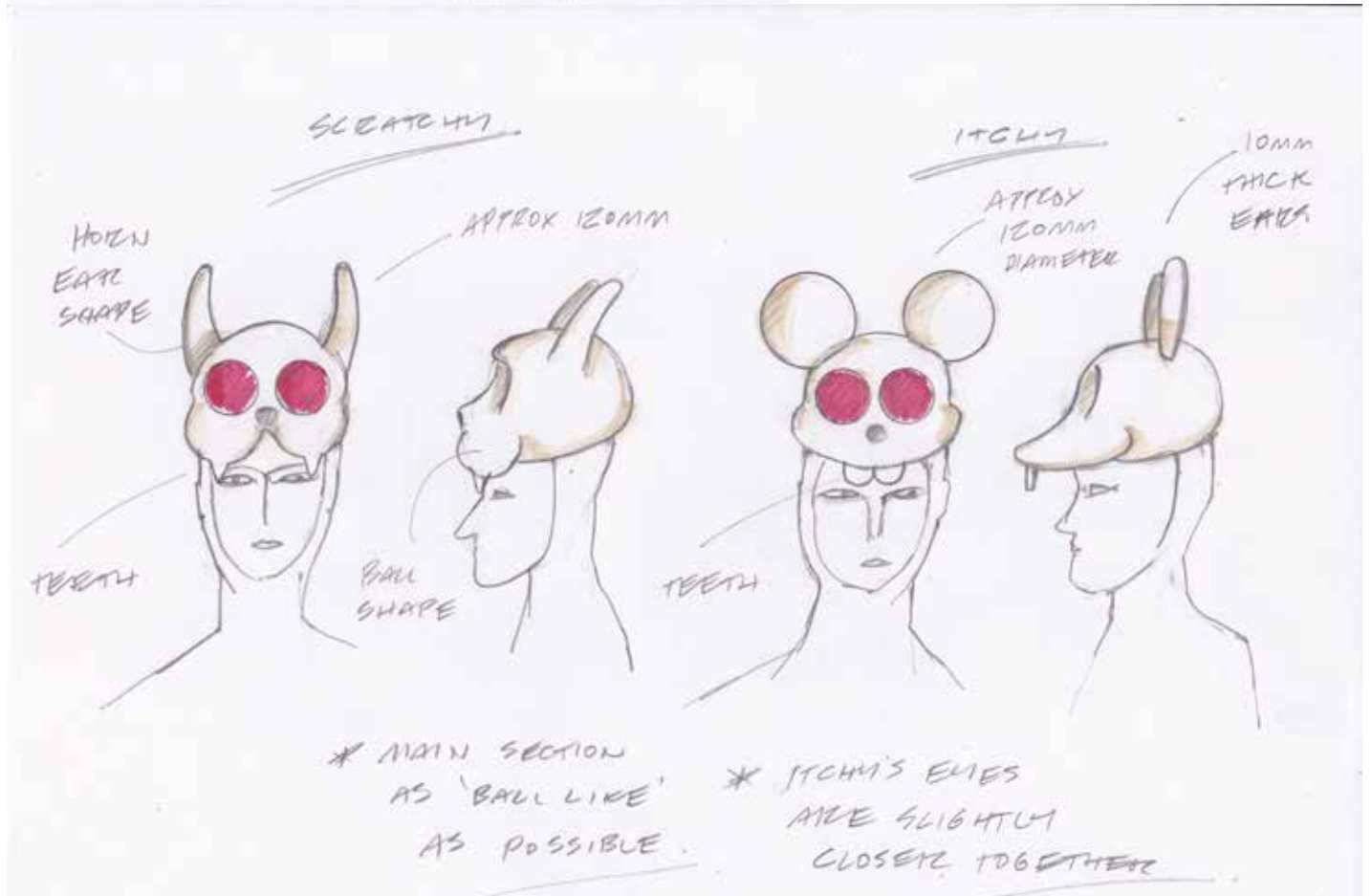


Mitchell Butel, Brent Hill, Jude Henshall, Paula Arundell and Esther Hannaford & Jacqy Phillips

HEADDRESS DESIGN SKETCHES BY JONATHON OXLADE



An early design for Mr Burns' headdress (left) and final designs for Itchy and Scratchy's headdresses (below).



