

# The Grinning Man

## Access Information About the Show

This Access Information Guide is designed to help our audience members better understand the specifics of content, design and sensory information to more thoroughly prepare them for their experience in the theatre and more clearly understand the visual and aural world of 'The Grinning Man'. Please note that there will also be some spoilers in this document.

Should any questions arise from this guide, please don't hesitate to contact Ashley Tickell at [ashley@vasstg.com.au](mailto:ashley@vasstg.com.au) for anything production related or you can call or send a text message to 0417 729 563. For information on ticketing and venue information, please call 03 9964 0918 or email Andrew at [andrew@vasstg.com.au](mailto:andrew@vasstg.com.au)

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## **Venue and Production Information**

### **Dates**

The Grinning Man runs from Thursday 25th April until Sunday 19th May, 2024

Wednesday through Saturday, shows are at 7:30pm with a Saturday matinee at 1pm  
Sunday shows are at 3pm

### **Run Time**

The Grinning Man has two acts, each running one hour, with a twenty minute intermission.

### **Ticketing**

Ticketing information can be found at [www.thegrinningman.au](http://www.thegrinningman.au) or [www.alextheatre.au](http://www.alextheatre.au)

### **Companion Card Scheme**

If you hold a government-issued Companion Card, simply send an email to [ticketing@vasstg.com.au](mailto:ticketing@vasstg.com.au) with a copy of your card and it can be processed for you. You will need to provide your name, email and phone number, and whether or not the seats need to be accessible for a wheelchair or other mobility device. The office will then call or send an email with an invoice for payment, whatever is your preference.

For more information on the Companion Card scheme, please see the [Australian Government site](#).

### **Assistance Animals and Dog Guides**

The venue welcomes assistance animals and dog guides.

Water bowls are available at venue.

Please just call 03 9964 0918 or email in advance to let us know you are booking with an assistant animal or dog guide at [andrew@vasstg.com.au](mailto:andrew@vasstg.com.au)

### **Getting to the Venue**

There are a number of trams you can catch to get to the theatre.

For up to date timetables, visit Yarra Trams ( LINK: [www.yarratrams.com.au](http://www.yarratrams.com.au))

## By Tram

Typically, a tram ride from south of the city to Alex Theatre St. Kilda is 15-20 minutes in duration, depending on traffic conditions.

## Direct Trams

- Tram No.96 – East Brunswick-Bourke Street-Southern Cross Station-Crown Casino-Fitzroy Street- STOP 132 (St. Kilda Station is directly opposite Alex Theatre)- St. Kilda Beach
- Tram No 16 – Melbourne Uni – Swanston Street -Flinders Street Station-St. Kilda Rd.- Fitzroy Street and Canterbury Rd.- STOP No.133 (20m past front door)
- Tram No 3a (Weekends Only) Melb Uni – Swanston Street – Flinders Street Station-St. Kilda Rd.- Fitzroy Street and Canterbury Rd.- STOP No.133 (20m past the front door) (20m past the front door) – Carlisle Street-East Malvern

## Nearby Trams

- Tram No.12 Victoria Gardens-Latrobe St.- Spring St.-Collins St.- Crown Casino-Clarendon St.-Park St and Fitzroy St. STOP No. 143 (Five-minute walk along Fitzroy St. away from the beach)

## By Train

You can also get to the theatre by train. For up to date timetables, visit Public Transport Victoria (LINK: <https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/timetables>)

- Flinders Street Station: exit station to Swanson Street, catch Tram No. 16 or Tram No 3a (Weekends Only)
- Southern Cross Station: exit to Spencer Street and catch Tram No.96. Exit to Spencer Street cross road to Collins Street catch Tram No.12.

## By Car

- From the north: St. Kilda Road, Canterbury Road, Beaconsfield Parade, Park Street, Punt Road
- From the south: Nepean Highway, St. Kilda Road, Grey Street, Marine Parade, Acland Street
- From the east: Dandenong Road, Punt Road

## Parking

As St Kilda can get quite busy, please ensure you allow enough time for parking.

