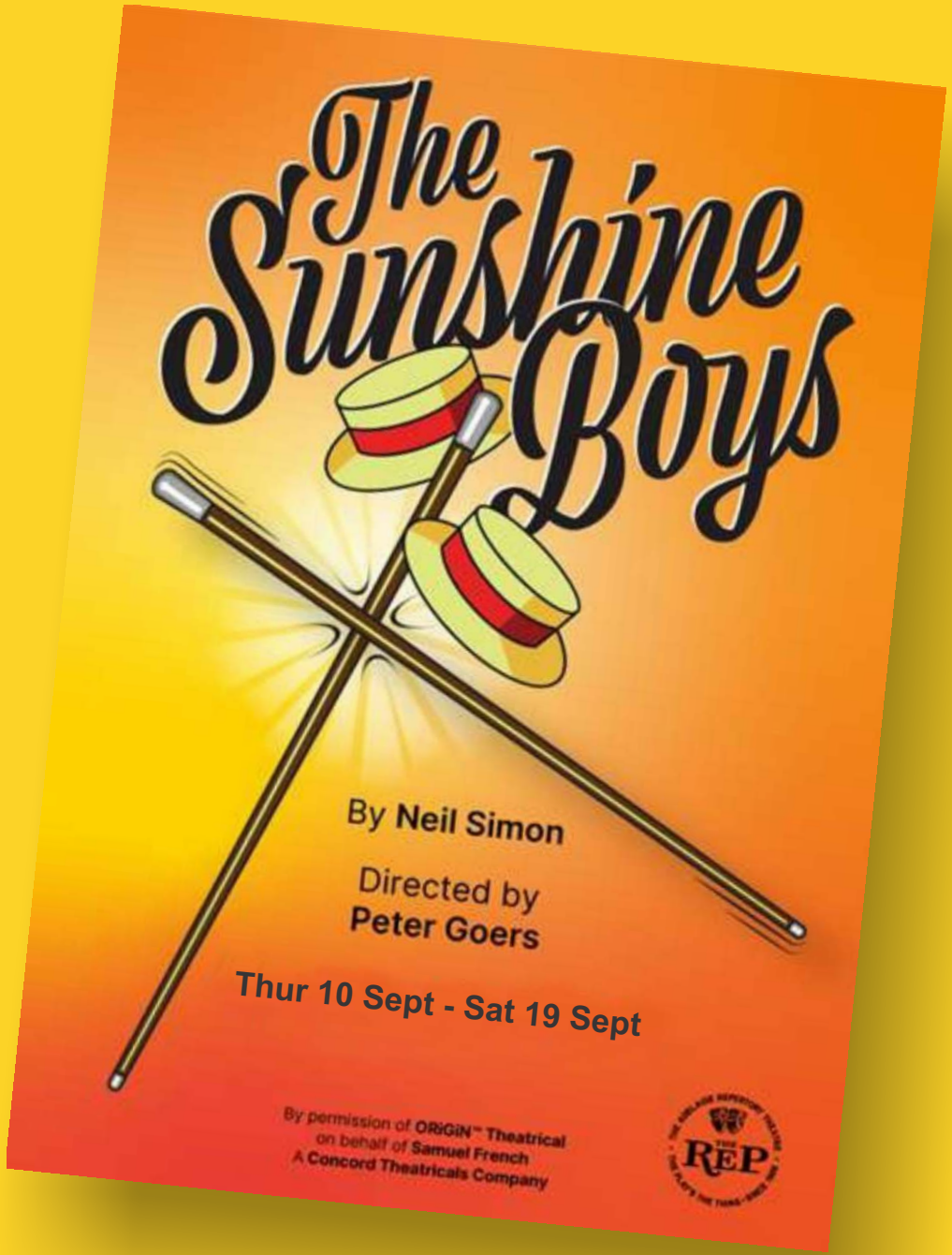
Issue No 2 August 2026

REPERTOIRE

Newsletter of Adelaide's oldest theatre group



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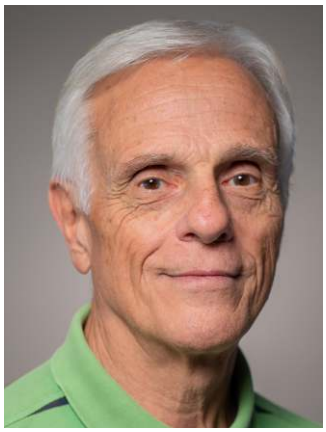
August 2026

Meet some of the cast bringing The Sunshine Boys Back to Life

With a director like Peter Goers at the helm… what could possibly go wrong?

