



GRIEF IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

26 JUL - 24 AUG

Based on the
novel by

Max Porter

Adapted by

**Simon Phillips,
Nick Schlieper &
Toby Schmitz**

Directed by

Simon Phillips

Co-produced with

**ANDREW
PRESENTS
HENRY**



**BELVOIR ST
THEATRE**

GRIEF IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

RUN TIME: 100 minutes (No Interval)

WARNING

This production contains strong language, themes of grief and loss, haze, loud sounds, strobe lighting, and the on-stage use of herbal cigarettes.

If you find the content distressing, support is available. You can contact Lifeline on **13 11 14** or visit [**lifeline.org.au**](https://lifeline.org.au) for 24/7 support.

GRIEF IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

CAST

Philip Lynch

Boy

Fraser Morrison

Boy

Toby Schmitz

Dad/Crow

Freya Schack-Arnott

Musician

CREATIVES

From the novel by

Max Porter

Adapted by

Nick Schlieper,

Simon Phillips &

Toby Schmitz

Directed by

Simon Phillips

Set Designer

Nick Schlieper &

Simon Phillips

Costume Designer

Ella Butler

Composer & Musician

Freya Schack-Arnott

Lighting Designer

Nick Schlieper

Sound Designer

Daniel Herten

Video Designer

Craig Wilkinson

Illustrator

Jon Weber

Assistant Director

Margaret Thanos

Co-producer

Andrew Henry

Voice Coach

Laura Farrell

Voiceover Artists

Laura Farrell,

Kobe Morgan &

Jack Stephens

Fight Coach

Diego Retamales

Stage Manager

Sam Illingworth

Assistant Stage Manager

Claire Edmonds-Wilson



We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we share our stories. We also pay our respects to the Elders past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Cover photography by

Daniel Boud

Rehearsal photography by

Brett Boardman

Illustrations from the 1973 edition of *Crow*, including images that accompany the poems *Two Legends*, *Crow and Mama* [From the Limited Edition *Crow*], *Crow Alights*, *Crow Communes*, *Crow's Fall*, *A Horrible Religious Error*, *Conjuring in Heaven*, *Crowego*, *Revenge Fable*, *Crow Paints Himself into a Chinese Mural*, *Fragment of an Ancient Tablet*, and *King of Carrion*; 1971 Drawings, by Leonard Baskin. © Leonard Baskin Art Trust.



Simon Phillips

CO-ADAPTOR AND DIRECTOR'S NOTE

SIMON PHILLIPS

As a teenage devotee of both Ted Hughes' excoriating CROW poems and the passionate, pagan lyricism of Dylan Thomas, a book that seized its glorious, mind-bending premise from the first and picked up an international literary prize named after the second was bound to reel me in.

When Andrew Henry sent me a copy of Max Porter's novel, and my first reading reduced me to tears in its final euphoric pages, I knew I was hooked.

There had been previous adaptations, but Max generously suggested that we take his novel as our 'script' and do whatever felt most meaningful to us to bring it to life on stage. So, with Belvoir's blessing, we were away.

Andrew and I both knew from the outset that Toby Schmitz, a long-time colleague and one of the greatest wranglers of text of his generation, was destined to take on the virtuosic central role, while Nick Schlieper, my friend, colleague and creative compatriot of over 30 years was to be an integral part of its realisation.

Our theatrical work needed an approach as fluid and form-redefining as the novel that inspired it. Porter stitches together a series of accounts, anecdotes, memories and fairy stories that guide the reader through a family's journey from despair and confusion to hope and fragile clarity in the face of the sudden, senseless loss of their wife and mother. The reader is asked to suspend any need for obvious linear narrative and submit to the sometimes-jarring juxtaposition of different characters' memories, or the author's fabulously cavalier disrespect for mood.

And of course, there's a significant difference between going on that journey in a novel, where the reader is free to ponder, back-track and take time out, versus doing it in the theatre, where a linear narrative is perhaps more customary and straight up-and-down human exchange is the order of the day.

Not so here. Here, we're asking you to leave your rational expectations in the foyer and give in to your emotional intelligence. A world in which a man opens his front door and ultimately his heart to a shape-shifting, iconoclastic, deeply sentimental, therapeutic Crow, who takes him and his children on an unconventional path to 'recovery'.

We've had a blast putting this together for you. Philip Lynch and Fraser Morrison joined the team, deftly oscillating between pre-pubescence and nuanced adulthood, and Freya Schack-Arnott has lent her equally impressive musical versatility to our story telling arsenal. Meanwhile, should words and music momentarily let you down, Craig Wilkinson and Jon Weber have fleshed out the world with their beautiful video work. It's also been my great pleasure to work for the first time with Ella Butler and Daniel Herten weaving their subtle magic in costume and sound respectively.

