

An Englishman, an Irishman and a Yank walk into a moody drama about life and death

THEATRE **SOMEONE WHO'LL WATCH OVER ME**

By Frank McGuinness, West East Theatre, 45 Flinders Lane, city, until May 17. Running time: 160 minutes
fortyfivedownstairs.com

Martin Ball Reviewer

AT A purely structural level Frank McGuinness's 1992 hostage drama has the formulaic feel of a familiar joke: "An Englishman, an Irishman and an American walk into a bar." Except that, in this play, the three men walk into Beirut, are kidnapped and imprisoned in a basement, and don't come out for 4½ years. Some joke.

It's this collision of humour and life-and-death survival that gives the text its vitality. Like Beckett's characters, the three men find their greatest truths in moments of absurd play, stripping away material concerns to reveal what makes people truly human.

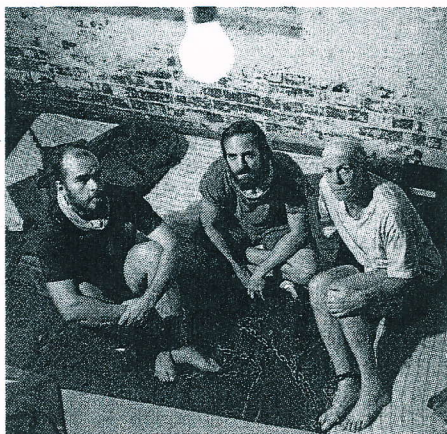
McGuinness' play is inspired by real events in Lebanon in 1986, but the conflict itself is suppressed in the play. The captors are never seen or heard and, apart from the copies of the Bible and the Koran in the room, the context of the kidnapping is largely irrelevant. The clanking chains that bind the hostages to the wall of their cell nevertheless ensure that the audience doesn't forget these men can't just walk out the door.

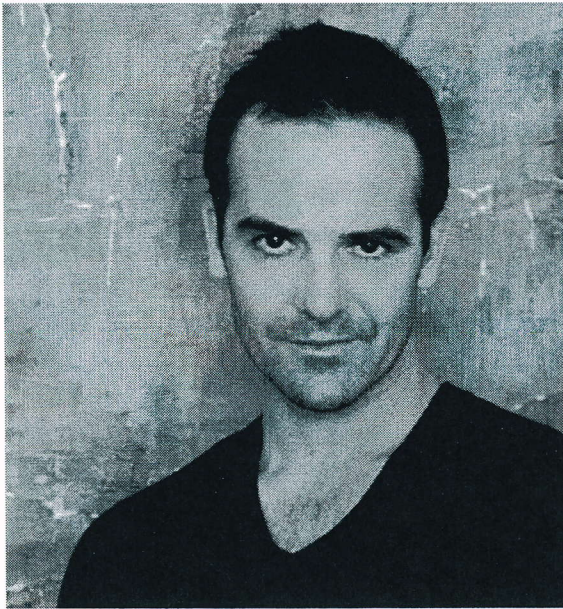
Someone who'll watch over me is the first production by West East Theatre, a group with links to

other Melbourne companies, Red Stitch and Human Sacrifice Theatre, and West East clearly shares these ensembles' aesthetic focus on the actor as the centre of production, with mostly fine results.

Richard Stables is compelling as the American hostage, Adam, a man struggling to maintain his humanity as his emotional strength is sapped away from him. Ezra Bix is well cast as the rather prim and pompous Englishman, Michael, someone completely out of place, like Donald Pleasence in *The Great Escape*. Trent Baker completes the trio as the Irishman, Edward, all raw emotion and instinct.

McGuinness' situations are often rather clichéd — the English-Irish face off over the potato famine, for example — but the parts that work are sublime. Director David Myles keeps a rather tight lid on the dynamics, achieving a fluent rhythm and some poetic moments. One might want more visceral expression at key moments, but overall there's a nice mood to this inaugural production by West East Theatre.





