



Photo: Jeremy Shaw

Playwright/screenwriter ANDREW BOVELL's latest work for the stage, *Things I Know to be True*, premiered in Adelaide in May, 2016 in a co-production between The State Theatre Company and UK-based Frantic Assembly. The production opened in London at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre in September before touring the UK.

*The Secret River* premiered at the 2013 Sydney Festival. The acclaimed STC production was directed by Neil Armfield and toured to the Centenary of Canberra Festival and Perth International Arts Festival. It won six Helpmann Awards including Best Play, as well as Best New Work at the Sydney Theatre Awards, the AWGIE Award for Stage writing, the David Williamson Prize and was joint winner of the NSW Premier's Literary Award for Community Relations. It subsequently enjoyed a return season in Sydney, before touring to Brisbane and Melbourne, and revived for the 2017 Adelaide Festival of the Arts.

*When the Rain Stops Falling* premiered at the 2008 Adelaide Festival of the Arts, produced by Brink Productions, before touring nationally and going on to win numerous awards. The play has been produced in London at the Almeida Theatre (2009) and in New York at The Lincoln Centre (2010) where it won five Lucille Lortell Awards and was named best new play of the year by *TIME Magazine*.

Earlier stage works include *Holy Day*, *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?*, *Speaking in Tongues*, *Scenes From a Separation*, *Shades of Blue*, *Ship of Fools*, *After Dinner*, *The Ballad of Lois Ryan* and *State of Defense*. Sydney Theatre Company revived *After Dinner* for a sellout season in 2015.

His most recent film is the French language *Iris*, directed by Jalil Lespert. *A Most Wanted Man*, an adaptation of the John Le Carré novel, directed by Anton Corbijn and starring Phillip Seymour Hoffman, premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival and was released internationally in July, 2014.

Other films include *Edge of Darkness*, *Blessed*, *The Book of Revelation*, *Head On*, *Lust*, *The Fisherman's Wake*, *Piccolo Mondo*, *Strictly Ballroom* and the multi-award-winning *Lantana*.

# Things I know to be True

Andrew  
Bovell



Currency Press,  
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## Such Stuff As Dreams Are Made On: Charting Family In Suburbia

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The land to the south of Adelaide is embedded in me to the point of muscle memory. I grew up on a communal property that sits on the dividing line between the Southern Vales and the Adelaide Hills in a small town called Kangarilla. A short drive towards the coast sits the Willunga Range that Andrew Bovell now calls home, and a bit further on the spread of Adelaide's southern suburbs, Seaford, Noarlunga, Christies Beach and Hallett Cove. The area has become a strange amalgam: the vales contain bohemian wine agriculture and a smattering of tree-changed artists, while the southern suburbs hold much of Adelaide's working-class community. Hallett Cove and the 'burbs that surround it are the stuff of a white-bread Australian dream, filtered through John Howard's 'relaxed and comfortable' view of the country. Sweep upon sweep of almost identikit houses, communities in which you become immediately isolated if you don't have a car and the dream of a bit more, but not too much.

Andrew and I first started talking about him writing a new play for State Theatre Company in 2013 soon after I'd come back into the Company as its new Artistic Director. Over a series of coffees and many emails we thrashed out the landscapes that we might adventure through. In 2011 I'd directed a revival of Andrew's play *Speaking in Tongues* and it signified the start of a series of projects for me that concentrated on taking emotional, deeply intimate material and introducing a sense of the visual epic to it. It was a cracking open of the play that, I think, we both enjoyed. As we talked about possible new plays, Andrew's ambition to push his writing and process even further out of his comfort zone steadily solidified. He wanted me to find a fresh way to disrupt his usual creative process.

At the same time I was having a separate conversation with an artist I've long admired: Scott Graham, the Artistic Director of Frantic Assembly. I'd connected with Scott and Frantic on and off over the previous decade over email, through observing their rehearsals and, eventually, assisting Scott and then co-Artistic Director Steven Hoggett

on Abi Morgan's *Lovesong*. After Steven left the company to pursue his freelance career I jokingly said to Scott that if he was ever looking for someone to co-direct with in the future I was only a phone call away. It didn't take much of a leap to realise that Scott might be the perfect disruptive influence for Andrew.

