



Ben Winspear and Marta Dusseldorp at Hobart's Theatre Royal. When they met, he told her he would one day return to Tasmania, which he left at age 19.

CURTAIN CALL

Nearly a decade after MONA opened and two years after they left Sydney for Hobart, actors Marta Dusseldorp and Ben Winspear are hell-bent on kick-starting phase two of Tasmania's creative-led recovery.

STORY BY *Gabriella Coslovich* PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Adam Gibson*

I'M TRYING my hardest not to look like an intruder as I wrestle with the iron gate at the front of a mock Tudor home in a laid-back beach suburb of Hobart. A buzzer is nowhere in sight. I force open the latch and, with a growing sense of guilt, wander through a rambling English-style garden, which is looking a little scrappy at the end of winter, in search of a front door. The two-storey, sandstone and brick house hints at a glamorous past – it was once the lodge and stables of a 19th-century mansion – but a grand entrance eludes me.

I spot a beige side door and bang hopefully on a metal knocker. The door flies open to the scuttle of man and beast: Ben Winspear, thick dark curls leaping across his strong-jawed face, and a ginger-fleeced dog leaping onto my just-washed cords. Winspear introduces me to Mabel, the family groodle, who barks inhospitably. He pulls back on her collar as she crossly sniffs the trespasser. The tall figure of Marta Dusseldorp appears behind the knot of man and dog.

"Mabel's humiliated that someone snuck through the gate," Dusseldorp says cheerily and beckons me in. I follow her down a corridor and into a crackling warm kitchen with well-used pots hanging around the stove and the promising smell of something baking in the oven. Winspear and Mabel rustle up behind. Nothing stuffy about this place.

I'd been expecting something a little more starchy, a little more intimidating. One assumes things about the way famous actors live, and Dusseldorp is one of

Australia's most recognised and loved. She's been a constant on our screens, nominated for multiple awards for her roles in the ABC television series *Janet King* and *Jack Irish* and the Seven Network's *A Place to Call Home*. In 2015 she won the AACTA award for best lead actress in *Janet King*, in which she plays the pointedly smart Crown prosecutor who gives the series its name. The role, I'm told, also made her a "gay icon". In the series, King is a lesbian, a mother of two, and in a relationship that's tested by work and life like any other.

In real life, 47-year-old Dusseldorp is married to Winspear, 44, a fellow actor and theatre director, and they have two daughters, Grace, 13, and Maggie, 10. While her husband doesn't have the kind of fame afforded by a prominent television career, he comes with a solid reputation of his own, a fixture in Australia's theatre scene, having worked with the likes of Barrie Kosky and Robyn Nevin, and as resident director of the Sydney Theatre Company.

Two years ago, Dusseldorp and Winspear left their home in inner Sydney and busy lives at the centre of Australia's film, television and theatre circles, exchanging a capital city of 5.2 million people for one with a population smaller than the City of Parramatta. A retreat from the big stages and bright lights of Sydney for Tasmania's sleepier shores might seem slightly mad – a sure way to put the brakes on an acting career – but Winspear, Wagga Wagga-born but Hobart-raised, made no secret that one day he'd return.

"Pretty much from the moment I met him he said,

'I'm not going to live here, in Sydney...I'm going to go back to Tassie,' and I was like, 'Okay,'" Dusseldorp says, in her distinctively deep and refined voice. "And then 14 years later he said, 'And now I really *am* going back to Tassie, wanna come?' So we started looking for a place."

Dusseldorp is dressed for the cold, snug in jeans, calf-high flat boots, layers of black wool, and a blue and green tartan scarf. Her fine blonde hair is casually pulled back into a high loose bun, her sculpted face make-up-free. Winspear, casually cool in blue and green checked pants and flecked white shirt, seems ready for spring. But then, he's faced many Hobart winters. Dusseldorp invites me to sit by a blazing glass-fronted fireplace, at a 1950s Laminex six-seater table with matching red chairs – the couple's "office", she says. Recovered from her shame, Mabel snuggles at my feet.

The coffee machine screeches into life as Winspear prepares a perfect brew with a fine layer of schiuma. Barista shift over, he explains why he'd long dreamed of returning to his native Tasmania. "I missed the relaxed nature of life," he says. "Pretty much every time you leave the house in Sydney you end up in some kind of confrontation with someone. It's just the rhythm of the place, and it was not fun. I was spending a lot of time working but also a lot of time with the kids, and I could see the effect that the place was having on me and therefore what it was having on them as well. The likelihood is that most children will grow up and live in a city...but it doesn't have to be your whole life, and



The couple perform at Hobart's St David's Cathedral earlier this month.