Richard Stables - Adam

TRAINED: THE ARTS EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS, LONDON

(Stanislavski, Uta Hagen, Lee Strasberg 'method' based training)

THEATRE: *Australia* - Psychopathia Sexualis (Red Stitch), Italian American Reconciliation (Belvoir) *London* - Falling Man (Kings Head Theatre), Burn This (Fortune Theatre), Serving It Up, Saved (Soho Theatre Co Workshop)

TELEVISION: Tangle, Dimensions in Time, Video K (UK)

FILM: Star Wars - The Phantom Menace, Lost Transmission, Mind the Gap

Richard has worked as an actor in various West End, Off West End and *London Fringe* and Touring Productions. He played a small role in George Lucas', '*Star Wars - The Phantom Menace*'. In Sydney he studied Practical Aesthetics leading to a masterclass with William H. Macy. He was a founding member of *Camelbite Theatre*, Sydney and *Red Stitch Actors Theatre*, Melbourne.

In 2005 Richard moved to Los Angeles and New York and spent 3 years working as an actor and teacher. He taught the Michael Chekhov technique at The Acting Corps, *Los Angeles*. He also trained as an actor at the *Ivana Chubbuck Studio* (Uta Hagen based) and the Sanford Meisner technique with Jeff Kober (L.A.) He is currently studying the Meisner technique with Simone Young (Melbourne).

In Melbourne he also studied with Daniele Legler and continued his training as an actor and teacher of the *Michael Chekhov technique* in *New York* with the Michael Chekhov Association (MICHA) headed by *famed acting coach and Hollywood and Broadway Casting Director Joanna Merlin*.

Richard is Co-Founder of West East Theatre.

When not acting Richard teaches Vedic Meditation at his meditation studio in Melbourne. (www.richardstables.com)

West East Theatre present

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me

By Frank McGuinness

by special arrangement with Casarotto Ramsay

fortyfivedownstairs 1-17 May

Tuesday to Saturday 8pm Sunday 6pm **PREVIEWS:** 29-30 April 8pm

Fortyfivedownstairs, 45 Flinders Lane Melbourne

Bookings: (03) 9662 9966, www.fortyfivedownstairs.com or www.westeasttheatre.com

Direction: David Myles

Featuring: Trent Baker, Richard Stables, Ezra Bix

Original Music: Gemma Turvey

'Someone Who'll Watch Over Me *is the best thing I've seen in a long time.*' The Times
London

'*Hilariously funny as well as moving...A wise and wonderful play.*' The Guardian

'Humorous and heartbreaking.' The Independent

West East Theatre is a new independent Melbourne theatre company created by Trent Baker and Richard Stables, both founding members of Red Stitch Actors Theatre. The company is delighted to launch itself with the first Australian production of Irish dramatist Frank McGuinness', ***Someone Who'll Watch Over Me***.

This highly acclaimed play was inspired McGuinness' conversations with Brian Keenan, who in 1986 was abducted on his way to work at the American University of Beirut. Keenan was kept in underground prisons and denied all contact with the outside world until his release four and a half years later.

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me is the heartrendingly compassionate, tenderly tragic yet surprisingly funny story of Keenan and two fellow captives held hostage together in a small cell. Powerless to escape the characters survive by resorting to elaborate flights of fancy and games of the imagination, using their humour to rescue each other from the brink of insanity.

'...more Beckett than Costa-Gavras...Instead of exploiting a real-life tragedy to bring a spurious journalistic reality to the stage, Mr McGuinness uses his premise as a springboard for imagining the fantasies, jokes and spiritual credos with which ordinary men might somehow survive barbaric incarceration.' The New York Times.

Trent Baker is a graduate of WAAPA (Acting) and VCA (Direction). At WAAPA he received the Nigel Rideout Award for his work. He has also worked with the MTC, toured nationally with Bell Shakespeare, starred in the 2008 Tropfest finalist film *Beggars Belief*, and directed for MTC education and Human Sacrifice. Trent regularly teaches and has conducted acting workshops for MTC, Bell Shakespeare, VCA and Shakespeare's Globe Australia.

