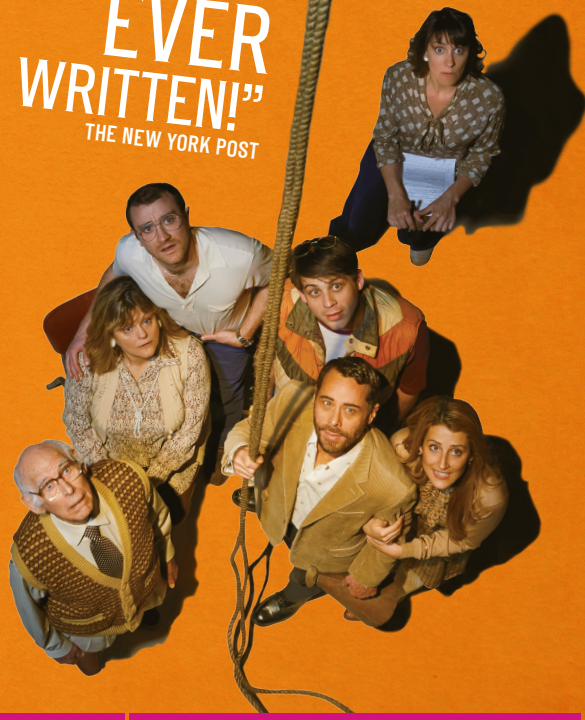


SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY AND QANTAS PRESENT

NOISES OFF

BY MICHAEL FRAYN
“THE
FUNNIEST
FARCE
EVER
WRITTEN!”
THE NEW YORK POST



17 FEB – 5 APR 2014
DRAMA THEATRE, SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

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THE BRITISH COMEDY MASTERPIECE
BROUGHT TO THE STAGE BY JONATHAN BIGGINS
AND A STELLAR AUSTRALIAN CAST

DIRECTOR
JONATHAN BIGGINS
SET DESIGNER
MARK THOMPSON
COSTUME DESIGNER
JULIE LYNCH

LIGHTING DESIGNER
NIGEL LEVINGS
SOUND DESIGNER
KINGSLEY REEVE

WITH
ALAN DUKES
LINDSAY FARRIS
MARCUS GRAHAM
RON HADDRIK
DANIELLE KING

GENEVIEVE LEMON
TRACY MANN
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PLAY-WITHIN-A-PLAY CONVENTION

Throughout theatrical history, playwrights have been incorporating the meta-narrative convention into the plots of their plays. This structure involves characters putting on plays or smaller plays that sit inside the larger play itself and are presented while the main narrative is paused. This ‘play-within-a-play’ convention serves many different purposes and has been used by playwrights in differing ways, depending on the Theatrical Style. Playwrights have used the conventions to highlight themes, strengthen meaning and frame the action.

A play-within-a-play has many different names including a story-within-a-story, a nested story, or mise en abyme which is the French literary term that derives from the practice of heraldry where an image of a small shield is placed within a larger shield.

SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare used this convention most notably in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Hamlet*. The device also features in his plays *Love’s Labours Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a play-within-a-play is featured in order to highlight the main theme of the play – forbidden love. Throughout the play, three interconnecting plots come together to create the larger play. One of these is the mechanicals, an amateur and mostly incompetent group of actors from the mortal world who are putting on the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* as the entertainment for the royal wedding. Shakespeare has deliberately incorporated *Pyramus and Thisbe* as it also centres around forbidden love, much like that shared by Hermia and Lysander.

In *Hamlet*, the theatrical convention is used by Prince Hamlet when putting on a play to mirror the events of the story. This play, called *The Mouse Trap*, was created by Hamlet to ‘catch a rat’ (his uncle, Claudius). It features the murder of a King by his brother, just as Prince Hamlet believes his Uncle Claudius killed his father, the King.

BRECHT

German political theatre practitioner, Bertholt Brecht featured a play-within-a-play in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. A group of fruit pickers and goat farmers, who both want to occupy a valley, are shown a story about a servant girl who is awarded a child instead of its natural mother, an aristocrat, because of her selfless devotion to the child. This action of the play is ‘framed’ for the audience, while also highlighting the theme or political point about lawful ownership and justice versus common good. In the words of Azdak in the play “...what there is shall belong to those who are good for it...”

Similarly, in Brecht’s *Man Equals Man* the play *The Elephant Calf* is performed in the theatre foyer during interval. It highlights the main political points of the play: the individual and the collective and the ability to mould and shape people.

FRAYN AND NOISES OFF

Playwright Michael Frayn’s decision to base the play *Noises Off* around a group of actors putting on a play called *Nothing On* allows him to comment (and mock!) the very essence of performing a play, from the frazzled assistant stage manager to the messy love triangles that sometimes take place off stage. *Noises Off* encompasses a play-within-a-play, and a farce within a farce in which actors play actors playing characters. The play-within-a-play allows the styles of comedy and farce to be taken to the extreme as the plot spirals out of control as the fiction of *Nothing On* blends with the reality of *Noises Off*.