

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY



Image: Kala Gare. **Photo:** Pia Johnston.

MY BRILLIANT CAREER

Presented by Sydney Theatre Company

Original Production by Melbourne Theatre Company

A new musical based on the novel by Miles Franklin **Book by** Sheridan Harbridge & Dean Bryant **Music by** Mathew Frank **Lyrics by** Dean Bryant **Directed by** Anne-Louise Sarks

30 March – 3 May 2026 Roslyn Packer Theatre



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Thank you to Melbourne Theatre Company for their contribution to our Education Resource pack.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. You can contact the Education Team on education@sydneytheatre.com.au

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Sydney Theatre Company acknowledges the Gadigal of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which the Company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with whom we work and with whom we share stories.

Sydney Theatre Company



Artistic Vision

Sydney Theatre Company, since its foundation has aimed to create theatre that...

CONNECTS

INSPIRES

STIMULATES

ENTERTAINS

Situated near the waters of Sydney Harbour, the Company presents an annual season of productions and programs at our home venues, The Wharf Theatres and Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay, and as a resident company of Sydney Opera House. Our annual season is curated by our current Artistic Director and Co-CEO, Mitchell Butel, who began his tenure in November 2024. The Company also regularly tours work, both nationally and internationally. Our work regularly plays to more than 400,000 audience members annually.

The Company's first Artistic Director, Richard Wherrett, laid out the Company's mission

to provide “first class theatrical entertainment that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun (and that) reflects the society in which we live, thus providing a point of focus, a frame of reference by which we come to understand our place in the world as individuals, as a community and as a nation.”

The Company’s acclaimed pedigree stems from a history of ground-breaking productions made by some of the world’s most respected and beloved performers, directors, writers and creative teams.



OUR HISTORY

Sydney Theatre Company was formed in December 1978, following the closure of The Old Tote Theatre Company the month before.

The then Premier, the Hon. Neville Wran, approached Elizabeth Butcher who had been seconded from NIDA to administer the Old Tote, and asked her to set up a new state theatre company, to perform in the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House.

Butcher established its legal identity and managerial structure, and proposed the name, Sydney Theatre Company. With John Clark (Director of NIDA) as the Artistic Adviser of the first season, five theatre companies were invited to suggest six plays to be presented by STC as the 1979 Interim World Play Season in the Drama Theatre.



The first production, in association with The Paris Company, was *A Cheery Soul*, by Patrick White, Australia’s Nobel Laureate for Literature, directed by Jim Sharman, featuring Robyn Nevin as Miss Docker.

In June 1979, Richard Wherrett, then one of Nimrod Theatre's co-Artistic Directors, was appointed Artistic Director of STC to plan and organise activities for the 1980 season. The first STC-produced play was *The Sunny South*, 1 January 1980, by George Darrell, with music by Terence Clarke, directed by Richard Wherrett, assisted by John Gaden.



In its early years the company operated out of several rented premises around the city, producing 38 productions in five separate venues. Elizabeth Butcher, STC Administrator, was given the task of finding one location that could house all the activities of the company, and a theatre.

After an extensive search, Butcher had the vision to propose the derelict Walsh Bay Wharf 4/5 as STC's new home, immediately envisaging the capacity of the building to fulfill all requirements of space, location and additional venue.

More than three years of obstacles budgetary and bureaucratic overcome, on 12 September 1983, NSW Premier, the Hon. Neville Wran, announced that the State Government had approved the expenditure of \$3.5 million dollars to finance the re-cycling project. The 60-year old ironbark timber wharf warehouse built to load cargo onto ships tied up alongside, was converted into premises suitable for creating, producing, performing and enjoying theatre, without sacrificing its historical integrity or context.