I wanted them to understand that there are choices and options out there."

There's been some adjusting, of course, mainly parental. The first time Dusseldorp witnessed a gang of kids rock up to the front gate after school on their scooters and bikes, calling out for Grace and Maggie to come out onto the street to play, she panicked, "Sydney mum" style. Winspear assured her that there was nothing to worry about. "In Sydney, I wouldn't put the kids on the bus and go, 'Here's 20 dollars, go to the city for the day,' but here you can do that," he says.

What Hobart couldn't offer when Winspear was growing up was a career in the arts. The opportunities were "almost zero", he says. Even though he came from a "theatre family" – his father, Les, was a founding member of Hobart's Big Monkey Theatre, which still exists – departure was the only option. And so in 1995, aged 19, he took off to study acting at Sydney's prestigious National Institute of Dramatic Art.

In 1998, straight out of NIDA, he was cast as Gloucester's bastard son, Edmund, in director Barrie Kosky's lurid, grotesque and unforgettable interpretation of *King Lear* for the Bell Shakespeare theatre company. Winspear went on to work as assistant director to the precociously talented Kosky on three

productions – the Sydney Theatre Company's *Oedipus* and *Women of Troy*, and *Le Grand Macabre* – for Komische Oper Berlin, where Kosky is now artistic director.

"That was life-changing," Winspear says. "I would suggest that everybody who grows up here [in Tasmania] should seek a broader experience of the world. A really dynamic environment here would involve people coming and going, and expats and new people and visiting artists and exchange programs. That's when a place becomes really vital and interesting for the audiences, and for the people making work here."

Dusseldorp and Winspear are now part of that exchange, bringing a wealth of experience and connections, and a determination to make a difference. They wasted no time setting up their stage and screen company, Archipelago Productions, and have a raft of projects in development, among them a new television series set in Tasmania involving writer/producer Andrew Knight (*SeaChange*, *Rake*, and with whom Dusseldorp worked on *Jack Irish*), which has received funding from Screen Tasmania. Dusseldorp would like to see a film studio set up in Tasmania to support local production and stories; it needn't be huge or hugely expensive, she says.

There are plenty of empty spaces that could be converted into a film lot.

"We shot *A Place to Call Home* in a [Sydney] tile factory," she says of the 1950s period drama in which she played Sarah, a nurse and Nazi concentration camp survivor. "It wasn't soundproofed – we had to stop when the bell rang at the school next door, we had to stop when it rained, we had to stop when someone coughed on the other set – it was not purpose-built."

The couple's ambition makes one think they might do for the screen and stage in Tasmania what David Walsh and his Museum of Old and New Art did for the visual arts. It brings to mind, too, actor Cate Blanchett and her playwright husband Andrew Upton, who, as co-artistic directors of the Sydney Theatre Company, significantly increased its international profile, touring productions globally, aided by Blanchett's star power. Not everyone, however, appreciated an Oscar-winning actor taking the reins at Australia's largest theatre company, with some sniffing that her celebrity got them the job ahead of other well-credentialled candidates.

Similarly, Tasmanians don't always take kindly to mainlanders muscling in with big ideas. An old-fashioned suspicion of overt ambition persists in some

quarters. The relaxed lifestyle can drift into inertia, a reluctance to change, and it veils a population that for too long has struggled with Australia's poorest health and education outcomes, under-employment and welfare dependency.

But despite its chronic social and economic challenges, Tasmania's breathtaking landscapes, relatively cheap real estate, and growing cultural confidence, bolstered by the arrival of MONA, is attracting a rising number of "tree-changers" from the mainland, heading primarily to Hobart. As Dusseldorp points out, before the coronavirus brought us to a standstill, "The whole world was talking about Tasmania...the flights were full."

She and Winspear want nothing less, as they say on the Archipelago website, than to promote Tasmania "as the most exciting corner of the country. A place in which to risk, innovate and inspire." It's a gutsy vision that shows faith in the power of the arts to transform minds, states and economies.

But they're not about to pander to mainstream tastes. For their first major stage production in Hobart they chose Melbourne playwright Angus Cerini's award-winning *The Bleeding Tree*, a brutal and darkly humorous tale about a rural mother and her two daughters who, after years of abuse and violence from the "man of the house", snap savagely and without remorse.