Ultimately of course, we're all besotted by Max's novel, and what its human insights and innate theatricality have offered us as artists. We hope we've managed to throw the work to you, in a new, vital form, honouring its literary origins but catapulting it into the here-and-now of Belvoir's unique theatre-space.



Toby Schmitz, Philip Lynch & Fraser Morrison



Nick Schlieper

CO-ADAPTOR, SET DESIGNER & LIGHTING DESIGNER'S NOTE

NICK SCHLIEPER

When a friend sent me a copy of this book shortly after its publication, I was immediately intrigued by both its unusual form and the presentation of the text. Lots and lots of very short sections, each with varied typefaces and layouts.

So I took it to bed and read it. And then I immediately read it again.

It stayed with me for a long time afterwards. Somehow or other, it manages to simultaneously be a forensic examination as well as a deeply felt and personal rumination about the “thing” we all go through at some stage of our lives. And it does this without ever becoming mawkish or sentimental, despite being at times an emotional rollercoaster. It retains a sense of lightness, no matter how heavy the subject matter, without striking a tone of ironic distance or self-commentary. Sometimes it feels akin to decoding a T.S Elliot poem and at others, it just punches you in the guts. It also becomes an exquisite meditation on the nature of love and even the role that art can play in our lives.

I put it away on my shelf and made a mental note to watch out for Max Porter’s next book.

It was several years later that Andrew Henry asked me if I knew it and whether I thought it lent itself to a stage adaptation. Unaware at the time, that an adaptation had already been done in the UK, I responded with a mixture of eagerness and



wariness. Eagerness for obvious reasons. Wariness because I'm always cautious about the dangers of adapting something to another form. I'm the sort of person who makes a point of never seeing a film based on a book I've read. The potential pitfalls of adaptation are many and varied, but could be summarised as – it's perfect the way it is, so why muck about with it? So my principle has always been; don't go there unless through the shift in form, you can illuminate it in a different way, or show it through an alternate lens and always on the basis that you amplify the original, not impoverish it. Hence, our guiding dictum as we began working on this new adaptation was – don't stuff up this fantastic book!

I'm quietly confident that we haven't done that – I hope you agree!







Fraser Morrison



Philip Lynch



Simon Phillips



Freya Schack-Arnott



Claire Edmonds-Wilson





Ella Butler



Margaret Thanos & Sam Illingworth





Philip Lynch, Toby Schmitz & Fraser Morrison



Toby Schmitz & Philip Lynch



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GRIEF IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

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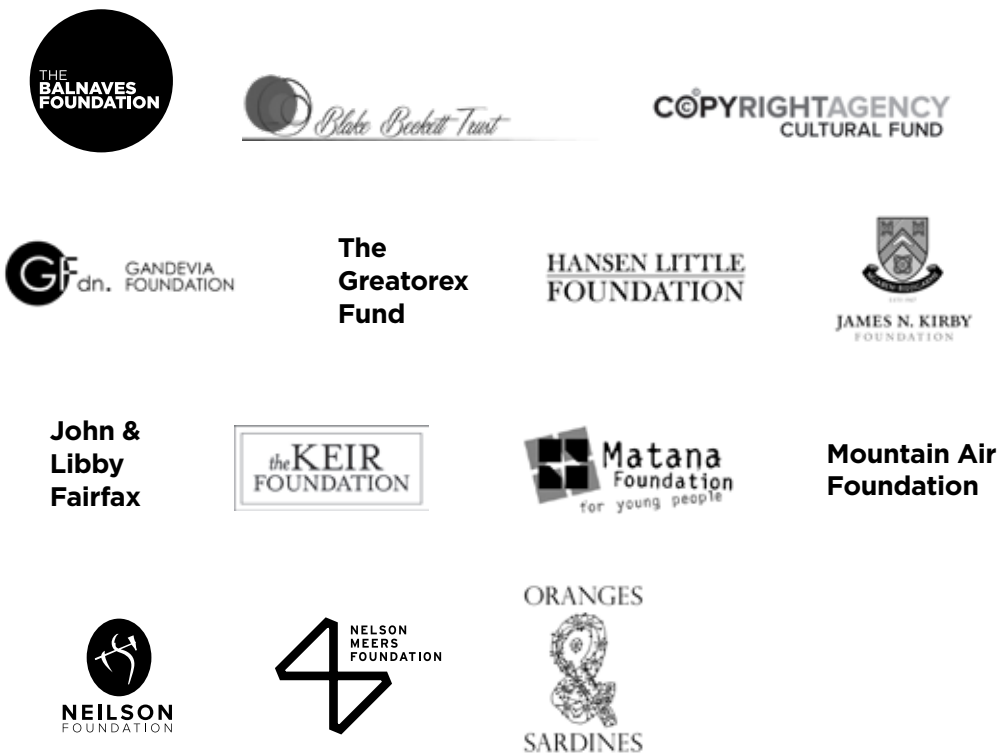
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