To read more about our history, our Resident Artists and to see our illustrious archives check out our website! **Sydneytheatre.com.au**

MEET THE CAST

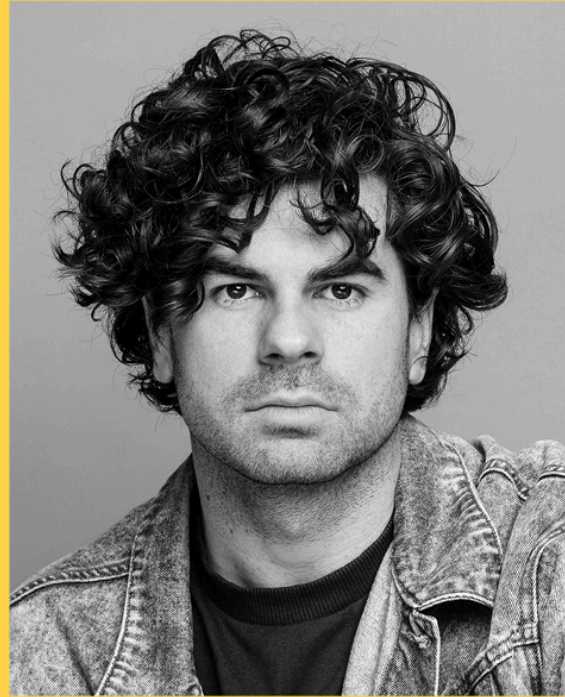


Sybylla Melvyn

Kala Gare



Frank/Ensemble
Cameron
Bajraktarevic-Hayward



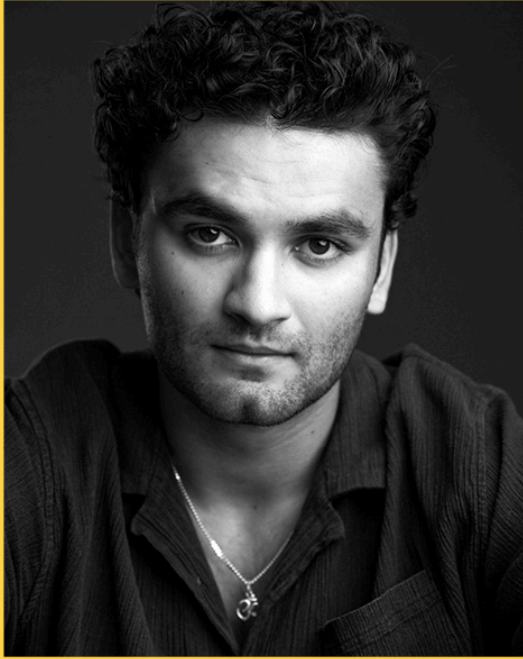
Jimmy/Horace/Ensemble
Lincoln Elliott



**Gertie/Blanche/Ensemble/
(Understudy Sybylla)**
Melanie Bird



Musical Director & Ensemble
Victoria Falconer



Harry/Peter/Ensemble
Raj Labade



Grannie/Rose Jane/Ensemble
Ana Mitsikas



**Father/Jay-Jay/M'Swat/
Ensemble & Assistant
Musical Director**
Drew Livingston



**Mother/Helen/Mrs M'Swat/
Ensemble**
Christina O'Neill



Ensemble
Jarrad Payne



Understudy
Jack Green



Understudy
Meg McKibbin

MEET THE CREATIVES



Book
Sheridan Harbridge



Book/Lyrics
Dean Bryant



Music
Mathew Frank



Director
Anne-Louise Sarks



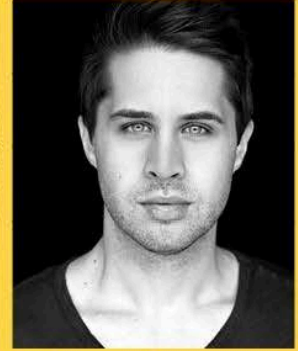
Choreographer
Amy Campbell



Set & Costume Designer
Marg Horwell



Lighting Designer
Matt Scott



**Orchestrator/
Vocal Arranger**
James Simpson



Sound Designer
Joy Weng



Associate Director
Miranda Middleton



**Associate Set &
Costume Designer**
Savanna Wegman



Music Direction Associate
Daniel Herten

MEET THE CREW

For Melbourne Theatre Company

Whitney McNamara
Stage Manager

Oriana Papa
Stage Manager

Tom O'Sullivan
Deputy Stage Manager

Mercedes Gowlett
Assistant Stage Manager

Sidney Millar
Automation Operator

Will Patterson
FoH Sound Operators

Connor Brown
In-Ears & RX Technician

Margaret Murray
Production Manager

**Sam Bruechert, Gideon Cozens,
Bryn Cullen, Max Evans, Nick
Eynaud, Terry McKibbin**
Transfer Team

For Sydney Theatre Company

Will Lewis
Production Manager

Julia Orlando
Deputy Production Manager

Simone Edwards
Backstage Wardrobe Supervisor

Samantha Salter
Wardrobe Day Maintenance

Amy Robertson
Lighting Supervisor

Travis Kecek
Lighting Programmer

Hannah Aylett
Head Lighting Technician

Jesse Greig
Lighting Operator

Jem Hoppe
Sound Supervisor & Technician

Liam Kennedy
Staging Supervisor & Head Mechanist

Jason Edwards
Fly Operator

**THIS PRODUCTION OPENED AT THE ROSLYN PACKER THEATRE ON THE 25TH of
MARCH 2026.**

THE RUN DOWN

Set in the sweeping landscapes of 1890s Australia, the electric reimagining by Sheridan Harbridge, Dean Bryant and Mathew Frank transforms Miles Franklin's literary heroine into a singer-songwriter for this very moment. Unapologetically ambitious, Sybylla Melvyn is wholly uninterested in the future society expects of her. Instead, she marches to the beat of her own drum, challenging class, gender and family to find her own voice.

THE NOVEL

Miles Franklin's novel *My Brilliant Career* was first published in Australia in 1901. After being rejected by many publishers, Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin shortened her name to disguise her gender and protect her work in the male-dominated literary world.

