

# QUEENSLAND THEATRE

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## Steve Pirie announced as winner of the Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2020–21 with *'Return to the Dirt'*

From over 220 entries for the Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2020–21 (QPDA), and three finalists announced earlier this year, Brisbane writer **Steve Pirie** has been announced the winner with *Return to the Dirt*, a powerful — and gently humorous — meditation on what it means to die in the 21st century and what a final act of love can do for our healing.

Pirie's work was selected ahead of fellow finalists **Anna Loren** for *Comfort* and **Maddie Nixon** for her work *Binnavale*. Delivered through Queensland Theatre, the QPDA is a prestigious and important award for Australian theatre in that it guarantees a professional production of the winning entry in the Company's 2021 season.

*Return to the Dirt* introduces you to Steve, a struggling artist who — after a long stint of unemployment — finds work as a funeral director. The play, using Gen-Y wit and pop-culture homage, takes you through the realms of the dead and behind the closed doors of the Australian funeral industry. *Return to the Dirt* is a celebration of finding your place in the world, the power of personal redemption and humility at the end of all things.

"Steve Pirie's play *Return to the Dirt* is a revelation," said Artistic Director **Lee Lewis**, who was part of the judging panel for the awards. "It is one of the best new Australian plays I have read in the last five years. He has done what all great writers do... bravely transform personal experience into story so that we are willing to imagine into the scariest of places. This play is emotionally rich, humane, startlingly funny, spiritually sophisticated and deeply honest. In these strange and difficult times this is the kind of writing we need to inspire us. I have not been so deeply moved by a play in years. Our playwrights are our national treasures and great stories are hived in every corner of this great country – this is a story set in Toowoomba which will speak to the world about how we, as humans, value a life. I can't wait to share it with our audience on the Queensland Theatre stage next year".

"The QPDA is the largest playwriting award in the country. The significance of guaranteeing a production to the winning play cannot be overstated. For every playwright in the country, the QPDA offers a career-changing opportunity. Working with the Queensland Government to shine a huge light on the extraordinary writing talent we have in this country is both inspiring and exciting", Lewis said.

Steve Pirie's play was inspired by his real experiences working in a funeral home in 2014. He said, "I hope this play is a stepping-stone to one of the most important conversations you need to have."

The QPDA was launched in 2002, and through it, Queensland Theatre has developed 31 new Australian plays, employed over 220 actors, writers and directors, and fostered audiences of more than 34,500 to engage with new theatre works. Previous winning works include *The Holidays* by David Megarrity (2018–19), *Rice* by Michele Lee (2016–17), *Oedipus Doesn't Live Here Anymore* by Daniel Evans (2014–15), *Trollop* by Maxine Mellor (2012–13) and *Fractions* by Marcel Dorney (2010–11).

Judges for the 2020–21 Awards include **Ms Christine Castley**, Deputy Director-General in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; **Ms Lee Lewis**, Artistic Director of Queensland Theatre; **Ms Nadine McDonald-Dowd**, Executive Producer, Queensland Performing Arts Centre; and **Ms Jennifer Medway**, Literary Associate, Melbourne Theatre Company.

The Queensland Premier's Drama Award is an initiative of Queensland Theatre with the support of the Queensland Government.

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