



Andrew Hallsworth and Dean Bryant.

# The Wizards Of Oz

» For director Dean Bryant and choreographer Andrew Hallsworth, all the world's a stage. And centre stage is friendship! Story by Matthew Myers.

**AUSTRALIAN** theatre is living in exciting times. Last year, a small-scale revival of the musical *Sweet Charity* at Sydney's Hayes Theatre was so triumphant that it moved to the Opera House before a national tour! How does a small production rise to such heights? Enter director Dean Bryant and choreographer Andrew Hallsworth.

Working together for almost ten years, Dean and Andrew share traits of self-confidence, trust and a no-nonsense attitude that elicits both discipline and respect from their peers. Above all, the boys have the one ingredient every team needs to survive a fickle industry – a lasting friendship.

Dean's introduction to theatre began at the Western Australian Academy Of Performing Arts, where he wrote a musical (*Prodigal*) with boyfriend Matthew Frank, which won the prestigious Greenroom Award before being staged Off-Broadway.

His creative counterpoint Andrew learned the ropes as a teen performing in productions such as *42nd Street*, *Guys And Dolls* and *Shout!* "Nearly every musical that came to Australia, I was in!" says Andrew. "But my passion was always the creative side."

Having also trained as a performer, Dean was mentored by famed director Simon Phillips. "We've done a lot of productions together," says Dean. "One of them being *Priscilla Queen Of The Desert: The Musical*, where I first met Andy. I think any relationship grows from being forced together. We got on really well, and we've been very lucky with most of our shows in that we've had endless time to socialise and discuss upcoming projects."

Andrew is quick to agree, pointing to their unique chemistry. "One of the nice things about Dean and I working together is that we really respect each other. If I'm choreographing a number, it doesn't bother me if Dean has input, and vice-versa. We don't get upset and we do everything together. We build everything from the ground up."

Since those early days, Dean and Andrew have gone on to create standout revivals of *La Cage Aux Folles*, *The Producers*, *Pirates Of Penzance* and, of course, *Sweet Charity*. The success continues with their current production of *Anything Goes*. This quintessential musical is a topsy-turvy tale of foiled plots and mistaken identities on the high seas, all set to a score by Cole Porter.

"This is 2015 so we've injected new excitement and flavour into the production," says Andrew. Dean agrees there is a special quality to this show. "In Australia, performers are so well trained and skilled. It's really pleasing to see what a good state our industry is in. We're getting all the commercial hits, tons of revivals and there are small-scale shows on everywhere."

Dean and Andrew have proved that a small-scale production can grow fabulous legs! They are known as the dream team of Aussie theatre,

but it's not just peers and theatregoers singing their praises. Last year they both won Helpmann Awards – Dean for Direction and Andrew for Choreography on, you guessed it, *Sweet Charity*. At the time, they were in Madrid overseeing rehearsals for *Priscilla*, so couldn't attend the ceremony. How did they find out? Twitter.

"I was just scanning my phone," says Dean. "A headshot of Andy came up, and I was like 'You won the Helpmann!' Then 20 minutes later I won as well. We were both really proud for the show. One of the best things to come out of *Sweet Charity* was proving it's possible to go from an independent production to a fully professional production, within a year. Hopefully that success will show producers there's middle ground where a production doesn't have to make millions to be worth doing."



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Their collaborations not only bring out their best, but the best in those around them. They live only two blocks from each other in Melbourne's CBD and their partners are also friends in a close-knit, supportive group. In fact, their respective partners accompanied one another to the Helpmanns to pick up their other half's trophy.

What keeps this unique partnership going? "I admire Dean's loyalty," says Andrew. "Having faith in somebody means a lot to me, so if I feel that, I'm comfortable. When we're working, Dean allows me to do whatever the hell I want and if we make mistakes, we make them together. Dean's probably the most intelligent person I know. Endless ideas stream out of him and they feed me. I love that about him."

"I like Andy's bravery," Dean gushes back. He will always say, 'Let's just go and do this'. Whereas I always want to know what I'm getting into. Andy's loyalty is unbreakable, because we've faced some difficult times and it's good to know I never have to question... well, I always know he'll back me up!"

**MORE:** *Anything Goes* is touring Australia. [www.AnythingGoesMusical.com.au](http://www.AnythingGoesMusical.com.au).