



TOMMY

Tommy

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL OF ARTS

2015

Eric Mingus
and Hal Willner

**World Premiere
Exclusive to Adelaide**

Thu 26 Feb – Sun 1 Mar
Her Majesty's Theatre

BASS 131 246
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**A NOTE FROM DAVID SEFTON,
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

I can assure you I will be every bit as excited and intrigued as anyone in the audience when the curtain rises for the first time on this historic 're-imagining' of The Who's legendary rock opera, the culmination of a five year conversation.

Mark Twain once defined madness as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

But Mark Twain never met Hal Willner.

Staggeringly, this is the eighth project I have undertaken with the inspired and inspirational Mr Willner.

And each one has been different to all the others.

The list of artists who have participated in those projects would take up my whole word allowance, but a brief snapshot: Lou Reed, Nick Cave, Elvis Costello, Bryan Ferry, Antony and the Johnsons, Randy Newman, Percy Heath, Marc Ribot, Jarvis Cocker, David Thomas, Van Dyke Parks... and Eric Mingus.

Which is how this whole extended journey began.

And Hal's own resume is just as star-studded and eclectic – from his early career with the legendary likes of William Burroughs and Marianne Faithful to such timeless and unequalled various artist tribute recordings like *Stay Awake*, surely the greatest ever collection of renditions from Disney songs – to other more recent milestones like the extraordinary collision between the late great Lou Reed and Metallica, the terrifying *Lulu*.

And now here we all are – another amazing line-up of top notch, fabulous artists about to embark on another unmissable, unpredictable and unrepeatable trip.

Fasten your seatbelts!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Sefton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tommy

Eric Mingus and Hal Willner

WORLD PREMIERE / EXCLUSIVE TO ADELAIDE

NARRATOR/HAWKER/DOCTOR Eric Mingus
ACID QUEEN/UNCLE ERNIE Gavin Friday
LOVER/COUSIN KEVIN/LOCAL LAD Harper Simon
MOTHER Camille O'Sullivan
TOMMY Yael Stone
NURSE/VARIOUS Elana Stone
FATHER Robert Forster
GUITAR Giancarlo Vulcano
DOUBLE BASS/BASS GUITAR Lyndon Gray
KEYS Matthew Carey
DRUMS Sim Cain
PERCUSSION Ben Todd
SAXOPHONES Catherine Sikora
SAXOPHONE AND REEDS Terry Edwards
TRUMPETS Sam Eads, Ross Irwin
TROMBONE Lucian McGuinness
VIOLIN Belinda Gehlert
VIOLA Jason Thomas
CELLO Hilary Kleinig

PRODUCER Hal Willner
CO-PRODUCER Rachel Fox
DIRECTOR Eric Mingus
MUSICAL DIRECTOR Giancarlo Vulcano
CREATIVE CONSULTANT Gavin Friday
SET DESIGN Eric Mingus
LIGHTING DESIGNER Peter Taylor
SOUND DESIGNER Jane Rossetto

FOR ADELAIDE FESTIVAL

PRODUCER Anne Wiberg
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR Marg Crompton
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR Gabrielle Hornhardt
STAGE MANAGER Bridget Samuel
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER Laura Chappell

DURATION: 1 HOUR 30 MINUTES (NO INTERVAL)



Side access

ACCESS INFORMATION

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A NOTE FROM ERIC MINGUS

This project is about exploring the melodies and story found within and on the folded cardboard sleeve of the classic Who album, *Tommy* from a different perspective. Grabbing hold of its basic structure and steering it into other directions. I want to draw on the essence of that recording that spoke to me when the needle hit the grooves and rumbled speaker cones, me hovered over the cover and booklet... drawn in by the music, artwork and the tale. Take its influence and bring it into the mix of the other influences of my creative journey and see where it leads us. Winter of 1979... maybe a month or two after my father had died, I was lost musically.

The jazz, blues and classical music I used to share with my father was heartbreaking for me to listen to. I remember spinning the weighted tuner dial of the radio up and down the numbers hoping it would land on something. Laying there with my head smack dead in the middle of the speakers, it landed on something alright... the bass solo of 'My Generation'. It jumped out at me. Not just because I played bass... but because the tune was angry... and so was I. Father ripped away from me when I needed him as I headed into manhood. That music helped me find my way again.