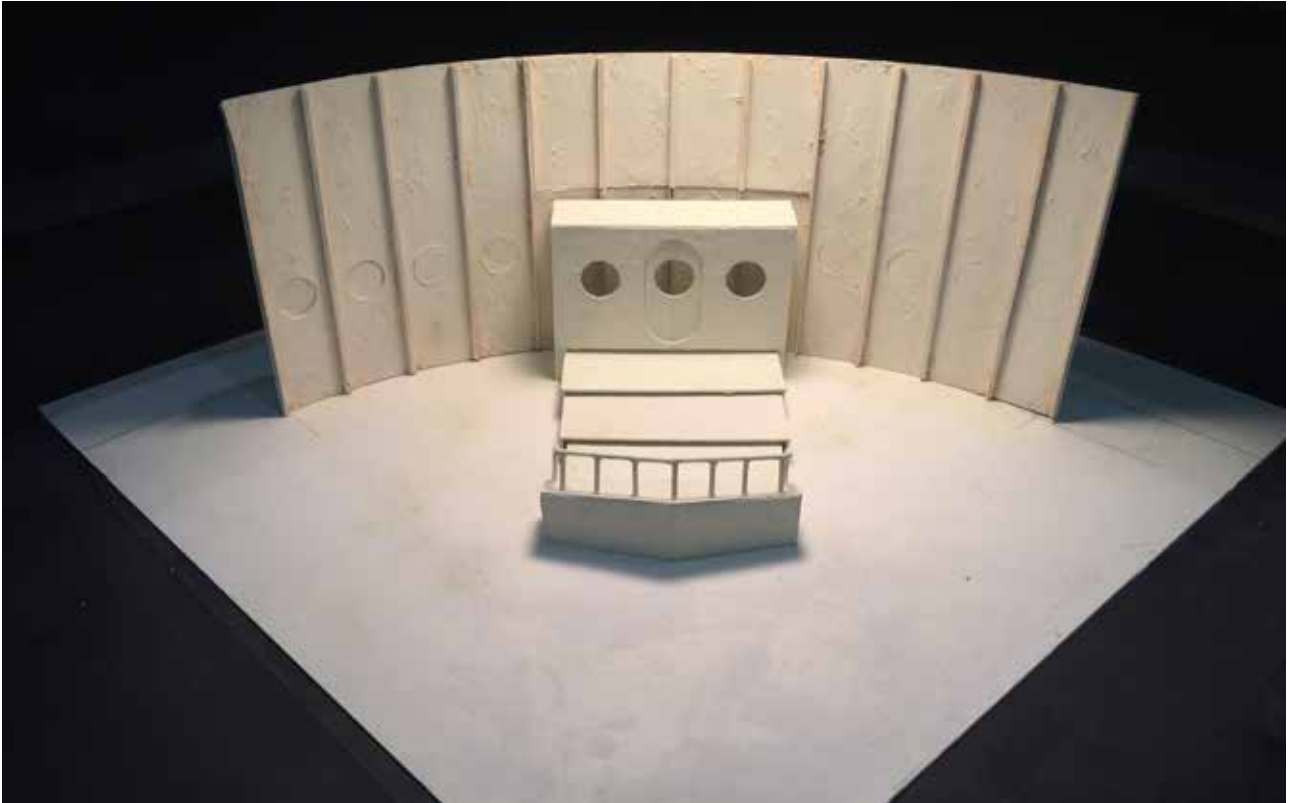
SET MODEL BOX BY JONATHON OXLADE



Set Model Box: *Mr Burns* ACT ONE
Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Set Model Box: *Mr Burns* ACT TWO
Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Set Model Box: *Mr Burns* ACT THREE
Jonathon Oxlade (2017)



Set Model Box: *Mr Burns* ACT THREE
Jonathon Oxlade (2017)

Set model boxes are made by set designers at a 1:25 scale.