Richard Stables has trained and acted in New York and Los Angeles and is a graduate of the Arts Educational Schools London (Acting). Whilst in London he worked as an actor for several years in various West End, Off West End, London Fringe and UK Touring Productions. He is a 'method actor' who'll prepare for his role in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* by spending more than 30 days in 'solitary confinement'.

Ezra Bix is a graduate of NIDA, where he and Baz Luhrmann played the brothers Dumain in *All's Well that Ends Well*. For the past eight years Ezra has toured India, China and Australasia with *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare – Abridged*, a comic version of Shakespeare's plays. He has also worked for the MTC, Malthouse and the London Repertory Theatre.

Richard Stables says, 'Our aim is to stage plays that vary radically in type, style and form and to always surprise the audience by not locking ourselves into the same character range, genre or era of play.'

For more information regarding this Media Release please call

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1st Floor, 110 Argyle St, Fitzroy ☒ PO Box 2765, Fitzroy VIC 3065

T: (03) 9419 0931 F: (03) 9417 4475 E: info@mbpublicity.com.au

We feel strongly about dedication in the theatre in Australia, and are aiming for longer, more intense rehearsal periods, utilising Method-acting and Michael Chekhov techniques and making every moment in preparation and on-stage personal and specific.

Ultimately West East Theatre aim to do what any artist does, which is to transport the audience to another place, another world that they totally believe in and are connected to emotionally and spiritually.'

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West East Theatre is grateful for the support of...

David Myles, Lucas Silva-Myles, Gemma Turvey and musicians Emma Sullivan, Trish Denys, Noel Hanway, Phil Collings, James O'Brien, Robin Mai and Woodstock Studios, 45 Downstairs staff- Mary-Lou, Phillipa, Abby, Richard and Andrew, Troy Dean, Wayne Aistrophe, Rohan Spong, Justin Batchelor, Bennetts Lane, Gina Morley, Veronica Albanis, Andrew Iser - Andrew Iser Photography, Yarra Trams, After the Tears, Torino Express, William Barton, Birdsong – Jennie Buckingham and Abe Huisken, Monica Turvey, Somage Fine Foods - Nathan Wakeford and Ben Kelly, NGV, Victorian Opera, Palace Cinemas, students of the National Theatre Drama School, Wil Ridley, Worldwide Online Printing, Nikki at Branded Products.

West East Theatre and everyone involved in the play dedicates this production to the courage and bravery of Brian Keenan, John McCarthy and all hostages past and present.

About West East Theatre

West East Theatre is a new independent Melbourne theatre company created by Trent Baker and Richard Stables, both founding members of Red Stitch Actors Theatre. The company is delighted to launch itself with this production of Irish dramatist Frank McGuinness', *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*. West East Theatre aims to produce plays that vary radically in type, style and form. To continually surprise the audience by exploring different characters, genres and eras in the plays we produce. West East is committed to bringing back dedication to the Australian theatre. We are aiming for longer, more intense rehearsal periods to guarantee high quality work. Utilising a variety of acting styles such as Method-acting and Michael Chekhov technique to ensure that every moment on-stage is personal and specific.

Ultimately West East seeks to transport the audience to another place, another world in which they are totally connected; emotionally and spiritually.

www.westeasttheatre.com



West East Theatre presents

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me By Frank McGuinness

Running from 29th April- 17th May 2009

@ 45 Downstairs
45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne CBD
www.fortyfivedownstairs.com

Background

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me is based on the true account of the kidnapping of Brian Keenan and his subsequent captivity with John McCarthy in the Lebanon in 1986.

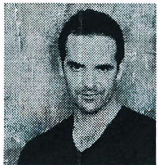
Brian Keenan and John McCarthy spent four and a half years together, confined underground and chained to the wall of their cell. The two men, pawns in a game of international politics, were utterly different in personality, physical appearance and background.

The working-class Irish Republican Keenan and his English cell mate, the upper-class McCarthy, a journalist ironically reporting on Keenan's own captivity, could easily have found each other at opposite ends of a gun barrel in the streets of Keenan's Belfast. Instead, in the face of the most acute deprivation and under the constant threat of death at the hands of their captors, they forged a relationship that transcended all that appeared to divide them.