The idea to take *Tommy* on this route sparked many years ago when I was working as a housepainter with a friend and we were passing the time by singing classic rock songs in the styles of other genres, just having fun. 'Aqualung' sung as opera... 'Bohemian Rhapsody' spoken as poetry... I then started singing 'Fiddle About' in the style of a Rat Pack crooner. We fell about the place laughing. I mean it took a rather dark tune and made it even more sinister in a way. But man it was funny. It stuck with me. That melody. I started listening to *Tommy* more deeply, many different recordings... the live recordings really stood out. The music having evolved from the original. Each band member delving into it deeper. This music really lends itself to exploration. I was walking somewhere... headphones on... listening to the radio. There was an interview with Pete Townshend about the tour in support of his album *White City*. It has that tune with big band leanings, 'Face The Face'... Pete then began to list some of the songs that his band was playing on that tour and one of the tunes he listed was 'Boogie Stop Shuffle' by Charles Mingus.

How cool was that! This guy from The Who... digs my father's music! I decided to write him – basically a fan letter – telling him how his music reached me and how great I thought it was that he was playing my father's music. I had hoped he would get it, don't think I expected to hear back... but I did. We wrote back and forth a bit. Chatted on the phone. Met when either of us was in the other's town. We became friends. Pete has always been supportive of my music. I hesitate to say mentor, but I have learned so much from him. When I told him I wanted to take on *Tommy*, I think he was a little surprised, but he gave me his blessing. What more could I ask for.

A NOTE FROM HAL WILNER

Eric Mingus and I have known one another for at least 25 years and have worked together countless times. A glance at the list of our projects is jaw dropping beautiful and totally insane at the same time – from multi-artist projects incorporating civil rights and reefer songs, music from the *Anthology of American Film Music*, works by Harold Arlen, Neil Young, Edgar Allen Poe, Doc Pomus and the Marquis de Sade, to name a few. Each time he is a highlight of the evening and unpredictable – he can be an incredibly sweet ballad singer one moment bringing one to tears, and in the next a scary screaming banshee wielding a piano bench over his head sending people under their seats for protection. Producer Joel Dorn, who was a hefty creature himself, said that Eric could "beat up a horse" like Alex Karas in *Blazing Saddles*, and then break into tears the next moment.

A number of years back, Eric told me that he had this idea for a project – a re-interpretation of The Who's *Tommy*. It was, at first, a serious 'really?' suggestion – kind of hard to wrap my head around. But then I sat and thought about it. And then it all made sense.

The original *Tommy* was released in 1969. I was 13 and hadn't yet ventured into the world of chemicals and cheap wine (still two years away). I was somehow an owner of records like *Disraeli Gears* and *Are You Experienced*, as well as a Rolling Stone reader. It still bewilders me as to how that was possible – but it's the truth. My friend Joey DePasquale (son of the famed violist) used to get all these records from his older siblings, and that winter of '69 he played the *Tommy* record for me – it was a new revelation. I can still smell the room that I heard it in, along with everything snowy and holiday-like when I look at the original cover and the libretto. I couldn't buy the record, as it was expensive for a 13 year old, so I went over to Joey's house every few days to hear it and follow along with the libretto – my first opera. To me, *Tommy* was actually a small intimate piece – mysterious with

many brilliant and unforgettable melodies, a real movie for the mind. The cover and graphics were Dali-esque for me, and I stared at them for many hours.

I got older and remained a Who fan, and even got to see them on the 'Who's Next' tour with LaBelle as the support act. *Tommy* always had a special place in my brain.

I was a bit turned off by how *Tommy* was later performed as a large extravagant show with roller skaters, and superstar movies with Ann Margaret rolling in baked beans – well, you know what I mean... (and I love Ann Margaret). Anyway, I really wanted that feeling I had when I first heard *Tommy* at Joey's house that Christmas...

Eric and I met a few times discussing all of this, and how to approach it so it would be an honest, unpretentious interpretation. Our first inspiration came when musician/arranger Steven Bernstein unearthed the rarely seen film of the making of Carla Bley's *Escalator Over The Hill*. For those unfamiliar with this work, 'do ya self a fava' and get it immediately. Released in the early '70s, it is a perfectly realized vision incorporating avant garde jazz, classical, rock, electronic music, opera, poetry, humor and all else creative in the world... it was done like a family – musicians and singers were all collaborating with all singing and playing, whether it was their main talent or not – yet under the strict baton of Carla. They were equals – lined up and performing together – and out of that came a new sound. Starting from there we explored further.

David Sefton, who has put on many of my monstrosities and is a long time champion of Eric Mingus, has supported this project from the outset and has been encouraging it for years. And when he landed in Adelaide, he gave us the opportunity to make this actually happen. Pete Townshend has been encouraging Eric throughout and not interfering, eager to see where Eric goes with it...

