

## Award-winning play *Return to the Dirt* premieres this October

The Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2020–21 winner is the play we're all dying to see.

*Return to the Dirt* is a warm, funny and surprising play based on Steve Pirie's year spent working at a Toowoomba funeral home. Guided by Steve himself in the role of The Playwright, the play sheds light on a little-known industry and explores some of our biggest questions — about what happens when we die, and what does it mean to live?

Initially penned as a response to the classic 'dinner party questions' when people found out Steve worked as a funeral director, *Return to the Dirt* attracted the attention of the Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2020–21 judging panel with its honesty, deep humanity and humour.

Queensland Theatre Artistic Director Lee Lewis was enthralled by *Return to the Dirt* on her first read and throughout the extensive creative development offered as part of the Queensland Premier's Drama Award program. She is overjoyed to now be directing the world premiere season at the Bille Brown Theatre.

"It's one of the best new Australian plays I have read in the last five years," Lewis said. "Steve's clever and compassionate writing features characters that audiences will recognise from any community and opens us up to those tricky but important conversations we all try to avoid."

"Dying is something everyone has to do one day, no one gets to avoid it. *Return to the Dirt* not only helps demystify the process and the business of dying, it also makes us think about how we want to live. What really matters to you in the precious time you have?"

"The power of live theatre is that audiences can ponder these big things together, enjoying the small details of this glorious production and the incredible characters we'll meet along the way."

Minister for the Arts Leeanne Enoch said *Return to the Dirt* represents a milestone for the Queensland Premier's Drama Award (QPDA) as the tenth QPDA-winner to be staged by Queensland Theatre since the award was established in 2002.

"For almost two decades the QPDA has been telling our stories through contemporary Australian theatre," Minister Enoch said.

"Queensland playwright Steve Pirie joins an impressive list of QPDA winners and their amazing stories including Michele Lee, Marcel Dorney and Daniel Evans.

"The Palaszczuk Government invests in Queensland Theatre to create new work and provide employment and creative development opportunities for our artists and arts workers.

"The QPDA celebrates and shares our stories and storytellers, and is a terrific example of the Creative Together 2020–2030, the Government's ten-year roadmap for arts, culture and creativity in action.

"The arts, cultural and creative industries are key to delivering Queensland's plan for economic recovery from COVID-19, each year contributing \$8.5 billion into the state's economy and supporting more than 92,000 jobs for Queenslanders."

Breathing life into *Return to the Dirt* is a cast who will all make their debut with Queensland Theatre. The role of Steve is to be played by Mitchell Bourke (*The Family Law*), with Jeanette Cronin (*Crownies, Rake*) and Chris Baz (*Blue Heelers, Water Rats*) as his colleagues Deb and Greg.

Steve's fiancé Claire is played by Sophie Cox (*Home and Away*), while actor, dancer and stunt performer Miyuki Lotz (*Reef Break*) joins the cast as both Lucy and Jess, while the role of young Ellie will be shared by Cleo Davis and Aara Afraz. Steve Pirie also makes his stage debut with the Company as The Playwright.

"We feel so fortunate to have our theatres open here in Queensland at the moment and it's not something we take for granted," Lewis said.

"Being able to share this new Australian play with audiences across the country through our new [Queensland Theatre at Home](#) digital series in November makes this season all the more special."

# RETURN TO THE DIRT by Steve Pirie

Directed by Lee Lewis

16 October — 6 November 2021

Bille Brown Theatre, South Brisbane

Steaming online from 29 November — 5 December 2021

Bookings [queenslandtheatre.com.au](http://queenslandtheatre.com.au) | 1800 355 528 | [sales@queenslandtheatre.com.au](mailto:sales@queenslandtheatre.com.au)

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## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

In a year spent tending to the dead, a young man learns to live.

Steve never imagined he'd end up working in the funeral industry. But when he finds himself living back home in Toowoomba to save up for his wedding, it's the only job he can get.

The year he spends working among the dead opens his eyes to what awaits us at the end and what it means to live.

With respect, wit and a nod to pop culture, Steve takes us on a journey that celebrates finding your place in the world, the power of personal redemption and humility in the face of the big questions.

*Return to the Dirt* is a refreshing, honest and surprisingly uplifting invitation to start the conversations we all try to avoid.

Winner — Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2020–21

## CAST and CREATIVES

Steve	Mitchell Bourke
Deb/Ensemble	Jeanette Cronin
Greg/Ensemble	Chris Baz
Claire/Ensemble	Sophie Cox
Ellie	Cleo Davis / Aara Afraz
Lucy/Jess/Ensemble	Miyuki Lotz
The Playwright	Steve Pirie
Playwright	Steve Pirie
Director	Lee Lewis
Designer	Renée Mulder
Lighting Designer	Ben Hughes
Sound Designer	Julian Starr



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For further information, imagery or interviews, please contact Amanda Lawson, Queensland Theatre via [publicity@queenslandtheatre.com.au](mailto:publicity@queenslandtheatre.com.au) or phone 07 3010 7669

Queensland Theatre acknowledges the Jagera and Turrbal people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, and their unique relationship with the lands, seas and waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.