

# NOOSA LIFE

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## Big guy takes on big role

■ Michele Sternberg

ON STAGE and off stage relationships are very different for the cast of the latest David Williamson play, *Sorting out Rachel*, according to one of the show's stars.

And that's probably a good thing.

Each of the characters in *Sorting Out Rachel* is facing a mammoth personal dilemma.

And each of these dilemmas mirrors the prevailing social issues in Australian society.

One has too little money, another too much: and the question is – how is that money best used for the greater good of the community?

There is Rachel (Jenna Owen), her mother Julie (Natalie Saleeba), her social climbing husband Craig (Glenn Hazeldine) and grandfather Bruce.

John Howard, who plays straight-talking millionaire Bruce, said the characters in the play are rather dysfunctional and

“don't like each other very much”.

If you're thinking John's face is familiar, he's been a regular in Aussie movies, TV shows and theatre productions for decades.

His film credits include *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Last Cab To Darwin*, *The Man Who Sued God*, *A Man's Gotta Do* and *Jindabyne*.

On television, he's appeared in *Warriors*, *Soul Mates*, *Janet King*, *Seachange*, *All Saints*, *Always Greener*, *Packed to the Rafters* and *Changi*.

Most characters in Williamson's plays are not created with actors in mind, but when David wrote the role of Bruce for *Sorting Out Rachel* he specifically mentioned to casting that, “If you can get John Howard as Bruce, that would be perfect”.

“I hadn't heard that... I don't know why he would have thought of me,” he said. “I am a reasonably big guy

with a sense of humour, I guess.

“I'm a big hunk of burning love,” John says with a laugh.

“But Bruce is fabulously wealthy on stage and I'm poor as a pauper off stage.

“The character I play, Bruce, is a self-made man who believes that the only real Australians are born north of Rockhampton.

“He's made his money out of cattle but he has a big secret.

“He hasn't been straight up about some things.”

The play revolves around three generations of the one family and John said each character was captured “perfectly”.

“David's ability to know how people of all ages behave and express themselves is extraordinary,” he said.

“People like David Williamson don't come along every day – he's the most prolific playwright within in Australia.”

John said the crowd's reaction to *Sorting Out Rachel* during its premiere Sydney performances astounded him.

“They were barracking,” he said.

Director Nadia Tass said what attracted her to *Sorting Out Rachel* was the notion that it examines the human condition pitted against large and intense national issues.

“Williamson never compromises the issues, nor the way it affects all of the characters,” she said.

“For each of them, the world appears to be collapsing as they realise the truths they are facing.

“And they can't just ignore these issues like many of our politicians might do: he insists these characters act on their responsibility.

“It is not until they are forced to deal with the dilemmas they face, that they achieve perspective, growth, and enlightenment.

“From the very first scene, we know the dominant issue in this play, and then we see what effect it has on each of Williamson's beautifully drawn characters.”

Nadia said the narrative was “full of surprises, filled with similarities between what is happening on stage and the Australian society at large”.

“The question remains – how is our world going to deal with these issues? Williamson holds a clear mirror to our world, and tells us to look at who we are, and asks – are we going to take responsibility?”

The world premiere of *Sorting Out Rachel* was held in Sydney last month, and Noosa audiences will have a chance to see it next month as a fundraiser for Noosa Alive.

John said he's looking forward to visiting Noosa and jumping in the ocean.

“I'm really looking forward to it,” he said.

“It's an absolute gift to be

### DETAILS

**WHAT:** *Sorting Out Rachel*

**WHERE:** The J Theatre, 60 Noosa Dr, Noosa Heads

**WHEN:** Four performances only (no extension possible) Wednesday, March 21 2pm (matinee) and 7.30pm, Thursday and Friday, March 22–23, 7.30pm

**PRICE:** Matinee \$57.50 (all seats), Evening \$62.50 (all seats)

**TO BOOK:** www.noosaalive.com.au, phone 5329 6560 Monday to Friday 9am–5pm (Booking fee applies) or counter sales at The J Theatre Monday to Friday 9am–5pm

**BIG TALENT:** Aussie actor John Howard (top left) stars in *Sorting Out Rachel*, written by playwright David Williamson.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

able to do a slot in Noosa. “All I'm going to do is swim.”