

## Media Release

For immediate release

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### An actor's life and backstage strife during WWII

INSPIRED by memories of his years working as a dresser for actor-manager Sir Donald Wolfit, Ronald Harwood's evocative, perceptive and hilarious portrait of backstage life comes to Melville Theatre this July.

Directed by Jacob Turner, *The Dresser* is set in England against the backdrop of World War II as a group of Shakespearean actors tour a seaside town and perform in a shabby provincial theatre.

The actor-manager, known as "Sir", struggles to cast his popular Shakespearean productions while the able-bodied men are away fighting.

With his troupe beset with problems, he has become exhausted – and it's up to his devoted dresser Norman, struggling with his own mortality, and stage manager Madge to hold things together.

*The Dresser* scored playwright Ronald Harwood, also responsible for the screenplays *Australia*, *Being Julia* and *Quartet*, best play nominations at the 1982 Tony and Laurence Olivier Awards.

He adapted it into a 1983 film, featuring Albert Finney and Tom Courtenay, and received five Academy Award nominations.

Another adaptation, featuring Ian McKellen and Anthony Hopkins, made its debut in 2015.

"*The Dresser* follows a performance and the backstage conversations of Sir, the last of the dying breed of English actor-managers, as he struggles through *King Lear* with the aid of his dresser," Jacob said.

"The action takes place in the main dressing room, wings, stage and backstage corridors of a provincial English theatre during an air raid.

"At its heart, the show is a love letter to theatre and the people who sacrifice so much to make it possible."

Jacob believes *The Dresser* has a multitude of challenges for it to be successful.

"It needs to be cast perfectly – which I think we've done – and the technical elements need to blend just right," he said.

"The cast have to work hard to make each individual moment perfectly truthful to really draw the audience into this incredible story."

Previously taking part in school productions and drama classes, Turner has since appeared in several productions with Limelight, Stirling and Melville Theatres, including *Sunset*

*Boulevard, Pride and Prejudice, Two Weeks With The Queen, The Real Housewives of Perth and Veronica's Room.*

In 2018, he turned his hand to directing with *Pygmalion*.

"I stumbled on to *The Dresser* completely by accident when I found the film starring Ian McKellen and Anthony Hopkins a few years ago," he said.

"I was completely absorbed and immediately wanted to bring the show to a local audience."

*The Dresser* plays at 8pm July 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16 and 17 with a 2pm matinee July 11. Tickets are \$23, \$18 concession – book at [www.TAZTix.com.au](http://www.TAZTix.com.au).

Melville Theatre is at 393A Canning Highway (corner of Stock Road), Palmyra.