AN INTERVIEW WITH LIGHTING DESIGNER CHRIS PETRIDIS

In *Mr Burns* what is the purpose of the lighting?

In Act I, the lighting includes minimal cues. They are designed to guide your eye around the space and focus it onto who is important at the time. We have had to do this as the light was too 'flat' and blurry and didn't help the storytelling progress. Act II and Act III are evolutions of that idea... Act II has a few more lighting cues. It is set in a warehouse with a skylight, a key light. Act III is soft and reflects candle light. Originally this act was designed to be bright and colourful, but it was changed to reflect religious references. It is reflective and ritualistic. The idea is that it is mostly lit with candlelight.

Throughout the whole show the only 'colour' used is warm light. We've taken this idea further now and added new cues to add to the 'drama' of the act. I like to find the contrasts in a show and play on that, e.g. Brightness vs Darkness in *Mr Burns*. The off white wall in the set is a constant architectural feature, which aids in accentuating the effect of the lighting.

How did you achieve the effect of the fire in the drum?

The characters sit around a fire. Inside the drum there is a LED strip that flickers and the sound designer installed a small blue tooth speaker, which plays the sound effect of crackling.

What was your biggest challenge working on this show?

How do you light a world that exists without electricity? It's pretty tricky! During the South Australian blackouts in 2016 I was so excited as it allowed me to do some research into life with no electricity! I came to this process with that experience. No electricity has been distilled into the design but because we are in a theatre things need to be seen... so, in fact, we have used quite a big rig. Each act is like its own show and has its own full rig and design aesthetic... and I've had to interpret it having no light in other ways. We do need lights and the audience does need to see the actors.

But actually the biggest challenge technically was creating a sense of night in Act I without using blue gels on a white stage whilst still keeping performers lit.

In a nutshell, how would you describe the lighting for *Mr Burns*?

Soft, unobtrusive and gentle.

Before LEDs and other technological advances what did theatre makers use to indicate candles on set?

Candles were just candles. Fire risk and all. People produced campfires in different ways. For example, silk flames with a fan and some small red and orange lights were one of the techniques used.

LIGHTING DESIGN STORYBOARD FOR MR BURNS ACT THREE BY CHRIS PETRIDIS



IMAGE 17 - Esther Song
Bow wash.



IMAGE 18 - Burns death
OH beam special covering Esther and Mitchell. Specials on each of their faces too.



IMAGE 19 - Stab
from back of bow. Red



IMAGE 20 - Esther spec
Spec on Esther for this song.



IMAGE 21 - Specs on performers
Tight specs on faces.

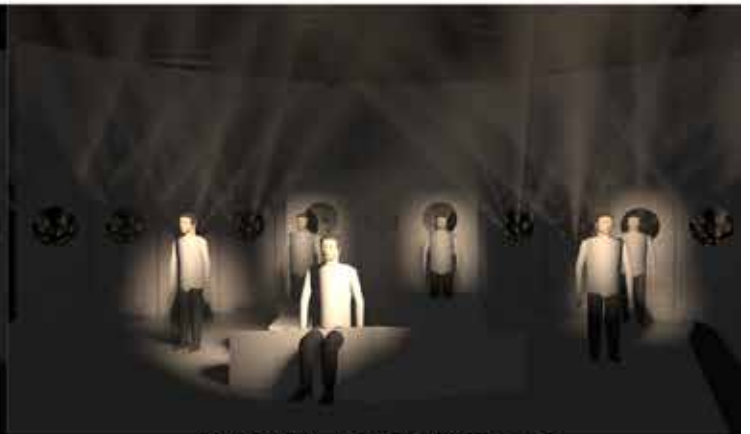


IMAGE 22.1 - Light starts to creep in
Beams start to creep up from the bottom.