As the Adelaide Rep prepares to open Neil Simon's 'The Sunshine Boys' this September, it's clear we're in for a comedy powered by performers who know exactly how to make an audience roar. This cast isn't just talented — they're battle-tested, beloved, and ready to deliver the kind of ensemble magic The Rep is famous for.

Rob Cusenza as Willie Clark



If you saw Rob Cusenza as Banjo in 'The Man Who Came to Dinner', you'll remember the sound of the audience rolling in the aisles. Rob brings that same explosive comic energy to Willie Clark — the cranky, stubborn half of a once- legendary vaudeville duo. His timing is razor-sharp, his physical comedy fearless, and his ability to turn a single line into a laugh-quake is unmatched. Willie is a man who refuses to go gently into retirement, and Rob is the perfect performer to make his bluster irresistible.

Robin Schmelzkopf (Smacka) as Al Lewis



Opposite Rob is Robin Schmelzkopf — "Smacka" to just about everyone — stepping into the shoes of Al Lewis, Willie's long- suffering partner. Smacka brings warmth, wit, and a beautifully understated humour to the role. Where Willie is volcanic, Al is dry, measured, and quietly exasperated. Together, they create the kind of comic friction that makes Neil Simon's writing sing. Their chemistry is the beating heart of the show.

Penni Hamilton- Smith as the Nurse



And then there's Penni Hamilton- Smith, returning to the Rep stage after her unforgettable turn as Miss Preen. Remember how you laughed every single time she opened those doors? Penni brings that same crisp, no-nonsense charm to the Nurse — a woman who has absolutely no time for showbiz theatrics, yet somehow ends up in the middle of them. Her grounded presence is the perfect counterbalance to Willie and Al's chaos, and her comic instincts guarantee she'll steal any scene she enters.

Directed by Peter Goers

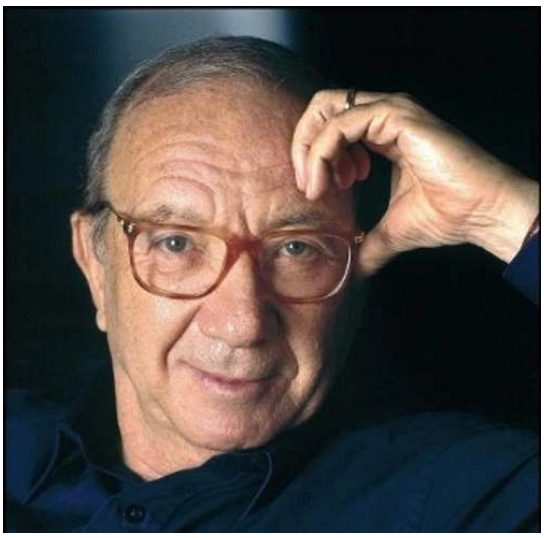


Guiding this gloriously mismatched trio is director Peter Goers, whose love of classic comedy and deep understanding of performers make him the ideal captain for this ship. Peter knows how to honour Neil Simon's rhythm, how to shape character- driven humour, and how to let actors shine without ever losing the heartbeat of the story.

With Rob Cuzensa, Smacka Schmelzkopf, Penni Hamilton- Smith, and Peter Goers steering the production, The Sunshine Boys promises to be a celebration of everything the Rep does best: sharp comedy, rich ensemble work, and performances that leave audiences glowing.

What could possibly go wrong? With this team — absolutely nothing. Except, of course, everything that's meant to.

Neil Simon: The Master of American Comedy Who Still Makes Us Laugh



Before the curtain rises on '*The Sunshine Boys'*, it's worth pausing to appreciate the man behind the mayhem. Neil Simon wasn't just a playwright — he was a phenomenon.

For decades, he was Broadway's most bankable writer, a comic craftsman whose plays blended sharp wit, human frailty, and an uncanny understanding of how people irritate, adore, and endlessly misunderstand one another.

Simon's brilliance lies in his precision. His jokes aren't just funny — they're engineered. Every line has rhythm, every pause has purpose, and every character is drawn with affection, even when they're behaving badly (which they often are). He wrote comedy the way musicians write jazz: with structure, swing, and soul.