However, Keenan and McCarthy were not alone in their incarceration. They were acutely aware of the presence of other international captives in surrounding cells, mostly Americans. Possibly inspired by this knowledge McGuinness adds the pivotal role of Adam to his play, an American hostage. Whilst on one level the roles of Edward and Michael are obviously inspired by their real life counterparts Keenan and McCarthy, McGuinness goes beyond mere realistic representation and imbues all three of the plays characters with qualities and traits of the two men.

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me, was a smash hit on The West End and Broadway in 1992 with the star of *The Crying Game*, Stephen Rea. And again in 2005 starring Johnny Lee Miller of *Trainspotting* fame.

CAST & CREW



Richard Stables - Adam

TRAINED: THE ARTS EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS, LONDON

(Stanislavski, Uta Hagen, Lee Strasberg 'method' based training)

THEATRE: *Australia* - Psychopathia Sexualis (Red Stitch), Italian American Reconciliation (Belvoir) *London* - Falling Man (Kings Head Theatre), Burn This (Fortune Theatre), Serving It Up, Saved (Soho Theatre Co Workshop)

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Trent Baker - Edward

TRAINED: WAAPA (Acting) VCA (Direction)

THEATRE: Scarlett O'Hara at the Crimson Parrot (MTC), MacBeth (MTC), Actors at Work (Bell Shakespeare) The Lights, Down the Road, Psychopathia Sexualis (Red Stitch), Corpus Christi, The Bear, Still (La Mama), A Midsummer Nights Dream

TELEVISION: Blue Heelers, Neighbours, Round the Twist, On the Beach, Child Star

FILM: Dingo, When Darkness Falls, Beggars Belief (Tropfest Finalist).

Trent has over 15 years experience in the Australian entertainment industry Teaching, Acting and Directing. He was one of the 12 actors who began *Red Stitch Actors Theatre*. In 1999 with Nancy Cato he began *The Chapel Loft Theatre* space at Chapel Off Chapel. In 2006 he directed the critically acclaimed *Human Sacrifice* production of Sam Shepard's True West. In 2008 he starred in the *Tropfest* finalist film *Beggars Belief* and directed *A Man For All Seasons* for *MTC education*. He teaches at *The National Theatre* and *St Martins Youth Theatre* and has conducted acting workshops for *MTC, Bell Shakespeare* and the *V.C.A.* Trent has twice assistant directed to Simon Phillips at *MTC* on *Festen* and *Scarlett O'Hara* at the *Crimson Parrot*. Trent is Co-Founder of West East Theatre.



Ezra Bix – Michael

TRAINED: NIDA

THEATRE: A Man For All Seasons (MTC), The Complete Works of William Shakespeare-Abridged (IMG-Touring Asia), Romeo and Juliet, The Taming of the Shrew (ASC), Earthly Paradise, The Secret House (Playbox), The Heartbreak Kid, The Great Gatsby, Three Hotels, In Angel Gear, Thy Kingdom Come, Rooted, Stingray, If Winter Comes, An Evening With Gary Lineker (UK), The Marginal Man

(UK), The Virtuous Burglar (UK)

TELEVISION: Rush, Satisfaction, Blue Heelers, Bootleg, The Secret Life Of Us, MDA, Murder Call, Janus, Embassy, The Feds, The Flying Doctors, Kelly, This Man ... This Woman, All The Way, The Four Minute Mile, Col'n Carpenter, Always Afternoon, The Fast Lane, Vietnam, Cyclone Tracey, Class Act (UK), The Knock (UK), To Play The King (UK)

FILM: The Big Steal, Deeper Than Blue, The Real Thing, Fever Pitch (UK),

Ezra will feature in ABC TV's upcoming series *Bush Slam*.



