



SYDNEY  
INSIDE  
OUT

FEBRUARY 13, 2022



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## GOLDEN AGE

Eddie Perfect on 9 to 5,  
bad reviews and  
being an 'old man'



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**AFTER HOURS**

# VIDYA MAKAN

Actor and singer. She performs in *Six the Musical* at Sydney Opera House until April 2.

## WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING

*The Great*, which is a fictionalised retelling of Catherine the Great from Russia. It's a comedic take on this historical story and what I love about it is that it has a very contemporary lens on this historical character. With the passing of Stephen Sondheim I've been getting into a lot of his work, so the last thing I watched was *Into the Woods*. There's a professionally recorded version of it on YouTube, the original Broadway cast in 1989. The first act is all these fairytales moulded together and the second act is what happens after happily ever after. It was magical to celebrate this man's life and legacy. He left behind a lexicon for us to mourn him with. We all felt like we lost a friend because his work was always so personal, so it was definitely a big thing for a lot of people in the industry. I feel like we're a community mourning.

## WHAT I'VE BEEN LISTENING TO

I like to listen to *The New York Times' The Daily*, which is a podcast about all different world news. They often talk about things that are happening around the world that I would have no idea about in a really gorgeous and warm way. I feel like they lead with love in all of the journalism that they do. The music that I love listening to is neo soul. I find that I relate to artists who are breaking the mould, so they might not be so mainstream, but people like Solange Knowles, The Internet, Jorja Smith. We have some Australian artists who I listen to a lot, like Sampa the Great, Miiesha, Kaiit. Sampa the Great is an incredible African-Australian artist. I particularly love the song *Final Form*, which is a woman of colour I listen to that and I feel powerful like I'm ready to take on the



Vidya Makan (above) has been watching another queen in action, Elle Fanning in *The Great* (below).

world. Another queen who I listen to a lot is Nina Simone. She's a huge inspiration to me in everything that I do in my work. She was so irreverent and not afraid to just be herself.

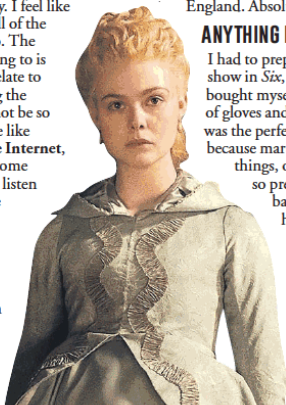
## WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

*Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo, that was an incredible read. It's about a cross-section of different African diasporic women in England across like 150 years, some of them related to each other, some of them not, but their lives all cross in some way. Each chapter focuses on a different woman in time. Such a wonderful exploration of what it is to be a woman or non-binary person in today's world in the arts as women of colour, in this book specifically with African heritage living in England. Absolutely amazing.

## ANYTHING ELSE?

I had to prepare for a heavy, heavy dance show in *Six*, so I found this boxing gym, bought myself a pair of wraps and a pair of gloves and I just really got into it. It was the perfect preparation for dancing, because martial arts is a lot of the same things, only you don't have to look so pretty when you're punching a bag. When you're dancing you have to pretend that everything's cool even when you're dying inside. I definitely don't have a violent bone in my body. I can't kill a cockroach, so I don't think I could punch a person – but the bag really gets it.

NICOLE ELPHICK



# In a Perfect

He survived Broadway, now Eddie Perfect is back in a West End musical. Just don't call him old, writes LOUISE RUGENDYKE.

**Eddie Perfect** is at home in Melbourne on a short break from a frantic three weeks of rehearsal for Dolly Parton's *9 to 5 The Musical*. After several fumbled Zoom attempts – he's finally on screen.

"It feels like we're heading out of the dark ages and back into real life," he reasons of our Zoom rustiness.

At 44, Perfect needs little introduction. He is one of Australia's foremost slashies – an actor/writer/singer/songwriter/comedian/guy-who-had-two-musicals-on-Broadway – yet, there's little fuss about him. His hair is pleasingly upright – the front sticking up from the constant running of his fingers through it – and he looks remarkably relaxed for someone who's due in front of an audience in less than a week.

There is one thing that is bothering him, though: he fears he has moved into the "old man" stage of his career. "Maybe playing older guys in musicals is where I'm heading," he says. "It's quite confronting to acknowledge. I'm heading into Captain von Trapp land and I think I kinda like it."