But what truly sets Simon apart is his humanity. Beneath the laughs, his plays pulse with real emotion — loneliness, longing, nostalgia, and the complicated love that binds people together even when they drive each other mad. *'The Sunshine Boys'* is a perfect example: two old vaudevillians who can't stand each other, yet can't quite let go of the partnership that defined their lives.

Simon understood that comedy isn't just about punchlines. It's about people. And that's why his work endures.

For the Adelaide Rep — a company renowned for ensemble chemistry and character-driven humour — Simon is a natural fit. His plays reward actors who listen, respond, and spark off one another. They thrive on timing, trust, and the joyful chaos of collaboration. In other words, they thrive at the Rep.

As we prepare to bring *'The Sunshine Boys'* to the ARTS Theatre this September, we honour a playwright whose legacy shaped modern comedy and whose work continues to delight audiences around the world. Neil Simon may have written about cranky old men, mismatched couples, and dysfunctional families — but he gave them heart, and he gave us laughter.

And really, what more could a theatre company ask for?

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A Glimpse into the Golden Age of Vaudeville

Where comedy was king, timing was everything, and two men in bowler hats could stop the world for a laugh.


Abbott and Costello

Long before television, before Broadway became a global brand, and long before comedians had Netflix specials, there was vaudeville — the beating heart of popular entertainment from the late 1800s to the 1930s. It was loud, chaotic, joyful, and utterly democratic. If you could make people laugh, gasp, or applaud, you had a place on the bill.

Vaudeville was a variety show in the truest sense: comedians, acrobats, magicians, singers, dancers, animal acts, novelty performers, and the occasional "serious" dramatic recitation all shared the same stage. Audiences never knew what was coming next — and that was the thrill.

At the centre of it all were the comic duos. Two performers, often mismatched in height, temperament, or worldview, bouncing off one another with impeccable timing. The "funny man and straight man" dynamic was born here, refined here, and perfected here. Their banter, bickering, and beautifully choreographed chaos laid the foundation for modern sitcoms, sketch comedy, and the kind of character- driven humour Neil Simon adored.

Vaudeville was also a training ground. Performers learned to read a room, adjust on the fly, and deliver jokes with surgical precision. If a gag didn't land, you changed it. If a routine killed, you kept it forever. Comedy was a craft, and vaudeville was the workshop.

By the time Neil Simon wrote *'The Sunshine Boys'*, vaudeville had faded — but its spirit lived on. Willie Clark and Al Lewis are relics of that era: men shaped by smoky theatres, relentless touring schedules, and audiences who demanded laughter every night. Their rhythms, their stubbornness, their chemistry — all of it comes straight from the golden age.

And that's why *'The Sunshine Boys'* feels so timeless. It's not just a play about two old comedians. It's a love letter to a vanished world where humour was handmade, performers were larger than life, and the stage was a place where anything could happen.


The Marx Brothers


George Burns and Gracie Allen

Vaudeville may be gone, but its echoes remain — in every punchline, every double- take, and every perfectly timed pause that still makes audiences laugh today.

Lights, Camera, Vaudeville: The Film Versions of The Sunshine Boys

Neil Simon's cranky comedy duo didn't just conquer the stage — they made Hollywood laugh too. Neil Simon's *'The Sunshine Boys'* has charmed audiences since its 1972 Broadway debut, and it wasn't long before Hollywood came knocking. The play's explosive chemistry, razor- sharp dialogue, and timeless portrait of two ageing vaudevillians made it irresistible to filmmakers. Over the years, *'The Sunshine Boys'* has enjoyed several screen incarnations, each bringing its own flavour to Simon's classic comedy.

1975 Film
Walter Matthau and George Burns



The first and most famous adaptation arrived in 1975, directed by Herbert Ross.

Walter Matthau played Willie Clark with volcanic energy, while George Burns — returning to the screen after decades — delivered a beautifully understated, dry, and devastatingly funny Al Lewis.

Burns won an Academy Award for his performance, and the film became a comedy classic. It captured the heart of the play: two men who can't stand each other, yet can't quite live without the spark that only their partnership provides.

1996 TV Movie
Woody Allen and Peter Falk



Two decades later, Simon's story returned in a made- for- television film starring Woody Allen as Willie and Peter Falk as Al.