David Myles - Director

David Myles has worked in the UK, USA and Europe for 25 years with acclaimed companies such as The National Theatre of Great Britain, The Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden, BBC, ITV and Paramount Pictures, working in the Theatre, TV, Film and Music Industries. He has worked with many of the world's leading directors like Peter Brook, Ingmar Bergman and Jonathan Miller, and directed Laurence Olivier in *The Merchant of Venice*, Maggie Smith in *The Three Sisters* and Derek Jacobi in *As You Like It*. Theatre work has ranged from Shakespeare to Rock Musicals in venues as

diverse as *The Old Vic* in London, *La Fenice* in Venice and *The Ahmanson* in Los Angeles. In Australia he has directed for the MTC, *Revenger's Tragedy*, *Travesties*, *Othello Playbox*, *Victorian Arts Centre* and the *Melbourne, Adelaide, Port Fairy* and *Castlemaine Festivals*. Music productions have included the award winning *Sweet Charity* and *Sweet and Bitter Conversations* and Opera productions *Seduction of a General*, *Miles to Furphy* for the *Federation Festival* and *Shakespeare Sung* and *Voicing Emily*. Recent productions include *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Seeking Djira*, *Two*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Hole in the Ground*, *Empire*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* at the *Regent Theatre*, *Trio*, *The Jacket* and *Sam Shepard's "The Late Henry Moss"*. He is also a Television Director and Artistic Director of *Seduction Opera*.



Lucas Silva-Myles – Lighting Design

At the age of 16 Lucas Stage Managed and operated Lighting/ Sound on "Les Liaisons Dangereuses" at the Athenaeum Theatre. He worked for Chamber Theatre Company on "A Respectable Family" at Gasworks Theatre. In the few years that followed he worked on "Banned" at Theatreworks, "Voicing Emily" at the Malthouse, "I Start Again" for 'A is for Atlas' at the Abbotsford convent, "Journeyman" at the Storeroom in 2005. Lucas was lighting designer for "Reading Beckett", another play that was in the 2006 Melbourne Fringe Festival, presented by La Mama. Other productions for La Mama have been "A

Hole in the Ground", "Machiavelli, Machiavelli", "Green Wolf", and "Trio", which had a second season at the Terminus Hotel in 2005 and tours of regional Victoria in 2006 and 2008, for which Lucas worked as the Lighting Designer. Productions for Soul Theatre have been "Laughing Wild" and "Dolly" and his most recent productions have been "Kill the Wolf" at the Arts Centre and "Catalpa" at the Malthouse.

Gemma Turvey – Sound Design

Melbourne based pianist/composer Gemma Turvey is a graduate of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music (2004). She currently performs regularly around Melbourne and at various festivals across Australia with her trio, the Gemma Turvey Trio, featuring Nick Haywood (Bass) and Tony Floyd (Black Sorrows, drums). Her most recent release *Into the Life of Things* features her original compositions and arrangements and has been rapturously received, being praised as being "like musical chocolate" (Qantas Inflight Entertainment). Recent accolades include twice finalist in the Music Oz Awards ((Australia's premiere award for unsigned artists), and finalist in the 2008 International Piano Improvisation Competition, in Vilnius, Lithuania. Gemma's catalogue is available on iTunes, ABC Stores and www.gemmaturvey.com. For more information visit www.gemmaturvey.com

WEST EAST THEATRE PRESENTS
"SOMEONE WHO'LL WATCH OVER ME"

FREE ADAM. FREE MICHAEL. FREE EDWARD.

AFTER A YEAR OF INTENSE PREPARATION WEST EAST THEATRE BURSTS ON TO THE MELBOURNE THEATRE SCENE WITH ITS INAUGURAL PRODUCTION OF THE WEST END SMASH HIT, "SOMEONE WHO'LL WATCH OVER ME" by Frank McGuinness.

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me is the story of three men who are kidnapped in broad daylight on the streets of Beirut and held together in a small cell. Their shared humanity allows them to transcend their ordeal, creating a bond of love and compassion that is truly life affirming.

This highly acclaimed play was inspired by McGuinness' conversations with Brian Keenan who, in 1986 was abducted on his way to work at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon.

