



Introductory Notes: *Jack Maggs*

Hello and welcome to the Audio Introductory notes for *Jack Maggs*, by Samuel Adamson (based on the novel by Peter Carey).

The State Theatre Company, South Australia in association with Adelaide Festival Centre presents a World Premiere of *Jack Maggs*.

Audio Described Performances and Pre-Show Briefing for blind and vision impaired patrons will take place at the Dunstan Playhouse on Saturday, 23 November, with the briefing at 1.00pm, and the performance at 2.00pm, and on Monday, 25 November, the briefing beginning at 5.30pm, a 6.30pm performance, with a post-show Q&A.

The performance run time is approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes including a 20 minute interval.

Jack Maggs by playwright Samuel Adamson is based on the novel by Peter Carey. Step back in time to 19th century London, where intrigue and mystery mix in *Jack Maggs*. Peter Carey's best-selling and Miles Franklin's Award-winning "reworking" of Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*, *Jack Maggs* comes alive on stage in a sweeping new adaptation by South Australian playwright Samuel Adamson.

The story follows the enigmatic ex-convict Jack Maggs (Carey's version of Magwitch) returning to London from Australia and embarking on a relentless quest to find his 'son' Henry Phipps, who has mysteriously disappeared. Maggs soon becomes entangled in the web of Phipps' neighbour, Percy Buckle and his bizarre household, where he makes a deal with young novelist and "mesmerist" Tobias Oates (or is it Charles Dickens himself?) to find Phipps. Oates has other plans though, and in *Maggs*, might just find the perfect inspiration for his new novel. All of this takes place despite Jack knowing that **"You're a dead man if they find you"**.

CONTENT warning: Contains coarse language, adult themes, fog, theatrical haze, smoke and blood and loud noises.

1. Set description and Props

This play is presented as a play, with all actors onstage eavesdropping or helping with scene changes throughout the performance. Various pieces of furniture and set are wheeled in or rearranged conspicuously to indicate scene changes. The Actors' production occurs in 1879, and their play is set in 1837. All of the props and sets have a ramshackle appearance, painted or patched together crudely, adding to the sense that we are always watching a play.

The stage, with black painted walls and floor, is bare, lit by a single warm bulb standing at the centre front of the stage. Several rope pulleys hang from the ceiling, and a series of curtains are drawn to either side of the stage, or resting on the stage floor to be hoisted up



during different scenes. Two short black walls are nearly hidden in plain view, on either side of the stage, the main props are wardrobes which are hidden behind these on-stage wings when the play opens.

The main curtains are a pair of billowing white patchwork curtains, cobbled together with irregular shapes and sizes of thin grimy fabric, they open and close on either side of the stage, once they appear. Throughout the show, they are pulled together in the centre to become a backdrop, or projection screen, to display shadow puppetry and projected images. Later, Tobias's home office is shown with more refined full-length curtains, seamless and clean rather than patched together and stained. A large patchwork swag made of worn denim-blue canvas stretches across the majority of the stage, hoisted above and in front of the main curtains. As lights change throughout the play, they highlight the ruffled and pleated textures of the fabric in warm yellow, white, blue and blood-red tones. A series of warm footlights dot the front of the stage.

At the back of the stage, an old dark timber piano, a chaise lounge with aging brown velvet padding, a white painted writing desk and a series of antique timber wardrobes which have been customized as movable trolleys to indicate different settings.

Two large double wardrobes have one of their doors painted like tall Victorian London buildings in grey and pastel colours. Characters exit and enter occasionally through these doors, or hide inside them, the other door has been removed and reveals hanging clothes in each house (costume pieces that are later used by the troupe of actors). These flank the stage throughout most of the performance.

The wardrobes are present on stage when we are in Percy Buckle's lounge or snuggerly, which features a series of upholstered armchairs, and the brown chaise lounge.

Later, Tobias Oates' drawing room features another wardrobe converted into a central timber fireplace with crackling fire. Above the fire a series of Christmas stockings are pinned to a wooden mantelpiece. Low floral-patterned upholstered armchairs adorn the room, and on the right side of the stage is Tobias's white painted writing desk. On the desk are a stack of writing books, some stationery and a human hand floating in a jar of green-ish formaldehyde.