Metropol: Canterbury Road

- 120 parking bays
- Operating hours Sun-Thurs 6:30am-1:00am; Fri-Sat 6:30am-3:00am
- Rates vary, click here to find out more

Metropol: Fitzroy Street

- 62 parking bays
- Operating hours Sun-Thurs 6:30am-midnight; Fri-Sat 6:30am-3:00am
- Rates vary, click here to find out more

St Kilda Bowls Club: Fitzroy Street

- 37 parking bays
- Operating hours 24 hours

For Parking Around Fitzroy Street

- Visit: [discoverstkilda.com.au/parking](http://discoverstkilda.com.au/parking)
- Visit: [Parkopedia.com.au](http://Parkopedia.com.au)

### **Wheelchair Access and Staff Support**

Wheelchair accessible seating is available for users and their companions. To confirm and arrange accessible seating, please call the Alex Theatre on 03 9964 0918 or email [ticketing@vasstg.com.au](mailto:ticketing@vasstg.com.au)

Main access to the theatres is via a staircase and lift.

The lift is located on the ground floor street entrance. If you need to use the lift, please alert the Alex Theatre Staff stationed at the building entrance who will guide you to it. If there is no one at the front entrance door, please press the buzzer on the right hand wall outside of the entrance doors.

Please note that access to the mezzanine levels in both theatres is via stairs only and is not suitable for patrons with limited mobility.

There is an accessible toilet available. Please ask the venue's friendly theatre staff for directions.

For any other access questions or support, please don't hesitate to reach out to the venue staff on site.

### **Sensory Information, Design Notes & Content Warnings**

#### **Historical Context**

'The Grinning Man' is a fictional story inspired by Victor Hugo's 1869 novel 'The Man Who Laughs'. Set during the historically contentious era of the Victorian 'freak show', it therefore

reflects the historical context of the time: specifically, the discriminatory and ableist attitudes of a society which mocked, pitied, and oppressed people living with disability and difference, as well as those of the lower classes.

Within the show, problematic and offensive language is used by certain characters. This language cannot be erased from our history and sadly persists in many contemporary settings, despite the progress of the Disability Rights Movement which has fought to secure equal opportunities and rights for people with disabilities.

We encourage you to learn about arts accessibility, diversity, equity and inclusion through the wide range of resources that are now available to artists, venues and organisations through peak bodies such as [Arts Access Victoria](#) and funding bodies such as [Creative Victoria](#) and [Creative Australia](#), and to always involve and work alongside people with lived experience, putting into practice the fundamental principle of 'nothing about us without us'.

### **Set Design**

- The set is largely inspired by German expressionism, featuring jagged shapes and sharp angles
- There is a large proscenium arch at the front of the stage, and a set of stairs leading up from the audience to the raised stage, which is 1.5 metres off the ground
- Once the front curtain opens, it reveals two more mini proscenium arches which frame two smaller curtains, and both have sets of stairs leading up to them
- Velvet fabric is dropped out of a window and pulled down the aisle and up onto the stage throughout the show

### **Lighting Design**

- The show uses light to medium haze and atmospherics throughout
- Light globes are built into the set elements and may create a slight blinding effect at different times during the show
- The show uses backlight and moving profiles which may pass over the first few rows, potentially dazzling the audience
- Most of the lights are unmasked so audience members in the first few rows may be able to see the lights themselves which may be bright
- The show may have states with high contrast and/or saturated colours
- The show may have some states which are very dark or dimly lit
- The show may have some states which contain sharp and sudden transitions from dark to light
- The show may have some states which contain flashes or brief strobing
- There will be occasional gleaming of yellow wolf eyes

### **Video Projections**

- The show makes use of projection and projected content which may be distressing to some viewers (a noose in the forest, a storm and sinking boat as well as brief moments of Grinpayne's mouth being revealed and a scythe dramatically coming down towards his face)

## Costume Design

- The costume design is largely inspired by the context set within the script of “a time that never was”. It borrows influences from and making nods to various periods throughout history, from the Victorian era to the modern day
- At the beginning of the show, the ‘players’ are costumed in earthy browns, creams, greys, greens and blues
- The Royal family (Princess Josiana, Lord Dirry-Moir, King Clarence and Queen Angelica) wear bright colours that include blue, green, pink and some pastel purple
- We use wide black and white stripes on Barkilphedro the clown, and black and white diamond print on costumes for the Lords and Kupsak.
- Grinpayne and Young Grinpayne wear bandages over their faces for most of the show
- Mojo the wolf wears a shaggy fur vest and puppeteers a mouthpiece with their hand