The novel was very popular at the time. The story is about Sybylla Melvin, a young woman living in rural New South Wales in the 1890s. Sybylla has big ambitions for her life and wants to be a writer, but she's uncertain about how to create a 'brilliant career'. Options for women 130 years ago were limited and success was tied heavily to marriage, not careers.

Sybylla's family struggles due to drought and the poor decision-making of her financially irresponsible father. Sybylla is very unhappy and therefore relieved when she's sent to live with her grandmother to reduce pressure on her family. It's at her grandmother's property, Caddagat, that Sybylla meets two young men – Harry and Frank – who demonstrate romantic potential.

Later, Sybylla is forced to leave Caddagat to help pay off her father's debts by becoming a governess for the M'Swat family.

Sybylla continues to search for her 'brilliant career' and is forced to make some challenging decisions.



ADAPTING THE NOVEL

My Brilliant Career is a new Australian musical based on the famous Australian novel by Miles Franklin. The show is directed by Anne-Louise Sarks, with the book by Sheridan Harbridge and Dean Bryant, music by Mathew Frank and lyrics by Dean Bryant. Miles Franklin's novel My Brilliant Career was first published in Australia in 1901. After being rejected by many publishers, Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin shortened her name to disguise her gender and protect her work in the male dominated literary world. The novel was very popular at the time.

The story is about Sybylla Melvin, a young woman living in rural New South Wales in the 1890s. Sybylla has big ambitions for her life and wants to be a writer, but she's uncertain about how to create a 'brilliant career'. Options for women 130 years ago were limited and success was tied heavily to marriage, not careers. Sybylla's family struggles due to drought and the poor decision-making of her financially irresponsible father. Sybylla is very unhappy and therefore relieved when she's sent to live with her grandmother to prepare her for marriage.



It's at her grandmother's property, Caddagat, that Sybylla meets two young men – Harry and Frank – who demonstrate romantic potential. Later, Sybylla is forced to leave Caddagat to help pay off her father's debts by becoming a governess for the M'Swat family. Sybylla continues to search for her 'brilliant career' and is forced to make some challenging decisions.

FROM PAGE TO STAGE



This version of My Brilliant Career is an adaption of Miles Franklin's famous novel into a musical, by Sheridan Harbridge, Mathew Frank and Dean Bryant. Sybylla's coming-of-age story is still set in 1890s rural New South Wales, however, this production represents more contemporary values, as reflected through the characters and themes in the story. In this My Brilliant Career, Sybylla's ambitions to be a writer come in the form of musician, as she sings and performs her inner most desires.

Learn more about the adaptation process in this Q&A with cocreators Dean Bryant, Mathew Frank and Sheridan Harbridge:



Co-creators Sheridan Harbridge, Mathew Frank and Dean Bryant. Photo: Emily Doyle

Why did you want to adapt My Brilliant Career?

