

# THE FATHER

## EDUCATION PACK



PRINCIPAL  
SPONSOR



SEASON  
SPONSOR



Meridian.

CORE  
FUNDER



THE  
**COURT**  
THEATRE

# CONTENTS

Cast and Creatives ..... 3

About the Play – Synopsis ..... 4

Characters ..... 5

The Director’s Vision ..... 8

Production Technologies – Set Design ..... 9

Production Technologies – Costume Design..... 10

Production Technologies – Sound Design ..... 11

Production Technologies – Lighting Design..... 12

Ask an Actor..... 13

Reflecting on the Play ..... 15

Dementia ..... 18

Who’s Reality ..... 20



# THE FATHER

BY FLORIAN ZELLER

TRANSLATED BY  
CHRISTOPHER HAMPTON

## *Cast*

André ..... Mark Hadlow  
Anne ..... Luanne Gordon  
Pierre ..... Tom Trevella

Laura ..... Ailis Oliver-Kerby  
Man ..... Owen Black  
Woman ..... Kim Garrett

## *Production Team*

Director ..... Simon Bennett  
Set Designer ..... Nigel Kerr  
Costume Designer / Manager ..... Deborah Moor  
Lighting Designer / Operator ..... Giles Tanner  
Sound Designer / Composer ..... Hamish Oliver  
Stage Manager ..... Ben Freeth  
Construction & Premises Manager ..... Bryce Goddard  
Workshop Supervisor ..... Richard Daem  
Set Construction ..... Nigel Kerr, Anne Le Blond,  
Richard van den Berg  
Costume Technician ..... Tracey Hollands  
Properties Manager ..... Julian Southgate  
Properties Technician ..... Simone Wiseman  
Head Technician ..... Giles Tanner  
Acting Production Manager ..... Mandy Perry  
Acting Assistant Production Manager ..... Erica Browne

## *Education Pack*

Rachel Sears, Jessica Carr, Riley Harter, Laura Tretheway  
and Mally Goldberg

*The Father* was staged at The Court Theatre from 3 – 24 August 2019  
Running time: 1 hour and 25 minutes with no interval.



## ABOUT THE PLAY

André is plagued by confusion. Strangers wander in and out of his flat, his daughter Anne seems to change partners every minute, he can never find his watch, and nurses are showing up in his living room out of the blue. *The Father* is a play that follows André's reactions and experience of dealing with the ever-progressing illness of his dementia. Written by Florian Zeller, translated by Christopher Hampton, The Court's production of *The Father* is directed by Simon Bennett, and stars Mark Hadlow as André, Luanne Gordon as Anne, Tom Trevella as Pierre, Ailis Oliver-Kerby as Laura, Owen Black as Man, and Kim Garrett as Woman. *The Father* provides comedy whilst maintaining empathy and communicates tightly woven scenes which place the audience in the thick of André's agony. With him, the audience too become overwhelmed and immersed into the dream-like state that is dementia.

### *Discuss*

*Who's story is this? As a class discuss who you feel empathy for and why.*

### *Have a go*

*Work in groups. Imagine you've been asked to write a spin off from *The Father* (a prequel, sequel, different perspective story) – write a synopsis of your spin off and pitch it to your class.*







## André

is slipping faster and faster into the tangled world of dementia. He is cared for by his daughter Anne, despite being incredibly proud and denying his need for help. He is intelligent and proud, but frightened and wary of his illness. He constantly seeks his watch to clarify not only the time but reality, and he bluffs his way through most confusing encounters with characters like Pierre, Laura, and even Anne.

## Anne

is a responsible woman, but she is rattled by her father's situation. His constant confusion and reluctance to be helped causes a strain on all her relationships, and this brings forth a flood of complex emotions. Anne shifts between frustration, anger, annoyance, humor and anxiety, all the while maintaining the love of a daughter for her father.

## Pierre

is Anne's husband/boyfriend who represents an intimidating figure who is constantly frustrated and angered by André's questions and memory lapses. Pierre shows a tendency toward violence and is both sarcastic and oppressive in his body language and words.

