



# A journey of his own

STC's co-artistic director has lots on his plate, writes

**A**NDREW Upton has been juggling a lot of balls over the past few months. Upton has been in the thick of planning the program for the next season at the Sydney Theatre Company — where he is co-artistic director with wife Cate Blanchett — while also simultaneously directing a production of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Considered to be one of the greatest American works of the 20th century, the play has been on Upton's radar for decades.

"I've loved this play since I first studied it at college when I was 22," he says. "I've lived with it on my shelf for 20 years because it's a play that always spoke to me as a writer and I love what it is about."

Despite his familiarity with the text, Upton has found the process of tackling the deceptively complex work to be challenging.

"It's been a wrestle because it's a fascinating play that's strangely very simple, and of course simple is the hardest to do," he says.

Built on an autobiographical base, the play — considered an O'Neill masterpiece — is a family drama that takes place on a day when resentment and conflict tear apart a highly dysfunctional family: egotistical Tyrone, his drug-addled wife Mary and their squabbling adult sons, Jamie and Edmund.

After being immersed in the tragic world of the play in rehearsals, Upton has delighted in returning home in the evenings.

"I have just loved going home to my three children each night," explains Upton.

"There is a lot of love in the family [in the play] but they are very fractured — so going home to a significantly less fractured family has been great."

The play deals with heavy themes but Upton says this production, especially in the hands of the impressive cast lead by William Hurt and Robyn Nevin, has surprising levity.

"It's black humour in the face of big obstacles, and when that comes alive it's fascinating," he says.

When the production opens

next week, Upton will have little time to relax with the 2011 season launching in September.

Then he'll focus on finishing his adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, which opens in November with a stellar cast led by Blanchett and Hugo Weaving. The Chekhov promises a new set of challenges, but Upton is eagerly anticipating the chance to get back to writing.

**Sydney Theatre, 22 Hickson Rd, Walsh Bay; June 29-August 1, \$40-\$90, 9250 1777, [sydneytheatre.com.au](http://sydneytheatre.com.au)**





International cast: William Hurt, Todd Van Voris, Robyn Nevin and Luke Mullins in Eugene O'Neill's challenging drama about family, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, and (below) Andrew Upton Pictures: Jez Smith (main), Brett Boardman