ASIGN OF THE TIMES

Created and Produced by



STEPHEN LLOYD HEPER, PRODUCING DIRECTOR



Scott Irwin stars as "Man" photo by Wendy McDougall

PRESENTER'S INFORMATION

Originally presented with NIDA Independent Theatre Program

THE FOLLIES COMPANY, PTY LTD 47 CHEVIOT STREET ASHBURY NSW 2193 0412118181 stephenlloydhelper@gmail.com

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COMPANY PROFILE

THE FOLLIES COMPANY has been producing high quality, popular, bold, live theatre since 1998 beginning with the musical **FOLLIES** at the Sydney Opera House with the SSO and a galaxy of Music Theatre stars. Since then, the company and its director, Stephen Helper, have developed the musical **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFE** on Broadway, **WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW** by Bacharach, David, Rankin and Helper at Sydney's Theatre Royal, **SIMPLY WEILL, A Kurt Weill Cabaret**, **YOU'RE GONNA LOVE TOMORROW**, **CAFE REBETIKA!** - the passion of the Greek Blues, all at the SOH.

The company's commitment to connecting audiences with artistry expanded to touring. Tours of **CAFE REBETIKA!** and **SYNCOPATION** have brought accolades and critical acclaim for the company but more importantly, have deeply effected audiences around the country. For The Follies Company, an audience in Albany is as important as one on Broadway.

Last year, the company produced **A SIGN OF THE TIMES** with NIDA Independent in Sydney and **THE ADVENTURES OF NAMAKILI** with Brown's Mart Theatre in Darwin. Both productions have proved to be powerful entertainment in their premiere seasons. These fine works eventuated from the company's rigorous creative development periods of several years.

Upcoming productions include **BLACK ELECTRIC** with the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) in November 2014; **SYNCOPATION** Off-Broadway at the York Theatre in May 2015; **A SIGN OF THE TIMES** at QPAC in August 2015. The Follies Company's exciting new country/soul musical **THE NEW BLACK** is in the final stages of development.

ABOUT THE SHOW

SHOW SYNPOSIS

Based on a 20 second interaction with a road worker who turns the Stop/Slow sign, *A Sign of the Times* is an epic comedy about depression. The dashing and charismatic Scott Irwin gives a sensational performance as this upbeat worker on the job. He lives in our world of job losses, loved-ones with cancer, relationship stress, endless wars, iPhones and terrible traffic.

Having been restructured out of his university teaching, our modern day Job has decided to take "time out" with this simple job. As he works, his imagination takes us from the "reality" of his work site on a journey searching for the fundamental forces that create misfortune. He entertainingly explores Einstein, Religion, Greek myths, Literature and the very essence of Theatre itself. He can also get his grove on with his sign-turning, which he demonstrates on several occasions.

But as we travel with him, we start to see a man valiantly, wittily, compellingly, distracting himself from the pain of his present sourced in events he relives from his past. He is going nowhere. In the pain of a nihilistic world, he is

caught deep in the mire of inaction. It is his escape from this subtle, insidious, engulfing trap that is the journey of *A Sign of the Times*. Just when the end of the road seems to lead to a permanent inner-hell, the love for his family brings him the inner-strength to leave the multiple realities of hell, of work, of loss, of heartache, of mire, of feeling the soul sucked out of him, to defy death and take positive action to rebuild his life. Voted as one of the 5 "Best and wisest productions of 2013" by Suzy Wrong (see reviews).

Features poetry by Robert Frost, Shakespeare, the Greek tragedians, Alexander Pope and T.S. Eliot.

Quick bump-in and out. Features magnificent lighting and sound design which create the multiple (if technically invisible) settings.

Premiered at the Parade Theatres, NIDA, September 11, 2013 following a two-year creative development period funded by NIDA Independent, The Follies Company and philanthropists.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written and directed by Stephen Helper, Lighting: Sian James-Holland, Sound: Darrin Verhagen, Starring Scott Irwin, Stage manager Mia Schack. Follies Company logo required (see cover).