## Laura

is André's carer. Patient, kind, but quite removed from the situation, she deals with André in a kind and professional manner. Laura's character and her youthful energy compares in contrast with André.

There are four named characters in the play but six actors. Zeller uses the cast to allow multiple actors to appear as the same character and then confuses and shocks the audience by bringing back moments of repetition but with different characters present. The moment when we see the actor who has portrayed a violent Pierre appear as a doctor is particularly strong as the audience are challenged to question who the real perpetrator of the attack was.

*Discuss*

How does the casting of the show support the vision of enabling the audience to experience André’s confusion?

What do you think would be a challenge of being one of the main actors in this show?

*Discuss*

This show is hugely focused on the relationship dynamic between André (the father) and Anne (the daughter).

Working in pairs consider the relationship between André and Anne and discuss how you think their relationship changes throughout the play.

*Have a go*

The power constantly shifts between the characters. Using the table below list as many examples of specific moments where the power shift changes and explain how this is supported by the choices made by the production team and the actors.

<i>Power held by André</i>	<i>Power held by Anne</i>

# IMPACT ON THE AUDIENCE

## Discuss

What responses did you experience as an audience member of this play?

## Have a go

As an audience member what does this play make you think about? Using the headings below as a starting point explore what choices the production team made to get you thinking this way.

## Confusion

What moment?	What choices made you feel this way?

## Empathy

What moment?	What choices made you feel this way?

## Humour

What moment?	What choices made you feel this way?



*Shock*

<i>What moment?</i>	<i>What choices made you feel this way?</i>

*Love*

<i>What moment?</i>	<i>What choices made you feel this way?</i>





# THE DIRECTOR'S VISION

*Interview with Simon Bennett*

*What can audiences expect from The Father?*

Audiences can expect a play rich with ideas and theatrical surprises. This play combines black comedy, farce and tragedy to conjure an experience that is surprising, funny and moving. An outstanding cast, led by Mark Hadlow, navigate a twisty narrative current, adrift on the rapids of unreliable memory, giving the audience a confronting and unforgettable night at the theatre.

*Why do you think telling this story is important?*

Our population is ageing, and modern medicine keeps people alive for longer. Therefore, dementia is touching more and more families. The challenges faced by Anne as she tries to do the right thing for her father, and by André, who fiercely fights to keep his independence, will be recognised by many people. This is a conversation about compassion, and that is important.

*You've had a prolific career within the television and film industry – what keeps bringing you back to theatre?*

I started out in theatre, abandoning a law degree when I fell head over heels with my vocation. So theatre was my first love. I've been fortunate to have been able to work as a director and producer for 30+ years in TV and film as well as stage. Whichever medium I'm working in, I'm still dealing with actors, stories and scripts - which I love. However, for me, nothing beats the long rehearsal process of theatre, nothing beats the thrill of sitting in a theatre amongst an audience, feeling their engagement with the live event unfolding before them. Theatre at its best generates a charge between audience and performers that is unmatched anywhere else.

*Do you have much experience with, or a personal connection to, dementia?*

My father died two years ago, after a long decline due to dementia. So I had first-hand experience of the indignity the disease brings, and the challenges faced by the family of the sufferer. When I first read the script of *The Father*, I recognised its truth and wanted to work on it.

*Why is this play an unmissable piece of theatre?*

The writing is extraordinary. The cast are superb. The content is topical. It's impossible to experience this play and not be moved.

*What is your vision for this production?*

I don't see my role as a director to impose a vision on a production. I see my role as a guide or interpreter. I will explore the text and characters with the cast, opening up possibilities, encouraging and challenging them. At the same time, I'll work with all the other artists involved in a theatre production, bringing their creative contributions together to forge something that will hopefully be coherent and clear. I'm responsible for shaping the musicality of the play, endeavouring to shape the audience's engagement with the experience across the evening, so they come away satisfied, entertained and provoked.



# PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES – SET

*Nigel Kerr - Set Designer*



The Father mostly takes place in Anne's (André's daughter) apartment. When designing the set the director wanted the set designer to reduce the playing space so it was more intimate. The room is small, the floor even comes slightly over the edge of the stage to further serve the claustrophobia of the piece and the confronting atmosphere for the audience.

The walls appear very fragile, like a veneer where we cannot see the frame. This represents the fragile state of the family relationships. The stone henge style pillars behind the set are to create an ominous and foreboding feel, like "the shadows are closing in". They are also to help with transitions and pulling focus.

The set was designed to be a metaphor of what is going on in André's head. Everything is skewed, instead of being 90 degrees, there are a lot of diagonal lines and everything is slightly off kilter. We get a feeling of things not quite lining up or being in the right place. The kitchen space fades into black, a darker part of André's mind where memories are lost.

The walls and floor are grey, so the costume and furniture stand out. The furniture gets stripped away piece by piece throughout the show to reflect his lost memories and this also gives us a loss of colour and vibrance.

Eventually this leaves us in the final part of the play where there is nothing but a stark white hospital bed on a bare stage. All colour is gone, and he is alone.

## *Discuss*

How did the set impact on your experience of watching the play?

What impact did the slow removal of the furniture have on you as an audience member?

# PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES – COSTUME

*Deborah Moore - Costume Designer*



When designing the costuming for *The Father* the decision was made to have an autumn colour pallet for the characters. Autumn is a season that brings an image of falling leaves and this works in symmetry with the idea of André's falling/lost memories.

André has the brightest costuming on the stage, he is still full of life and vibrant. However, in contrast his daughter is more muted, she has endured and dealt with these problems for a long time.

The actors who are playing the doubles are dressed similarly but not identically to their original counterparts. This is so the audience can better experience André's confusion as we are seeing these scenes from his perspective and experiencing his reality.

The hospital costuming has no colour at all, this is all done in greys and a white coat. By the end of the show a feeling is created of loss and isolation and the lack of colour in costuming aids this atmosphere.

## *Discuss*

As a class discuss the visual impact of André in red surrounded by the grey and white colours of the hospital and the hospital staff.



# PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES – SOUND

*Hamish Oliver - Sound Designer*



In this production we combine delicate musical textures with more assertive and perhaps disturbing sound-based music (e.g. a layer of low rumbling sounds) that fragments and disrupts the more gentle textures. The “sound effects” in this production are a doorbell, a buzzer and recordings of leaves in the wind. The rest of the sound I created was musical compositions.

In general, we didn’t want to ‘underscore’ the play by having music coming in under scenes to reinforce them - the script and delivery are so naturalistic it would feel forced to add an obviously theatrical construct such as underscore. Two exceptions are when there is a single uneasy ‘note’ sounded towards the end of a scene, to reinforce the idea that something is not quite right. Very often, we wanted to achieve momentum during a transition, which meant that, apart from being quite brief and fast-moving, these musical transitions also commented on or referred to the upcoming scene rather than the previous scene. Often this created a slightly jarring effect (e.g a gentle soothing ending to a scene being interrupted by an energetic and abrasive musical texture along with abrupt

lighting changes and fast set movements).

André’s line “I feel like I’m losing all my leaves”; could be imagined as a sound - it seems to represent the blowing away of things/ events/memories by time or other means... as part of the sound design you can hear the sound of rustling leaves during certain transitions.

The sound design references André’s regression (although not at all smooth and unbroken) towards childhood. The script mentions that he wants a song, and mentions a lullaby; part of the melody is a lullaby-like piece and it is used it twice (once fragmented).

There’s a huge amount of uncertainty throughout (for the audience as well!), the sound design implies that some things that we all feel are fundamental are becoming unreliable in André’s experience of his world. The ‘foundation-shifting’ tumultuous rumbles that start appearing once things are more obviously shifting around for André - culminate in the final transition (entry of hospital bed in blinding white light) where they reference the wall moving as well.



# PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES – LIGHTING

*Giles Tanner - Lighting Designer*



One central idea was to mirror the thematic arc of the show with lighting. Essentially, as André's world starts to disintegrate, we see changes in the lighting that reflect his mental journey. The lighting starts off using warm colours and extensive use of low angle front lighting and as the play progresses, we move to steep and cool lighting. This moves the feel of the lighting from comfortable and domestic to uncomfortable and stark leaving us with a very institutional feel by the end.

The lighting is used to focus our attention on specific action on stage as the scene changes happen. This allows us to keep telling the story while allowing the set and furniture moves to occur in relative darkness. The Director was very

to use this technique to keep the narrative moving and not allow the audience to become disengaged from the central action.

The lighting also uses isolation as a tool to suggest the emotional and physical isolation of various characters. Cool lighting suggests the sterility on mental health facilities and the inability of André to remain emotionally connected to other characters.

The final lighting states and the stark set are suggestive of a microscope slide and the associated clinical nature of a hospital and the idea that André's life is now something that is observed and managed by others and a lack of personal autonomy.

# ASK AN ACTOR

*Mark Hadlow - André*



André is an unlikely protagonist – what appealed to you about his story?

I think what appealed to me about it is here is a man who has been very successful at who he was, suddenly cast into the world of not knowing what is going on; who he is; who other people are - and it's scary. And I think that's a subject at the moment that is invading New Zealand; alzheimers and dementia. It's incredibly debilitating and it's very, very frightening.

How did you prepare for your role?

I spent two months looking very closely at it and making sure that I was very accurate to what the script wanted. The script has been written brilliantly and the adaptation by Christopher Hampton into English has been extraordinary. Dementia is portrayed so specifically, Let's utilize this from the perspective of The Court and do something that brings huge awareness to the massive problem of dementia and alzheimers and all of those issues that our aged population are approaching.

Why do you think telling André's story is important?

Because I think our population is aging and we're going to have more retired people than we have people who are working. It's a bit like breast cancer or prostate cancer. For ages we've been living in this splendid isolation that we don't have these problems... but we do. There's lots of people who are working incredibly hard out there on mental illness and, of course, Dementia Canterbury, are working so hard under extreme pressure.

It's a very important topic - and it's a good play. Its formula is extraordinary. It's been put together so well - First and foremost it's a play; it's an entertainment... but it's an entertainment about something that's extremely prolific in our society.



# ASK AN ACTOR

*Luanne Gordon - Anne*



What appealed to you about this play?

It was a mix of things that all together meant it wasn't a project I'd have considered saying no to. After reading the play and being blown away by the themes and structure of it, and by the utter rawness and humanity of Florian Zellar's writing, I was pretty much sold. But then knowing Mark Hadlow would be tackling the wonderful role of André was also a huge factor in my decision. It's a really moving piece and to do justice to this calibre of work means you want to be working with the best. Every actor likes to play and Mark is so good at it. I knew it would be a wonderful, albeit heart wrenching, journey with him.

How did you prepare for your role?

Honestly, I'm meditating again. Playing Anne is very tense. She is so stressed and anxious. She holds so much tension due to what she's going through that it can be hard to shake it off. So, I'm meditating. I'm also learning my lines and listening to the other actors I'm working with and finding all the honesty and truth I can muster.

Finally, why do you think André and Anne's story is important to tell?

It's important because so many people live through this, and it's always important to reflect our culture and society, and for people to be able to recognise themselves and their situation in our common stories - to not be alone.



# REFLECTING ON THE PLAY

## *Have a go*

In groups work to complete the tables below. Use the information in this pack and add your own ideas and thoughts on how The Court Theatre's production of The Father used drama elements, techniques, conventions and technologies within this performance. Remember to consider why the director/designer/actor made these choices and what impact this had on your interpretation of the play.

