

malverntheatre  
company

*is proud to present its 377<sup>th</sup> major production*



a  
HAPPY  
and  
HOLY  
OCCASION

by John O'Donoghue

*by arrangement with Conal O'Donoghue*

**26 April – 10 May 2025**

Directed by Nicholas Opolski

# The Cast

|                                           |                 |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Mary O'Mahon .....                        | Kat Baldwin     |
| Denny O'Mahon.....                        | Curtis Mason    |
| Christy O'Mahon.....                      | Matteo Maxwell  |
| Vincent De Paul (Houses) O'Halloran ..... | Ian McMaster    |
| Tocky Keating .....                       | Sean Dowling    |
| Father Thurlogh O'Gorman.....             | Darren Mort     |
| Breda Mulcahy.....                        | Sharon Casey    |
| Cecilia McManus (Miss Siss) .....         | Carol Shelbourn |

# About the Play

It is February 1942 and Australia has been at war for 17 months under Prime Minister John Curtin (ALP). Our soldiers are fighting in the Middle-East, the Mediterranean and North Africa. The age of conscription for single men is 18-45; for married men, 18-35. Even our entertainment is war-focused with the film *40,000 Horsemen* being a cinematic hit, starring the popular Australian actor, Chips Rafferty.

However, this is of no concern for the O'Mahon family, for tonight is a very happy and holy occasion. Tomorrow, young Christy will travel to Sydney to begin his studies for the priesthood. The O'Mahon family, proud Irish-Australians, throw a small party of farewell, with lamingtons and sing-alongs. But faith and duty can be heavy burdens, and the news of the war is increasingly grim – the family is forced to confront difficult truths.

Malvern Theatre Company is pleased to revive this classic Australian play. A joyous celebration of Irish-Australian humour and resilience, a study of faith and friendships, a drama of a family at pressure-point, *A Happy and Holy Occasion* is a bitter-sweet portrait of a vanished Australia.

# Setting

The front room of the O'Mahon house in Mayfield West, a suburb of Newcastle in the neighbourhood of the BHP Steelworks. The time is Friday 13 February, 1942.

The performance runs for approximately 2 hours, 10 minutes plus a 20 minute interval.

Complimentary tea, coffee and biscuits will be available during the interval. Wine will also be available for purchase.

CONTENT WARNING

This play contains course language, theatrical cigarettes and incidents of violence.



# About the Playwright

*John O'Donoghue*

John O'Donoghue was born in Newcastle in 1929. His family connection to the Hunter Valley began in 1831, when his great-great-grandfather was transported from Ireland for life, after an incident in which "the military were attacked and disarmed". O'Donoghue worked for many years as a teacher and within the Education Department, but also achieved success as a playwright.

His plays *A Happy and Holy Occasion* and *Essington Lewis: I Am Work* were produced by most of the State Theatre Companies and heralded a golden age for the then Hunter Valley Theatre Company. O'Donoghue died in 2022, at the age of 93.



### **Nicholas Opolski – Director**

Nicholas has been involved with Malvern Theatre Company as an actor and director for 20 years. Some favourite performances here and elsewhere include the title roles in *Hamlet* and *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, the narrator in *Our Town*, 'Noel Coward' in *The Jewels of Edith Sitwell*, and 'Douglas Fairbanks' in *The Farnsworth Invention*. Directing credits for Malvern Theatre Company include *Dracula*, *Educating Rita*, *Crown Matrimonial* and *The Lady in the Van*. Most

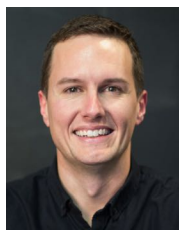
recently he has directed *Virginia* for La Mama Theatre and for Avid Theatre Company, *Hamlet*, which he co-directed with Kat Baldwin. He has been Artistic Director of Malvern Theatre Company since 2023.