BIOGRAPHIES

Scott Irwin (Man) played Pinkerton in the Chinese National Theatre (Beijing) production of Cho Cho produced by the Ganters. Known around Australia in commercial musicals, he has starred in They're Playing Our Song, Every Single Saturday, Hairspray, High School Musical, Kiss Me, Kate and Annie Get Your Gun for The Production Company, Beauty and the Beast. Other credits include Secret Bridesmaid's Business at the Malthouse and the feature film Razzle Dazzle.

Darrin Verhagen (Sound) has created scores and sound designs for Chamber Made Opera, Daniel Schlusser, Malthouse, Melbourne Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre Company, Moira Finucane, Chunky Move, Australian Dance Theatre, Lucy Guerin, Sue Healey, and Mary Oslund/USA.and Keene Taylor Theatre Project. His **Meat Party, Life is a Dream** and **Birthday Party** scores were nominated for Green Room "Best Composition/Sound Design", an award he won in 2005 and 2010 for his soundtracks to **Memory of Water** and **Poet** #7 respectively. http://www.darrinverhagen.com/

Sian James-Holland's (Lighting) designs include: Singled Out (Seymour Centre), A Sign of the Times (NIDA Parade Studio); Fireface (ATYP), Box Of Birds (Performance Space), Weimar Cabaret (Barry Humphries & ACO tour), This Is Where We Live (Griffin), Hamlet (Sport for Jove), The Book Club (Hit Productions), The Ham Funeral and Small Poppies (The New Theatre). Reasons to be Pretty, Ordinary Days (Darlinghurst Theatre), Flying Fruit Fly Circus (national tours) and for numerous Canadian companies.

Stephen Lloyd Helper (Writer/Director) directed Syncopation by Allan Knee which toured 44 theatres across every state and territory. It will premiere Off-Broadway with the York Theatre Company in its 2014 - 15 season. His numerous directing credits include a Broadway Revival of Fiddler on the Roof nominated for a "Best Revival" Tony® Award and the conception and development of the Broadway smash musical review Smokey Joe's Café. It ran for 4 1/2 years (a 30 longest running show in Broadway history), 2 years in the West End and has toured worldwide. At the Sydney Opera House, Steve has directed the sell-out Simply Weill - A Kurt Weill Cabaret, Follies by Sondheim and Goldman; New Year's Eve gala You're Gonna Love Tomorrow and the premiere seasons of Love Letters. At the Seymour Centre, he has directed The Popular Mechanicals, Morning Sacrifice, Agnes of God. Another of his favourite productions is Gallipoli the Musical (a play) by Mark Penzak at La Mamma for the Melbourne Fringe.

As a co-writer/director he helped create *Café Rebetika!* which premiered at the Arts Centre Melbourne (Fairfax Studio) and *The Adventures of Namakili* with Aboriginal actor Lynette Lewis Hubbard. It premiered in Darwin to standing ovations in November 2013. It is currently forming a tour through ArtBack, NT.

He is co-writing the Indigenous musical *The New Black* with Deadly Award winner Marcus Corowa and Leeroy Bilney. It tells the story of Jim Kokatha, a bright, educated Aboriginal man climbing the corporate ladder balancing his family and cultural responsibilities.

Steve received his BA in directing and playwriting from Yale University and received a Distinction in RMIT's Multicultural Arts Professional Development program.

PERFORMANCE SPECIFICS

DURATION

Act 1 – 50 minutes

Act 2 – 35 minutes

SUITABLE VENUES

All venues can work except as street theatre.

MAXIMUM NUMBER OF PERFORMANCES PER WEEK 8 performances

MINIMUM BREAK BETWEEN PERFORMANCES 150 minutes

LICENCING AGREEMENTS
N/A

APRA OBLIGATIONS N/A

TOURING PERSONNEL

The touring party consists of 2 people.