"The fluff and bubble [of theatre] is great to keep people laughing and amused, but we tend towards subjects that are more visceral," Dusseldorp says. "It doesn't mean that they can't be funny. *The Bleeding Tree* is very funny, because that's the skill, to bring people in gently" – Mabel jumps as her mistress loudly claps her hands – "and then wake them up a little bit."

The Bleeding Tree was meant to launch Hobart's newest performance venue, the 350-seat Studio Theatre at The Hedberg arts complex, in May. Local wisdom had it that four or five performances were all that Hobart audiences could sustain. Dusseldorp, accustomed to six-week seasons in the theatre, said no, let's try for 10 shows. Local wisdom resisted: no, you should only do four. "So I'm sitting here going, 'We can't get enough audience for two weeks?'" She pushed back, went for 10 shows and "we were almost maxed-out...we were nearly there."

And then the pandemic hit.

ABOVE THE fireplace in the kitchen hangs a painting of a glassy-eyed woman, hair rolled into a bun at the nape of her neck. She has a world-weary, faraway look. I recognise it as the work of the highly collectable Sydney artist Del Kathryn Barton. Dusseldorp bought the painting when she finished filming *Janet King* in 2017. "That's how I was feeling at the end of the series," she says, glancing at the unearthly woman above the fireplace.

For seven years, Dusseldorp had maintained a grueling schedule, performing back-to-back on *Jack Irish*, *A Place to Call Home* and *Janet King*. She also performed alongside Cate Blanchett in this year's ABC television series *Stateless*, based on the true story of the wrongly detained Australian resident Cornelia Rau and the human rights abuses of the since-closed Baxter

immigration detention centre in South Australia. Like Blanchett, who co-created and co-executive-produced the series, Dusseldorp is a refugee advocate, officially as Australian representative for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

If Dusseldorp had any doubts about moving to Hobart, they weren't to do with missing out on the urbanity and glamour of Sydney.

"I was worried that I would see the kids even less," she says. "I still had to shoot the last season of *A Place to Call Home*. I wasn't ready to retire." But the opportunities Hobart offered were manifest. "We could start a company down here," she says, "and we could initiate collaborations with fabulous people who were already here, and people who were moving here. In Sydney we could never have endeavoured to create a theatre company, not in a million years."

What's the best thing that's happened since they moved down? "The pandemic!" Dusseldorp cries out, and bursts out laughing, setting us all off. The laughter is a complicated mix of elation, sadness, relief and frustration. COVID-19 is a contrary force that has inordinately affected the always precarious arts sector.

"I had jobs lined up for the rest of the year which are no longer supported," Dusseldorp says.

Forget about travelling to the mainland – Tasmania's Liberal Premier Peter Gutwein has closed the borders until at least December 1, to control the spread of COVID. But the restrictions have also ceded a respite from busy-ness. For Dusseldorp, the pandemic has brought much-needed rest.

Knowing what it's like to move from the adrenalin-charged rush and endless choices of a big city (in my case, Melbourne) to Hobart's slower pace, I wonder what Dusseldorp and Winspear have most struggled with since their move. "It was hard early on when Marta was travelling a lot, coming and going," says Winspear, the stay-at-home parent. "That was difficult, but it was not dissimilar to life in Sydney." Dusseldorp cuts in, voice rising a notch, "It was for me, too, all that flying."

She found a way to cope by resolving that rather than seal herself off, she'd strike up conversations and learn about the world through the eyes of others. Of course, it helps if you're a celebrated television star. "You got Andrew Wilkie that way," Winspear says, referring to the Tasmanian independent federal MP and well-known anti-pokies campaigner.

Dusseldorp found herself sitting next to Wilkie on a flight to Sydney in June 2018. Wilkie had his noise-cancelling headphones on. Dusseldorp tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hi, I'm Marta Dusseldorp," she said.

"Yes, I know who you are," Wilkie replied.

She told him that she had moved to Hobart. Great, he said, as he began to put his headphones back on. "And I was like, 'So, tell me, what do you think is important down in Tasmania, how can I help?'" Dusseldorp says. Wilkie's headphones remained off for the rest of the flight.

He remembers it well. "It was the most delightful flight," Wilkie tells me. "She has enormous vision and really is a giant in Tasmania when it comes to the creative arts."

He has since supported her on several projects, facilitating meetings and links in the state. He stresses that what he's about to tell me is his view alone, not Dusseldorp's. "There's a depressing lack of political vision in Tasmania and a disappointing lack of investment in the arts," he says, "and it's not enough to keep referring to MONA and the MONA effect. It can't all be done by one man. If we had 20 people like that, and we funded them properly, we would have an arts-led recovery, but I don't think the state government gets that. They look at MONA and think, 'We have art now.'"