## *Drama elements and how they impact the meaning and understanding*

ELEMENT	HOW IT WAS USED	THE IMPACT
TENSION		
SITUATION		
MOOD		
CONTRAST		
TIME	The show jumps black and forth in time and moments are repeated.	This allows the audience to experience the confusion that André feels in his day to day life.
CAST	Some actors play the same characters at different moments	

# REFLECTING ON THE PLAY

*Drama techniques and how they impact meaning and understanding*

TECHNIQUE	HOW IT WAS USED	THE IMPACT
USE OF SPACE		
BODY		
MOVEMENT		
VOICE		

# REFLECTING ON THE PLAY

*Production technologies and how they impact meaning and understanding*

TECHNOLOGY	HOW IT WAS USED	THE IMPACT
SET	The set disappears slowly throughout the course of the play.	
LIGHTING		
PROPS		
SOUND		
COSTUME		



# LIVING WELL WITH DEMENTIA

Unless you already knew, it would be impossible to tell that John had dementia.

*"I've reached an age where my train of thought often leaves before me"*

he told his audience, gratefully receiving a hand-bound version of his life, full of pictures, anecdotes and much-loved memories.

In association with Dementia Canterbury and the Christchurch City Libraries, a group of seven spent six weeks sharing their stories with a volunteer who helped them craft their Life Story books, each full to the brim with humour, heart and soul.

Bill's book in particular was a hit, with his 'saucy' sense of humour demonstrated on the front cover where a photo of himself was featured, giving the reader the finger...

Inside the books, there were stories of escaping enemies in World War II, travelling around the world to find love and, in some cases, pictures of the adult children in the room being held in their parents' arms.

For some participants, like Roy, over 95 years of life were put into their books. For the owners and their families, these mementos are incredibly special, allowing them to share stories when, eventually, their owner will be unable to.

"It helps participants realise and remember that their life has and does matter," said Activity Co-Ordinator Kim Slack.

For many people, the life they knew and loved fades away when diagnosed with dementia. Social ties and independence are often greatly reduced, alongside a wide variety of symptoms that vary from person to person.

Memory loss is a common implication, but it doesn't always affect everyone. A change in function is more prevalent - having trouble using household appliances, for example. Other symptoms include tiredness, forgetting people or a feeling of being 'not quite right'.



Mrs. Elizabeth Hall and Family

The only common tie between the different types of dementia is an overall impact on day to day functionality.

*"Dementia is much more than memory loss,"*

says Dementia Canterbury Manager, Darrah Campbell. "That's one of the indicators, but many people have a range of symptoms that can be physical, sensory or mood related. The biggest thing for us is the emphasis on a dementia diagnosis being the start of a new journey - and not the end of life."

Neuroimaging, blood tests, patient history and details from family members all help to confirm a diagnosis.

Dementia Canterbury is a local support organisation that aims to provide services and education to help people and their carers live well, once dementia has been identified.

"Historically, organisations like ours have been about supporting care partners. That's always a significant part of the role of the organisation, but we've come to appreciate that people can and do live well with dementia and that we need to support access to good education, early diagnosis and partner with our community to help people do things they're interested in," Campbell says.

Having been with Dementia Canterbury for over nine years, she still sees stigma in the community that she wishes to change.

"In many respects, dementia is where cancer was twenty years ago. People say 'oh, that's the one I don't want to get' or 'if I get dementia, put a pillow over my face' and silly things like that.

We've got an aging population and this is something we have to get our heads around. More and more of us are going to be susceptible to dementia."

While there's no cure, there are ways to reduce your risk of developing dementia.

Campbell says:

*"What's good for  
your heart is good  
for your head"*

he told his audience, gratefully receiving a hand-bound version of his life, full of pictures, anecdotes and much-loved memories.

In association with Dementia Canterbury and the Christchurch City Libraries, a group of seven spent six weeks sharing their stories with a volunteer who helped them craft their Life Story books, each full to the brim with humour, heart and soul.

Bill's book in particular was a hit, with his 'saucy' sense of humour demonstrated on the front cover where a photo of himself was featured, giving the reader the finger...