Name	Role	
Scott Irwin	Actor	
Mia Schack	Stage Manager / Driver	

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Year	Venue	Number of performances
2013	Parade Theatre	21
2013	Workshop NIDA reh. room	2
2012	Workshop Artists Platform Syd	2
2011	Workshop NIDA reh. room	2

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

As part of our commitment of artistry connecting audiences, A SIGN OF THE TIMES deals with important contemporary issues, many of which are close to home to regional audiences: loneliness, overcoming sorrow, grief, isolation, unemployment, economic insecurity, identity and the stresses that any and all of these things have on family relationships. Furthermore, it addresses them in a way that uses **humour** to disarm the taboos that often surround these topics. Our character of Man seeks answers, seeks a way out, seeks a way to restore his resilience.

The way the production builds its connection with the audience is in many ways is a crucial part of its community engagement program. It purposely presents a fellow with a genuine workaday job - a kind of person we can see everyday but basically ignore. So many jobs are like this and can lead to ever-lower self-esteem. The fact that Man chooses jobs on the outskirts of town gives the work even more "common ground" with a regional audience.

There are ways we would like to see this community engagement extended beyond the time in the theatre. As suicides are highest in regional areas, a sense of mission, of the need for communication, to talk things out, to express ones feelings truly goes to the heart of A SIGN OF THE TIMES.

DESCRIPTION / DETAILS / COSTS

1. Depending on the venue and community, we would help venues arrange an audience connection with Lifeline, Beyond Blue the Black Dog

Institute, Relationships Australia, the local hospital or other validated service. This connection could be anything from distribution of access material to holding 45-minute discussion groups. Whatever would be deemed by the venue manager to be most appropriate to her/his community. It is unlikely that there would be an additional charge.

- 2. For many people, writing about their own situation can be very helpful. The actor and/or the writer/director or a writer local to the community could hold a 90 minute writing workshop to assist people "write out" their own stories. This has been shown by numerous studies to be a very productive exercise. Fee negotiable.
- 3. Less focused on mental health, the company would be happy to provide materials free of charge to stimulate a discussion group about the philosophies, scientific theories and religious belief systems that are a part of the play. This discussion could be lead by a local person or we could provide (at additional cost) someone to lead the discussion. *Fee negotiable*.
- 4. An hour of theatre communication games. Scott Irwin leads a fun, public participatory workshop on communication skills. Participants need to wear comfortable clothes, easy to move in and sand shoes. \$7 per person (approximately to discuss).

TARGET AUDIENCE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Activities 1, 2, 3 are aimed at Teenagers/Young Adults/Adults. Activity 4 is for ages 8 and up. People can participate as individuals, couples or families.

None of the activities require experience.

To reach the target audiences, different strategies beyond the network(s) provided by the venue would be used. For Activity 1 we would seek to use any existing network the participating mental health organisation would have. If the regional area has a major employer or social club, we would seek to work their networks, too.

Activities 2 and 3 can work through the local High Schools, Churches, TAFE, Unis and libraries. Activity 2 is particularly attractive for local councils to support.

Activity 4 can be cross-promoted with any of the ways mentioned above. In addition, it could be an add-on at the time of ticket purchase, it could be offered through any local dance/arts school. As this is largely a physical activity, it can also appeal to sporting groups, teams as well as banking/business staff for teambuilding and health/fitness programs.

MARKETING

MARKETING COPY
One line

An acclaimed Comedy about a workingman challenged by the universe.

Short (100 words)

Starring the handsome and charismatic Scott Irwin (*Les Mis, They're Playing Our Song*) this acclaimed comedy is the hilarious and deeply affecting story about a workingman challenged by the universe. Based on a true story, everything is going wrong in Man's life, seemingly out of his control. He seeks headspace in the simple job of turning the Stop/Slow roadworks sign. And he finds it! Our Man, has a wild, exhilarating and super-entertaining imagination. He takes us on his electrifying and soulful search to understand "what makes bad things happen to good people". Written/Directed by Tony Award nominated Stephen Lloyd Helper.