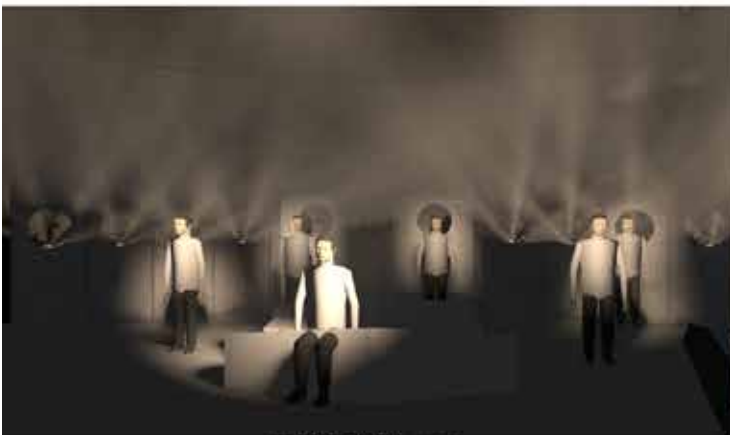


IMAGE 22.2 - more
More!



IMAGE 22.3 - full
(Maybe they could keep travelling upwards over the course of the song and disappear again?) Full!

AN INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR MITCHELL BUTEL

What roles do you play in *Mr Burns*?

I play Gibson in Act I and Act II. He is a survivor of the fires and grid failures in the play, who while travelling across the East Coast of America in search of safety, hears a group of people talking (primarily) about *The Simpsons* and who accidentally becomes part of their group. In Act III, I play a twisted version of Mr Burns in a deconstruction of the famous Simpsons episode 'Cape Feare' (Mr Burns has now replaced the original villain of the episode Sideshow Bob).

What are their relationships with the other characters in the play?

Gibson is an outsider to the group initially but becomes part of it and seven years later, is one of the main actors in their travelling theatre troupe. He is also perhaps the most anxious and obsessive-compulsive. Mr Burns in Act III is very much the villain and Bart Simpson's arch nemesis. He terrifies the whole Simpsons family.

What processes did you go through to bring your characters to life?

Gibson's character is not that far removed from my own - a moderate, middle-aged educated man - so that process of connecting to him wasn't so hard. He is American though so it's been important to work with our accent coach to ensure I have the correct dialect and sound for him. Playing Mr Burns is a different kettle of fish - I'm obviously influenced by the cartoon character but also by other great villains - Robert De Niro and Robert Mitchum in both versions of the *Cape Fear* movie, Disney villains like Captain Hook and Scar and great pop culture villains like Darth Vader and Gollum. Costume is a massive factor in creating this character. My costume has a slight hunch-back which affects my walk and look. Creating a voice for Mr Burns is crucial too. The playwright has advised that we don't directly imitate the cartoon but that we find a voice that invokes them and other archetypes. I am deepening and 'poshing' up my voice for Mr Burns and using a lot of air to create the right sound.

What are your characters' objectives?

Gibson's objective is to survive, to find a safe place and ultimately, to perhaps find other people/a community with whom he can create a new life. Mr Burns' objective is to 'educate' Bart Simpson about the world and its realities.

What were some of the challenges you faced in bringing your roles to life?

Energy and sustaining tension is a big challenge for this play. It is a rollercoaster ride of sudden and extreme changes so you need both energy and alertness. Being so evil is also an emotionally strange place to go, so that requires some courage too.

What do you like most about your character(s)?

I love Gibson's reasonableness, intelligence, warmth and sensitivity. I love Mr Burns' sense of mischief, danger, and anarchy.

Can you choose some of your characters' lines from the show?

"I've been stopping here and stopping there, mainly I've just been going." (Gibson)

Gibson is the ultimate survivor and traveller. The man who keeps on walking. This is a good snapshot of him.

"The world has much to teach us and it's my responsibility, yes, I will confess it, my pleasure, to see that you are educated." (Mr Burns)

Mr Burns seeks to show Bart Simpson what he considers to be the truth of the world and all its horrors. This is his main mission.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JACQY PHILIPS

Who do you play in Acts I and II?