Dean Bryant (DB): We all grew up in rural areas – Sheridan and I, like Sybylla, on dairy farms – and loved that the story was about a young person who didn't fit in and was searching for their place in the world, for some way to live a creative life.

Sheridan Harbridge (SH): I was really excited to take on such an iconic book that every generation has grown up

with. Every time I would tell people we were adapting it, just the absolute emotions that would pour out of them about how much they loved that book growing up... It was really exciting to take on and bring their version of Sybylla to life.

What was behind the decision to turn it into a musical?

DB: It felt like a story that would enlarge by being sung. We had the idea of a teenage girl in her room writing out her angst in piano ballads. The score has always lived in that world, and we needed to tune the script to match the energy we were aiming for.

Mathew Frank (MF): Working with actor-musicians is the most exciting thing to see, it's like Olympic athletes. Getting the orchestra out of the pit and onstage, being musician, singer and actor – it's a thrilling thing not to separate the disciplines.

DB: The novel is epic, with Sybylla spinning from place to place and her mood changing constantly. We wanted to capture that dynamism in the musical. The way she talks to the reader immediately opened up a way for her to talk to the audience. This became even more exciting when we transformed the show into an actor-musician version, reimagining her as the front girl of a band, taking us into almost a gig version of her life.

SH: What's exciting about adapting the book is that it was successful, not just for feminism in the moment, which was not spoken about much, but also because it was distinctly Australian.

MF: Musically, I loved the idea of someone finding their voice, so I could use my own composer's voice while marrying that to modern music, working in different pop genres – like a Sybylla mixtape – but also playing with folk songs and music of the day. So there's my voice as a composer, my pastiche of pop/rock, alongside a pastiche of music from the time.

SH: Can I add to that I think those three phases are

interesting, because we take on the three phases of feminism: her era, feminism from the 70s when the book was republished and had that huge cultural place with the film and then the feminism of now, which is a different cultural beast.



How does Sybylla's story intersect with where feminism is now?

SH: The current phase of feminism is very close to the inner world of Sybylla in 1896, which was contradictory. She wasn't trying to be a perfect, ideal, strong woman; she's gloriously selfish and lets herself go down any path and follow any impulse without censoring it. I think there have been phases with feminism when women have had to be flawless, to be a wall of strength but now we're embracing imperfection – that's true equality. What's exciting about adapting the book is that it was successful, not just for feminism in the moment, which was not spoken about much, but also because it was distinctly Australian and that was what was so unique – an Australian feminist story. We crave to hear our own voice

on stage and it's fun to incorporate what Australia is now into the work.

What was the writing process like?

DB: Mathew and I have collaborated as co-writers for a quarter of a century now, so we were used to the joys and struggles that come from that. But bringing a co-writer onto the script was exciting and scary. Sheridan and I have now worked in so many different modes, and what's really rewarding is that you can keep taking the reins as one of you feels strongly about what needs to happen next. When you trust the person there's a massive sense of relief in sharing the load.

At its heart, what do you think this version of My Brilliant Career is about?

SH: The story is about a young artist striving to find a mode of expression. We are all here because of the risk that Miles Franklin took at a terrifying time to be an artist and make her way in the world. I am here because of this, and to see the offspring of that risk in full flight, in their form of art, is the perfect journey for this work. It's about how Sybylla, as an artist, is someone who exists outside the matrix but pushes back against the structure women are placed in that doesn't make sense. That is a timeless story, questioning why we build societies as they are. It's ultimately about joy and rebellion ...

MF: ... about taking a risk to share what the world might not want to hear ...

DB: ... and how the place you wanted to escape from feeds what you ultimately create.

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MF: ... about taking a risk to share what the world might not want to hear ...

DB: ... and how the place you wanted to escape from feeds what you ultimately create.