"IN SYDNEY WE COULD NEVER HAVE ENDEAVOURED TO CREATE A THEATRE COMPANY, NOT IN A MILLION YEARS."

In January it will be 10 years since MONA opened and indelibly transformed Tasmania's image, casting the island onto the world stage. But MONA has been closed since March due to the pandemic, and a reopening has yet to be announced. Its associated winter festival, Dark MOFO, was cancelled this year.

I email the office of Tasmanian Arts Minister Elise Archer to ask whether she has time to talk about Archipelago Productions and more broadly about culture in the state. She doesn't, and that's understandable given that she's also the Attorney General, and the Minister for Justice, Corrections, Building and Construction, and Heritage. But in an emailed statement, she says that Archipelago's ambitions reflect those of the government, and that a stimulus package of more than \$3.5 million has been delivered to help the cultural and creative industries through the pandemic. "We are confident that the arts are going to play an important role in our state's recovery and rebuild," she writes.

I ask Wilkie, how realistic are Dusseldorp's and Winspear's aims? Could Tasmania really become "the most exciting corner of the country" – or, to use his word, an "incubator" for the creative arts?

"It is realistic, it's that simple," he says. "It's a wake-up call to the people who have been here a long time. People like Marta and Ben are cultural disrupters and that's what the state needs."

DUSSELDORP OPENS the oven and a giddy smell of sweetness rushes out. She pokes a cake-tester into a big fat loaf of banana bread that's forming a tantalisingly golden crust. It's not often that one turns up for an interview to find a cake baking for morning tea, but Victorian-based author Favel Parrett, another Tasmanian who left for the mainland as a teenager in the 1990s, assures me that such hospitality is not unusual in this household. "When I'm on tour, Ben and Marta will say, 'Come over,' because they know that all you want is a home-cooked meal, and she'll make a spaghetti bolognese."

Parrett met the couple eight years ago at the Lighthouse Literary Fest, at Aireys Inlet on Victoria's Surf Coast, where the author was talking about her debut novel, *Past the Shallows*. "They had already read it and they were just so friendly," Parrett says. "They are just two of the most down-to-earth, lovely people, just not what you would expect of celebrities."

The couple have since optioned *Past the Shallows*, a tale of three brothers and their violent fisherman father, set on the remote south-east coast of Tasmania. Winspear has adapted the book into a screenplay and is working on an experimental film and a possible



Ben Winspear (front) as a child, with brother Dallas.



Marta (left) aged 24, with mother Edwina and older sister Teya.

stage production. "If you tell Marta an idea and she's on board, you know it will happen. It might take 10 years, but it will happen, and Tasmania needs that," Parrett says.

When Hobart architect Peta Heffernan met Dusseldorp and Winspear at the Tasmanian Theatre Awards in 2017 and learnt that they were moving down from Sydney, she asked whether they'd be interested in joining the board of Creative Island, a non-profit, voluntary organisation whose mission is to help elevate Tasmania as "a cultural and creative powerhouse". Heffernan runs Liminal Studio with her partner Elvio Brianese. The two designed the Hedberg arts complex (in collaboration with Singaporean architects WOHA), connecting the new building to the historic Theatre Royal next door to create a multi-venue, state-of-the-art music and theatre hub.

They were also designing the set for *The Bleeding Tree* until COVID intervened. Heffernan left Tasmania in the late '80s, aged 18, and headed for Melbourne. She only returned in the mid-2000s, rediscovering her love for the place after experiencing the *Ten Days on the Island* festival, which "gave me confidence that there was enough cultural maturity to move back".

The presence of Dusseldorp and Winspear on the Creative Island board has helped the organisation "get a louder voice", Heffernan says. "The creative sector still has a lot to do to be heard and appreciated for what it contributes to the island. The big thing that MONA did was get people here so they had the opportunity to experience all the other creative offerings that already existed, and in a similar sort of way, because of Marta's incredible reputation, having her here draws attention – if she says something, people listen." It appears they do – *The Bleeding Tree* will now open on November 12 at the Theatre Royal which, being larger than the Studio Theatre, ensures optimal social distancing for larger audiences.

