

- *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* is based on the novel by Max Porter adapted for the stage by Simon Phillips, Nick Schlieper and Toby Schmitz. The production opened at Belvoir St Theatre on Wednesday, July 30, 2025, directed by Simon Phillips.
- The show runs for approximately **100 minutes**, with no interval.
- *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* is set in England, in a contemporary time. The actors speak in English accents.
- The events of the story take place after the sudden death of a much-loved wife and mother to two young boys [SPOILER: her death is a result of a fall at home after an unexpected medical incident] Her death is referred to in the play but not depicted. The play recounts events in the years after the loss.
- The production features three actors and one musician. Actor Toby Schmitz plays both the role of Dad and Crow. Actors Fraser Morrison and Philip Lynch portray the roles of his two sons - the Boys. The musician is cellist Freya Schack-Arnott who remains on stage throughout the production.
- The story is told from three perspectives: that of the character Dad, his two sons, the Boys and Crow. Dad and the Boys are looking back at the events, which happened when they were much younger.
- The production is presented in a **heightened style**. The production makes use of animated illustrations on a long screen at the back of the stage. The actors address the audience, rather than each other.
- At the beginning of the play, the character of Dad is writing a book about English poet Ted Hughes' *Crow* poems. After his wife's sudden death, Dad is visited by a large, talking crow who says, 'I will stay with you until you don't need me anymore.' Crow stays with the family for some years, as they navigate their grief.
- Crow tells fables, full of metaphors and sometimes violent imagery. One fable begins 'Once upon a time there was a demon who fed on grief.' And later '... Then Crow demonstrated to the demon what happens when a crow repels an intruder to the nest... the beak hurled down hammer-hard into the demon's skull with a crack and a spurt then smashed onwards down through bone, brain, fluid and membrane, into squirting spine, vertebra snap...' In another fable Crow tells of two young Princes whose mother has died suddenly and who constantly fight. Crow says '...Then they found a poison book and took turns to make each other sick. Then they hanged each other. Then they flayed each other. Then they crucified each other. Then they drove rusty nails into each other's skulls.'
- There is an instance of a very loud noise, close to the start of the production.
- In one scene, the actors playing the Boys narrate a story about the trapping and killing of a guppy fish when they were children. He says: 'Soon it circled slowly and sadly in the tiny prison-pool and we selected a perfectly sized stone. My brother slammed it down over-arm and it popped and splashed, rock on rock in water and delightedly we lifted it out.' The character expresses regret over the incident.'
- The play contains coarse language, used at times of heightened emotion by Dad, and subversively by the Crow. The word c*nt is used on one occasion, in the context of Dad being jealous of award-winners on TV.
- On another occasion, Crow refers to himself as 'But please remember I am your Ted's song-legend, Crow of the death-chill, please. The God-eating, trash-licking, word-murdering, carcass-desecrating math-bomb motherf*cker, and all that.' Crow's language is purposely disruptive, symbolising the force and unpredictability of grief.
- The show contains sexual references. At one point, the character of Dad recounts the time he brought home a woman after a date, for the first time his wife died. He says 'I haven't had sex with many women, and I only got good at it with my wife, doing things my wife liked. I didn't want to do those things or think about whether I should be doing those things or thinking about the thinking, which meant I bashed her teeth, then knelt on her thigh, then apologised too much, then came too quickly, then tried too hard, then not hard enough ... When I came down Crow was on the sofa impersonating me pumping and groaning.'
- In one of Crow's fables, he narrates the story of a young crow happening upon his parents 'rutting'. This fable is illustrated on the large screen.
- During the play, the Boys describe their last conversations with their dying Grandmother. One Boy begins 'Not long after, our Gran was dying. We were told we could go up, so we went up... She had an oxygen tank on wheels.'
- The production references the consumption of alcohol to excess, in the context of a bereaved husband dealing with the loss of his wife.
- The production contains the use of **strobe lighting** for 6 seconds, as well two further instances of flashing white lights. On one of these occasions the audience is in darkness.
- The production contains the use of haze and the on-stage use of herbal cigarettes.

- Please ensure **all mobile phones are turned off** completely, **refrain from eating in the theatre**, and **avoid taking notes during the performance**. Students should understand that the performance is live and that the actors can see and hear them in the audience.
- Dedicated 11:30 AM Schools Performances are followed by a **Q&A session with the cast**, where students can ask questions about the production.