See video links below to hear from the creatives!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcO6LW1Buqo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAg727RnrBO>

CURRICULUM LINKS

Drama	Stage 4, 5, 6 - Australian Theatre reflecting society, Literary classic reimagined for stage, Women's voices Exploring & Responding and Developing practices and skills Levels 8 & 10
English	Stage 4, 5, 6 - Identity, Culture and Voice Language and Literature Levels 7–10
Music	1 & 2 Stage 6: - Composition & Performance
Creative Arts	7–10 - Adaptation as Contemporary Australian Theatre Practice
History	Stage 6 - Australia between the Wars, Women and Rural Life, Rights and Freedoms
Geography	Stage 5 - Changing Places, Human Wellbeing

Suitable for

This production contains mature themes and theatrical haze effects. Recommended for ages 11+ / school years 6–12.

Themes & Ideas

- Coming of Age
- Australian identity
- Societal and Familial expectations
- Class & Gender
- Feminism
- Ambition & Creativity

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Ten actor-musicians perform all the characters in the story, and most play more than one character. The cast also play musical instruments during the performance.

See the following video on the MTC website for more information:

<https://www.mtc.com.au/education/education-hub/script-notes-with-kala-gare-and-victoria-falconer>

SYBYLLA

Kala Gare



Sybylla Melvyn is the main character who is telling her story. Sybylla is a teenager who lives on a farm in Possum Gully with her mother and father and siblings. Life on the farm is hard, physical work and Sybylla wants more from her life than to be a farmer and get married. Sybylla is played by Kala Gare.

‘Sybylla is an icon. She’s a teenage girl who has giant dreams and a deep passion for something bigger than her, but no understanding of what it is, and how she – a poor girl in 19th century Australian outback – can achieve it. She was raised with a freedom to follow her dreams and a true belief that she could achieve them, arming her with an intellect and appetite for more that would keep her raging against the social conformities of the time as she grew older’

KALA GARE

HARRY

Raj Labade

Harold Beecham, often called Harry, owns the property near Caddagat called Five Bob and is therefore a wealthy, eligible bachelor. He is Sybylla's love interest, and fiancé, for much of the story. Harry is played by Raj Labade.



'Harry is a wealthy landowner in a town called Caddagat and the only suitor that really excites Sybylla. He's headstrong, calm, but sometimes has a bit of a temper. He's driven by the desire to have everything in life – love, success and everything in-between. The way Harry stands is postured and more mannered than myself, so I stand with my chest out and shoulders back. I also have a slight accent which is a subtle British or upper-class Australian dialect.'

RAJ LABADE

FATHER

Drew Livingston



Sybylla's father, often called Dick (full name Richard), struggles to support the Melvyn family financially. He was once an ambitious man and happy husband, but farming life has been challenging, and he struggles with alcoholism. He makes bad business decisions which cause hardship for the family. Father is played by Drew Livingston.

JAY-JAY

Drew Livingston

Jay-Jay is Sybylla's Uncle. His full name is Julius and he is a carefree bachelor who travels around. He often visits his family – sister Lucy and mother Grannie Bossier – at Caddagat. Jay-Jay is played by actor Drew Livingston.



'Jay-Jay is a landowner who wants as much as he can get for as little effort possible. He loves his people and to have a good time. He is the kind of person who truly believes he is always in the right. I like to think about how Jay-Jay always invades other people's space. He does it with his voice and comments as well as physically.'

DREW LIVINGSTON

MR M'SWAT

Drew Livingston



Mr M'Swat runs a successful farm at Barney's Gap. Sybylla is sent to the M'Swats to be a governess for their many children. This arrangement is 'payment' for the money Mr M'Swat lent to Sybylla's father, Dick Melyvn. Mr M'Swat is played by Drew Livingston.

MOTHER

Christina O'Neill

Sybylla's mother is called Lucy. She grew up on Caddagat in wealthy surroundings but married Dick Melvyn for love – this did not turn out well for her. Lucy struggles to support her family, both financially and emotionally, which causes tension with Sybylla. Lucy is played by Christina O'Neill.



'Lucy is Sybylla's mother. She is a realist, grounded and practical and what drives her is a better life for her children and their survival in this tough landscape. In the course of the story, she loses so many things (the cattle, her husband's battle with the bottle, children leaving home) but she tries to be courageous and strong in the face of so much adversity. Lucy has a quick tempo – she thinks quick and she always has a task at hand.'

CHRISTINA O'NEILL

HELEN

Christina O'Neill



Helen is Sybylla's Aunt. She was once married to a man who left her for another woman, and Helen now lives at Caddagat with her mother. Helen and Sybylla get along well, and Helen provides emotional support for Sybylla. Helen is played by Christina O'Neill.