Another wardrobe with the doors and back removed has only a square frame remaining, this becomes the interior of a horse drawn carriage, seating two performers, who sit oblivious to the hanging shirts beside them, which act like coach curtains.

A further moveable wardrobe or trolley is bedecked with draped and fringed curtains drawn to the sides, this is a flamboyant boudoir at the Floral Street Gentleman's Club in Covent Gardens. And yet another is a miniature version of the main stage, with blue overhead swag and long white side drapes.



Lighting is used as a device that allows several scenes to play out together on stage. The pools of overhead light create cameos suggesting where our attention should be, whilst also indicating the continuation of simultaneous storylines playing out.

2. Cast: Characters and Costumes

When the audience enters the Playhouse, the actors are already on stage and limbering up, in various stages of dress and undress. The period costumes are nineteenth-century with a nod to current aesthetics; while evoking a dark Gothic London, they are vaudevillian and music hall, both sumptuous and yet grubby. The aesthetic builds the themes of the play, poverty and opulence are overlaid with mystery and intrigue, deceit and decay.

We first meet **Mercy Larkin** played by **Ahunim Abebe**, she is both a lively kitchen maid and the narrator of our play. She has a mop of short dark corkscrew curls and brown skin. She wears a white shirt with an overlarge bow and collar at the throat, large, long puffed-sleeves, and a skirt over layers of petticoat that ends in a frill at her mid-calf, revealing beige tights and black lace-up boots with a low heel. Over this a bibbed apron in shades of brown with two small pockets and rows of frills. Later she adds an oversized maids bow to her hair.

Mercy, acting as the play's narrator, is often in hiding or watching the action from a distance, unseen by the others. She begins the play and frequently describes the action or fills in the gaps, speaking directly to us.

Jacqy Philips plays **Ma Britten, Mrs Halfstairs and Old Mercy**.

Ma Britten is an iron-fisted and infamous 'doctor'. She wears a grey unruly wig under a small cap and dark glasses, a white long-sleeved shirt with a horizontally striped black and white skirt that bunches irregularly around her body. (Her right arm is in a sling.) Her legs are covered by white pantaloons and on her feet are low-heeled ankle-length brown boots.

Mrs Halfstairs is a tyrannical housekeeper; she wears a small mop hat over her white curled hair, and a brown apron edged with a frill at the knee.

Old Mercy is a very wise playwright.

Jack Maggs played by **Mark Saturno** is an enigmatic stranger, belligerent and bruised. He first appears wearing a black top hat, with a soft brown travelling kitbag slung over his shoulder. His patched knee-length grey sack overcoat has deep turned-back cuffs and hides a rich red waistcoat over a white shirt and loosely tied cravat. His vertically striped, grey and white long trousers are patched on the right knee and tucked into thick socks and brown laced boots.

Maggs is afflicted by a tic on the right side of his face, it is accompanied by the sound of a high-pitched piercing tin whistle. This squealing sound recurs frequently throughout the performance indicating Jack Maggs' having a painful flare-up, he then clutches his twitching face and collapses, this is often accompanied by a strobing white flash of light.



Nathan O’Keefe plays **Percy Buckle and Dr Grieves**.

Percy Buckle is a fussy and duck-legged ex-grocer, with a short, cropped beard. When first we meet, he wears a long navy blue and white striped apron over a white shirt with extravagant sleeves, straight legged breeches and soft brown shoes. When the apron is removed, he dons a long-line sleeveless double-breasted vest, a sombre but luxurious tapestry of browns. To this is added a large pale cravat. At times his vest is removed, and his long white shirt is pulled out to float like a nightdress around his calves. Later he wears a round Fez style hat and the most elegant, beaded slippers with upturned toes.

Dr Grieves is a stern doctor, he wears a pale top hat and floor length patchwork cloak in autumn toning’s.

Tobias Oates played by **James Smith** is an up-and-coming writer, cherubic, charming and pugnacious. His neatly combed-back brown hair and long sideburns compliment his fine rimmed glasses. He wears a multicoloured waistcoat of small, patchworked squares in colourful luxurious fabrics over a cream-coloured shirt with long-legged pants, and black shoes. Tobias carries a black gentleman’s cane with a solid silver handle or topper and tip when out walking.

Jelena Nicdao plays **Miss Mott and Lizzie Warriner**.