## Music & Sound Design

- The show is largely underscored by a six-piece band, including frequent use of drums and bass, evoking a dark, carnivalesque sound which certain audience members may find aurally overwhelming
- Sound effects include (but are not limited to): door knocking, animalistic wolf howling/growling, the crackle of fire, the shattering of glass
- Sound and music volume will be very loud at certain points in the show, with many moments of ensemble singing in unison
- A number of cast members scream and make loud noises live throughout the show

## Dialogue

Course and derogatory language that reflects a historical time period is used on occasion throughout the show, including but not limited to:

- Freak, freaks, freak show
- Gimps, crippled, damned, disfigured, aberration, horror, monster, mutilated, disfigurement
- Fuck, fuckity, fuck off, fuck me

Sexual references and innuendos include but are not limited to:

- Orgy. erotic, wank
- Unimaginable massiveness
- Anal snake

References to disability include but are not limited to:

- Blind
- “Cannot see”

## Content

### *References to Disability*

- Grinpayne lives with a physical facial difference, having had his face cut brutally by a scythe as a child
- Grinpayne's love, Dea, was born blind and is referred to as such at different moments throughout the show. Dea, however, does not see her blindness as a weakness
- Grinpayne and Dea refer to themselves as "broken", "jagged", "blind", "shattered"

### *Depictions of Ableism*

There are some depictions of ableism within the text, which include but are not limited to:

- Abuse of power by people in authority over characters who are seen as disabled or disfigured
- Victimisation of disabled people and people with a disfigurement/physical difference
- Pity surrounding disability and disfigurement
- Removal of Grinpayne's individual agency by characters around him
- The incorrect assumption that Dea, who is blind, is unable to love someone because she cannot see them

### *Depictions of Voyeurism/Pleasure-Seeking*

- Passengers and sailors on a ship stare at and bully Grinpayne, singing "Show us yer face, show us your hideous horrible face". One also says, "He's disfigured. Come on, lad, give us a thrill", while another says, "Make us laugh" amongst other derogatory comments
- Aristocrats Lord Dirry-Moir and Princess Josiana attend the 'Freak Show' to watch Grinpayne and Dea putting on a puppet show. In essence, they come to see disabled and disfigured people being put 'on show' for amusement
- The people of Trafalgar Fair also raise Grinpayne up to an almost God-like pedestal, his difference and scarred face creating feelings inside them that they 'do not understand' - ones of immense pleasure
- Josiana wants to be "filled with Grinpayne's pain"

### *References to Death & Dying*

- Young Grinpayne sees his father hanged and the ship his mother is on go down in a storm. These moments are both depicted on stage.
- Grinpayne's father figure, Ursus, also loses his wife in a snow storm
- Osric sings a lyric about a kitten drowned in a lake
- We see, in an overly dramatic way, King Clarence (who choked to death) in his coffin on stage
- "Kill the untitled bastard" and "duel to the death" are heard during the swordfight
- We see Ursus extremely weak and audiences will recognise that he is dying

### *Sexual Intimacy Between Consenting Adults*

- Princess Josiana is a very sexualised character who speaks about how she enjoys sex, has orgies, and refers to 'burning away cobwebs' in regards to her need for sex
- Princess Josiana and Lord Dirry-Moir are in an incestuous relationship as brother and sister. They kiss, touch and there is one moment during a song when Lord

Dirry-Moir tosses a curtain over himself and flails his arms around in a very extreme manner that suggests over-the-top cunnilingus.

- Princess Josiana and Grinpayne share an intimate kiss and lie on the ground, clothed
- Dea and Grinpayne share affectionate, loving kisses twice in the show.

### *References to Sex*

Barkliphedro the clown narrator and the ensemble make references to brothels and sex, with terminology such as:

- Hog-brothels
- Pecker
- Hedonist
- “Giving me the horn”
- Wriggle on the floor
- Squirring, squealing, sore-bleeding den of bottomless iniquity
- Goosing your enemies
- Pleasant orgy, m'lady?
- A cockroach having a wank
- Erotic breakfast dance

### *Depiction of Consumption of Drugs in Medicinal Form*

- Ursus (a druggist and puppeteer) is seen throughout the show giving Grinpayne Crimson Lethe, a vial of medicine to help him with his pain and take away his memory
- Ursus nonconsensually administers Crimson Lethe to Dea on two occasions
- Barkliphedro the clown and Quake the inspector of nuisances force Grinpayne to take the drug as well

