

## **Play Award (\$30,000)**

**Andrew Bovell, *When the Rain Stops Falling***

**Scott Theatre**

*When the Rain Stops Falling* is an epic play spanning four generations and two countries. The action moves from the claustrophobia of a 1950s London flat to the windswept coast of Southern Australia and into the heart of the Australian desert.

The implications of the effects of climate change provide the canvas to the minutiae of people's lives: in 1959 London the emotional turmoil of newly-weds where the difficult adjustment to living with another person is exacerbated by one partner's psychological problem; emotional aridity caused by the denial of love; the turmoil of a suddenly burgeoning love in the Coorong; the spiritual impact of sunrise near Uluru; the long, slow devotion within an almost accidental marriage; and the loss and rediscovery of filial and paternal love.

The play interweaves a series of connected stories, as seven people confront the mysteries of their past in order to understand their future, revealing how patterns of betrayal, love and abandonment are passed on. Until finally, well into the future, as the desert is inundated with rain, one young man finds the courage to defy the legacy.

This haunting, poetic and timely play by one of Australia's most respected playwrights lives long in the memory for its grace, humanity and unconventional wisdom.

**Brendan Cowell, *Ruben Guthrie***

**Company B**

On the surface, *Ruben Guthrie* is a play about the effects of alcoholism on every aspect of one's life. Ruben Guthrie is the creative guru at an ad agency and even his boss thinks that alcohol is the essential stimulus for his creative genius. Even his parents, who know his weaknesses, love to have a drink with their son. Ruben lives the Australian stereotype of every social occasion starting with a drink. It is when he stops drinking that, ironically, his life seemingly begins to fall apart. All his security blankets are taken away and the journey through hell begins.

Playwright Brendan Cowell takes all the stereotypical characters and situations and breaths life and depth into them. As we know there are no easy solutions to this addiction and many solutions are raised in the play by his family, friends and colleagues. It is easy for them to encourage him forward, but he sees that they do not themselves do what they say. Alcohol has seeped so deeply into the fabric of Australian life that to say 'no' to it is almost unpatriotic. *Ruben Guthrie* takes us into an unsentimental journey of the main character's self discovery and his striving for a new lease on life. It is an almost impossible task for him, but a most involving experience for the reader.

**Tom Holloway, *Don't Say the Words*, Griffin Theatre Company, co-produced with the Tasmanian Theatre Company, Currency Press Pty Ltd**

*Don't Say the Words* is an 'epic in miniature' inspired by Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

After a decade under siege – a city has finally fallen. But ten years of fury have taken their toll. For an officer returning from this epic campaign, it is time to put the horrors of war behind him, and take back his place in the family home. For the officer's wife, it is time to begin again.

This exceptional, daring and confronting work is a rare beast – a contemporary tragedy that enacts rather than recounts its emotional and ethical conflicts. Tom Holloway’s love of language – particularly the riffs and rhythms of colloquial Australian speech – is evident in every contorted, painful and specific phrase. The world of the play is a crucible of searing emotion and unpredictable response. *Don’t Say the Words* is theatre at the forefront of change. Holloway’s work never apologises for its content or form. This is a stunning work by a young playwright which anticipates an important body of work.

**Daniel Keene, *The Serpent’s Teeth*, Sydney Theatre Company  
Currency Press Pty Ltd**

The two one-act plays forming *The Serpent’s Teeth – Citizens* and *Soldiers* are poetic, thoughtful and probing. The plays are self-contained yet imaginatively connected in their exploration of the effects of war, loss and resilience.

The first play – *Citizens* – is set at the dividing wall of an unspecified war-torn country. A series of grippingly juxtaposed events occur and a picture of life is revealed in the fragments. Over the course of the play, the fragility and nobility of the human spirit at its most vulnerable is carefully probed and laid bare. The second play – *Soldiers* – is set in an echoing Air Force hangar, where family members gather to receive the bodies of their sons, brothers and friends lost in an unspecified conflict abroad. The initial connection they share is the battle that claimed their loved ones.

Within the context of world events each scenario of both plays resonates with intelligence, emotion and character. Together with Daniel Keene’s deliberate ambiguity there is space for each audience to write their own play within these performance texts. *The Serpent’s Teeth* is an assured contemporary play in every way that well deserves its inclusion on the shortlist.

**Damien Millar, *The Modern International Dead*  
Griffin Theatre, in association with Parramatta Riverside, Currency Press  
Pty Ltd**

*The Modern International Dead* delves into minds of a special group of Australians who every year abandon their comfortable lives down under and head straight into the world’s hell spots to bring humanitarian or medical relief to the suffering. Why do they do this? What problems do they encounter? Playwright Damien Millar has digested hundreds of hours of interviews and interwoven those stories into the lives of his three main characters: Luke, the soldier who becomes an aid worker; Bridgette, who went from religion to counselling; and Rod, the scientist and weapons inspector.

The beauty of the work lies in depiction of the real world these workers face in the field. There is no sentimentality when the power of politics enters the arena and compromise becomes the only solution. The diversity of voices first appears random, but eventually the stories come together as a united voice crying out with anger and despair. This play truthfully displays the disbelief and frustrations of those who have gone out ‘to save the world’, but who have had to come to the realisation that they are not really able to change, or even affect in any way, the course of war.

**Tom Wright, *The Women of Troy*  
Sydney Theatre Company**

In his adaptation of Euripides' *The Women of Troy*, playwright Tom Wright has distilled and modernised the language for our times. The play commences with the aftermath of the sacking of Troy. It delves into the inner thoughts and turmoils of Hecuba, Queen of Troy and the other women of the royal family, including Cassandra, Andromache and Helen. It is truly an anti-war piece which attacks the macho culture of soldiers and the dehumanisation of women.

Wright constructs a series of honest and viscerally stinging monologues for the characters to voice their anguish, regrets and anger. It is regrettable that the script probably cannot easily involve anyone who is not already familiar with Euripides' epic tale and its tragic characters. The play is a montage of unlinked emotional moments rather than a dramatic journey of discovery. The script does not include the words of the Chorus, but only lists them as 'singing'. What a pity to lose such a vital 'character' usually present in classic Greek drama. What remain are tremendously involving monologues searching for a play.