In the first two acts of *Mr Burns* I play a character called Maria who I've interpreted as being a reclusive ex-hippie lady who has a cabin in a wooded area not far from the Hudson River and a place called Buchanan which has a nuclear power plant which is referenced in the play.

What is Maria's relationship with the other characters?

In Act I, some refugees from other nuclear devastation have found me and we are mentally surviving the horror of the apocalypse by retelling episodes of *The Simpsons*.

In Act II, seven years on, the group have formed into a troupe of players re-enacting those episodes and a repertoire of chart hits from their collective cultures. Maria believes that what they create should be as authentic as possible and should aim for meaning rather than pure entertainment.

Can you think of a quote that stands out to you said by Maria?

It can't look like mud, it's got to look like engine oil so it's not just that he's dirty but it's that thing like, all through the journey, he's clinging to the underbelly of the car, hot engine oil in his face but he holds on, he perseveres, like that's what makes him scary. (Maria)

Who do you play in Act III?

I play Itchy the mouse from the cartoon show that the Simpson kids love to watch who, with Scratchy the cat, becomes Mr Burns' evil henchmen.

Can you think of a quote that is most telling about who Itchy is?

Itchy and Scratchy sing a song which describes our characters for the audience:

*Two little darling lads are we
Charming, disarming, full of glee
Frolicksome as such sprites can be
Everyone's going to be sad*

*Nobody's safe for we care for none
Appalling things are a source of fun
Death is a joke that's just begun
Everyone's going to be sad.*

My challenge with the play was that being seventy years of age and much older than everyone else, I had to 'learn' a culture I'd never really engaged with, not just *The Simpsons* but the music of Beyonce and Britney Spears and Eminem etc: whose dance routines and pop and rap styles we recreate. I also had to learn dance routines that really tested my 'older' brain!

I think this an important play for everyone in the very threatening world we live in now which doesn't look like improving for the generations to come. It's a play for everybody. It's a play about refugees. It's going to make people think... a lot.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JUDE HENSHALL, ACTOR

What roles do you play in *Mr Burns*?

In Act I and II I play Colleen, a survivor of an electrical apocalypse! In Act III I play Lisa Simpson...but not as you know her.

Who are they and what is their relationship with other characters in the story?

Colleen does not say a single word in Act I but we gather she may be experiencing trauma of some kind. There are clues in the script which tell us bits and pieces about her. In Act II, it is seven years later and Colleen has become the director of a travelling theatre troupe playing *Simpsons* episodes to the rest of the survivors of the apocalypse.

What process did you go through to bring Colleen to life?

There is always a lot of research that goes into creating a character. For this play I started researching from the external world of the play first then moved to the internal world of the character. For example, I began researching electrical outages, nuclear explosions, I read *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, then I focused on the character's American accent, I wrote out her entire journey, I found where she lived in America, I imagined her entire back story, I tried lots of vocal expressions of her until I reached a clean, direct sound that seemed to sit well.

What is Colleen's objective?

For Colleen, her super objective is to survive.

What were some of the challenges you faced in bringing Colleen to life?

A challenge in this play is that you have a giant leap in imagination, it is a world of destruction and despair the likes of which we have not witnessed before. The imaginative work required a lot of internal picture building and intense concentration to keep it alive in the play.

What do you like most about your main character? What did you learn from her?

I love Colleen's strength, her persistence and resilience is something I could learn!

Do you have a favourite quote from Colleen and why have you chosen it?

Alright, we are going to keep moving. (Colleen)

Colleen says this a lot in the play. This sums up her will to go on and want to survive.



Jude Henshall (front) Jacqy Phillips (front, right) Mitchell Butel (centre back) in rehearsal for *Mr Burns*

PODCAST



Paula Arundell

Director Imara Savage and actors Mitchell Butel and Jude Henshall explore the big ideas in Anne Washburn's wildly inventive play.

Produced for Belvoir by Zoe Ferguson

[Listen to the *Mr Burns* podcast online here:](#)

<https://belvoir.com.au/schools-performances/mr-burns/#Podcast>

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