### **Kat Baldwin – Mary O'Mahon**

Kat has spent her adult life finding a rhythm between engagement in the Arts and service in the Navy. Some of her favourite credits include 'Frances' in *Gulls* with The 1812 Theatre, 'Mrs. White' in *Clue* with Playhouse Players and 'Horatio', 'Rosencrantz' and Co-Director for *Hamlet* with Avid Theatre and Ardour Theatre Companies. She has performed in Europe with the Australian Shakespeare Company and the Prague Shakespeare Company and has enjoyed

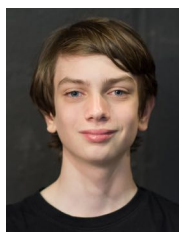
television roles in *The Secrets She Keeps*, *Halifax: Retribution* and *Wentworth*. This is Kat's debut production with Malvern Theatre Company.



### **Curtis Mason – Denny O'Mahon**

Hailing from Sydney's Blue Mountains, Curtis is a seasoned performer with over 20 years' experience spanning plays, musicals and screen. Highlights of his stage repertoire include his portrayal of 'Harry Wade' in *Hangmen* (Action Drama Studio, 2022) and 'Tim Conigrave' in *Holding the Man* (PEP Productions, 2018), for which he was nominated for Best Actor in a Drama by The Victorian Drama League. Other notable credits include as 'Aldolpho' in *The Drowsy*

*Chaperone* (Action Drama Studio), 'Jim Wanamaker' in *Is There Life After High School?* (PEP Productions), 'Rapunzel's Prince' in *Into the Woods* (Fab Nobs Theatre) and 'Younger Brother' in *Ragtime* (Waterdale Theatre).



### **Matteo Maxwell – Christy O'Mahon**

Matteo trains with Stage Left Performing Arts School, where he has had the privilege of being mentored by passionate and inspiring teachers, such as Justin Clausen and Rose Elliott. He has been in musical productions including Theatrical Inc's *The Sound of Music* as 'Kurt Von Trapp' and *The Wizard of Oz* as 'Nikko, Leader of the Flying Monkeys'. He has also appeared as 'The Mad Hatter' in *Alice in Wonderland* and as 'Max Dreggs' in the short film *The Family Dreggs*.

This is Matteo's first purely dramatic stage role and he is both excited and humbled to be working with such talented people.



### **Ian McMaster – Vincent De Paul (Houses) O'Halloran**

Ian has appeared in many Malvern Theatre Company shows including in *The Crucible* as 'Reverend John Hale', *And Then There Were None* as 'Judge Lawrence Wargrave' and more recently as 'Frank' in *Educating Rita*. He also appeared in Malvern Theatre's production of the *Chekhov Short Comedies*, playing his favourite role of 'Mikhail Lvovich Astrov' in *Uncle Vanya*. Ian has won a Best Supporting Actor award for his role as 'Edwin Bates' in *Hotel Sorrento*

and was part of a Victorian Drama League award winning production of *In The Next Room*. Ian is pleased to be once again collaborating with director, Nick Opolski.



### **Sean Dowling – Tocky Keating**

Originally from County Kerry, Ireland, Sean moved to Melbourne over two years ago. He discovered his love for acting, and in particular theatre, during the stage and screen acting courses he completed with the National Theatre Melbourne. Given his Irish roots, he was a natural for Ballarat National Theatre's 2024 production of *Dancing at Lughnasa* where he played the role of narrator 'Michael Evans'. He is looking forward to bringing this same level of authenticity and depth

to the role of 'Tocky Keating' in *A Happy and Holy Occasion* and also turning his Kerry accent into a Cork one.



### **Darren Mort – Father Thurlogh O’Gorman**

Darren trained in film and television at the College of the Arts and later at the Rehearsal Room. He has had credited TV roles in *Neighbours*, *Blue Heelers*, *City Homicide*, *Warnie*, *Underbelly* and *Dr Blake’s Murder Mysteries* and has also appeared in feature films, including in the yet to be released *War Machine* with Dennis Quaid. Darren is also credited with stage roles in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, *Three Sisters* and *The Wrong Horse*, alongside several musical

theatre roles. It is his first time with the iconic Malvern Theatre Company and is feeling blessed to be part of this cast and crew.