"Hilariously funny as well as moving...a wise and wonderful play" The Guardian

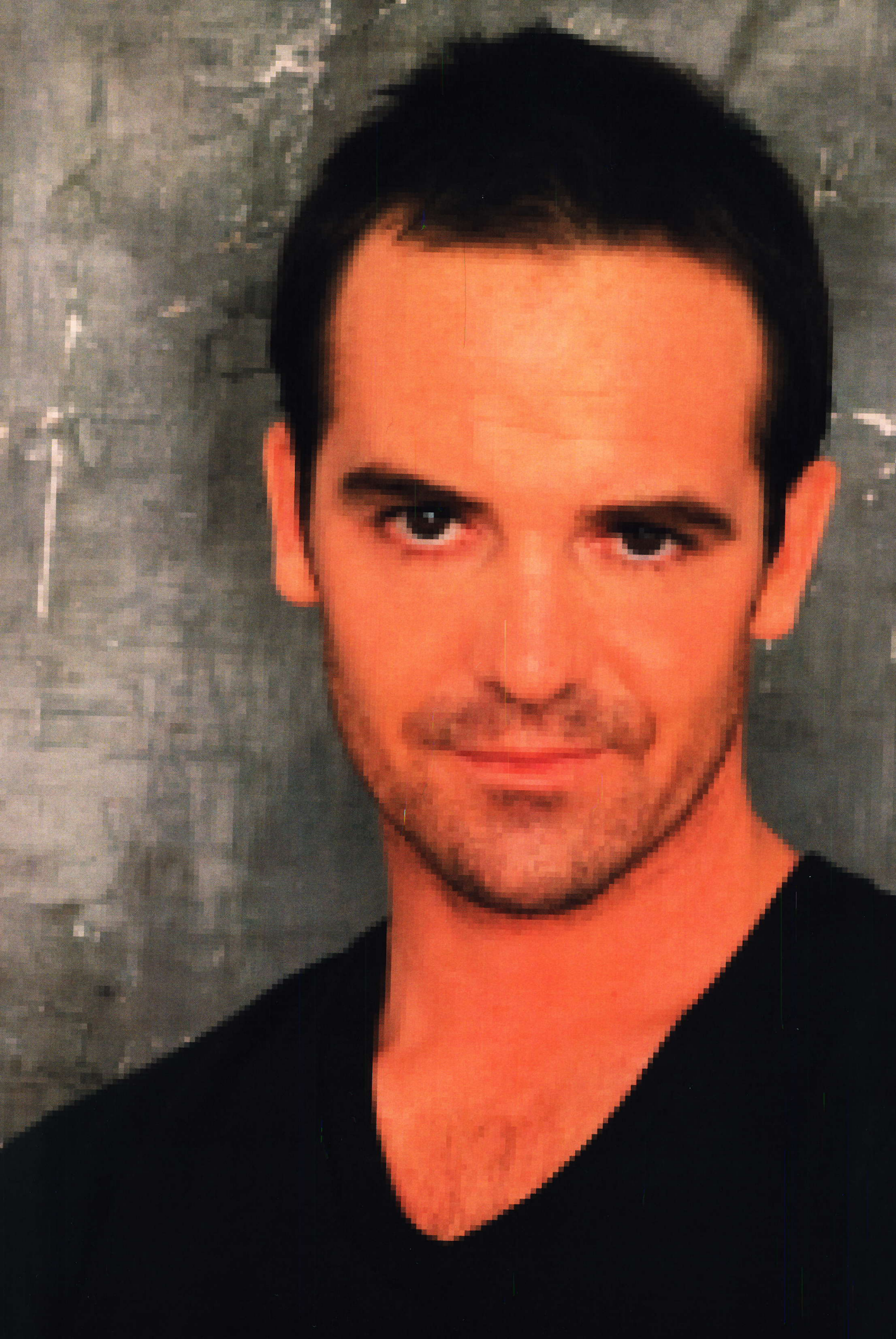
"...more Beckett than Costa-Gavras...Instead of exploiting a real-life tragedy to bring a spurious journalistic reality to the stage, Mr McGuinness uses his premise as a springboard for imagining the fantasies, jokes and spiritual credos with which ordinary men might somehow survive barbaric incarceration." The New York Times.