This version leaned into a more modern rhythm, with Allen's neurotic energy bouncing off Falk's gravelly charm.

It offered a fresh take for a new generation, proving that the play's themes — ageing, ego, nostalgia, and the strange intimacy of long- term creative partnerships — remain evergreen.

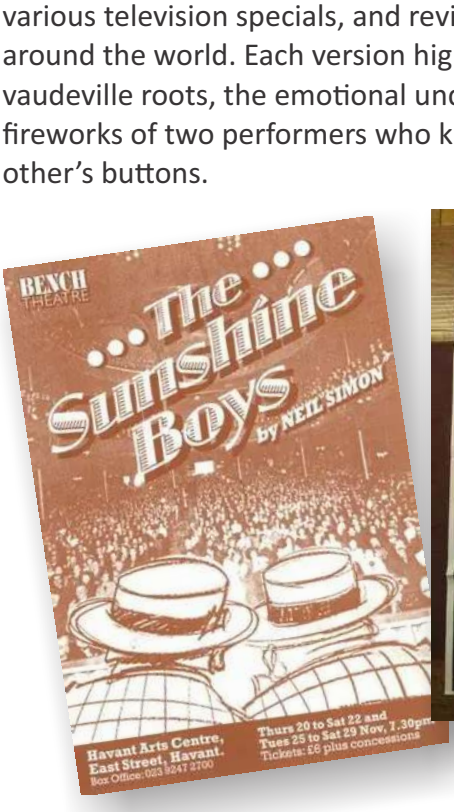




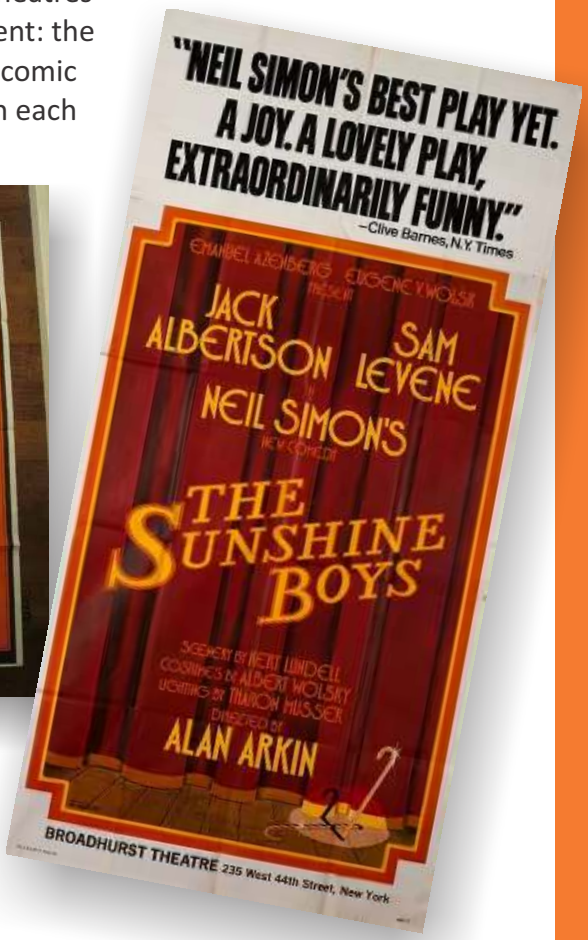
Lights, Camera, Vaudeville: The Film Versions of The Sunshine Boys

Other Adaptations & Legacy

Beyond these major productions, *'The Sunshine Boys'* has been filmed for stage, broadcast in various television specials, and revived countless times in theatres around the world. Each version highlights something different: the vaudeville roots, the emotional undercurrent, or the sheer comic fireworks of two performers who know exactly how to push each other's buttons.







And now, it's the Adelaide Rep's turn to carry the torch — with Rob Cusenza, Smacka Schmelzkopf, Penni Hamilton - Smith, and Peter Goers stepping into a legacy shared by Walter Matthau, George Burns, Woody Allen, and Peter Falk, along with others making up the full cast.

If history is any guide, audiences are in for a treat. After all, *'The Sunshine Boys'* has never failed to shine — whether under stage lights or on the silver screen.

Adelaide Rep's 2026 season is already shining — and we're only getting started.

