

The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead

By Robert Hewett

Director: Geordie Johnson
Designer: Michael Gianfrancesco
Lighting designer: Kimberly Purtell
Composer: Stephen Woodjetts

Studio Theatre
June 27 to September 24
Opens June 30

ABOUT THE PLAY

OVERVIEW

First produced in 2004, the one-woman drama *The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead* is the first Australian play ever to be performed at the Stratford Festival.

Combining comedy, pathos, psychological drama and mystery, it gradually pieces together the circumstances that lead a suburban housewife to commit a tragically misdirected crime of passion – and explores the unexpected consequences that ensue.

The sole performer plays seven different roles, including the housewife, her husband and her four-year-old son.

SYNOPSIS

Suburban housewife Rhonda Russell (the redhead of the title) is taken by surprise when her husband, Graham, phones her from work to announce that he is leaving her. Then her friend and neighbour, Lynette (the brunette), who runs a store in the local shopping mall, tells her that she has seen Graham with another woman, a blonde who runs a discount jewellery store in the same mall.

When the incensed Rhonda heads off to confront her rival, the resulting altercation escalates into a physical struggle – with unintentionally fatal results. But the facts behind this seemingly straightforward case of betrayal and revenge are nowhere near as clear and simple as they seemed to be at first sight – and other lives besides Rhonda's and her victim's are profoundly affected as a result of her attack.

As the pieces of the puzzle fall into place, a story that seems to begin as the stuff of supermarket tabloid sensationalism evolves into a deeply moving journey toward understanding and acceptance.

SOURCES AND ORIGINS

Playwright Robert Hewett writes: “This story began with an almighty whinge. If it had been measured like an earthquake, it would have shot right off the Richter scale. It came in the form of an e-mail from an actress. Part of it read: ‘... and I’ve just won Best Actress, Best Director, been awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award and I’m broke and out of work!’ ”

Mr. Hewett responded by writing the first draft of the play as a vehicle for his friend – although, as things worked out, she was unable to arrange the funding necessary to mount a production of it, and she ended up relinquishing it to another performer.

STAGE HISTORY

The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead premiered at The Stables Theatre in Sydney, Australia, in February 2004. The performer was Jacki Weaver.

In January 2005, it launched the Melbourne Theatre Company season at the Fairfax Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, Australia, playing to capacity and extending its run, before touring Victoria and New South Wales.

It was also presented at the regional Hothouse Theatre, Albury, Australia, in March 2005.

A French-language production at Theatre Claque, Lausanne, Switzerland, premiered in January 2006.

Other recent or upcoming productions include:

- The Court Theatre, Christchurch, New Zealand (April 2006).
- The State Theatre Company of South Australia (May 2006, to be followed by a season at the Queensland Theatre Company and a tour).
- Auckland Theatre Company, New Zealand (August 2006).

The play’s first North American production opened at the Grand Theatre in London, Ontario, in December 2005.

STRATFORD FESTIVAL STAGE HISTORY

This is the first production of *The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead* at the Stratford Festival. No other plays by Robert Hewett have been presented here.

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

PERIOD AND SETTING

The play is set in the present day. Robert Hewett has adapted his original script to transpose the action from its original Australian setting to Canada.

Different wigs are donned by the performer to reflect the transitions from one character to another.

SELECTED ARTISTIC PERSONNEL

The Blonde, The Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead is directed by **Geordie Johnson**, now in his 10th season at the Stratford Festival, where his roles have included Nathan Detroit in *Guys and Dolls*, Hector in *Troilus and Cressida*, the title role in *Richard II*, Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, Edmund in *King Lear*, Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, Biff in *Death of a Salesman* and Chance Wayne in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. He has also appeared at the Shaw Festival and the New Shakespeare Company in England. His film and television roles include Kerensky in *Largo Winch*, the title role in *Dracula: The Series*, Daniel Booth in *Traders*, Liszt in *Liszt's Rhapsody* and Dr. Oliver in *The English Patient*. Mr. Johnson received a 1988 Dora Mavor Moore Award for his portrayal of Toilane in *I Am Yours* at the Tarragon Theatre and a Gemini Award in 2000 for his appearance in CTV's *The City*.

The performer is **Lucy Peacock**, now in her 19th season at the Festival. Ms Peacock's previous Festival credits include Mrs. Dolly Levi Gallagher in last season's *Hello, Dolly!* and Jane Banbury in last season's *Fallen Angels*, as well as Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Anna in *The King and I*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Regan in *King Lear* (both in Stratford and in the Tony-nominated production in New York), Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*, Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Desdemona in *Othello*, Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Gwendolyn in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Yelena in *Uncle Vanya*, Masha in *Three Sisters* and Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* (1988), among many other acclaimed performances in leading roles. This season, she also plays Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* and the title role in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

ROBERT HEWETT

A graduate of Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia, Robert Hewett joined the Melbourne Theatre Company as an actor in 1972. He worked in theatre, film, television and radio before switching to writing.

His first play, *Just ... One Last Dance*, premièred at the Mercury Theatre in Auckland in 1980 and was presented again by the Melbourne Theatre Company later that year. The Melbourne Theatre Company also produced his second play, *Gulls*, in 1983. *Gulls* received the Green Room Award for Best Play and was shortlisted in the inaugural Premier's Literary Awards. It has since been produced in Australia, the United Kingdom (at the Bristol Old Vic, Leicester's Haymarket, Glasgow's Tron and the Shaw Theatre London), South Africa (where it toured for three years), New Zealand, Malta, the U.S., Singapore, Canada and Sri Lanka. It is currently being translated into Czech for production in 2007.

In 1991, the Playbox Theatre Company in Melbourne premièred Mr. Hewett's *The Adman*, which was later presented in Brisbane and Sydney, and at the Kennedy Center as part of the Washington International Theatre Festival. *Waking Eve* also premièred at Playbox in 1997 and later toured to Sydney.

In mid 2000, *Goodbye Mrs Blore* premièred for Hit Productions and toured extensively through Victoria and New South Wales. Mr. Hewett's one-act play *Showday* has recently been performed in rural New South Wales, and his most recent work is the one-woman cabaret *Taught By Experts*.

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

IN THE PLAYWRIGHT'S OWN WORDS

"I think you have to use all the tricks of the stage to succeed against all the electronic competition these days."

– As quoted in the article "*Jacki's Play, Robert's Way*," by Robin Usher (see below)

ON THE INTERNET

ARTICLE ABOUT ROBERT HEWETT

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/Jackis-play-Roberts-way/2005/01/04/1104601337925.html>