Inside the books, there were stories of escaping enemies in World War II, travelling around the world to find love and, in some cases, pictures of the adult children in the room being held in their parents' arms.

For some participants, like Roy, over 95 years of life were put into their books. For the owners



and their families, these mementos are incredibly special, allowing them to share stories when, eventually, their owner will be unable to.

"It helps participants realise and remember that their life has and does matter," said Activity Co-Ordinator Kim Slack.

For many people, the life they knew and loved fades away when diagnosed with dementia. Social ties and independence are often greatly reduced, alongside a wide variety of symptoms that vary from person to person.

Memory loss is a common implication, but it doesn't always affect everyone. A change in function is more prevalent - having trouble using household appliances, for example. Other symptoms include tiredness, forgetting

*"Those are really  
uplifting things for  
people to feel that they are  
contributing"*





people or a feeling of being 'not quite right'. says Dementia Canterbury Manager, Darral Campbell. "That's one of the indicators, but many people have a range of symptoms that can be physical, sensory or mood related. The biggest thing for us is the emphasis on a dementia diagnosis being the start of a new journey- and not the end of life."

Neuroimaging, blood tests, patient history and details from family members all help to confirm a diagnosis.

Dementia Canterbury is a local support organisation that aims to provide services and education to help people and their carers live well, once dementia has been identified.

"Historically, organisations like ours have been about supporting care partners. That's always a significant part of the role of the organisation, but we've come to appreciate that people can and

do live well with dementia and that we need to support access to good education, early diagnosis and partner with our community to help people do things they're interested in," Campbell says.

"Mediterranean diet, exercise... The things people don't commonly know about are good sleep, treating depression, reducing your levels of stress and staying socially connected. Things like volunteering are really good for our health and wellbeing."

For people with dementia, the organisation has found that socialisation and activities are good for their health and wellbeing too, with a range of activities available for Dementia Canterbury clients. Besides partnering with us here at The Court Theatre, they work together with local libraries, the Art Gallery and the Botanic Gardens, to name just a few!

"Activity groups like Life Stories create opportunities for people to celebrate their life, share their skills and knowledge and be together.



# WHO'S REALITY

There are multiple moments in the play where different realities are presented. Who do you believe?

Dementia is not an illness where sufferers are deluded, their reality is real it is just from a different time in the lives. Dementia is explained in the book Contended Dementia by likening memory to a photo album with related emotions recorded alongside each memory. When living with Dementia the photo album loses some of the images but the emotions are still there. Then when someone living with Dementia experiences an emotion that they can't make sense of they assign another image with the same emotion to that new memory. This can present as someone thinking and behaving like they are in a situation that they are not in.

(Contended Dementia by Oliver James)

## Discuss

How is this experience of life represented in the play? Can you recall a moment in the play when each of the techniques below was used to give the audience the experience of living with Dementia.

TECHNIQUE	HOW IT WAS USED	THE IMPACT
REPETITION		
ACTOR SWITCHING		
CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE		
REPLAYING THE SAME CONVERSATION WITH SLIGHT CHANGES		
SEQUENCING OF EVENTS		











3 - 24 AUG 2019  
**THE FATHER**  
By Florian Zeller



7 SEPT - 5 OCT 2019  
**THE PINK HAMMER**  
By Michele Amas  
**CAXTON**



19 OCT - 9 NOV 2019  
**FRESH OFF  
THE BOAT**  
By Oscar Kightley and Simon Small



23 NOV 2019 - 18 JAN 2020  
**THE WIND  
IN THE WILLOWS**  
By Kenneth Grahame



22 FEB - 14 MAR 2020  
**A STREETCAR  
NAMED DESIRE**  
By Tennessee Williams



28 MAR - 25 APR 2020  
**LYSANDER'S  
AUNT**  
By Ralph McCubbin Howell



9 - 30 MAY 2020  
**HIR**  
By Taylor Mac



13 JUN - 11 JUL 2020  
**RENT**  
By Jonathan Larson