MRS M'SWAT

Christina O'Neill

Mrs M'Swat is the matriarch of the M'Swat family and is referred to as Missus M. She has many children, including a newborn baby (which is a doll prop). Sybylla becomes the M'Swat children's teacher to help pay off her father's loan from the M'Swats. Mrs M'Swat is played by Christina O'Neill.



GRANNIE

Ana Mitsikas



Bossier runs Caddagat and is Sybylla's grandmother. Sybylla is sent to live with her Grannie in Act 1 to help prepare Sybylla for marriage. Grannie comes from a wealthy family and has fixed ideas about how women should be good wives and mothers – Sybylla does not agree with this. Grannie is played by Ana Mitsikas.

'Grannie is the Grandmother of the main character, Sybylla. Grannie is very traditional and believes it is important to conform to society's expectations. She doesn't understand Sybylla's drive to challenge the status quo and instead works to help Sybylla make a 'good' marriage – one that will bring financial security for her and her family. Grannie believes that a good marriage is the only way for a woman to get ahead in life and is the 'career' that all women should train to do.'

ANA MITSIKAS

ROSE JANE

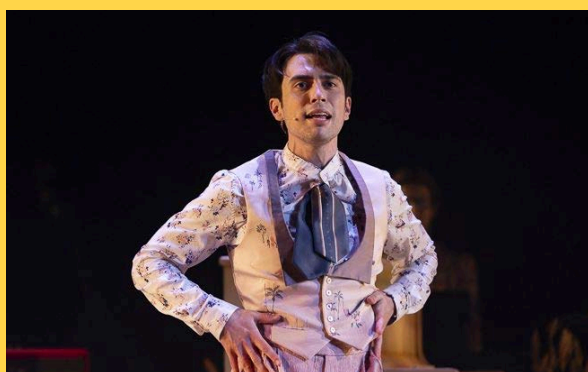
Ana Mitsikas

This is Rose Jane, the youngest member of the M'Swat family. She is intrigued by Sybylla's ability to play piano and asks Sybylla to teach her. Rose Jane is played by Ana Mitsikas.



FRANK

Cameron Bajraktarevic-Hayward



Frank Hawden is an English jackaroo (farm worker) who works at the property, Caddagat. He first appears when he's sent to collect Sybylla from the station. He finds Sybylla attractive and expresses interest in marrying her. Frank is played by Cameron Bajraktarevic-Hayward.

'Frank's driven by the desire to prove his masculinity and intelligence to everyone.'

CAMERON BAJRAKTAREVIC-HAYWARD

'Frank is a young British man who has come to Australia for a year basically for work experience. He's driven by the desire to prove his masculinity and intelligence to everyone. To get into character I have to put on an upper-class British accent (also known as Received Pronunciation or RP). This truly does help sit into who Frank is along with the help of many pairs of high waisted trousers.'

CAMERON BAJRAKTAREVIC-HAYWARD

BULLANT

Cameron Bajraktarevic-Hayward

This is Bullant, another of the M'Swat children. He's called bullant because he often pinches his siblings. Bullant is played by Cameron Bajraktarevic-Hayward



BLANCHE

Melanie Bird



Blanche is a glamorous woman from the city who visits Caddagat with Harry. She enjoys her life, traveling across the country attending social events among upper-middle society. She sees these events as opportunities to 'audition' potential husbands. Blanche is played by Melanie Bird.

'Blanche Derrick is a sharp, stylish socialite who is described as one of the greatest beauties in Melbourne. Men fall at her feet, but she's far more than just glamorous – she's clever, socially aware and understands the choices available to women in the late 1800s. Determined to succeed within that system, she plans to marry well. Blanche mentors Sybylla, encouraging her to be strategic without giving up who she is. I let Blanche's feathered pink costume, designed by award-winning Marg Horwell, shape my physicality, helping me carry myself with confidence and elegance.'

MELANIE BIRD

BALLADEERS

Victoria Falconer

The Balladeers are musicians who are part of the ensemble. They often move around the stage to become part of the storytelling. This balladeer is played by musician Victoria Falconer, who is also the Musical Director of the production.



