



- *Tell Me I'm Here* is a Australian play written and adapted for the stage by Veronica Nadine Gleeson, based on the book by Anne Deveson.
- Anne Deveson's book is an account of her son Jonathan's life, and the impact of his complex mental illness, schizophrenia.
- The production is directed by Leticia Cáceres and premiered at Belvoir on Wednesday 24 August 2022
- [Tell Me I'm Here](#) runs for approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes, including one interval of 20 minutes.
- [Tell Me I'm Here](#) is set across a number of years, from 1961 to 1985.
- There are 6 actors in the production, who play fifty-eight characters, The character Anne Deveson is played by one actor throughout the production (Nadine Gardiner). The character Jonathan Blain (her son) is played by one actor throughout the production (Tom Conroy).
- The play contains two Acts. Act One contains thirty scenes; Act Two contains nineteen scenes,
- The style of the production is slightly heightened naturalism, which balances humour with the sadness of the narrative.
- The action of the play takes place at various locations in Adelaide, Sydney, India and Uganda. Many scenes are set in the Adelaide family home of Anne Deveson and her three children – Jonathan, Georgia and Joshua. This home is represented on stage by a long wooden table and a tall wall of bookshelves behind it.
- The play depicts Jonathan experiencing **symptoms of schizophrenia**, including delusions, hallucinations, disordered thinking and disordered behaviour. We see the character's symptoms intensify during the show, from a child who says to his mother 'When I look at you, your face keeps turning into a witch' to a young man exhibiting behaviours such as trying to extract rats from his head, rocking, wailing, excessive giggling, hearing voices in his head, verbally abusing family members (on one occasion spitting at this mother) and appearing increasingly dishevelled. We see Jonathan distressed and frightened by what is happening to him.
- During the course of the show Jonathan draws on a blank white wall and the floor of the set. His drawings sometimes represent the location of the scene (such as trees or a gravesite) and sometimes reflect Jonathan's thoughts. In Act One Jonathan draws an artistic female nude on the floor of the stage. At another point during the production he draws a knife and writes the words DO NOT HARM ANNE. The drawings remain visible throughout the production.
- In Act One, Jonathan threatens his mother Anne with a knife and tells her that he is going to kill her. Jonathan is experiencing delusional thinking and believes Anne is the devil. He stands on the table holding the knife upwards, then points it towards his mother. The lighting state changes to a lurid pink, yellow and purple. Anne grabs a decorative crucifix from the shelf and holds it up. Jonathan calms down, drops the knife and apologises
- *Tell Me I'm Here* shows the impact schizophrenia has on family members and carers. Georgia and Joshua are at times frightened by Jonathan's behaviour (for example, when he throws books at them and upends furniture) and at other times frustrated and angry by how much of Anne's focus and energy is taken up by Jonathan. In one scene, Ellis, Jonathan's father, bangs the table in anger, causing tension.
- *Tell Me I'm Here* depicts the impact of heavy medication. In scenes when Jonathan is receiving treatment in hospital he appears 'docile and robotic' and walks slowly and heavily. In one scene Jonathan starts to gasp for air and choke as a result of a new medication. He is subsequently given the correct counter medication.
- *Tell Me I'm Here* contains attitudes to mental health prevalent in the 1980s, including lack of support and understanding. The production contains scenes set in India when Anne and Jonathan seek alternate treatment from a now discredited American therapist names Jacqui Schiff. While the depiction of Jacqui Schiff is at times humorous, people appear in loose restraints, are held down, and asked to stand on their tiptoes facing the wall.
- The production contains instances of stage violence – one character is punched in the face and another is hit on the arm.
- SPOILER ALERT Towards the end of the production Jonathan dies; the implication is that Jonathan has chosen to end his life. Prior to his death he has been taken to hospital twice after an overdose of Serepax and alcohol. We hear a cry of anguish when Anne learns that Jonathan has died.
- *Tell Me I'm Here* contains strong language, often as a symptom of schizophrenia.
- The production makes reference (separately) to an infantile cerebral haemorrhage and a diagnosis and death from cancer.
- There is onstage smoking, the consumption of alcohol, references to drug use and **loud noises** in this production, including the upturning of a heavy table and the sound of low-flying helicopters.
- There is one reference to a teenage boy reading Playboy.