### *References to and Depictions of Violence*

- Grinpayne, our ‘Grinning Man’, has had his face carved with a scythe as a child - we see this moment viscerally towards the end of the show as well as reenacted in a flashback in the story. It is this action that takes place that causes the ripple effect of the rest of the story as he searches for the man who “crucified his face”.
- We see Grinpayne reeling and flinching in agony a number of times throughout the show because of this childhood injury
- Queen Angelica states that she wants all traitors punished brutally
- Barkliphedro the clown narrator sings a line in the opening number about their parents whacking them ‘black and blue’. This is sung in a darkly comical tone.
- There is a sword fight with daggers where one character gets stabbed
- We see Grinpayne in a tower having just been arrested and badly beaten
- Ursus is tortured in a tower
- Grinpayne’s mother is knocked out with the wooden end of a scythe
- Ursus hits Mojo the wolf to the ground

### **Movement**

The movement of The Grinning Man helps to place us in a world where carnivalesque energy, German expressionist shapes and human puppetry are part of telling the story.



All the characters within the show are very physical and need to be able to exist in this heightened world of dark whimsy and themes of class and otherness.

- Puppetry is used as older versions of characters guide and manoeuvre other cast members to tell past tales and navigate jumps in time.
- There is a gestural language that is used throughout the show to emphasise repeated ideas or lyrics.
- There is also the character of Mojo the wolf, which is depicted through grounded movement, and foundations of contemporary dance.

### **Audience Interaction**

- The cast enters and exits down the aisle of the theatre at various points throughout the show
- Audience members in the first few rows may be directly looked at and interacted with by members of the cast: people who prefer not to be interacted with during live theatre are advised to book tickets from row D backwards

### **Synopsis**

#### **Act 1**

##### *Scene 1*

Barkilphedro the clown introduces the players in the story, with a spotlight on the centre front curtain. The players and clown are in dark colours and earth tones, looking dirty and rough. The aristocrats pop their heads out of 4 windows, looking rather ridiculous, and Lord Dirry Moir rides in on his Unicorn Hobby Horse to arrive at Trafalgar Fair.

##### *Scene 2*

The curtain opens and we see Ursus, Grinpayne and Dea, being introduced at Ursus' puppet theatre for the first time. Ursus tells the story of how Grinpayne's mother is taken in a storm, and how his face is cut. Grinpayne's father appears as a hanged man to encourage him to fight and live.

Mojo the wolf appears and brings Grinpayne and the baby he finds to Ursus. Time passes in the story and we see that the baby has grown into young Dea. They have two puppets for their own puppet show they like to share together, Beauty and the Beast. As Beauty and the Beast crescendos, Young Grinpayne and Dea change into our grown Grinpayne and Dea.

##### *Scene 3*

King Clarence's funeral is set, with the King framed by a pastel blue coffin that matches his pastel blue and pink garb. A pig's foot stuck in his mouth. As Kupsak announces the heir to the throne, Angelica comes down the centre aisle to claim her place, looking ragged and crazed. All leave the stage, and the King has to stop 'being dead' to awkwardly exit.

##### *Scene 4*

Grinpayne struggles with his past, sharing with Dea his desire to find out who cut his face. Dea promises to help him as he struggles with his pain.

### *Scene 5*

Barkilphedro pulls a huge, purple-green velvet curtain from a castle window, dragging it across the stage for Princess Josiana in her chambers. Barkilphedro wishes to be a Lord as Lord Dirry Moir barges in. Josiana jumps into Lord Dirry Moir's arms and they begin to kiss passionately. Together, as they touch, play and sing, they decide to rush to Trafalgar Fair to see Grinpayne's show.

Back at Ursus' home, Grinpayne and Dea have an argument about whether or not Grinpayne should try and find out the truth of his past or if he should let go and move on.

### *Scene 6*

Lord Dirry Moir, Josiana and Barkilphedro appear to watch the tale of Grinpayne once again at Trafalgar Fair. But this time Grinpayne does not stick to the original performance and reveals his face in pain and anger. The crowds love it. His garish grin is projected onto the curtain behind him.

### *Scene 7*

Ursus is in awe of Grinpayne's performance, having made a great deal of money. But again, they argue. Ursus, hurt, exits as Grinpayne takes his medicine once again to ease his pain.

### *Scene 8*

Ursus is arrested.

