

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

Monday December 14, 2020

Roles of a lifetime unveiled as Jimi Bani leads the 14-strong cast for Queensland Theatre's *Our Town*

Single tickets for Our Town, Triple X and Taming of the Shrew on sale as the Company begins the countdown to the 2021 Season

There's a line in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Our Town* by **Thornton Wilder** that says, "Does anyone ever realise life while they live it ... every, every minute?"

It's a powerful question, and after surviving the rollercoaster that has been 2020, Queensland Theatre's Artistic Director **Lee Lewis** said *Our Town* will be the most beautiful play to come back to the theatre with next year — an uplifting and life-affirming experience to start afresh in 2021.

Directed by Lewis, *Our Town* features 14 cast, the largest ever to grace the Bille Brown Theatre stage. The 12 roles announced today includes a line-up of some of the best actors in the country, with **Jimi Bani**, **Colin Smith**, **Libby Munro**, **Hugh Parker**, **Roxanne McDonald**, **Andrew Buchanan** and **Anthony Standish**. They will be joined by four artists making their first Queensland Theatre mainstage appearances — **Amy Lehpamer**, **Lucy Heathcote**, **Egan Sun-Bin** and **Silvan Rus**. In addition, **Jayden Popik** returns after wowing critics in his Queensland Theatre debut, last month's acclaimed *Mouthpiece*.

"*Our Town* is a huge story told very simply, about a group of people who live in a small country town, and it's an extraordinary reminder that it's the small things in life that matter in the face of big tragedy," Lewis said.

"This is a big, classic play, bringing with it career-highlight roles with all the challenges that actors revel in performing. Casting acting greats alongside upcoming new talent has been a thrill, and we can't wait to see the energy and learnings that emerge when rehearsals start in two weeks."

The pivotal role of Stage Manager in *Our Town* will be played by **Jimi Bani** (*Hedda*, *My Name is Jimi*, *MABO*), master storyteller, actor, writer and ninth Chief of the Wagadagam tribe from the Torres Strait.

"Jimi Bani is one of this country's greatest actors, so it's incredibly exciting to see him play one of theatre's greatest roles. **Paul Newman** famously performed it on Broadway 2002, marking his final ever stage appearance, following a near 40-year break. Such is the appeal of *this* role, in *this* play," said Lewis.

The roles of Dr Gibbs and Mrs Gibbs will be played by stage stars **Colin Smith** (*Nearer the Gods*, *An Octoroon*, *Black Diggers*) and **Libby Munro** (*Grounded*, *Noises Off*, *Venus in Fur*), while Mr Webb and Mrs Webb will be played by **Hugh Parker** (*Hydra*, *Nearer the Gods*, *The 39 Steps*) and **Amy Lehpamer** (*Beautiful*, *the Carol King Musical*, *School of Rock*, *Sound of Music*).

"The superb **Colin Smith** was last seen on the Company stage in 2018's *Twelfth Night* and we welcome home from LA and back to Queensland Theatre, the dynamic Matilda Award-winning **Libby Munro**," she said.

"Queensland Theatre fans will be thrilled that the much loved and talented **Hugh Parker** is back on our stage, along with the brilliant actor and musician, **Amy Lehpamer** who has been conquering the musical theatre world across the seas, in her debut with us.

"The role of George Gibbs will be performed by breakout star **Jayden Popik** (*Mouthpiece*, *Blackrock*, *Ghosted*) who wowed critics on the Playhouse stage last month in *Mouthpiece* opposite **Christen O'Leary**. It has been one of the strange gifts from the pandemic that we have been able to work with an artist of such talent at this stage of his career.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

“Opposite Jayden, playing Emily Webb, will be young Queensland actor and QUT graduate **Lucy Heathcote** (*Dinner, Three Sisters, Incognito*). We can’t wait for audiences to see the chemistry between these two. Of course, *Our Town* was the original rom-com, with George and Emily the original Ross and Rachel from *Friends!*”

“The role of Mrs Soames will be played by the legendary **Roxanne McDonald** (*Rovers, Head Full of Love, Winyanboga Yurringa*), who last performed with Queensland Theatre in the acclaimed *Head Full of Love*. We also welcome back **Andrew Buchanan** (*L’Appartement, Harrow, The End*) who absolutely wowed theatre fans in *L’Appartement* just last year. And rounding out the stage alumni is **Anthony Standish** (*City of Gold, The Wider Earth, Jane Eyre*).

