



Pat Thomson, David Franklin, Bob Hornery, Susan Leith 1987

All Photos: Regis Lansac

The Secret House

by
Noel Hodda



Griffin Logo 1987

THE SECRET HOUSE by NOEL HODDA

THE SECRET HOUSE was first produced by **THE GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY** at the historic Stables Theatre in 1987.

The play received overwhelmingly positive reviews.

The production marked the directorial debut of Michael Gow, now a major force in Australian theatre and most recently Artistic Director of The Queensland Theatre Company.

The play had subsequent productions at **The Hole In The Wall Theatre Company Perth** and **Playbox Theatre Company Melbourne**.

BACKGROUND

THE SECRET HOUSE was first seen in 1986 as part of the Griffin Theatre Company's D-Week showcase of new works and works-in-progress with direction and dramaturgy by then actor and emerging playwright Michael Gow.

The D-Week rehearsed reading caused great excitement. The work-in-progress was so enthusiastically received that Peter Kingston, then Artistic Director of Griffin, immediately offered to program it into the next year's season.



David Franklin, Pat Thomson, Bob Hornery, Susan Leith

1987

GRIFFIN RETRO READINGS SEASON

In 1996 Griffin staged a series of **Retro Readings**. These were successful plays from the company's past, each given a one-night-only rehearsed reading.

THE SECRET HOUSE was included in the series and its author-directed reading filled the theatre to capacity with an enthusiastic audience despite minimum publicity.



Bob Hornery, David Franklin

1987

The timeless themes of this challenging, darkly humorous and ultimately affirming play still resonate with a wide audience. It lives in the hearts and minds of all who saw the original production and is ready to enter the hearts and minds of a new generation of theatre-goers.

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Synopsis

When GLEN, accompanied by his sister SISSY, returns to the family home on the outskirts of town after an absence it is apparent that all is not well. His father KEN is asleep at the kitchen table with the radio droning on and his mother is nowhere to be seen. There is an air of unease, an unease that becomes easier to understand as the play progresses.

Their mother CATH appears from her bedroom and the family re-unites, bound by ritual humour and ceremony. It is Glen's birthday but no-one seems to be celebrating despite the cake on the table and the cups of tea and glasses of whisky that follow.

They all turn in for the night and the play begins its exploration of the past and its secrets. In a series of time-fractured scenes we meet PATRICK, Glen's identical twin brother, and witness the antagonism and resentment that lies beneath the surface in this seemingly benign family environment. We see the family prepare for a funeral and discover that it is Patrick's. We witness Glen return home a year before for the funeral of his twin brother to be met by a family in denial and inarticulate in the face of overwhelming grief felt at the fact that this brother committed suicide. Blame follows denial and both are accompanied by questioning and want. These scenes are presented in a non-linear time frame with an accompanying soundscape that takes us into the deeper reaches of the emotional lives of the family. We share the nightmare of autopsy, the emptiness of despair and the lost and confused hope and humanity of those left behind.

The dawn comes – the morning after the opening scene of the night before – to reveal Cath ordering and re-ordering her memories and mementos. The secrets of the house have been revealed overnight as the family slept. Sissy confronts Cath with her fear of facing up to the death of Patrick. The anniversary of both his birthday and death prompts re-evaluation by some and creates a space for hope and change. The play ends with Cath finally leaving the house against her husband's advice to join Sissy and Glen at the cemetery, leaving Ken alone again at the table with his beloved radio and paper.

Although dealing with death and grief, *The Secret House* is cut through with a deep layer of humour as the family lives their lives together, falling back on old stories and customs to keep their world alive.