He's playing the villain of the piece – Franklin Hart Jr, a "sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical bigot", who becomes the target of three disgruntled employees – Judy, Violet and Doralee – who act out their revenge fantasies on him. The show is, of course, based on the 1980 movie starring Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin and Parton. In this iteration of the musical, it's Casey Donovan, Marina Prior and Erin Clare who will soon have Perfect literally strung up on stage.

"No one thinks they're an arsehole," Perfect says of Franklin Hart Jr, who was played by a slimy Dabney Coleman in the film. "Every character has to be motivated by something that's truthful. Otherwise, it's just terrible to watch. So finding that is interesting, because you have to keep reminding yourself no one just says horrible things."

What seems to motivate Hart the most, though, is trying to bed Doralee, take credit for Violet's work and just plain ol' belittle Judy. Even though the film is more than 40 years old, it's social critique about women, men and workplaces is still – shockingly, depressingly – spot on.

"Everyone is dealing with stuff," says Perfect. "It's not simply, you know, an opportunity to just kick the shit out of men and say, 'men are idiots', the women make mistakes as well. The women prejudice each other. The lead character, Violet, she prejudices Doralee because of the way she looks. So it doesn't let anyone off scot free. It's complex and interesting and varied

and I guess the message is sort of solidarity, but also allowing everybody to be themselves. The only thing that's not progressive is my character. I'm just unbelievably awful."

Awful he may be, but at least Perfect doesn't have to worry about it too much. He's stepped into a ready-made musical (the show premiered on Broadway in 2008, but was revamped for its West End debut in 2019). All he has to do is say the words and sing the songs. Which is a change from Perfect's usual trick – write the words, sing the words, act the words or, in the case of Broadway, juggle two shows at once: *King Kong* and *Beetlejuice*.

"It means that you go home and you don't have to rewrite and you don't have to wake up at 3am going, 'This song is not right. And we need another song here,'" he says.

"I'm really enjoying that. But the absence of that means there is a lot of time to fret about the intimate details of performance, the striving to try and nail the character or that

*I'm heading into Captain von Trapp land and I think I kinda like it.'*

Eddie Perfect

scene. It's very enjoyable, but I do feel total guilt about it 100 per cent of the time."

Why? "Because, you know, it's sort of like, I don't know, it's like it's too much of a free ride." So, you like waking up at 3am then?

"Oh, yeah, if I don't feel like I'm slowly being tortured to death by the thing I'm working on, the bits that are missing or something's not right. Which is a terrible way to be. Because I know that some people make shows and they have a really good time."

Broadway was not always kind to Perfect – 2018's *King Kong* was eviscerated by a couple of snarky *New York Times* and *Guardian* reviews ("spirit crushing" and "forgettable lyrics"), while 2020's *Beetlejuice* was described by the *Times* as "noisy" and "absolutely exhausting". *King Kong* closed after less than a year, but *Beetlejuice*, for which Perfect was nominated for a Tony for best original score, came, well, back from the dead in a recovery

led by superfans undeterred by the reviews. It's box office went up on the strength of repeat visits and targeting a



## BEST OF THE WEEK

### SUNDAY ART

See the diverse works on show at *Hazelhurst Art on Paper Award 2021* (until March 27), with pieces incorporating painting, photography, sculpture and more, including Martin King's winning graphite drawing. 10am-4pm, *Hazelhurst Arts Centre*, 782 Kingsway, Gympie, free, [hazelhurst.com.au](http://hazelhurst.com.au)

### MONDAY OUTDOORS

Stargazers are invited to pack a romantic picnic for Stars for your Valentine, so they can chill out watching the sunset with telescopes set up for an even better view of the heavens at night. 8pm, *Loch Avenue South, Centennial Park*, \$15, [centennialparklands.com.au](http://centennialparklands.com.au).