So I can say that is how it came about from where I sit... And though *Escalator Over The Hill* jump-started a vibe, it has since found its own. Giancarlo Vulcano, who I met through the *Saturday Night Live/30 Rock* world where he has provided some stunning arrangements through the years, came to mind as someone who comes from a whole other world and skill set than Eric, yet has a similar relationship to music. They have provided a natural sound and approach that, conceptually, was everything I was hoping for – but couldn't define sound-wise. The cast is balanced in the berserk way we were

looking for and includes artists from theatre, avant music, R&B, pop music, television and true folk music – some we've known for years and others we met last week. There was a real method to this madness... and I can't wait to see how it works out. It could be monumental and, well, at the least it will be something you will not forget. But I hope that Eric and company give the audience a completely new take on this great work and it can live on.

Thanks to Eric for all the magic and trust, willingness to be in any great and silly project I bleated out all these years... David Sefton and Rachel Fox for making this happen.... Giancarlo for his work and spirit. And thank you all for coming. It's finally a boy Mizzzzus Walker!

I'll be seeing you...

A NOTE FROM PETE TOWNSHEND, THE WHO

Eric Mingus and I became friends a few years back, and I was pleased that the son of the great Charlie Mingus – who I have loved since my teens – enjoyed my music by return. We became good friends, and spoke often. I soon discovered Eric had the most sonorous and lyrical double bass style of his own, using his father's instrument, and more recently that he and his now wife Catherine make excellent recordings together and write good stuff.

Eric has spent too much time as a carpenter, living a practical life earning a living and providing a useful service to society, and needed to do something completely off the wall and – in the manner of all great musicians – risk bankruptcy. Interpreting *Tommy* as a jazz piece, and bringing it halfway across the world fits the bill I think. What an adventure! I send good wishes to Eric and Catherine, and his group, and I hope everyone who attends the Adelaide Festival of Arts enjoys the music. After each performance please pass one of those hats with corks hanging off it because otherwise Eric will never go home.



ERIC MINGUS

Eric Mingus is an acclaimed composer, performer, recording artist and poet, who has performed with Gavin Friday, Elliott Sharp, Hubert Sumlin, Lou Reed, Todd Rundgren, Elvis Costello, Nick Cave, Karen Mantler, Steven Bernstein,

Catherine Sikora and Levon Helm to name a few, and has been a featured performer in many of Hal Willner's performance projects. Eric's compositions range from blues and rock songs to haunting instrumental melodies and jazz inspired arrangements, and this extraordinarily broad range of styles is always clearly defined by his unique aesthetic sensibility.



HAL WILLNER

Hal Willner is a music producer for albums, films, television and live events, best known for his invention of the 'concept album,' for providing 'sketch music adaptations' for *Saturday Night Live* for over three decades and music

producer for the unrivalled TV series, *Night Music*. Hal has produced important records for Marianne Faithfull, Lou Reed, Macy Gray, Bill Frisell (Grammy-Best Contemporary Jazz Album), Lucinda Williams and Laurie Anderson. His debut concept album focused on Fellini's composer (Amarcord Nino Rota), then Thelonius Monk, Kurt Weill, Charles Mingus, Disney, Edgar Allan Poe. Live events celebrating Poe, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, Doc Pomus, Bill Withers, Shel Silverstein, Allan Sherman and Harry Smith have played venues including London's Barbican, the Luminato and Adelaide Festivals and Sydney Opera House. Films: Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* and *Kansas City*, Wim Wenders' *Million Dollar Hotel*, Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*. Willner also collaborates with theatre director Robert Wilson, most recently on *The Old Woman* with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Willem Dafoe. He has appeared onstage narrating Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, directed by Chloe Webb, at UCLA, San Francisco Jazz Festival and the Park Avenue Armory in New York.



ROBERT FORSTER?

Robert Forster was a founding member of The Go-Betweens and co-writer of 'Cattle and Cane', Number 20 on APRA's Top Australian Songs List, and is currently a writer, solo artist and performer with an ardent following in Australia, Germany,

the UK and the US. In 2006 his music writing won the Pascall Prize for Critical Writing. One of his pieces appeared in *The Best American Music Writing 2007*. When Robert won the Pascall Prize for criticism in 2006, the judges praised the charm and intellectual clarity of his work and hailed him as "a godsend because he writes about popular music with an authority and grace that would be rare in any area of criticism and is all the more striking in a field where criticism is often modish."