“Finally, two more Company debutants are QUT graduate and Queensland Theatre Young Artists’ Ensemble alumni **Egan Sun-Bin** (*Three Sisters, Dinner, Carnies*) and Queensland Shakespeare ensemble favourite **Silvan Rus** (*Henry IV, Pt 1, Hamlet, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*).

Lewis said Thornton Wilder wrote this play in the run-up to World War II in the 1930s.

“People were incredibly worried about fascism and what was happening to the world and the values that they'd cherished so much. He wrote this play to remind them of what was deeply important, creating the story about this little country town called Grover's Corners. And it's a town we all recognize. I grew up in a country town, probably a little bit bigger than Grover's Corners, but still had the same things and similar people.”

“The story focuses on two families living next door to each other, the Gibbs and the Webbs. The young son, George Gibbs, and the young daughter, Emily Webb, fall in love and marry. We follow the town over the course of about 10 years and experience all the changes and the sadness that happens. The end of the play is magic. Thornton Wilder was an incredible form breaker in his time.”

“I think *Our Town* is a play written for difficult times, to remind us about what matters. And that's why my heart went straight there when I thought about the possibility of a 2021 Season.”

“We need to see great big stories that fill us with inspiration. We need to have our artists back at work, breathing life into the imagination. We need to talk to friends about the play we all saw last night and disagree with them about what it really meant. We need the buzz of a foyer. We need our culture to come back to life, and we are making this happen,” said Lewis.

****Our Town* opens on January 30 and runs until February 27 at the Bille Brown Theatre.** Single tickets for this production, as well as *Triple X* by Glace Chase and *Taming of the Shrew*, are officially on sale and make the perfect festive season gift this year, with shows set to fill quickly as fans lock in their theatre fix after so many months without!

ABOUT OUR TOWN

With a story so simple and a heart so warm, this classic celebrates all that is precious in life.

Life in a small town. Babies are born. Children go to school, and play and dream. People grow up, fall in love, get married, hold down a job, and grow old. The same surnames last down through the years, but the faces change. There are inevitable tragedies and triumphant joys.

As we come to know the people in this town, we see how the threads of their everyday lives are gently woven into the rich and complex, funny and heartbreaking fabric that is community.

And for all its simplicity, this play reveals a great truth at its heart: deep meaning and startling value are in every moment of existence. You don't know what you've got until it's gone.

Pulitzer Prize-winning *Our Town* has long been America's most performed play. It reminds us to look to the future with hope, to see the beauty in the everyday world and to cherish the people we love.

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OUR TOWN by Thornton Wilder

30 January – 27 February 2021

Bille Brown Theatre, 78 Montague Road, South Brisbane

Season Ticket packages and single tickets available at queenslandtheatre.com.au

Telephone 1800 355 528 | Email sales@queenslandtheatre.com.au

CAST

Stage Manager	Jimi Bani
Dr Gibbs	Colin Smith
Mrs Gibb	Libby Munro
George Gibbs	Jayden Popik
Mrs Webb	Amy Lehpamer
Mr Webb	Hugh Parker
Emily Webb	Lucy Heathcote
Howie Newsome	Egan Sun-Bin
Professor Willard	Andrew Buchanan
Constable Warren	Silvan Rus
Mrs Soames/Jo Crowell	Roxanne McDonald
Simon Stimson	Anthony Standish

CREATIVES

Writer	Thornton Wilder
Director	Lee Lewis
Costume	Nathalie Ryner
Lighting Designer	Paul Jackson
Composer/Sound Designer	THE SWEATS

For further information, imagery, interviews or more, please contact Kath Rose 0416 291 493 or email kath@kathrose.com



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