Jarrad Payne

Another Balladeer, this musician also plays guitar and percussion and provides many sound effects throughout the show. This balladeer is played by musician Jarrad Payne.



'I am the musical director, which translates to being the leader of the band onstage. At times, members of the band are called in by Sybylla to play various character roles in the telling of her story. The band as humans could also be seen as an extension of Sybylla's thoughts and feelings, which is exactly how music works in musical theatre – when action or emotion rises to a heightened state, in musical theatre land,

the only option is to sing!

VICTORIA FALCONER

THEATRE STYLE

Musical Theatre



Musical theatre combines songs, dialogue, acting and dance, often with spectacular sets, costumes and lighting. In many ways musical theatre overlaps with opera; however, musicals put more emphasis on the spoken dialogue whereas operas are usually entirely sung. By their very nature, musicals are highly non-naturalistic, usually depicting a wide variety of locations, actors playing multiple roles, the conventions of song and dance accepted as “normal” behaviour, and solo songs used as a dramatic device to tell the audience more about a character’s thoughts and feelings (a soliloquy to music, in a way).

Most Western musical theatre emerged in the 19th century, with many conventions and structural elements established by Gilbert and Sullivan (in Britain) and Harrigan and Hart (in the United States). Well-known

Australian musicals include *Bran Nue Dae* (the first Aboriginal musical, penned by Jimmy Chi and his band Kuckles), *The Sapphires* (written by Tony Briggs, about a singing group of four Yorta Yorta women who tour Vietnam during the war), *The Boy From Oz* (the first Australian musical to make it to Broadway), and movie-to-stage adaptations *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *Muriel's Wedding*, which have both toured internationally. In this production of *My Brilliant Career*, the actors are also the musicians, always in view of the audience and sometimes playing instruments in character. Direct address is used by Sybylla throughout the show, and most actors play multiple roles.

Sources: BBC (2022), *Musical Theatre* on bbc.co.uk; Tongue, C. and Neutze, B. (2022), *The 15 greatest Australian musicals, on stage and screen – sorted* on theguardian.com.

SETTING



The story of *My Brilliant Career* takes place in the 1890s, in rural New South Wales. The production also depicts several locations as we follow Sybylla on her journey.

There's Possum Gully (Sybylla's family's farm), her grandmother's home (Caddagat), the M'Swat family home (where she becomes a governess), and other scenes set in an orchard, on a boat and at a fancy ball. As part of the design process, Set & Costume Designer Marg Horwell created miniature sets of each scene, to demonstrate her design vision to the wider production team.

The storyboard images that you see here are three examples of Horwell's vision placed in the model box (small-scale replica of the set design in the theatre). The show opens in a field setting with a piano on a raised central platform. When we meet the Melvyn family, the space becomes Possum Gully, their family farm. Horwell and Director Anne-Louise Sarks's



vision for this field is that it represents both the rural Australian landscape and also a gig – the band is central to each setting. Horwell's set and costume design acknowledges that the band is central to the creation of the world of the story – they're not a backdrop or accompaniment, they are also creators. The piano is central to Sybylla's self-expression and creating cohesion with the other band members of actor-musicians. The synthetic thatch flooring is a gesture to the drought stricken rural landscape. It's deliberately textured and should feel expansive, but it's also not trying to be naturalistic; Horwell's design is very theatrical.

The second storyboard shows the orchard scene at Caddagat, Sybylla's grandmother's property, which was also Sybylla's childhood home. Caddagat has a feel of a refined English house in the Australian landscape (note the chandelier). Caddagat has everything that Sybylla's been yearning for – books, art and no farm duties. It's a fabulous life, but it's also a world where Sybylla is thrown into the marriage market



– a very traditional expectation for a woman at the time. Caddagat's orchard is where Sybylla first meets Harry Beecham, a wealthy young man who owns a neighbouring property. Sparks fly between them. The flowers on the floor have been added in an earlier scene to represent Caddagat's fabulous, theatrical world. New scenes evolve with new additions like the ladders – these are a gesture to the orchard and are required for the apple-picking that takes place.



The third storyboard shows the Beecham's ball setting. Harry's wealthy family throw a ball to celebrate Harry's return after a period spent away. Multiple chandeliers are flown in from above to highlight the wealth, flamboyance and playfulness of this scene.