Extended (300 words)

Starring the handsome and charismatic Scott Irwin (*Les Mis, They're Playing Our Song*) this acclaimed comedy is the hilarious story about a workingman challenged by the universe. Everything is going wrong, out of his control. He takes the simple job of turning the Stop/Slow roadworks sign and begins his search to understand "what makes bad things happen to good people".

The stage becomes the canvas of Man's imagination. We go from worksite to home, hospital, pub, an office tower balcony to relive with him joyful and painful events that add up to his isolation here and now. About to discover *why* it's all happened, he is hit by a truck. We journey to an afterlife waiting room only to be hurled back to earth. Confused and lost, he ends up in hell. Here, his faithful sign, "Fred", is broken and reads "Stop" on both sides. Crushed, ready to surrender to nihilism, he hears a ticking: time ticking ever onward, affirming life. Hope grows anew rekindling deep love for people and things that matter that he *can* effect. He defies his hell which now becomes a garden. He wishes us flourishing lives and goes to rebuild his life.

Critics were enthralled at the Parade Theatres at NIDA - *Suzy Goes See* deeming it "the wisest and best play of 2013... something that shines bright, eternal, like a diamond". Lisa Thatcher says, "Man becomes our own Man, sweeping us up .. lifting the room to an ecstatic joy... The lights and sound work together to create an atmosphere as powerful as a stage set itself, enhancing the clever rapid word play that throbs at the heart of *A Sign of the Times*. For a production with such grand themes, it is all a joy to follow, easy and witty, rapid and fun."

MARKETING SUMMARY

Men and Women ages: 45+; 18 - 30; Parents; Workers; Nurses; Uni & HS students/teachers; HSC students, Theatre groups (Irwin musical star), Social clubs.

Selling points:

Cast: Handsome, charismatic, rugged star actor in a to-die-for performance. Star of Les Mis, Hairspray, Rocky Horror Show.

Script: Winner! Voted 1 of the 5 Best new plays of 2013.

Reviews: All raves from Sydney critics

Relevance: About a new kind of battler - a true Aussie Everyman trying to

deal with the powerful, stressful forces now in everyday life.

Director: Broadway, Off-Broadway, Tony-nominated

Unforgetability: Will change your understanding of the meaning of life forever.

Quality: Of the highest possible artistic standards

Character: A true Aussie Everyman.

MEDIA QUOTES

Suzy Goes See (11/9/13) "One does not go to the theatre expecting the earth to move or a spiritual experience to take place, but a hope always exists that just maybe, tonight is going to be special. A Sign Of The Times is... a play that can shake you to your core. There is a depth in Helper and Irwin's work that is rare and incredibly moving. We understand that devastation and salvation make for good drama, but it is the way they portray these experiences, with dignity, bravery and truth, that has created something that shines bright, and eternal, like a diamond."

Lisa Thatcher (14/9/13) "If emotional and intellectual paralysis is the great theme of modern literature, Steve Helper is suggesting they are the great theme of modern life. The great catch cry of our "Man" in Steve Helper's A sign of the Times is what he so often repeats to his wife: "don't worry. I didn't do anything." Helper wants us to look past that paralysis, through the minefield of intellectual choices we have about how we approach our life, to the power to act. What is it that has us take action? What will it take for us to act?"

"Our Man is completely embodied by Scott Irwin... He is just deeply sad, although even that sadness can't hide his pure joy and wonder at the beauty of the universe and all it contains."

"As our Helper's Man becomes our own Man, we grow a deep involvement with the character, sweeping us up and over the barrier between audience and actor, between observation and the act.

But all this heaviness is couched in a cheer that stumbles blindly from the character, infusing his words and lifting the mood of the room to an ecstatic joy. The whimsy of clocks that refuse to stop ticking, tarot cards being about

risk management, the imagination being the key to success, and clever lines like "I'm more powerful than God because there is no question that I exist" lighten what could be a dark and heavy mood."

"It is this combination of Steve Helper's dynamic dialogue and Scott Irwin's endearing, mature warm presence that bring A Sign of the Times to enthusiastic life, reaching into the mind as well as the heart.