Directed by David Myles
Featuring Richard Stables, Trent Baker and Ezra Bix
Original Music by Gemma Turvey

Apr 29 – May 17 Tues – Sat @ 8pm, Sun @ 6pm
Forty Five Downstairs - 45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

Book tickets at www.fortyfivedownstairs.com or 03 9662 9966

For more info on West East Theatre go to: www.westeasttheatre.com





Extreme craft of the method man

April 27, 2009

To play a hostage, Melbourne actor Richard Stables locked himself in a shed and got his friends to beat him up. He tells Melinda Houston why he doesn't just act.

Advertisement

RICHARD Stables looks in urgent need of a decent feed. In fact, Richard Stables is in urgent need of a decent feed. And not just because he's an impoverished actor.

Wan and hollow-cheeked, the committed method actor has just spent the best part of a month in solitary confinement, subsisting on starvation rations and being beaten regularly. All for his art.

"I trained in London in the mid-90s, at a drama school set up to be the UK version of the Actors' Studio," he says. "I've been preparing for roles this way ever since then."

As a student, he spent weeks dressing as an elderly woman in order to play Queen Margaret in *Richard III*. For his next role he weight-trained and hung out in gay bars; after that he lost all that weight he had gained and more to play a man dying of AIDS.

For their first production as independent theatre company West East, Stables and partners Trent Baker and Ezra Bix have chosen *Someone Who'll Watch over Me*, based on the experiences of Brian Keenan, who spent more than four years as a hostage in Beirut.

The company's ethos is "dedication". That means more than double the usual time for rehearsal. And the kind of preparation that surely falls well outside the MTC's occupational health and safety obligations.

"The first thing I did was make a cell," Stables says. "First I used a small room in my house. Then the shed. And basically I've spent the last month, on and off, in the shed." Unbeknownst to his landlord, he attached a chain and shackles to the wall, blacked out the windows, and recruited two friends to serve as his captors — who he rather eerily refers to only as "my captors", despite obviously being well aware that one was his musician girlfriend, Gemma Turvey, and one his friend and colleague Ezra Bix.

"One captor, the nice captor, shoved food under the door once a day," he says. A boiled egg. An apple. A small bowl of porridge. And a bottle of water, all of which Stables had to make last 24 hours. "I could tell her step, it was lighter. The mean captor, the one who beat me, walked much more heavily. He wore boots. I could always tell which one was coming. And that's where the fear factor comes in."

Twice a day for seven or eight days at a stretch, his "mean captor" would enter the room armed with a bat made from four weekend newspapers rolled tightly together and bound with masking tape. "I had bruises all over my back and buttocks and legs.

And I lost 15 kilos," Stables says. "You lose energy, your body gets very fragile. But your will gets stronger."

And, like the notorious Milgram experiment, the "mean captor" — who in his ordinary form is someone Stables describes as "a beautiful, gentle man" — became increasingly brutal in his beatings. "He was hitting me pretty hard. By the second day, he got into it," Stables says. "So it was an interesting relationship, a lot of fear, a lot of anger. The last time I actually spat on him. And swore at him. He hit me harder in response. But you start to feed on the pain."

And once the role-play was over? "It actually was a bit weird!" Stables says, sounding — surprisingly — surprised. "It did take a couple of weeks to adapt, to start seeing him as my friend again."

Stables' voice remains perfectly calm when he recounts his method experiment, but the longer he talks, the more his head droops, the more his focus turns inward.

"It is almost like it pulls the mind down," he says. "And you have to actually physically pull yourself out of that. By exercising. By talking to myself. By talking to my family out loud. Reading the Koran or the Bible, that's what he (Brian Keenan) was given to read. Anything to get yourself out of your head. Even after eight days, it's amazing the things that happen to your mind."

As a teacher of Ayurvedic meditation, Stables says he has the mental equipment to handle it. "But there are times when certain memories and things come into my head and really take me over, emotionally."

And physically? He laughs. "I'm seeing an osteo this afternoon."

Someone Who'll Watch over Me, fortyfivedownstairs, 1-17 May, westeasttheatre.com

<http://youtube.com>.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/04/26/1240684333892.html>