After a triumphant start with *'The Man Who Came to Dinner'*, audiences and reviewers alike have been raving. One reviewer called it "a gloriously chaotic comic feast", while another praised the Rep's ensemble as "pitch- perfect, fast - paced, and irresistibly funny." Peter Goers' Sheridan Whiteside was described as "a masterclass in comic timing — a performance worth crossing the city for."

And the momentum continues.

Next up, *'The Sunshine Boys'* brings Neil Simon's legendary wit to the ARTS Theatre — a warm, sharp, laugh - out - loud tribute to showbiz, friendship, and the glorious messiness of ageing entertainers.

It's a season of classics, comedy, and sheer theatrical delight — and Adelaide audiences are loving every minute.

Why Comedy Shines Brightest at the Adelaide Rep

Celebrating a Legacy of Laughter and Ensemble Brilliance

For more than a century, the Adelaide Repertory Theatre has built a reputation for delivering comedy with heart, precision, and unmistakable flair.



"Mother and Son"

While the Rep's repertoire spans drama, classics and contemporary works it is comedy that has consistently drawn audiences back through the doors of the ARTS Theatre — eager for a night of sharp wit, warm nostalgia, and the kind of ensemble chemistry you simply can't manufacture.

"Well, Shut My Mouth"



Comedy is deceptively difficult. It demands timing, trust, and a cast that listens as closely as it speaks. It thrives on rhythm, generosity, and the ability to turn human foibles into shared joy. And this is where the Rep excels: in the collaborative craft of making people laugh together.



"Rules For Living"

Across recent seasons, audiences have seen this skill on full display —Their most recent production of "The Man Who Came to Dinner" was a classic example - from fast- paced farce, character- driven humour, from satire to beloved classics, the Rep's performers bring a grounded authenticity to comedy. They find truth inside the jokes and connection inside the chaos. It's ensemble work at its finest: actors supporting one another, building momentum, and creating the kind of electric rapport that makes every performance feel alive.

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Become Involved
Why not be part of the Rep Team

You don't need to be an actor to be involved with the Rep.

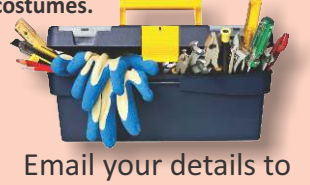
Every production is supported by teams of behind the scenes volunteers.

We need people who can prompt, paint, design, construct, show people to their seats; move sets, or sew costumes.

People who like to play with sound and lights, people to make tea and iron costumes.







Email your details to
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Why Comedy Shines Brightest at the Adelaide Rep



"The Man Who Came To Dinner"

This September, the tradition continues with Neil Simon's *'The Sunshine Boys'*, a comedy that celebrates the messy brilliance of showbiz partnerships. It's a perfect fit for the Rep — a story built on timing, tension, and the irresistible clash of personalities. The production showcases exactly what the company does best: strong character work, crisp comedic delivery, and an ensemble that understands how to turn friction into laughter.



"Nana's Naughty Knickers"

As Adelaide's oldest theatre company, the Rep has always championed community, creativity, and craft. Its comedies remind us why live theatre matters: because laughter shared in a room full of people is one of the simplest, purest joys we have. And because when performers trust one another, audiences feel it — and return for more.

"Shakespeare In Hollywood"



With *'The Sunshine Boys'* taking the stage from 10–19 September, audiences can look forward to another production that highlights the Rep's signature strengths. Expect warmth. Expect wit. Expect ensemble magic. And, of course, expect plenty of laughter — the kind that keeps the Rep's legacy shining bright.



"Noises Off"

2025 Season Awards

Congratulations are in order for several of our favourite Rep performers who were nominated for awards in our 2025 season. The Adelaide Critics Circle (ACCI) announced over 50 nominees across professional and community arts for their 2025 Annual Awards. A few notable 2025 nominees and award winners include:

- Community Individual Nominees: **Penni Hamilton-Smith** (*'Mother and Son'*), **Robyn Brookes** ('The Other Place'), **Emily Burns** (*'Shakespeare in Hollywood'*)
- Community Group Nominees: **The Adelaide Repertory Theatre** (*'The Other Place'*)
- Individual Actor (Community - Supporting Role): **Sandy Whitelaw** (*'Mother and Son'*)

BOB PEET receives O.A.M.



Congratulations to **Bob Peet** who this year received an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for his contribution to the arts. National and Community Recognition.

Bob is an adored theatre maker, director and set designer.