DUSSELDORP GREW up in a successful, socially conscious and boisterous Sydney family. "We were very loud, and allowed to be loud," she says. Her paternal grandfather, the Dutch-born Gerardus "Dick" Dusseldorp, was the founder of the company that became construction, development and investment giant Lendlease, a man celebrated for his progressive management style and concern for the rights of employees. Marta didn't see him all that often, and he died in 2000, but he left a deep impression. "It always felt like he was whispering to me, 'You can do anything you can dream of,' and that wasn't to do with money and position. He instilled in me a courage and a bravery, and, in many ways, an arrogance to believe that that was possible, especially as a woman."

Dusseldorp is the second oldest of five siblings. She was eight years old when she lost her infant brother Yoris to

HIT ROLES



Dusseldorp playing the title role in *Janet King*, which spun off from 2011's *Crownies*.



In *A Place to Call Home*, which began filming in 2013.



With Guy Pearce in *Jack Irish: Dead Point*, 2014.



With Cate Blanchett and Dominic West in *Stateless*, 2020.

COURTESY OF MARTA DUSSELDORP AND BEN WINSPEAR; BEN KING; DALLAS KILPONEN

leukaemia, a tragic lesson at an early age about the fragility of life. From ages four to 14 she studied ballet, deciding after that to continue on at school rather than pursue a place at the Australian Ballet. As a boarder at Geelong Grammar, she met a drama teacher who encouraged her to explore acting. “So that’s when I started my craft,” Dusseldorp says.

Her older sister Teya says Dusseldorp was destined to be an actor: “She always loved to perform, she would be the centre of attention. We spent a lot of time going to see her dance performances. You could see that on the stage was where she could shine.” A former lawyer who now heads the Dusseldorp Forum, set up to mark the retirement of Dick Dusseldorp and fund initiatives to improve the lives of young people, Sydney-based Teya is excited by the vision her sister and Winspear have for Tasmania. “Not just art for art’s sake, but utilising art for social purpose. It’s the blending of those two roles that will make what they do with Archipelago very special.”

IN SOME ways, Winspear has lived in the shadow of Dusseldorp’s television success. “He really is a man of theatre, and you can’t really get famous in the theatre unless you really try,” says Ralph Myers, former artistic director of Sydney’s Belvoir Theatre, who first met Winspear when they were students at NIDA. In 2008, Myers directed Winspear in the Sydney Theatre Company production of *Frankenstein* after the actor cast in the lead as the monster’s creator, Victor, withdrew a week before opening night.

“Ben stepped in and saved our bacon and he was so much better than the person who had been cast, and he came with such a generosity of spirit and open-mindedness,” says Myers. “He was exactly what we needed in that show. He is the kind of person you want in the rehearsal room because he is so easy and charming and he allows things to be and to happen, both as an actor and as a director.”

The oldest of two siblings, Winspear spent his childhood running wild on the flanks of Hobart’s Mount Wellington, at an alternative community school that he describes as “basically supervised anarchy”. “We would take off, barefoot, in the snow, with a machete, and return in time for the bus after playing unsupervised in a quarry and lighting fires,” he says. “It was amazing that no one died.”

The experience seems to have influenced his approach as a parent. The quality he most wants to encourage in his daughters is for them to be true to their impulses. On the mantelpiece, next to Winspear’s delicately hand-carved Huon pine mushrooms, is a concrete “vase” from which droop the tendrils of something that might once have been a plant, inserted into the wet concrete before it became a solid mass. Maggie had asked whether she could put fresh flowers into the “vase” she was making. Rather than tell her no, that the flowers would wilt when the concrete dried, Winspear said yes and let his daughter work it out for herself.

“They’ll come up with an idea, I’ll look at it and I’ll think forward to the mess that it’s going to involve and the hours it’s going to take me to clean up and I think, ‘I really don’t have the energy or the time for that, so I can say no, and crush that impulse in them permanently, or say yes, and that’s how they’ll grow’ – and I’ll just go around mopping up after them.”

Dusseldorp and Winspear met at the Sydney Theatre Company in 2003. Winspear was resident director and Dusseldorp was playing Mistress Marwood in *The Way of the World*. He was transfixed by her craft – “It’s not often that you see someone where you go – *Who’s that?!?*”

She was intrigued that she’d met someone she couldn’t figure out. “I was like, ‘I have no idea what you’re thinking,’” she says. “I used to say to him all the time, ‘What are you thinking?’ I’d never had to ask that before.”

