



Audio Description Pre-Show Notes: Elf the Musical

The Venue

'Elf: the Musical' takes place in the Concert Hall, which is located inside the Sydney Opera House's largest set of white, curved, sail-shaped "shells" on the western half of its box-like concrete and granite "Podium".

The venue is entered from the covered opening underneath the "Monumental Stairs" which stretch across the southern end of the Podium, then up two flights of internal stairs through the Box Office level and into the theatre's Southern Foyer, a light-filled space enclosed by expansive concrete and glass structures.

As well as containing two built-in bar areas, for this performance the Southern Foyer will also include an 'Elf: the Musical' merchandise stand on its eastern side, and an "Elfie" photo station in its northwestern corner featuring an icy North Pole backdrop and two decorated Christmas trees.

The Concert Hall is the largest and grandest internal venue at the Sydney Opera House. It seats over 2,600 people in tiered seating rows divided into separate walled sections that surround a low, open stage or "platform".

These sections include the Stalls which are lower down and closer to the Stage, the Lower and Upper Circles which are behind the Stalls and raised higher up, and the rectangular Boxes which run along each side of the Stage and Stalls, at the same height as the Circle. For this performance, seating sections behind the stage have been hidden by the set and are not in use.

The Concert Hall has a light and warm atmosphere, almost every surface made of timber. The walls and floor are a deep, honey-coloured brush box. The seat frames and ceiling are made of a lighter, cream-coloured white birch. Bright magenta or purplish-pink upholstery on the seats creates a sea of vibrant colour throughout the space.

The vaulted ceiling of the Concert Hall reaches its highest point at 30 metres directly above the stage, culminating in a circular section known as the Crown. Angular segments radiate out from the Crown, stretching over the audience before cascading down to meet the edges of the space.

The Set

The normally open stage of the Concert Hall has been transformed into a theatre set.

Large LED screens make up a dynamic backdrop that projects images of different settings. A long, tall screen spanning the length of the stage creates a back wall. Two narrower screens sit a few metres in front of this on either side of the stage, creating an alcove in the back middle section of the stage.

In the middle of the back LED wall is a set of sliding doors which open out from the centre for the performers to enter and exit from. Often, the physical moving screens will have a projected door on top, so it looks like the projected doors are opening and closing. There is a white cloth behind the doors lit up by lights along the bottom.

The orchestra and conductor are positioned above the back LED wall on a raised platform visible to the audience. Behind them a black cloth dotted with tiny colour changing lights creates the illusion of a starry night sky.

More LED panels create a border around the platform. These panels are arranged in a mosaic of different shapes to look like stained glass windows, which change colour during the show. Hanging at the top of the stage in front of these panels is a row of nine large, coloured snowflake shapes.

The stage floor is white. Black floor-length curtains cover additional entry and exit doors at the sides of the stage. There are two sets of wooden stairs on either side of stage that lead down into the audience.

A combination of moving images on the LED screens, along with a handful of physical set pieces placed in front of the screens, will create the scenery for a range of different locations both in the North Pole and around New York City. Some of these are described below.

Act 1

North Pole – Santa's Cabin

The screen shows snow-covered hills and terrain on a dark winter's night, the Northern Lights twinkling above. On the narrow righthand screen is an inside wall of Santa's cabin, glowing warm red in the light of a fireplace in the centre. In front of this wall there is a 'Lazy Boy' recliner armchair facing an old box shaped TV with an oversized book on top.

North Pole – Elf Workshop

The projected image of the inside of a wood log cabin with an angled roof and two central green doors. There is a clock above the door, and a sign with the Countdown to Christmas, which starts at '14 days to go!' On either side of the doors are waist-height pigeon-holed shelves, filled with knick-knacks, toolboxes and packages. Above the shelves are windows looking out to the snowy terrain.

There are four tables that wheel in, connecting to make one long production line where the elves work. Each table has a green garland and red ribbon attached to the front. Two red and green wheelbarrows are wheeled on, full of presents and wrapping paper.

North Pole – Santa's Workshop

Filling the right half of the LED backdrop, Santa's Workshop is a similar wooden log cabin to the Elf Workshop. In the righthand corner of the cabin there is a woodworking bench with a pegboard on the wall above it, where tools are arranged in size order. On the left is outside, where snow is falling.

New York – Streetscape

A moving image of tall skyscrapers of different styles and ages; all with different shaped windows. A hot dog cart is wheeled on at street level, the hot dog vendor holding a big poster with an image of a hot dog and the words "World's Greatest Hotdog".

