

From Macedon Ranges to centre stage

Preeshita Shah

From the Macedon Ranges to the stages of Sydney, Angus O'Farrell is living his theatre dreams.

The Alice Miller School student is one of four winners of the 2025 John Bell Scholarship, selected from 88 applicants across the country for a week working alongside some of Australia's leading actors and theatre professionals at Bell Shakespeare's Walsh Bay headquarters.

The moment Angus heard the news, he knew exactly who to tell first.

"I saw the email and texted my drama teacher straight away. I was like, 'Ann, I got it!' It was just very exciting," he said.

That drama teacher, Ann Browning, had been the driving force behind Angus's application. While studying Shakespeare in English class, she recognised something in him worth nurturing.

"My teacher was like, 'you have to do the scholarship, it'll be so cool,'" Angus recalled. "As I started learning the monologues, I thought 'I've really got to do this'."

For his monologue, Angus chose Benedict's speech from Act 2, Scene 3 of *Much Ado About Nothing*, playing what he describes as "this big buffoon-type bachelor guy".

The week in Sydney was a whirlwind of workshops, rehearsals and masterclasses that Angus said went by "in a blur".

"We'd have a workshop during the day. Then we'd go into the Julius Caesar rehearsals, which were going on next door to the theatre. We'd pop in and watch the cast and crew do their thing, sometimes getting up and joining them," he said.

One of his biggest revelations was witnessing the collaborative nature of professional theatre. He watched the actors playing Cassius and Brutus work through a single scene with their director, playing it 20 different ways.

"It really felt like watching an acting masterclass, the way they had done so much work before they got there. It was eye-opening, how

you really need to be prepared, especially with something like Shakespeare," he said.

The highlight of the week came on Thursday when John Bell himself workshopped the students' monologues.

Going last in his group, Angus sat watching the others perform, running over his lines in his head. "I was like, don't mess it up," he said.

"He's very honest and just has such a deep understanding of the text. He's plainly going to tell you what he thinks you need to improve in a kind way, which was really comforting," Angus said.

Another great moment came on Friday, when the four scholarship recipients performed a comedy piece they'd created throughout the week, poking fun at the Julius Caesar cast.

"The whole physical comedy thing, which we'd worked on with a bunch of professionals, was just so fun and the cast as an audience were just laughing. It was such a welcoming group to perform to."

The experience has clarified Angus's future in ways he didn't expect, particularly after conversations with Bell Shakespeare staff about the fluid nature of theatre careers.

"I hadn't even considered that careers can be free-flowing and nuanced. You don't have to do the same thing all the time. You can be a stage actor and you can be a screen actor and you can do Shakespeare and then you can be a teacher," he said.

Angus remains in touch with his three fellow scholarship recipients, bonding over daily sushi runs to the IGA and long conversations on the dock.

"Now I've got three friends from across Australia, which is really cool," he said.

For Angus, opportunities like this are rare in regional areas.

His advice to other students?

"Everybody who cares about it should do it, or at least audition. It's just such a fun and eye-opening experience."



John Bell Scholarship winners (left to right) Wajanoah Donohoe, Safiah Sawal, Angus O'Farrell and Rori Doherty (front).

You're invited

Preview
information
session

Registration essential

Be among the first to explore a whole new life at GemLife New Gisborne – a brand-new over-50s lifestyle resort in the heart of the spectacular Macedon Ranges region.

Join us for an exclusive preview of Stage One, coming soon. You'll meet the creators behind the community and learn about the resort's stylish, low-maintenance homes with modern comforts, premium inclusions, and energy-smart features.

Get ready to discover the exceptional lifestyle amenities to come, including \$20 million of resort facilities centred around a historic restored century-old homestead.

DATE Thursday and Friday, 5-6 March 2026

TIME **Session 1:** 10am to 12pm
Session 2: 2pm to 4pm

WHERE Baringo Food & Wine Co. (Platform 3) 283 Station Road, New Gisborne

RSVP Register online by Tuesday, 3 March at [GemLife.com.au/gnginfo](https://www.gemlife.com.au/gnginfo)



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