Act two brings the audience into a more metaphysical realm as the real questions of the play come to life, in a less ordered and more difficult to pindown examination. If act one reminded me of Beckett's Waiting for Godot, then act two takes us into the realm of No Exit, and Sartre's great cry of responsibility for our actions. The subversive message of A Sign of the Times is that to act is not enough. One must choose in good conscience, the right act.

In this way, A Sign of the Times doesn't just pour the current great themes of our world at our feet, but scrambles them in a meta-narrative that replaces the dramatic act with the day-to-day act, the audience with the principle character and the history of theatre with a prophetic look at the future. There have been many great fortune-tellers, claims our Man: Orwell, Kubrick, and Elliot, just to name a few. We can include Beckett and Sartre in that list, along with so many great thematic themes Steve Helper adds in a rolling creative ball of time."

"Sian James-Holland's lighting is all mood, as shifts in thinking have their own signposts, the lighting fluent with the flow and crash of the Man's inner tide. Darrin Verhagen's sound takes us from the edges of a busy construction site, through to a forest being lost to logging, through to the pin point of a moment in time when everything in the room floats in the expanding universe. The lights and sound work together to create an atmosphere as powerful as a stage set itself, all the while enhancing rather than detracting from the clever rapid word play that throbs at the heart of A sign of the Times. For a production with such grand themes, it is all a joy to follow, easy and witty, rapid and fun."

David Kary (Sydney Arts Guide, 19/9/13)

"I left NIDA's Studio theatre after seeing Stephen Helper's A SIGN OF THE TIMES thinking that was really, really good."

"Seeing so much theatre, as I do, I don't usually have such a strong, positive reaction. I have had some time to reflect on what made Helper's show stand out... Helper, who also directed the show, had a very strong creative team supporting him and they of-course produced the goods but most of all, it was the intimacy and openness generated, both by the writer in his script and Scott Irwin in his performance. This show was all about sharing, reaching and touching the audience with this guy's journey and perspectives on life."

"In some ways, the character of Man reminded me of Woody Allen,- unloading his personal stuff to his audience, quoting from intellectuals... Remember Woody Allen's direct address to the camera in ANNIE HALL that made it such stand-out. There's something similar in A SIGN OF THE TIMES."

"Well worth a look."

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

"I have been to 40+ professional productions this year (2013), STC, Darlo, Belvoir, Griffin and A SIGN OF THE TIMES was the simplest but most stimulating, most moving and most beautiful of any of them." Chris McGuiggan, Hurstville, NSW.

COLLEAGUE RECOMMENDATIONS

PRODUCTION RECOMMENDED by colleague Justin Macdonnell: "Brilliantly written. Brilliantly performed. Brilliantly directed. Brilliantly staged... Brilliant!";

PRODUCTION RECOMMENDED by colleague Gai Strouthos (Finance Director, Sport For Jove): "Hilarious. Heartbreaking. Heart warming. A happy, powerful night in the theatre. It needs to be seen by audiences everywhere."

PRODUCTION RECOMMENDED by colleague Wendy Blacklock: "Act I is superb, Act II needs some cuts and it will be superb, too." We made the cuts, Wendy!

VIDEO LINKS

4 minute promo: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzJXTenUchc 7 minute highlight: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSG9ZGhI0A8 21 minute selections: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajI6bG87UPw 1 minute teaser: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz96enKR7Nc All video is broadcast quality.

Pre-edited footage available in 1 minute and 30 second footage for your voiceover.

IMAGES

Production Shots can be found and downloaded from this link: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ct4eym7o2x5zksj/AADydAE6jF-cIII6a-7Ki96_a All photos by Wendy McDougall. Graphic design by Chad Drake.