"On the 19th of January 2026 I celebrated my 86th birthday. A week later, on Australia Day I was awarded the Order of Australia Medal, the OAM, for services to the Performing Arts.

That award represents the cream on my cake, as I had decided to finally retire after working 70 years in the performing arts industry in one form or another. I created my last set for Adelaide Rep last November. In South Australia, like most places, when a community theatre group asks you to design a set for them that really means design, build and install. At my age the actual design part is easy, but the build is now beyond me.

That means that I now have time to finish my memoir, a work in progress for about six years on and off; it also means I can share stories of my life in this wonderful industry, both at a professional level, and combined with my other great love, community theatre. Receiving the OAM means a great deal to me and I feel honoured that a group of people have taken the trouble to nominate and recommend me for this award. Yes, I am honoured, feel humble and excited at the same time if that is possible.

For those who do not know me well I can advise that my life in this industry has been far from dull, taking to the stage in 'Showboat' at 18, joining the famous Tintookie Puppet company at 19, and working on and off as a puppeteer for 10 years, touring Australia and overseas. Then on to venue management, opening and managing 6 regional venues for the arts over 25 years, then opening the Lyric Theatre at the Star Casino in Sydney. After 2 years there, I ran away with the circus for the Big Top production of 'CATS' in a 2000 seat tent, followed by 'Grease' then 'Shout!' A 4 week stint at Riverside Theatres turned into 4 years, when I so called retired at the age of 67.

Then I spent many years running the workshop for Miranda Musical Society as it was then. Throughout my entire working life, I have had an active role in community theatre, directing and designing over 55 shows and now, even though I came to the Adelaide Hills to retire I still created sets for about 11 shows. Now, in my so-called retirement I produce concerts for seniors at the Capri Theatre in Adelaide, 6 a year, and 14 to date. As I said before, the OAM is the cream on my cake, a lovely topping to a career that I love. Of course, there are many people who are worthy of receiving this award, and I hope that they too will be recognised in this touching manner."

Congratulations to a worthy recipient. Well done



Board Members Update



Warren Fenn

"It has been an enjoyable few months getting to know board members and then some of the operational staff, volunteers and crews when recently doing a "bump-in" for 'The Man Who Came to Dinner' and then the "bump-out" a few weeks after. I'm finding each week that I learn even more about the Theatre, the communities we support, the clients and operations. I had a chance to spend some time doing a walk around of all the facilities in a more detailed way the past month or so too. There is a great culture that is promoted through the actions of our people involved in the operations and board, including volunteers which has been enjoyable to see. It has been exciting from my point of view seeing how everything works and getting some new experiences and appreciation for all the people behind the Theatre and what goes into making it such an engaging and entertaining experience for audiences. Hoping to help with a variety of maturity improvements in the compliance and management systems aspects of the organisation in the coming weeks / months.

I am hoping to continue to get opportunities to share my advice, expertise, and to volunteer ongoing so to speak to help keep the magic happening that is the The Rep and Arts Theatre."

Di Thompson



"My exposure to the Theatre board has been very interesting the past few months. Not being a performer, I find it fascinating how a show progresses from concept to stage.

Fabulous to see casts, volunteers and patrons interacting and supporting.

I hope to provide my skills to the board in the coming months and understanding more of theatre life.

I am keen to assist with engaging with existing and new volunteers".



Kyle Martin

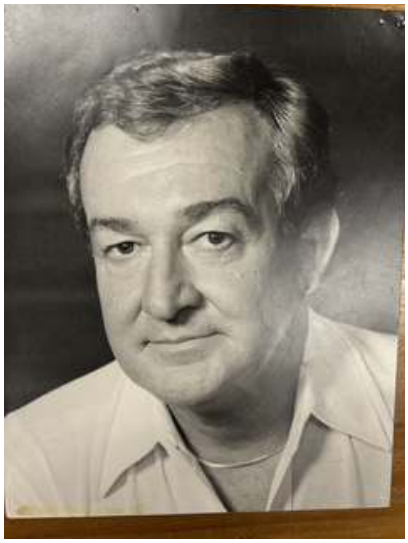
"My first few months on the Board at The Rep have been incredibly enjoyable—and certainly busy! As Treasurer, I've been keeping myself occupied behind the scenes, helping strengthen our governance, refining reporting, and making sure the numbers support all the wonderful work happening across the organisation.