Miss Mott is a fretful cook; her curly hair is covered by a mop hat. Her blouse has elbow length sleeves and a small shawl is tied around her shoulders, she wears a longer gathered skirt in green with a gathered apron and tan coloured boots.

Lizzie Warriner is a kind, clever and vulnerable eighteen-year-old, the sister-in-law of Tobias Oates. Over her smooth dark hair, she sports a large cream coloured confection of a hat that ties in a bow beneath her chin. Her long green gown has elbow length sleeves and a tightly laced bodice.

Rachel Burke plays **Hawthorne, Mary Oates, and Henry Phipps**.

Hawthorne is a boozy actor; his blonde hair is drawn back smoothly with a tiny hat that sits on a rakish angle. He wears a long extravagant coat of small velvet squares with a luxurious fur collar, cuffs and magnificent deep fur edging around the hem.

Mary Oates is the long-suffering wife of Tobias Oates; she is a woman of hidden strengths. She has a young babe-in-arms, John, who she carries swaddled in a pale blanket. Her pale hair is caught in an up-do, small ringlets held in place by a narrow band around her head. She wears a red handkerchief at her throat, a white shirt and bunched up red ruffled skirts over white petticoats and brown dainty heeled shoes.

Henry Phipps is a fair-haired dandy, vain and decadent. His hair is curled and piled high on top of his head like a pompadour or curly quiff, he wears a white shirt with a large lavender bow tied at the neck with long trailing ends and a fitted purple frock coat, his underwear comprises fine silk drawers, white stockings, and heeled leather shoes. His affectations extend to carrying a pair of white gloves.



Dale March plays **Edward Constable, George Conklin and Partridge.**

Edward Constable is a tormented footman, He wears a powdered curled wig, with a short ponytail caught in a ribbon, white shirt and breeches, his livery is yellow. He has black garters on each leg above patterned socks and brown laced shoes.

George Conklin is a landlord with a past, given to wringing his hands. His long brown hair escapes from underneath a brown Australian style bushman's hat. He wears a tight sleeved shirt with a knee length brown apron wrapped around his waist.

Wilfred Partridge is a thief-taker disguised as a clergyman; he wears a clergyman's hat with a chain of office around his neck, a pale brown knee length surplus, gathered onto a yoke and a long expensive looking patchwork floor length cloak with a brown lining, over the top.

The actors make the music live on stage, there is a piano pushed along the back wall, a violin, and a tin whistle. They also form a Chorus, with 6 or 7 forming a group that advances on the main protagonist in relevant scenes or forms a tableaux vivant (where the players freeze in place). They are slightly threatening and highlight the witnessing role of the servants and the narrator within the play and draw the audience in to share this connected space and experience.

3. Creatives

The Creative Team

Playwright:	Samuel Adamson (based on the novel by Peter Carey)
Director:	Geordie Brookman
Set & Costume Designer:	Alisa Paterson
Lighting Designer:	Nigel Levings
Composer:	Hilary Kleinig
Sound Designer:	Andrew Howard
Accent Coach:	Jennifer Innes
Assistant Director:	Annabel Matheson
Production Manager:	Gabrielle Hornhardt
Stage Manager:	Bridget Samuel

Getting to the Venue: The performance is at the Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre. The recommended Dunstan Playhouse drop off zone is at the northern end of the Riverbank Footbridge on War Memorial Drive (walk across the Footbridge to Dunstan Playhouse) or at the Intercontinental Hotel (walk north between the Intercontinental Hotel and Railway Station along the lane way to the Riverbank). There is also a drop off area and two accessible car spaces on lower Festival Drive, accessible from the west via Montefiore Road.

Adelaide Festival Centre is easily accessible by public transport, including the tram (stop at Railway Station), trains, buses and a free bus service that operates on a loop throughout the city and North Adelaide with stops on the corner of King William Road and North Terrace.

Wheelchair access & Companion Cards

Wheelchair accessible seats, companion cards and other accessible bookings can be made via phone on 08 8415 5353 (Monday – Friday, 9.00am – 5.00pm), or via email at tickets@statetheatrecompany.com.au

This completes the audio introduction for *Jack Maggs*.
Your Describers will be Hen Vaughan and Jules Fielke.

For more information on audio described performances please contact Access2Arts using the
email address audio.describer@access2arts.org.au