GAVIN FRIDAY

Gavin Friday's career spans four decades, and he still puts the same energy and passion into his work that he did with the Virgin Prunes in 1977. 1987 saw the start of a 15 year long collaboration with pianist Maurice Seezer.

Gavin's first solo album with Seezer was *Each Man Kills The Thing He Loves*, released in 1989. It was followed in 1992 by *Adam 'n' Eve*, and three years later by *Shag Tobacco*. The decade was also the beginning of his career in film as both a vocalist and composer. He wrote the soundtrack to Jim Sheridan's *In the Name of the Father*, which including Sinéad O'Connor's hit, 'You Made Me the Thief of Your Heart'. In 1996 Friday and Seezer contributed the song 'Angel' to the *Romeo + Juliet* soundtrack and wrote their first score for the Australian film *Angel Baby*. Since 2007, he has been playing live with the Gavin Bryars Ensemble, on performances such as 'This Shakespeare Sonnet Project' and 'The Sinking of the Titanic'. In Summer 2008, Scott Walker invited Gavin to perform in *Drifting and Tilting – The Songs of Scott Walker* and in 2009 Gavin turned 50 and celebrated with a gig at New York's Carnegie Hall. Guests included Antony, Rufus Wainwright, Courtney Love, Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson and U2.



CAMILLE O'SULLIVAN

Camille O'Sullivan enjoys a formidable international reputation for her intensely dramatic interpretations of the songs of Brel, Cave, Waits, Bowie and more. The multi-award-winning singer has stunned audiences

around the world with her 5-star sell-out performances, including Sydney Opera House, London's Royal Festival Hall and appearance on *Later... with Jools Holland* (BBC TV). Dark, sexy, fierce, amusing and mesmerising, Camille transforms each song she performs into an intense emotional and theatrical experience, inextricably drawing her audience into a world illuminated by the dark and the light.



HARPER SIMON

Harper Simon is an American singer-songwriter, guitarist, and producer. In 2010 he released his critically lauded self-titled solo album, which *Rolling Stone* called "a gorgeous collection of vintage-sounding country-folk tunes and

dreamy psychedelia." *Division Street*, Simon's second solo album, was released in March 2013 to critical praise. Simon recently co-produced the short film *Fruits De Mer* directed by Hala Mata for *Nowness*, and hosts *TALK SHOW* on *TheLip.tv*.



ELANA STONE

Elana's genre shape-shifting has led to collaborations with the likes of Passenger, Washington, Urthboy, Hermitude and Ngaiire, among others. Her unique and enchanting live performances have only served

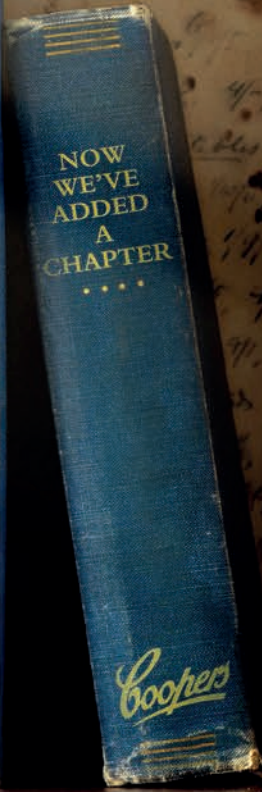
to make her one of Australia's most sought after vocalists. 2015 sees Elana return with brand new material from her upcoming third studio album. Powerful vocals and synth laden sound envelop the epic singles 'Panic Attack' and 'Sleep Doesn't Come' without dulling the songstress's introspective lyricism.



Yael STONE

Yael Stone is an Australian actor happily loving, living and working in New York City. In 2011 Yael performed alongside Geoffrey Rush in Neil Armfield's critically acclaimed two-hander, *Diary Of A Madman*. Following a

smash Sydney run, the production transferred to New York for a sold-out season at BAM, and was wildly received by New York audiences. Yael fell in love with the city and subsequently moved there. Since graduating from Australia's legendary acting school, NIDA, Yael has worked for many leading Australian theatre companies, appearing in productions for Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir Theatre Company, Griffin Theatre Company and The Malthouse, amongst others. She has appeared in numerous roles on the Australia screen, and has been nominated for numerous Helpmann awards and Sydney Theatre Awards, winning Best Newcomer, and Best Supporting Actress on two occasions. Yael is thrilled to be a part of the ensemble of the Emmy award-winning Netflix series *Orange is the New Black*, whose third season premieres in July of 2015. Yael is currently in Australia shooting *Childhood's End*; a six-hour mini-series based on Arthur C. Clarke's classic to premiere in 2015.



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