Of course, board meetings and spreadsheets are only part of the story. I also had the chance to lend a hand during the bump-in for 'The Man Who Came to Dinner'. Seeing everything come together and then getting to watch the production come to life on stage was something magical. It's a fantastic reminder that while the audience sees the performers, it takes an enormous team behind the scenes to make the magic happen.

It's been a real pleasure working alongside such a dedicated mix of long standing and newer Board members. Everyone brings something different to the table, united by a shared passion for The Rep and its broader community.

Also, a huge thank you to every volunteer who gives their time, energy and expertise. Whether you're on the stage, backstage, front of house, in the workshop, serving on working groups or on the Board, The Rep simply wouldn't exist without you. I am certainly looking forward to what the future brings!"

Vale:
Ritchard Schmutsch 1937 - 2026



Ritchard Schmutsch was a well-known Adelaide-based actor and director, recognised primarily for his prominent work with the Adelaide Repertory Theatre at the historic Arts Theatre (see long list below)

Notable highlights of his theatrical career include:

- Directing: He directed the Adelaide Rep production of Tudor Gates' thriller *'Who Saw Him Die?'*
  He also directed Robert Bolt's *'A Man for All Seasons'* at the Arts Theatre in 1990.
- Ritch directed several Agatha Christie plays for The Rep.
- Acting: He has performed in multiple stage productions at the Arts Theatre, including *'Hobson's Choice'* (1982), *'The Hollow'* (1991), *'Go Back for Murder'* (1994), and *'The Chalk Garden'* (1996)

Ritchard was also a renowned ballet performer in his early years and danced with Sandy Whitelaw in her ballet days.

Sandy was a regular visitor to Ritch when he was in care.

Jude Hines has acted several times with Ritch and visited him in care only a couple of months ago with Sandy.

Ritchard was an active contributor to Rep productions – as actor, director and crew member – for over two decades from 1978 to 1999. During this time, he was involved in 20 Rep productions:

1978 *'Career'*, Cast
1979 *'The Bundle'*, Cast
1982 *'Hobson's Choice'*, Cast
1985 *'Halfway Up the Tree'*, Director
1986 *'Who Saw Him Die'*, Director
1987 *'Separate Tables'*, Director
1988 *'Running Riot'*, Director and Crew
1989 *'The Browning Version'* & *'Harlequinade'*, Director
1990 *'A Man for All Seasons'*, Director
1991 *'The Hollow'*, Director
1994 *'Go Back for Murder'*, Director
1996 *'The Chalk Garden'*, Director and Crew
1997 *'I Have Five Daughters'*, Crew
1997 *'Tribute'*, Crew
1997 *'The Business of Murder'*, Crew
1998 *'Separate Tables'*, Crew
1998 *'When We Are Married'*, Crew
1998 *'Wait Until Dark'*, Crew
1998 *'Charley's Aunt'*, Crew
1999 *'When Did You Last See Your Trousers?'*, Crew

Prior to joining the Rep, he was involved with other amateur theatre productions, including *'Simple Symphony'* at Norwood Town Hall in 1960 and *'The Hollow'* at Grundy Hall Brighton in 1962.

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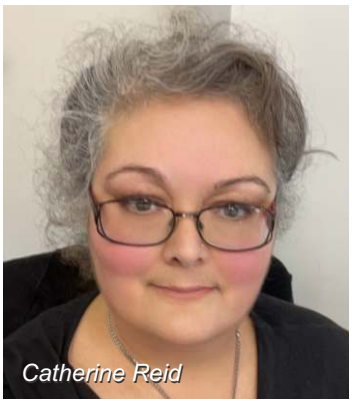
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Photography: David Roberts
Editor: Penni Hamilton-Smith

Board: David Sinclair, Gary Anderson, Jay Antoney, Di Thompson, Warren Fenn and Kyle Martin

Arts Theatre Update


Catherine Reid

It's been an extraordinary few months at The Arts Theatre, with record audiences, outstanding productions and plenty of reasons to celebrate.

Firstly, we'd like to extend a warm welcome to **Greg Donhardt**, who has joined the team as our new **Venue Operations and Facilities Manager**. Greg brings a wealth of technical knowledge and practical experience to the role, and we're delighted to have him helping care for and develop our much-loved theatre.

Our stages have rarely been quiet. Congratulations to **Therry Theatre** on their phenomenal production of *'Jesus Christ Superstar'*, which achieved the remarkable feat of selling out its entire season **five weeks before opening night**. It was a wonderful success and a testament to the quality of community theatre in South Australia.

