



**THEATRE AT THE END OF HISTORY. A WEEKEND WITH STEPHEN SEWELL
6- 8 OCTOBER 2006**

Presented by Stages, the WA Playwrights' Consortium, in association with the Australian Writers' Guild and the Australian National Playwrights' Centre.

"In this chaotic, mad world, artists are needed more than ever to bring hope and meaning to our existence" Stephen Sewell

STEPHEN SEWELL

For 25 years Stephen Sewell has been Australia's most exciting big-issue playwright. Plays such as *Traitors*, *Welcome the Bright World*, *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, and *Dreams in an Empty City* reflect the breadth of his vision and the depth of his concerns. They are passionate, epic, anguished, intensely human works. Plays of the 1980s and 1990s include *Hate*, *Sisters* and *The Garden of Granddaughters*, in which, still, individual passions are shown to be reflections of broad political issues. In 2003 he wrote *Myths Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America*, a play hailed by some critics as a masterpiece, and his most recent work, *Three Furies: Scenes From the Life of Francis Bacon* recently won the 2006 Victorian Premier's Literary Award, the Louis Esson prize for drama.

Also a successful screenwriter, his script for *The Boys* won an AFI Award in 1988. In 2000, he formed ISM Films with partner Ian Iveson and their first film, "Lost Things" (written by Sewell), has just been released to considerable critical success. Their two next films, *Sisters*, starring Stellan Skarsgard, and to be directed by Sewell, and *Wolf* are now in the process of being financed.

THEATRE AT THE END OF HISTORY: A Conversation with Stephen Sewell.

Friday 6 October, 6.00pm, Blue Room Studio

Held at the Blue Room Studio, the public conversation between Stephen and Stages' Director Sophia Hall, explored all the facets of a playwright and man who believes that, even whilst the world around us is going mad, "theatre is not dead, and will not die till the last man and woman utter their last gasp and human life is expunged from the universe forever. Theatre is in our genes, it is what we are made of, it is what we are."

"For that we have hope is clear. No artist, no creator, ever sets forth without hope, even if the thing they create appears to be carved out of pitch black despair. We hope to find something in ourselves that is worthwhile, we hope that what we have to say will help other people, we hope there is a glimmer of truth in the churning confusion of our words; we hope to find the truth ourselves, the truth that we know is lurking just behind the curtain and all we need to do is take one more step, make one last effort, to find it and to live by its light; for if artists are not truth tellers and truth seekers, what are they? Peddlers of trash promptly and properly forgotten."

THEATRE AT THE END OF HISTORY: A Weekend Workshop with Stephen Sewell

Saturday 7 - 8 October, Stages, 196 Oxford Street, Leederville

Over the weekend Stephen presented three sessions in which his formidable mind and passionate inquiry took a perspective on three key questions that lay at the heart of what he believes playwrights should be and are thinking about.

Session One - Theatre of Edge

Theatre is an unexplored world whose boundaries we hardly even know. Unlike film, which is heavily convention bound, theatre remains a constantly evolving art, with every theatrical venture offering a chance for redefinition and new discovery. Why, therefore, does so much of our theatre feel tired, out of date, unimaginative and boring? This session hopes to challenge the participants to rethink their views of what theatre is and is capable of and to rise to the challenge presented to writers by spectacle and director's theatre.

Session Two - Psychology vs. Craft

Craft aspects of theatre from the writer's point of view are relatively straightforward and easily and quickly learnt. Particular styles, for example farce, of course have their own rules which must be learnt and adhered to, in the same way that screenwriting has its intricate rules, but the only rule theatre writers really need to pay attention to is "Don't bore the audience." Writers, in common with other artists, are nevertheless confronted by challenging psychological issues which must be recognized and dealt with in order to successfully undertake their task, and this session will look at some of these issues, and the ways we can deal with them.

Session Three - Theatre vs. Screen

The skills needed to write good theatre are often mistaken to be the same ones used to write film and television, when really these are three very different media. In this session theatre and film are compared, and the distinctions noted. Some practical points of film writing are covered.

Stephen's Guiding Principles

- People in conflict are people doing things
- Work out a discipline and stick to it: a regular slot every day even just for three hours (08:30 to 11:30) just do it, never change it.
- Don't wait for inspiration
- Just write. Bad writing can be fixed up later.
- It doesn't matter where you start; just start
- Dialogue is about characters trying to deceive one another in a way that doesn't deceive the audience
- Don't read anything you write. When you've written "The End" go back to the beginning and start again. Do that 3 times before reading anything.
- If you write in a teapot, shoot yourself - don't sit down and work it all out first: theatre is not social work.
- You can write 10 minutes of dialogue a day. You can write a full-length play in 2 weeks
- It doesn't matter what you write, just write
- Most successful contemporary plays are about 90 minutes long.
1st Act: 60 minutes. Interval. 2nd Act: 30 minutes.
- When you think you're writing shit you're about to discover gold.
- You have to have your own star to sail by