

ON THE MARCH

A PASSION FOR LANGUAGE AND DRAMA LED MELBOURNE-BORN DAN SPIELMAN INTO AN ACTING CAREER ON FILM AND STAGE

BY ALEXANDRA ROACH

WHEN he finished his Higher School Certificate at 17 in 1996, Melbourne-born Dan Spielman had absolutely no idea what he wanted to do.

He had a passion for language, although he spoke only English fluently. And he had such an enthusiasm for the performing arts that he had attended his first professional audition in his school uniform, but had no formal acting training.

In the end, Spielman decided to pursue acting, spurred on by his love of drama class and student theatre productions at Melbourne's St Michael's Grammar School and the encouragement of his teachers.

"The breadth of material we covered was staggering, really, and there were curiosities that were born and encouraged at school that formed the foundation for my practice," Spielman said on the school's website last year.

"The creative mind was nurtured there in a meaningful way and thanks to particular staff and their passions, and the extraordinary ambition of the drama programs, I found my path."

Since that first audition - which won Spielman a major role in the ABC drama series *Raw FM* and

saw him defer his university studies to pursue acting - Spielman has won roles in cinema, television and on stage.

Before making his feature film debut in the 2003 Australian flick *One Perfect Day*, Spielman had roles on Australian TV classics including *The Secret Life of Us*, *Farscape* and *Wildside*. More recently, he played a major supporting role on Network Ten's hit series *Offspring*, from 2011-12.

TV audiences saw Spielman most recently in September this year when played the lead role in Rachel Ward's ABC mini-series *An Accidental Soldier*.

Spielman gave a restrained, heartbreaking performance as Harry Lambert, an Australian soldier who deserts his company during the First World War and goes into hiding in the French countryside, where he falls in love with a local woman.

In 2012, Spielman trod the boards for Bell Shakespeare Company's production of *Macbeth*, playing none other than the lead role, widely considered one of theatre's most challenging.

"It's a huge role," Spielman said last year. "It's an extraordinary challenge and privilege to be able to explore language like this, because it really does expand you. You could [play the role] for years and still be finding new space and dimension inside it."

Spielman's performance was popular with au-

diences and jaded, cranky theatre critics alike, and many were surprised to learn that, despite his deftness with Shakespeare, Spielman is not a classically trained actor in the tradition of Sir Laurence Olivier or Dame Judi Dench.

Spielman embarked on studies of theatre and stage craft when he was awarded a fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust in 2002, although he preferred to observe actors on stage rather than attend formal classes.

The Churchill fellowship, which is granted to Australians to travel abroad to conduct research in their chosen field, saw Spielman travel to Europe to study theatre, radio and poetry.

Travelling to Switzerland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Spain and the UK over 12 months, Spielman translated the work of poet Arthur Rimbaud from French to English. Unable to speak French, Spielman took an interesting approach to completing his translation work.

"I do it word by word, using the dictionary," said Spielman in 2002, according to the Australian Television Information Archive.

"It's labour-intensive. But if you don't know anything, then you don't miss anything."



Dan Spielman starring as Harry Lambert in the ABC's *An Accidental Soldier*.