Here at the Rep, *'The Man Who Came to Dinner'* proved to be our most successful production in over fifteen years, attracting outstanding audiences and reaffirming the enduring appeal of classic comedy when paired with exceptional performances.

Our resident hirers have also enjoyed tremendous success throughout the year. **The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of South Australia** received widespread critical acclaim for both *'Funny Girl'* and *'You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown',* with reviewers praising fresh interpretations, exceptional performances, tight musical direction and inventive staging. **Marie Clark Musical Theatre's** *'Oliver!'* delighted audiences with one of the company's strongest seasons in recent years, combining excellent ticket sales with glowing reviews. We were also pleased to welcome **Fever** back to the theatre with its enchanting **Ballet of Lights** productions of *'Cinderella'* and *'Sleeping Beauty'*, introducing many first-time visitors to The Arts Theatre.

The second half of the year promises just as much excitement. **Pelican Productions** will bring us *'Grease'* followed by *'The Little Mermaid Jr'*, while **Fever** returns with more performances in its popular **Ballet of Lights** series. September sees the arrival of *'The Jury Experience: Killer A.I.'*, an innovative interactive courtroom experience where the audience decides the verdict, before **Rumoured Productions** presents a special one-night-only concert performance of **The Who's** *'Tommy'*, following acclaimed performances at the Hopgood Theatre and Shedley Theatre.

Closer to home, the Rep will soon present *'The Sunshine Boys'*, directed by Peter Goers, while acclaimed crime writer **R.A. Spratt** visits The Arts Theatre to launch the latest instalment in the much-loved **Friday Barnes** series. Then, in October, **Adelaide Youth Theatre** returns with two audience favourites: *'High School Musical'* and *'The SpongeBob Musical'*, ensuring the next generation of performers continues to shine on our stage.

Finally, while we're celebrating a fantastic year, we continue to face one significant challenge. Our ageing climate control system has reached the end of its life and replacing it is one of the most important projects in the theatre's future. If you are able to help preserve the comfort and sustainability of this historic venue, we invite you to consider making a contribution to **The Arts Theatre Fighting Fund**. Every donation, large or small, helps us create a more comfortable experience for our audiences, volunteers and performers while securing the future of The Arts Theatre for generations to come.

Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support. We look forward to welcoming you back to the theatre soon.

SUPPORT THE ARTS THEATRE COMMUNITY

Please consider making a donation to support our The Arts Theatre Fighting Fund and keep the curtain rising for generations to come.

Make a donation now – every dollar makes a difference!

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From the President

David Sinclair



Our 2026 season opened with the fantastic production of *'The Man Who Came To Dinner'*. The production was highly successful, receiving excellent reviews from the Adelaide theatre critics as well as wonderful feedback from our record-breaking audiences. Our fabulous cast led by South Australia's doyen of theatre Peter Goers, cabaret star Michael Griffiths, Jess Corrie, Helen Geoffreys as well as our very own Penni Hammilton-Smith, just to name a few, brought the show to life filling the theatre with laughs, entertainment and applause. We couldn't be happier with the result. Congratulations and thanks to our wonderful director Sue Wylie and everybody involved.

Our second production for the year, *'The Sunshine Boys'* directed by Peter Goers, is already in rehearsal and promises to be yet another huge success. This play is a subtle mix of emotional sadness and genuine laugh-out-loud comedy expertly navigated by our lead players Rob Cusenza and Robin Schmelzkopf, two of Adelaide's most experienced performers.

With much disappointment, the Board has had to make the decision to cancel our third production for 2026, *'The Drowsy Chaperone'*. This decision has not been made lightly, but with performers already committed to other productions, despite extensive efforts, we were unable to fully cast several key roles essential to the production. While this is disappointing for everyone involved, we remain committed to presenting a strong 2026 season and look forward to announcing an exciting replacement production in the coming weeks.

Again, I would like to thank everyone who is part of our REP community, whether you are a regular theatre goer or one of our amazing volunteers. It is your passion, generosity and commitment that have enabled the Adelaide Repertory Theatre to remain the oldest continuously operating theatre company in the Southern Hemisphere.

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4 Press the green button to confirm transaction
5 Tap card and Collect your ticket



THE ARTS THEATRE

David Roberts Videography

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