### TUESDAY STAGE

The Umbilical Brothers new show *The Distraction* (until February 27) sees the hilarious duo utilising green-screen technology for an evening of laughs that involves the audience in the high-tech trickery. 8pm, *Sydney Opera House*, \$64.90, [sydneyoperahouse.com](http://sydneyoperahouse.com)

THE SAT 0002



### WEDNESDAY STAGE

Sydney Fringe Festival's *Bernie Dieter's Club Kabaret* (until March 12) comes direct from London's West End with a potent mix of saucy tunes, gender-bending aerial moves and daring fire breathing. 7.30pm, *The Famous Spiegeltent, First Fleet Park, George Street, The Rocks*, \$49, [sydneyfringe.com](http://sydneyfringe.com)

### THURSDAY FILM

Mardi Gras Film Festival (until March 3) commences with the Australian premiere of opening night flick *Wildhood*, a Canadian coming-of-age tale. 7pm, *Event Cinemas, 505-525 George Street, city*, \$21, [queerscreen.org.au](http://queerscreen.org.au)

### FRIDAY MUSIC

Melbourne post-punk outfit Dr Sure's Unusual Practice play a free gig to share tracks from *Remember the Future?*, their latest album. 9pm, *The Vic on the Park, 2 Addison Road, Marrickville*, free, [facebook.com/druresunusualpractice](http://facebook.com/druresunusualpractice)

### SATURDAY COMMUNITY

Pymont's Harris Street is transformed into a pedestrian-only strip for just one day as part of Summer Streets. 11am-10pm, *Harris Street, Pymont*, free, [whatson.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://whatson.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au)



# world, he's working it out

younger audience, the soundtrack has been streamed more than 100 million times and its songs turned into TikTok hits. After its early pandemic shutdown in March 2020, the show is due to reopen on Broadway in April, and talks are apparently under way for an Australian production. Perfect, meanwhile, has just finished working with translators on a Korean version of the show. "[The lyrics] 'welcome to a show about death' became 'this is one killing show'," he says laughing.

How did he handle the bad reviews? "You have to listen to it," he says. "You have to aggregate the criticism that comes at you. Because if you get great reviews and then just one person's like, 'Well, this was a piece of shit', you can just dismiss that. But if you get five reviews, that are like, 'This is really good, but this doesn't make sense.' Or you can tell from the reviews they're not reading what it is you're trying to say, you absolutely have to listen to that, because there's a pattern there."

"You just have to grit your teeth and read horrible things about yourself."

Still, it hasn't been enough to deter him. He's working on a few unnamed Broadway projects and has been busy writing and performing in Australia since he returned from New York in 2020 with his wife and two daughters.

With a federal election looming, though, does Perfect ever feel the need to create another great Australian musical? In 2006, he brought the house down as a fishnet stocking-clad Alexander Downer in Casey Bennetto's musical *Keating!*



'What a way to make a living': Eddie Perfect in rehearsals for *9 to 5 The Musical* with Casey Donovan, Marina Prior and, below left, Caroline O'Connor. PHOTOS: DAVID HOOLEY

"I just feel like with politicians, there's no one out there that deserves a musical, to be honest," he says. "You've got to be legendary in some way to get a musical written about you. Just because you're been here for five minutes, and you're sort of irritating, that does not make a good musical."

Is there a great Australian musical out there, though, one that's just waiting to be written? "Well, that's a really interesting question," he says. "I think the only reason we ever talk about the great Australian musical is because this is sort of, I don't know, Captain Ahab and great white whale fallacy that there is the

ultimate Australian musical waiting out there. It's like the great Australian painting, it doesn't really exist, there's just got to be a lot of it. Of all different stripes."

For now, though, Perfect is concentrating on *9 to 5 The Musical* and trying not to think of being, you know, old.

"I'm in a cast with a bunch of people who are in their 20s and you're like, 'Holy shit, I'm not in my 20s any more. I'm 44.' But you know, I'm not" — he pauses — "I'm still fit and strong, I still do everything. You can't talk yourself out of life, you've just gotta go. Yeah, it's hard because you look different and you feel different, and your body's different, and your brain's different. And we've also been through this pandemic, and I wonder whether there's a lot of people out there who might have made a decision about how old they are, that might not be right."

"And now we're re-emerging back into life, I kind of go, 'Who am I?' I can still go for a run and go to the gym and have a heart attack. And I can still experience joy and love and be stupid and be silly and maybe go to the pub."

Somewhere along the line I decided I don't go to nightclubs anymore and I'm totally fine with that. But a lot of people are like that because we had two years of not being anyone in the world and now it's like, 'Who am I?' I'm just kind of back to working that all out, which is good."

"But I'm not that old, I'm not old."

*9 to 5 The Musical* is at the Capitol Theatre until May 8.

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COVER Eddie Perfect PHOTO: Simon Schluter

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