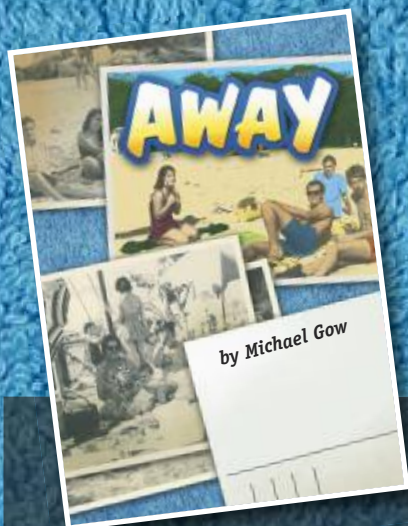


## Up, Up and Away!



by Michael Gow

Phoenix's 2009 season of Australian plays opens with a magical production of Michael Gow's classic *Away*.

We are delighted once again to welcome back one of our most talented and hard working set designers, Maureen Cartledge, her design for *Away* is as always, exceptional. We welcome back the wonderful Annette van Roden (*The Sum of Us*) as well as a band of new and talented actors who are making their mark on the family of characters audiences know and love. They are under the direction of Phoenix actress and member Lyndelle Green. The production is also in the capable hands of the Company's dedicated stage manager, Tania Kraus, who has also sourced many of the period specific props. *Away* is essentially a period play set in the 1960s and Coco Kohlhagan has stepped up to assist with the costume design. After watching a rehearsal of *Away*, I am very excited about what

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*Above: Dannielle Jackson as Meg and Mitch Feltscheer as Tom.*

*Right: Gerry Smith as Harry and Abi Rayment as Vic.*



**AWAY OPENS MARCH 21ST**

[www.phoenixtheatre.com.au](http://www.phoenixtheatre.com.au)

## Away

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**Phoenix will be offering up to its March/April audiences. The performances are rich and authentic and the cast are working beautifully as an ensemble. The period specific costumes are equally good.**

**I remember reading a fab article in the paper on the eve of the play's 20th anniversary revival by Griffin Theatre at the Stables in 2006. The article was an interview with writer Michael Gow and Griffin's then Artistic Director David Berthold. I have included excerpts from that article for your interest.**

Michael Gow was feeling the heat. But not all of it was due to the 40-degree temperature inside the Stables Theatre the night his play *Away* premiered 20 years ago.

He was feeling his mother's wrath. Alarmed at the drama unfolding on stage, by interval she refused to leave her seat. "She thought I'd revealed the most hideous secrets of our family," says Gow.

Only when audience members approached Gow after the performance to tell him how much they were reminded of their own mothers was she pacified.

"Then she realised it wasn't about her at all, that it was about a certain type of family and situation and it wasn't a personal attack," he says.

Gow's play, about three Australian families on a Christmas camping holiday in the 1960s, has engaged audiences ever since. It has been a staple on the school curriculum, been staged overseas and has been performed repeatedly around the country.

*Away's* unique mix of satire, stock suburban characters and fairies - with a deeply serious and painful core - sharply contrasted with the issue-based naturalism of the time. Its depth and originality was recognised as soon as it premiered in January 1986, directed by Peter Kingston with a cast that included Geoff Morell and Vanessa Downing.

"A fantasia reaffirming the great Shakespearian themes of suffering separation, regeneration and reconciliation," is how the Herald's critic, H.G. Kippax, described it.

Although the play features characters who are the product of an era - British migrants, a family grieving for a son killed in Vietnam - its concerns transcend time and the work invites reinterpretation.

In part, it is a play about children dying before their parents.

"It's about the wrong generation going first," Gow says.

The play appeared in Sydney in the late 1980s, as a young generation faced a deadly threat. So when a colleague described the work - in which a youth faces a terminal illness - as an early AIDS play, the description resonated with Gow. But it is not the only reason the play struck a chord, Gow believes.

It came as Australians were prepared to look beyond either the sunny self-image embodied in the movie *Crocodile Dundee* or the mythic embodied in *Gallipoli*.

"In Australia, there's always this discussion about who are we. In the 1980s, the discussion stopped being quite so naive and started becoming more critical. [We began to consider] that you might find out about who you are not just by looking at the good things," Gow says.

"This play was more ordinary [than *Crocodile Dundee* or *Gallipoli*]. It was looking behind the everyday rather than the heroic and the mythic and all that outback stuff."

The play captures a vanishing era - now even more so - yet also questions the nostalgic gloss with which we look back and long for a relaxed and comfortable Australia. "It never was," Gow says. "The suburban good life has always been a mask for a lot of anxiety and unhappiness and stuff ... There are no good old days."