COSTUME DESIGN



Set & Costume Designer Marg Horwell's design approach to My Brilliant Career blends period authenticity with modernity, celebrating both character and performers, all while honouring the complexities of the play's heroine, Sybylla Melvyn – a young woman ready to make her mark on the world.

For Horwell, *My Brilliant Career* was as much about creating a physical transformation as it was about weaving together subtle narrative shifts. 'This show, costume-wise, really was about developing a linear arc,' Horwell explains. 'We start with a contemporary look – a person who comes on stage with no character – before they begin playing an instrument. Then, we gradually embed elements into their costumes that allow the performer to seamlessly become any character, without the need for dramatic changes

or making huge transformative shifts.’ This flexibility in design is crucial, especially given the nature of the show, which involves all the actors playing instruments and dancing. ‘The characters rarely leave the stage, and getting them to change costumes is so tricky,’ says Horwell. ‘Most of the changes are under a minute, so the costumes had to work within those parameters.’ The evolving world of *My Brilliant Career* became a balance of historical accuracy and imaginative interpretation. ‘We needed to introduce a form of storytelling that would evolve with the piece,’ Horwell continues. ‘We started with a more subdued, period-appropriate world, but as the show progressed, the costumes become more saturated in colour and more playful in silhouette.’

The aim, Horwell reveals, was to maintain a sense of malleability between the character and the performer. ‘We wanted the line between character and performer to be quite fluid,’ she says. ‘As we went along, there was a desire to show that our performers were always present in the world of the play, no matter the character they were portraying.’



‘The first look for Sybylla is one of my favourite things I’ve designed. It’s influenced by a recent Maison Margiela collection which featured cut-offs over pleated skirts. I love taking “now” fashion and smushing it into period fashion. Her corset look is inspired by a Dior collection, and it’s made from vintage bowtie fabric.’
MARG HORWELL SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Designing for the play’s protagonist, Sybylla Melvyn, was an especially rewarding experience for Horwell, and was done so with actor Kala Gare in mind. ‘Designing for Sybylla, and by that I mean Kala and her physicality and the way she doesn’t let clothes wear her, Sheridan’s voice because I can hear her humour, as well as Anne-Louise’s voice as director, has been so rewarding and, in my career, one of the most fulfilling tracks for a character,’ she says. ‘We wanted Sybylla’s costumes to be oversized, playful, and absurd in a way that pokes fun at period fashion, corsetry and layers, particularly in a hot Australian climate.’ Apart from Sybylla’s ‘wonderfully anachronistic’ first costume, one of Horwell’s favourite designs is Sybylla’s final costume, a denim wrap skirt and a pleated shirt rolled up at the sleeves. ‘She looks so much older than she did at the start and over the course of two-and-a-half hours, she’s matured beautifully. There’s something simple about the palette and it’s the opposite of a lot of musicals where you build up to be shiny and colourful at the end, it feels very genuine and grounded. The bookend of *Sybylla* is very satisfying to me.



Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the 'current phase of feminism' that Harbridge discusses? What makes a story feminist?
2. Look at the introduction in the novel and consider how this text might be adapted for the stage. Will characters speak to each other or directly to the audience? Are there sections that you think could be sung?
3. Discuss the choice to have Sybylla's inner monologue delivered as direct address on stage.
4. How does Sybylla talk about Harry? What is informing her opinion of him throughout the story?
5. Discuss Uncle Jay-Jay and Dick Melvyn's treatment of Sybylla in the story. How do their personalities shape Sybylla's understanding of society and her roles within it?
6. Discuss the function of Grannie in the story and what she tells us about gender roles at the time the story is set.
7. Compare and contrast Frank and Harry. What does Sybylla think of each of them?
8. Discuss the arrival of Blanche and the impression she makes on Sybylla. Is this a turning point in the story?
9. How does the set design, including choice of colours and textures reflect the rural setting that is central to the story?
10. How does the piano – placed in a central position – manage your expectations as an audience?

Bibliography

Thank you to MTC Education Hub for the information in these resources. You can find more resources on MTC Education HUB -

<https://www.mtc.com.au/education/education-hub/my-brilliant-career-resources/>