The strands began to draw slowly together. Along with designer Geoff Cobham, the three of us discovered a shared love for the photos of Gregory Crewdson. Crewdson's work digs under the skin of U.S. suburbia to find something alien and powerful in the heart of those left behind by the clichéd 'American dream'. We wanted to find a way of excavating the layers of Australian and English culture in the same way, to look for the anxiety that exists under seeming lands of plenty. With little more than this, we decided to just dive in.

In 2014 the four of us gathered together in a rehearsal room with six actors who Andrew and I thought it would be interesting for him to write for: Alison Bell, Paul Blackwell, Tilda Cobham-Hervey, Eugenia Fragos, Luke Mullins and Nathan O'Keefe. They were asked to bring a scrap of writing, a picture and a piece of music that meant something to them. Not exactly a specific brief. Over the next week we talked, trained, let improvisations often play out over the course of hours, and looked for interesting ways to combine movement and a sense of the visual epic with text. All the while we hunted for the thinnest of connecting threads that might lead us to the beginnings of narrative or character. Surrounding us on the walls of the room were the images from Crewdson's 'Beneath the Roses' series, which often became trigger points for exercises or somewhere to retreat to in the moments when we had no idea which direction to take next. It was by turns exhilarating, frustrating and deeply inspiring and reminded all of us of what special creatures actors are: they can create gold dust out of next to nothing.

At the end of the week Andrew quietly took Scott and I aside and said simply, 'I think they're a family'. With that, the world of the Prices was born.

Andrew has long been a master of charting the dreams we're sold and the difficult and often tawdry outcomes of straining to achieve them. In *Things I Know To Be True* he skilfully dissects the differing dreams recent Australian generations have had pushed upon them. The working-class baby boomers have been encouraged to defer their lives;

to sacrifice now for a comfortable old age and the pleasure of seeing their children have more opportunities than they did. Gen X, Y and the millennials have all been told in different ways that they can (as Fran says in the play): ‘Have what you want, you can be what you want. No matter what the cost’. As the boomers move into their twilight years, the inter-generational tension is palpable.

Andrew is a writer obsessed with our struggle to love and with dissecting all of the wonderful and terrible things we do in love’s name. Over the course of Andrew’s play, neatly structured around a single year, each of the Price children hits a point of emotional rupture with their parents. Terrible words are said and entire life paths are questioned. Each one of the Prices must face the fact that (in Rosie’s words): ‘People aren’t perfect. Even the people you love. Especially the people you love.’ But amongst the maelstrom Andrew finds joy, absurdity and a dreamlike sense of the way that we paint our memories over and over, like a single canvas covered with a thousand layers of subtly different brushstrokes.

The journey of the play as it reached production has been a gentle lesson in how the intensely local truly does translate to the global. The very Australian family—indeed the very southern Adelaide family—that Andrew places onstage has connected powerfully with audiences, whether its voices sound like the deeply Australian tones of Paul Blackwell in Adelaide or from the Scottish burr of Ewan Stewart in London. As Scott and I guided both an Australian and U.K. cast through the twists and turns of the text, the deep nuance of Andrew’s writing has continued to reveal itself.

In a world increasingly dominated by the digital, theatre is being tempted more and more towards flash and sparkle for the sake of flash and sparkle, chasing the erroneous idea that our job is to somehow out-Netflix Netflix. Andrew’s careful focus on words, memory, family and the human heart reminds us that to come together in a darkened auditorium and laugh, cry and dream together is a rare and special thing.

*Geordie Brookman*  
*April, 2017*

Geordie Brookman has directed theatre, musicals and events around Australia, the U.K. and Asia. Since 2012 he has been the Artistic Director of State Theatre Company South Australia.

*Things I Know To Be True* was first produced by State Theatre Company South Australia and Frantic Assembly at the Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide, on 13 May 2016, with the following cast:

PIP	Georgia Adamson
BOB	Paul Blackwell
ROSIE	Tilda Cobham-Hervey
FRAN	Eugenia Fragos
BEN	Nathan O'Keefe
MARK	Tim Walter

Directors, Geordie Brookman and Scott Graham

Set and Lighting Designer, Geoff Cobham

Costume Designer, Ailsa Paterson

Sound Designer, Andrew Howard

Original Artwork, Thom Buchanan

Original Music, Nils Frahm

Stage Manager, Melanie Selwood

Assistant Stage Manager, Alex Hayley



## CHARACTERS

The Price family:

BOB, 63, retrenched auto factory worker

FRAN, 57, senior nurse

Their children:

PIP, 34, Education Department bureaucrat

MARK, 32, information technology specialist

BEN, 28, financial services worker

and

ROSIE, 19, who doesn't know who she is or what she wants to be yet

## SETTING

The play is set primarily in a suburban home and garden in Hallett Cove, in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, a provincial city in Australia, not unlike any working-class suburb in any provisional city in the Western world.