*Away with the fairies, with a mother's blessing* - Joyce Morgan  
SMH arts review June 7 2006



Murray Dwyer as Ray and Annette van Roden as Coral.



Front: Dannielle Jackson, 2nd row: Phil Chaffey and Annette van Roden, 3rd row: Gerry Smith and Murray Dwyer, back: Abi Rayment, Hayley Staveley and Wendy Morton.

**Phoenix's production opens on Saturday 21st March. Our two extra matinee performances are already sold out - so book early!**

# Burning the Midnight Oil



After signing on as Artistic Director (under Helen Tonkin) in September 2004, and planning my first season of plays in 2006, I resigned my post at the 2009 AGM. Like the essence of the business itself, it has been a challenging, fruitful and educational ride. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ray Frankel and Helen Tonkin for the opportunity of holding this position for Phoenix – for their belief and support. I would also like to thank everyone who has guided, advised and supported me in my journey. Thank you to all the brilliant designers, technicians, crews and divine casts I have worked with in my own productions and all the new directors who have worked with Phoenix during this time. I would also like to thank all the Committee people I have worked with over the years.

Returning part time to NIDA, a baby and finishing my first play commission has meant that something had to give. I will of course be on hand to advise the Committee re artistic matters as required and will continue writing for Focus! I also hope to direct another production in the near future.

However the Phoenix juggernaut rolls on as the Company continues to evolve and it is in capable hands. I would like to welcome Alex Byron, who has directed two productions for Phoenix – *The Boys* and *Proof*. Her dedicated, intelligent and organised production approach coupled with her efficient work ethic, planted a seed for me which I know will bear bountiful fruits for Phoenix's future when Alex comes on board as our 2010 season Artistic Director. Welcome Alex.

On behalf of the membership I would like to extend a hearty welcome to the new Committee. Congratulations to Helen Kohlhagan who has stepped into the role of President; welcome back to Tania, Scott and Len and welcome to new Committee member Michael Heffernan.

Good Night, and Good Luck.

Tonya

## Phoenix's New Committee for 2009

President	Helen Kohlhagan
Secretary	Tania Kraus
Membership Secretary	Len Kasserman
Photographer General Member	Scott Clare
General Member	Michael Heffernan
Guest 2010 Season Artistic Director	Alex Byron

Phoenix and its members would also like to acknowledge the work of our very excellent and not so silent book-keeper, Mr Ian Hastings.

## The Peach Season auditions in May



Check our website for updates

## Flights of the Phoenixes

- Ⓢ Simon Greer (*Up For Grabs*, *The Hypochondriac*) is directing Rockdale Musical Society's production of *Miss Saigon*. He is assisted by Andrew Castle (*Madness of George 3*) and the cast features John Burfitt (*Up For Grabs*). 13-21 March, bokings 9591 3395.
- Ⓢ Willoughby Theatre's upcoming production of *A Chorus Line* will feature the work of several Phoenixites – director: Janina Hamerlok (*Nunsense*, *Edwin Drood*), associate director: Tonya Wheatley (*Madness of Geroge 3*, *Gaslight*), set design: Simon Greer (*Up for Grabs*, *The Hypochondriac*), cast: Scott Clare (*Madness of George 3*, *The Hypochondriac*), John Burfitt (*Up For Grabs*) stage manager: Kathy Coates (*The Hypochondriac*). 28 Apr – 9 May, bookings 1300 727 440.
- Ⓢ Dave Kirkham (*Madness of George 3*, *Gift of the Gorgon*) stars in *The Herbal Bed* at the New Theatre Newtown. 19 Mar – 11 Apr. Bookings MCA 1300 306 776.
- Ⓢ Scott Clare (*Madness of George 3*) appeared in the *25th Annual Putnam Spelling Bee*, produced by Stage Artz, at the Zenith Theatre in February.
- Ⓢ **2009 Short and Sweet festival of One -Act plays** (Sydney) Winner of the 2009 Short and Sweet Wildcards Awards was *Remembering the Kites*, by Singapore playwright Harry Allen. The cast included a stunning performance by Tim Hunter (*Gaslight*, *It's my Party*), with direction by Jennie Bazell (*Woman with Dogs Eyes*, *Playhouse Creatures*). Congratulations dynamic duo! Jennie also directed *One Star*. Alex Byron (*The Boys*, *Proof*) directed *Palindrome Love*. Scott Grimley (*The Boys*) wrote and directed *Coleslaw Love*.
- Ⓢ Barry French (*The Burning*) directed *Take Me Out* at the New Theatre as part of the Mardi Gras festival.