The mutual interest erupted into something far more intense when they met later that year in Berlin, where Winspear was working on *Le Grand Macabre* with Kosky. “It had to then be

“I USED TO SAY TO HIM ALL THE TIME, ‘WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?’ I’D NEVER HAD TO ASK THAT BEFORE.”



everything for me,” Dusseldorp says. “I really felt like I had met the father of my children.” She laughs and adds: “Ben was like, ‘I’m never getting married, I’m never having kids, I don’t want kids.’ And I’m like, ‘Really? Because you’d be an amazing dad.’ I was 30 by then, so I knew.”

Dusseldorp’s instincts were spot-on. Winspear has been the primary parent. “I’ve loved that more than anything that’s ever come along,” Winspear says. “Children don’t remain children for very long and every day you mourn something that you used to do together that they’ve outgrown, but that you haven’t.”

The parenting role has meant that he’s had to knock back work. “I’ve said no to a lot of stuff, a lot of touring stuff; I haven’t put my hand up for things, I haven’t chased work, I haven’t tried to develop a lot of my own work

“It’s not often that you see someone where you go – ‘Who’s that?!’”, says Winspear of first meeting Dusseldorp in 2003.

over the last 12 years because I’ve known that I won’t be able to do it justice, so I would say I would have diminished probably 60 per cent of my professional output.”

Adds Dusseldorp: “But we always talked about that...I was always...‘I can say no to this.’”

Winspear makes it clear, “I’m not sad about that because there will always be another job. A job’s a job.”

Next door to the kitchen there’s a long, glass-roofed atrium where the kids are allowed to explore their creative impulses. When I visit it’s a makeshift film studio. Dusseldorp and Winspear are creating a film to complement their upcoming performance at St David’s Cathedral. The cathedral’s director of music, Thomas Rimes, asked them whether they’d like to be part of the church’s *First Signs of Life* concert series. (Rimes is another example of the Tasmanian cultural exchange, a leading composer and conductor who was born in Fiji and grew up in Hobart before heading off to the US and Europe to forge his musical career.)

In no time, Dusseldorp and Winspear had an idea. They’d perform Shakespeare’s 1593 poem *Venus and Adonis*. When Winspear discovered that the work had been written while London theatres were closed because of an outbreak of the plague, the choice felt all the more fitting. A tragic tale of the lustful Greek goddess who forces herself onto the young Adonis, who would rather hunt boar than make love to Venus, the poem seeps with sexual allusion. A daring choice for a church performance. But Hobart audiences are up to it, insists Winspear. “There is no second-guessing this audience,” he says. “This audience travels to Melbourne to see theatre all the time, and they are hungry and articulate and experienced and deserving.”

I’ve been here for more than two hours and Dusseldorp realises she’s forgotten to serve the banana bread. She sends me home with two thick slices, neatly wrapped in foil, still warm from the oven.

FOUR WEEKS later, I head to St David’s. A queue spills from the church’s Gothic entrance, down the stairs and along Murray Street in central Hobart, and there’s still half an hour to go before the performance begins. *Venus and Adonis* has sold out. A second performance, by demand, will sell out too. When the doors open, people file in and fill every second pew, as required by coronavirus restrictions.

Winspear and Dusseldorp appear from behind the altar and stand at their lecterns, in the spot usually reserved for the minister. Like a modern Greek goddess, Dusseldorp glows in a white suit and silver trainers. Winspear is her monochromatic opposite in black. They read Shakespeare’s words to an ominous score composed and performed live by Rimes on synthesiser, with two other musicians on organ and percussion. A screen projects images of implied nudity and sex, hands gliding over phallic flowers, Dusseldorp’s tousled blonde hair trailing over Winspear’s bare skin.

The atmosphere in the church is electric. People watch with quiet intensity. I spot Arts Minister Elise Archer in the front rows. The reading goes for more than an hour and I wonder what the audience is making of it. “The poem builds to its wrenching climax. The crowd bursts into applause. From the side of the church, a throaty woman with a broad Australian accent yells out: “Thank you for coming here!” ■

OPENING PAGES AND THIS PAGE: ADAM GIBSON; HAIR & MAKE-UP BY LIZ GOULDING; CHIEF STYLIST: MELISSA BOYLE; ON LOCATION STYLIST: YOLANDA PEART-SMITH; BEN WEARS HUGO BOSS “HENRY” SUIT AND “JILLIAS” SHIRT AND HUGO BOSS SHOES. OPENING PAGES: MARTA WEARS EMPORIO ARMANI JACKET AND PANTS. THIS PAGE: MARTA WEARS ROMANCE WAS BORN DRESS AND LANA WILKINSON “CATY” SHOES.