### *Scene 9*

Josiana appears, narrating a letter she has written to Grinpayne as he reads it. Dea encourages Grinpayne to go to her to find out more, and he races off, leaving Dea alone.

### *Scene 10*

Again, the crowd is celebrating Grinpayne, this time surrounding him in the street as he attempts to go to Josiana. They reach to him and touch him like he is a God to be worshipped. The curtain closes as Grinpayne's garish grin is projected onto the screen.

## **Act 2**

### *Scene 11*

People appear with lanterns, lurking as Grinpayne enters down the aisle, pondering his life and if he truly should find out the truth as he makes his way to the castle.

### *Scene 12*

Ursus is being tortured by Barkilphedro and two torturers in order to get the ingredients to Grinpayne's medicine. When Ursus says, "Who are you?" He is shocked to see Barkilphedro, recognising him from the past.

Dea and Mojo storm in and Barkilphedro explains the truth of Grinpayne's past.

King Clarence appears, gnawing on his pig's foot with Grinpayne's father on his knees in front of him. Barkilphedro continues to tell his tale, speaking of his desire to be Lord and how

he brings the Trelaws - Grinpayne, and his parents - to the gallows to be hanged on behalf of the King.

When Dea realises that Ursus partook in Grinpayne's torture, Ursus quickly grabs her and drops medicine in her mouth.

#### *Scene 13*

Grinpayne meets Josiana. She removes his mask and they begin to kiss as she pulls him on top of her. He calls out to Dea right before he is arrested and brought back to the castle.

#### *Scene 14*

Grinpayne is in the torture chamber, a rod behind his back. Lord Dirry Moir enters and Angelica strips him of his title, carelessly tossing Lord Dirry Moir's velvet gown to Barkilphedro. Lord Dirry Moir is hauled away through a doorway, sticking his face back out for a moment of extra silliness.

Barkilphedro waits to be given the title of Lord, and is shocked when she returns the title to Grinpayne Trelaw.

#### *Scene 15*

Lord Dirry Moir appears in Trafalgar Fair as everyone moves across the stage, overcome by Grinpayne and the way he makes everyone feel. Dirty Moir yells as he comes face to face with the beggars and 'simpletons', no longer holding his title and looking more downtrodden.

#### *Scene 16*

Grinpayne makes his way to his new chambers in the Royal House of Clarence in Catford and goes to bed. Barkilphedro appears to ensure Grinpayne doesn't remember what really happened to him, and brings along the Beauty puppet.

Queen Angelica enters to check in on Grinpayne and let him know of his duties as a Lord. Princess Josiana appears and proposes to Grinpayne, who wants nothing to do with her. He wants to see Dea.

#### *Scene 17*

The crowd waits for Grinpayne and his show to begin. Lord Dirry Moir appears and is again a mess without his title and money, and is shocked to see Barkilphedro in his lavish, velvet gown.

#### *Scene 18*

Barkilphedro takes the Beauty puppet to show Dea to pass on a message to her...but the message Barkilphedro shares is not the message Grinpayne wishes to share. Before Dea can put the pieces together, Ursus tries to drug her again. They argue and Mojo takes Dea away to find Grinpayne.

The fair burns.

### *Scene 19*

Queen Angelica tells Grinpayne he cannot marry Dea as she has died in the fire at Trafalgar Fair. Grinpayne agrees to marry Angelica.

### *Scene 20*

Lord Dirry Moir interrupts the marriage between Grinpayne and Princess Josiana. He grabs a bouquet of flowers and uses them as his weapon to fight Grinpayne. Mojo rushes down the aisle with Dea on his back to share the truth. Lord Dirry Moir and Grinpayne prepare to duel. Grinpayne's father appears as a ghost to encourage him.

The two men fight and Grinpayne stabs Lord Dirry Moir in the stomach. He dies. Very dramatically. Princess Josiana's kiss brings him back to life and they run off stage together.

Grinpayne remembers and the scene flashes back to Barkilphedro and Ursus cutting his face.

Dea and Grinpayne reunite and share a kiss. He relinquishes his title to be with Dea and start a new life together.

### *Scene 21*

Grinpayne and Dea return to Ursus and Mojo, but Ursus is dying and says his goodbyes as he encourages them to remember their past and use what's real to build their dreams and a begin a new story.

Grinpayne and Dea walk up the aisle hand in hand as the entire company appears onstage, holding lanterns, to see them off.