

# “I’M A BRIDE. I’M SUPPOSED TO BE EUPHORIC!”

**MURIEL HESLOP OF PORPOISE SPIT IS SET TO MAKE HER STAGE DEBUT!**

**IN THE 1990S**, Australian cinema turned a corner. Filmmakers left the sentimental period dramas and outback thrillers behind and began to tell more dynamic, multi-cultural and nuanced stories that reflected contemporary, urban Australia. Quirky hits such as *The Castle*, *Babe* and *Cosi* earned international acclaim, but it was the trifecta of *Strictly Ballroom*, *Priscilla Queen Of The Desert* and *Muriel’s Wedding*, all released between 1992 and 1994 that stormed the global box office.

Some 20 years later, in the era of the screen-to-stage adaptation, both *Priscilla* and *Strictly Ballroom* have received theatrical makeovers. It was inevitable that *Muriel* would eventually tread the boards.

*Muriel’s Wedding* is the story of the charmless Muriel Heslop; an overweight, under-achieving, social misfit who regularly escapes into a fantasy world of ABBA songs and bridal gowns. By chance, she embezzles money from her family and escapes her small town for the bright lights of Sydney and a new life as “Marial”. Her wedding fantasies, however, become out of hand just as her past catches up with her and she looks set to lose the best thing in her new life, faithful friend Rhonda.

The film has many laugh-out-loud moments but they barely conceal a very dark story – one that resonated strongly with Australian audiences. Muriel’s sense of shame is debilitating and she believes that only assuming a glittering façade can bring her happiness. This rang true for many gay people and the film, even without a gay character or explicit gay themes, is regarded as a gay classic.

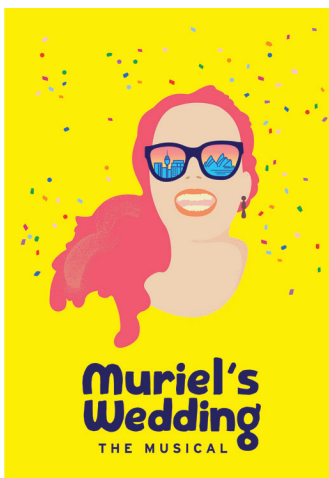
The stage adaptation has been written by the original film’s writer/director, PJ Hogan, and directed by Simon Phillips who is also directing next year’s stage revival of *Priscilla*.

In the lead role is newcomer Maggie McKenna, fresh from training at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy (AMDA) in LA. The other key roles are picked up by Gary Sweet as Muriel’s self-serving father and Madeleine Jones as Rhonda.

The cast is rounded out with a roll call of famous faces: Helen Dallimore as blousy beauty consultant, Deidre Chambers and Justine Clarke



(ABOVE) STEPHEN MADSEN AS ALEX, MURIEL’S HUSBAND. MAGGIE MCKENNA WILL STAR AS MURIEL.



RACHEL GRIFFITHS AND TONI COLLETTE IN THE 1994 FILM.

## QUOTABLE MURIEL MOMENTS:

“You’re terrible Muriel.  
Wait! Let her finish her orgasm.  
Diedre Chambers, what a coincidence!  
You can stick your drink up your arse, Tania.  
I’m with Muriel.  
Goodbye Porpoise Spit!

as Muriel’s mum Betty, Christie Whelan Browne is Tania Degano and Aaron Tsindos as her husband Chook.

Bound For Broadway scholarship winner Stephen Madsen plays Olympic swimming hopeful Alexander Shkuratov in Muriel’s arranged marriage. “I saw the film in high school and was really into its offbeat balance of comedy and tragedy,” he says. “I revisited it a few months before I heard about the stage production and was really struck by how sad it actually is. I haven’t re-watched the film since starting rehearsals because we’re creating our own version of the story, and I didn’t want to feel too married – pun intended – to moments from the movie.”

Madsen has been preparing mentally and physically for the role of the Russian swimmer (changed slightly from the film’s original South African character). “The script is so good my character exists very clearly on the page so most of my work has been done by PJ Hogan. I have a Russian accent in the show so I’ve worked with a coach in my preparation. I’ve also had to hit the gym and pool regularly to pass as an Olympic swimmer!

“We’ve all known people like these characters and we’ve all felt like an outsider,” says Madsen. “The film has stood the test of time because the writing and the performances are so strong. It made international stars of Toni Collette and Rachel Griffiths and for good reason. It’s full of heart, brilliantly funny and very quotable.”

A key element of the film was the use of ABBA’s music. Unluckily, the *Priscilla* production was not able to use the ABBA songs and replaced them with Kylie. But ABBA have agreed to the use of their music for this production of *Muriel*. Additional original numbers have been written by Kate Miller-Heidke and Keir Nuttall, who attracted great acclaim, and Helpmann Awards, for their scoring of *The Rabbits*.

**MORE:** *Muriel’s Wedding* plays at the Roslyn Packer Theatre until December 30.  
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