### **Sharon Casey – Breda Mulcahy**

Sharon made her acting debut with Heidelberg Theatre Company’s 2023 production of *Cosi*, playing social worker ‘Justine’. Since then, Sharon has completed training with Brave Studios and has performed in three more productions; as ‘Mabel Chiltern’ in Oscar Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband* (also at Heidelberg Theatre Company); ‘Nurse Ann Franklin’ in Norman Robbins’ *Tomb with a View* and as ‘Esmerelda’ in Thornton Wilder’s *Skin of Our Teeth*, both with

Essendon Theatre Company. This will be Sharon’s first time to perform at Malvern Theatre Company and she is delighted for the opportunity. She hopes you enjoy this wonderful John O’Donoghue play.



### **Carol Shelbourn – Cecilia McManus (Miss Siss)**

Carol is very happy to be back on the Malvern Theatre stage having last appeared as the ‘Honourable Margaret Wyndham’ in *Crown Matrimonial* and has very much enjoyed being directed by Nick once again. Other Malvern roles you may have seen her in, include as ‘Mum’ in *The Anniversary*, ‘Martha’ in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and singing, dancing and generally showing off in *Tomfoolery*. She is also very pleased to have been involved

in Malvern Theatre Company’s Emerging Leaders Program last year, working with a group of fabulous young people, to hone the art of theatre.

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## **Thanks to our Sponsors**



L’Olivo is a small, family-owned restaurant located at 171 Waverley Rd in Malvern East. In a warm, friendly atmosphere, L’Olivo serves up an array of tasty Mediterranean delicacies including tapas, pastas, pizza and much more. Recommended for a pre or post-show meal, coffee or drink! Visit [lolivo.com.au](https://www.lolivo.com.au) for further details or to book.



AUV Real Estate specialises in private sales and property management. In 2024, they achieved consistently strong results in the Malvern East area. Offering both leasing and sales services, they can meet all your needs, no matter the enquiry. Further details at [auvrealstate.com.au](https://www.auvrealstate.com.au).

### **Menzies Malvern**

For over 20 years Menzies Malvern, a contemporary retirement village, has provided an exceptional lifestyle in the heart of cosmopolitan Melbourne. Live a short stroll from the delights of Malvern’s cafes and boutiques while enjoying the peaceful retreat of your beautiful home. Menzies Malvern will enrich your wellbeing with a warm community of like-minded neighbours, resort-style luxuries and thoughtfully designed surrounds. It’s your place to live well. Further details at [menziesmalvern.com.au](https://www.menziesmalvern.com.au).



Via Fratelli is a traditional Italian restaurant located at 151 Waverley Rd, Malvern East. Specialising in traditional wood fired pizzas, classic Italian pastas and a full authentic menu. With a profound level of service and hospitality, it is the perfect choice for a pre-theatre meal. Show your ticket for the show you’re attending for a 10% discount on your total bill. Further details at [viafratelli.com.au](https://www.viafratelli.com.au).

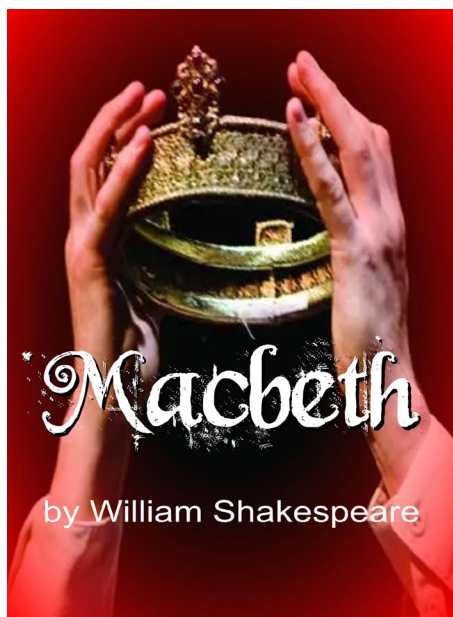
# Director's Notes

I have always believed this play to be worthy of inclusion among the handful of great Australian plays that are beloved and often revived. For me, it can stand up against *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *Away* and *The Club* and in its way it shares some similarities with these wonderful works. All of them are distinctly Australian, set in very specific regions and laced with local references, and yet their interest is not just parochial: their themes are universal, and playable across the globe. In its small living room in Newcastle, 1942, *A Happy and Holy Occasion* pitches up big ideas about religion and marriage, and the tension between ideals and human fallibility. As with the other great plays mentioned, it shows us a portrait of how we lived then, to allow us to reflect on how we live now.