A family room, a kitchen and patio extension at the back open to a classic Australian backyard. A Hills Hoist, a lemon tree, a well-cut lawn, a rose garden, a shed up the back somewhere and an ancient eucalypt towering above.

The play takes place over a year.

## ACT ONE

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### *IT BEGINS LIKE THIS*

BOB PRICE *stares at the telephone.*

*His children [PIP, MARK, BEN and ROSIE] are watching.*

PIP: It's late.

BEN: Past midnight.

PIP: And the phone starts to ring.

MARK: You're standing in your pyjamas and bare feet still heavy with sleep because you've just been woken.

ROSIE: Your heart is beating.

BEN: Too fast.

ROSIE: Like it might go.

PIP: Any minute it might go.

ROSIE: And you know if you answer your life is going to change.

MARK: And you're not ready for it.

PIP: Even though you've been waiting for this call ever since we were old enough to stay out past nine.

BEN: Ever since you stopped tucking us in at night and turning off the light.

ROSIE: Ever since we came screaming into this world.

PIP: You've been waiting for this.

MARK: And you're thinking which one of my kids is in trouble?

ROSIE: Which one of my kids is hurt?

BEN: Which one of my kids is dead?

PIP: And how will I tell their mother?

BEN: You could turn around

PIP: walk away

ROSIE: not answer.

MARK: But you know that this

BEN: whatever this is

ROSIE: just has to be faced.

*The phone starts to ring ... once ... twice ... three times ... four times. BOB answers.*

BOB: Hello?



*BERLIN*

ROSIE: Berlin. A winter coat. A travel bag. A red nose. And a broken heart.

I'm standing on the platform at the train station. It's cold. The train is late and my socks are wet. I'm not quite sure how I got here or where I'm meant to go next.

I met him four nights ago and he was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen. His name was Emmanuel, of course, and he came from Madrid.

I'd been travelling by myself for three months. The great European adventure. London. Dublin. Paris. Prague. Then Berlin. I'd been saving for a year. Cafe work, bar work, babysitting. Mum and Dad said don't go by yourself. It's too dangerous. Go on a tour or at least with some girlfriends.

I'll meet people. I told them. I'll be fine. But meeting people is harder than you think. I mean I did, meet people, at hostels and stuff but mainly other Australians. And it was fun for a night or two. But the boys just wanted to have sex and I guess that's alright but if I wanted sex with an Australian boy I would have stayed in Hallett Cove.

So I go to the churches and the museums and the galleries and I walk through the cobbled streets and I sit in cafes trying to look mysterious and everything is so beautiful. Everything is what I was expecting it to be. And yet somehow I want it to be more.

I Skype home twice a week and tell Mum and Dad what an amazing place Europe is. They've never been. I tell them I'm having the best time because I can't bear the thought of them being disappointed for me. And when I Skype my brother Mark, I pretend the camera on my iPad is broken because he knows me and he will see it in my face. He'll see that it's all a mess and he'll tell me to come home but I can't go home, not yet, I mean then, I couldn't go home then because it would be such a ... defeat.

I don't know what it's meant to be. I don't know what I'm meant to do. I keep wondering when it will start. Life. When will life start?

And then there he is. At a club in Mitte. Dancing. With his shirt off. And I think, wow, that guy can really dance. That guy is like ...

fire. And then he looks over at me. Me? And I am gone. I pretend not to be. I try to be cool. To make it seem like I'm not interested. But I am so interested. And we dance until the sun comes up. And as we come out of the club into the light, I think this is it. This is life. I am living.

And I know he wants to take me home. To his place. Or to his friend's place. Or to someone's place, I'm not quite sure whose place it is, and I say okay. Because at last I am living and I don't want life to stop.

And when he kisses me I want to cry. Because I'd never been kissed like that. Not in Hallett Cove. And I'd never been kissed where he kissed me or touched quite like that. He seemed to know things and for once it didn't seem to matter that I didn't. Three days. Three days we stayed in bed. And after three days I knew some things too.

