

St John's Cathedral & the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble present

# A SLEEP OF PRISONERS

By Christopher Fry

## TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Welcome from Dr Peter Catt, Dean of  
St John's Anglican Cathedral

Presentation by Stephen Vagg: "Happy 60th Birthday,  
Brisbane TV Drama: A

Look Back at A Sleep of Prisoners".

Staged-Reading of A Sleep of Prisoners, a  
play by Christopher Fry:

**TRAPPED IN THE RUINS OF  
A WAR-LOCKED CATHEDRAL, FOUR  
ENGLISH SOLDIERS BED DOWN FOR  
THE NIGHT AND DREAM  
OF LIFE AND DEATH...**

## From the Writer

The first thought of *A Sleep of Prisoners* came on a summer afternoon in 1950. I had been invited by the Religious Drama

Society to write a play for them for the Festival of Britain and could not bring myself to say 'yes' or 'no'. I had vague ideas for two plays in my head but both were for the theatre. I had promised to start work on one of them soon. It has always seemed to me that the differences and conflicts between men spring often – perhaps more often than not – from the differences between the outward armour, the facades behind which we hide our spirits. Perhaps the design of the play could be to show first of all, a group of men as they seemed on the surface to each other and then let them sleep and dream, each man dreaming of the other three and of himself, so that each character would be seen four times over. What is the truth of a man?

In *A Sleep of Prisoners* I have tried to make a more simple statement, though in a complicated design where each of the four men is seen through the sleeping thoughts of the others, and each, in his own dream, speaks as at heart he is, not as he believes himself to be.

CHRISTOPHER FRY (1907-2005)

Excerpt from UK Radio Times – 14 December, 1951



Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble has a had a long track record of performing both verse drama and

contemporary local stories. Over the years, we have worked extensively with prisoners, returned military personnel with PTSD, and with wartime stories.

Our mission at QSE is to bring classical stories to life for a contemporary local audience and in particular through the lens of the marginalised, which is exactly what Christopher Fry did with *A Sleep of Prisoners*, juxtaposing key biblical texts with modern characters *in extremis*.

The key components of this play - dramatic verse, liminal and subliminal states, deprivation, and moral complexity - resonate strongly with the themes which QSE explores in its work both on stage and in our communities.

The important place of this text in Australian performance history, which led to the play being performed in St John's Cathedral in March 1961 and was filmed live by ABC Television, becoming the first small-screen drama made and broadcast in Brisbane. The original cast was headed by leading Australian actor Ron Haddrick.

QSE is proud to be part of Queensland entertainment history in recreating *A Sleep of Prisoners* - 60 years later and for one night only.

## From the Director

## The Team

### DIRECTOR

Rob Pensalfini

### CAST

Private Peter Able [Leah Fitzgerald-Quinn](#)

Corporal Joe Adams [Rebecca Murphy](#)

Private Tim Meadows [Rob Pensalfini](#)

Private David King [Angus Thorburn](#)



### REHEARSAL ASSISTANTS

Mikala Crawley

Willem Whitfield

### VENUE TECHNICIAN

Gerard Finn

### PRODUCERS

Ian Eckersley, Stephen Vagg,  
Queensland Shakespeare  
Ensemble

## SPECIAL THANKS

Our heartfelt thanks go to all who made this production possible...

St John's Cathedral  
Dean Peter Catt  
Gerard Finn  
Lisa Clarke  
Liliana Macarone  
Peter Murphy  
Sarah Doyle  
Communify  
QSE Core Ensemble  
All our Sponsors and Supporters

## COMING UP WITH QSE

### YOUNG ACTOR'S SHAKESPEARE INTENSIVE

Become a QSE actor  
for the holidays!  
Young actors (grades  
7 – 12) are invited to  
train as an ensemble  
in a collaborative  
environment.

July 6th – July 9th,  
2021



### THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

Theatre of the  
Oppressed is a  
powerful tool for  
people who want  
to effect change in  
their own lives and  
in their  
communities.

June 28th – July  
2nd, 2021



**A Sleep of Prisoners**  
**March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021**  
**St John's Anglican Cathedral, Brisbane**