MARKETING MATERIALS

Reviews; Video: 30 sec, 1, 3 & 7 minute video footage, Hero image, Complete graphic design suite, DL flyer, Poster, Post Card layouts, Production shots, Foyer display (blow-ups of reviews, 1200 x 2800 window/lightbox poster; Your theatre image, town landmark/streetscape image can be photoshopped onto your poster to appeal to your market. Program. Dedicated website (near completion).

A SIGN OF THE TIMES

CONTENT WARNINGS / AUDIENCES TO AVOID N/A - However, there is use of a smoke machine/hazer.

SPONSOR OR OTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS N/A

TEACHER'S RESOURCES

Fully Qualified NSW High School English/History teacher available to develop resources for classroom use including: Information on poetry and dramatic quotes used in the play, structural elements of storytelling, use of non-visual elements of design to create audience visualisation, analysis and expansion of of the philosophical, scientific and religious references in the play, the use of props, lighting design, sound design, the power of text.

Copies of the script are available well in advance of the performances for a fee.

PRODUCTION DETAILS

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

There is no set. The literal places and more surreal locations are all suggested through light and sound - and the performer, of course.

Lighting and Sound are highly integrated with text and performance.

The only props are provided by the Company and they are an Esky, a traffic sign on a long pole, a baked bean sandwich in a brown sandwich bag, a large water bottle, a construction/camping lantern, a broken traffic control sign, a simple black chair.

The lighting instruments are in full view so masking would only be required to help define the space or control light spillage from windows, doors, etc.

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE

Pre-rig, flash patch and colour assumed prior to company arrival.

Bump in commence: 8:00am

Focus, equipment and cue check completed: 12:00pm

1st Performance can begin 2:00pm

Bump out commence: Immediately after last performance

Bump out completed: Within 2 hours

CREW REQUIRED FROM VENUE

2 (lighting/sound) Crew required for Bump - In for 4 hours

1 lighting operator Crew required for Performance

2 (lighting/sound) Crew required for Bump - Out for 2 hours

STAGE

The production can be performed in almost any space. If your venue is less than 5 metres deep and 8 metres wide we will probably need to present a slightly scaled back performance in terms of lighting and sound. There are no set elements and no flying requirements.

THE FOLLIES COMPANY to supply Props.

Venue to supply

Only what is required to make the space performance-ready.

LIGHTING

The lighting is integrated into the performance with the sound - at times suggesting specific places, at other times supporting mood/action, at other times the approaching of a large dump truck.

THE FOLLIES COMPANY to supply:

Two HMI headlamps, hazer, MR16's or 'Birdies' (floor/footlights) These will all assist in a quicker/easier bump-in/out

Venue to supply:

Most venues will have the following lamp inventories in their standard rigs:

Venues LARGER than 9m wide 6m deep

Ideally >48 dimmer channels

26 Narrow variable zoom Profiles

12 1KW Frenels

8 500W Fresnels

16 MFL Par 64

2 NSP Par 64

6 Booms

10 Boom Arms

Venues SMALLER than 9m wide 6m deep

48 dimmer Channels (ideal)

16 MFL Par 64

2 NSP Par 64

18 Narrow variable zoom Profiles

8 500W Fresnel's

9 1KW Fres

6 Booms

10 Boom Arms

(A further stripped-down lighting version of the production is available.)

SOUND

The sound design is a key factor in the success of the production. At times, it even seems like another character on stage. Certainly there is much interaction between the performer and the sounds.

THE FOLLIES COMPANY to supply

Sound card for operation and outs for sound effects/music/etc.

Venue to supply

Two upstage speakers, one spot speaker, two front of house speakers.

AV N/A

WARDROBE

Character remains in the same costume throughout the show.

THE FOLLIES COMPANY to supply All costume elements

Venue to supply 1 Dressing Room Washing Machine Dryer Iron

FREIGHT NOTES

Depending on distances involved and itinerary, the Company will either rent a station wagon to drive to the venue or take a flight with the technical elements in checked luggage/frieght. A truck is not required, use of loading dock is not required.

CRITICAL ISSUES

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There are no critical issues. A complete blackout would be ideal but not impossible to work without one.

CONTACTS

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