## Production Team

|                                   |                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Director .....                    | Nicholas Opolski                                                                       |
| Stage Manager .....               | Barry James                                                                            |
| Set Designer .....                | Nicholas Opolski                                                                       |
| Lighting Designer.....            | Linda Corrin                                                                           |
| Sound Designers.....              | Michael Birkett, Linda Corrin                                                          |
| Costume Designer .....            | Barbara Murray                                                                         |
| Props Designer .....              | Barry James                                                                            |
| Lighting and Sound Operator ..... | Linda Corrin                                                                           |
| Newsreader.....                   | Barry James                                                                            |
| Prompt.....                       | Annie Grant                                                                            |
| Technical Director .....          | Michael Birkett                                                                        |
| Set Construction .....            | David Allen, Noel Ellis, Peter Erlanger,<br>Graeme Munro, Max Murray, Nicholas Opolski |
| Production Coordinators .....     | Nicholas Opolski, Annie Grant                                                          |
| Program Designer .....            | Janine Evans                                                                           |
| Program Coordinator.....          | Monica Greenwood                                                                       |
| Photography .....                 | Lorraine Bell                                                                          |
| Publicity.....                    | Blake Stringer                                                                         |
| FOH Manager.....                  | Judy Clues                                                                             |
| Ticketbox Manager.....            | David Gordon                                                                           |
| Ticket Secretary.....             | Kerry Carr                                                                             |

## Next at Malvern Theatre Company



### Macbeth

by William Shakespeare

"Stars, hide your fires. Let not light see my black and deep desires".

A valiant and trusted soldier, Macbeth is propelled down a dark and treacherous path when an encounter with supernatural beings bring to the surface secret dreams of power. Spurred on by his ruthless wife, he embarks on a terrifying quest to get the Scottish crown. But once got, it must be kept. Macbeth's determination leads him into a nightmare world of murder and madness, taking the country to the very brink of catastrophe.

Shakespeare's most thrilling story, of unchecked ambition, witches and ghosts, castles and swordfights, is a harrowing

exploration of crime and guilt, power and corruption. Malvern Theatre Company's production of *Macbeth* will excite all lovers of this classic play.

**Directed by David McLean**

20 June – 5 July 2025

To book tickets, visit our website at [malvernthatre.com.au/book-tickets](https://malvernthatre.com.au/book-tickets) or phone 1300 131 552.

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## Acknowledgements

Malvern Theatre Company acknowledges that we are performing on the traditional land of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri People and offer our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Malvern Theatre Company is very grateful for the support provided by the City of Stonnington.

We would like to thank the following people for their additional support of this production, without whom the show would not be what it is: Debbie Keyt of D.K. Productions at Beaumaris Theatre Company, Neil Barnett, Lizzie Opolski, Oliver Martucci, Andrew Ferguson, David Maxwell and Valeria Bonazzi.

As an organisation, we take pride in supporting the local volunteer network in the community and the charitable organisations that underpin this important work. As such, we have donated all benefits of the Charity Night performance to the following organisations:

- Ashburton Baptist Church
- Order of the Eastern Star (Box Hill Chapter)
- RSPCA
- The Compassionate Friends Victoria

If you are a member of a Volunteer group or a Charitable organisation and would like to raise funds by arranging a group to attend our Charity Night Preview Performance, please contact us at [malvernthatrecompany@gmail.com](mailto:malvernthatrecompany@gmail.com).

## Calling All Volunteers

Would you like to volunteer at Malvern Theatre? There are many opportunities to be involved. Please visit our website and click on the 'Volunteer' tab to express your interest.