We don't even get up to eat. He disappears and comes back with a bowl of cereal and two spoons. And that's all we eat. Cereal. Out of the same bowl. For three days.

On the third night I watch him sleeping and I do that thing you shouldn't do. I think about the future. I imagine taking him home to meet Mum and Dad and my sister and brothers and and and how they will all love him, like they love me. And how clever I am and brave to have found such a man, such a beautiful man, different but the same, and brought him all the way back to Hallett Cove and then, there I am ... Oh, I am so embarrassed but suddenly there I am in our backyard with Dad's roses all around us and I'm walking across the lawn on his arm, and he's got tears in his eyes and Mum's there in a new dress, which she never lets herself have, and my sister Pip is there with her husband, Steve, and their two girls. She got married in the backyard too. And Mark, my oldest brother who I adore is there with his girlfriend, Taylor. And then there's Ben, my other brother who's there with a girl who's new and won't last because they just don't with Ben and I love them all so much, sometimes I think, too much, if you can love too much, but now I have to make room for Emmanuel who's standing there in a suit and he is just so, so ... so handsome ... And I ... I'm wearing a white dress ... And I'm kind of surprised, kind of shocked because I never even knew that that's what I wanted. And maybe it's not what I want, it's what I think Mum and

Dad will want for me, but anyway I'm there in a white dress on my father's arm walking across the lawn and ...

Then he wakes up and he looks at me as if he knows what I'm thinking and as if he wants to get up and run, so I kiss him on his lips before he can. And he smiles. And I'm gone all over again. And we make love, so tenderly, so sweetly, and after, as I drift off to sleep, lying on his chest, listening to the beat of his heart, thinking I could listen to this for the rest of my life, I think is this it, is this what falling in love is?

And when I wake up in the morning he's gone ... along with four hundred Euros from my wallet, my iPad, my camera, my favourite scarf and a large piece of my heart. I find a girl in the house, smoking a cigarette at the kitchen table, and ask if she's seen him. She shrugs and says that he said something about going to see his girlfriend in London. She tells me to get my things and to get out of her house.

I walk through the streets of Berlin. I feel small. I feel like I'm twelve years old, I feel ridiculous. I want to cry but I won't. Well I do, a bit. But not as much as I want to. I want my dad. I want my mum. I want my brothers and my sister. I want to hear them laugh and argue and fight and tease me. But I can't think of them much because if I do my chest will explode. I feel like I'm going to literally fall to pieces. That my arms are going to drop off and then my legs and my head. And so to stop myself coming apart I make a list of all the things I know ... I mean actually know for certain to be true, and the really frightening thing is ... it's a very short list.

I don't know much at all.

But I know that at twenty-five Windarie Avenue, Hallett Cove, things are the same as when I left and they always will be.

And I know that I have to go home.



*HOME*

*The roses are in bloom. BOB is using a leaf blower. He blows this way. He blows that way. He hasn't quite got the hang of it.*

*FRAN appears at the back door. She wears a nurse's uniform.*

FRAN: Bob ... Bob ... *Bob!*

*He blows her.*

Stop it!

*He blows her again. She raises a warning finger at him. She's not in the mood.*

The kids have to be picked up at three-fifteen.

BOB: I know.

FRAN: But you can't be late.

BOB: I'm never late.

FRAN: You were late on Monday.

BOB: Five minutes. That's not late.

FRAN: It takes two minutes to grab a child and put her in your car.

BOB: You know that, do you?

FRAN: There's dinner in the fridge. Some bolognese. Just heat it in the microwave. Pip will pick them up at six.

BOB: I'm going to see about getting rid of that tree.

FRAN: You're not touching that tree.

BOB: It makes a mess of the garden.

FRAN: Good. Give you something to do.

BOB: It's going to drop a bough one day, right on the shed.

FRAN: With you in it if I'm lucky.

BOB: It's a bloody eyesore.

FRAN: It's the most beautiful thing in the garden. It's the only thing that doesn't grow in a straight line and hasn't been pruned to within an inch of its life.

*She turns to go inside. ROSIE is standing there, wearing her winter coat with her backpack over her shoulder like she'd never been away.*

ROSIE: Hi.

FRAN: Where the hell did you come from?