The Empire State Building is a central point in the crowded city skyline, towering majestically above the other skyscrapers. It is a grand Art Deco building shaped like a rocket, its outer walls gradually tapering in as it climbs higher into the sky, until the top of the building is a tall and narrow pole pointing upwards into the clouds.

Greenway Press – Lobby

These offices are located on a top floor of the Empire State Building. The lobby is a grand space, with brown-red marble walls and gold embellishments. Above a double set of elevator doors in the centre is a big sign reading 'Greenway Press' in ornate gold font. Movable office desks with matching office chairs are scattered about, and a long, marble-topped reception desk sits on the righthand side of the elevator doors.

Greenway Press – Mr Hobbs’ Office

A set of big double doors with glass panels in them are at the centre of the back wall, with a semi-circular, spiky gold star ornament above the door frame. Two long windows on the left and right look out onto the New York skyline. A long, marble-topped conference desk and a couple of black chairs are all the furniture in this large private office.

Macy’s Department Store – Interior

A grand old department store in the heart of New York, decorated for the holiday season. A Capital ‘M’ is illuminated above two grand doors in the centre. Two arched windows outlined with Christmas lights are on each side of the doors.

On the right is a Christmas tree with glowing lights and a star on top. On the left, glittery snowflakes sit in a top window which looks out onto the street. Below is a storage room full of presents and boxes. White display shelves full of toys are wheeled on, along with a red, angled ladder and wheelbarrows full of presents.

Hobbs Residence

Inside a classic New York Skyscraper is a modern furnished apartment, with floor to ceiling windows that look out onto the tops of the New York skyline.

A set of double doors feature on the left as the entrance to the apartment, with a beige two-seater sofa and a full coat rack located to the right of this entrance. A dining table with matching chairs sits in the centre of the room, and there is a painting on a grey wall to the right.

Central Park

A large park in the heart of New York City. The stage is bordered with green trees and shrubs. The skyscrapers peek up from behind the treetops in the background. Leafy patterns created by light cover the white floor. A silver park bench is located on the right-hand side of the stage.

Rockefeller Centre – Ice Skating Rink

A wide, open patch of ice sits out the front of the Rockefeller Centre. Spotty lights projected onto the floor give the effect of the glistening ice scattered around.

Christmas trees line the ice rink, with glowing lights and tinsel. In the centre of these trees at the base of the Rockefeller Centre is a golden fountain featuring a statue of Prometheus. There is a park bench to the left of the ice rink.

Act 2

Chinese Restaurant – Chung Fu Palace

A red brick building with oriental Chinese decorations including lanterns, ornate dragons and murals of mountains. Four large, round tables with red tablecloths sit around the restaurant, and there is an ornate circular window in the centre of the back wall, with red light coming through the gaps.

Central Park – Tavern on the Green

Trees line the background with Christmas lights strung between them. The New York skyline peeks over the top. An old-style, one-storey white building is visible in the distance across the park: it is an upmarket restaurant called 'Tavern on the Green'. A park bench sits on the left of the stage.

The Cast and Characters

Buddy the Elf – Gareth Isaac

Buddy is 30, but very young at heart. At 6 foot 3, he is a lot taller than your average North Pole elf, with long and slender features. He has fair skin and short, dark red curly hair. His oval-shaped face is extremely expressive. His eyebrows are often lifted as his bright eyes widen in wonder, his rosy cheeks often accentuated by a huge, open-mouthed and gleeful grin.

He is highly energetic and moves with a spring in his step, his long and at times ungainly arms and legs unable to keep still for more than a few seconds at a time.

He wears a bright and festive elf outfit: velvety green knee-length pants with jagged hems, held up by red suspenders over a frilled white button-up shirt with matching green velvet cuffs and collar. Swirling patterns of gold embroidery decorate his pockets and collar, as well as the sides of his matching green, cone-shaped elf hat with a large white pom-pom at its point. Bright yellow stockings cover his legs below his pants, and his bright red shoes curl upwards into a long point at the toe.

Walter Hobbs – Simon Burke

Buddy's estranged human Father is children's book publishing executive Walter Hobbs. He is a middle-aged man of average height and build, with fair skin and white-grey hair cut in a short, neat style. Walter is a serious man who often wears a stern expression.

He is dressed in a royal blue pinstripe business suit of matching trousers, waistcoat, and double-breasted jacket, with a gold silk tie and black leather shoes. When he is outside in the city, he also wears a stylish long grey overcoat.

Emily Hobbs – Katrina Retallick

Emily is Walter's wife and Buddy's stepmother. She is middle-aged, slightly younger than Walter, with a slender build and similar height to Walter. She has fair skin and wavy, golden blonde hair that falls to her shoulders in a half-up, half-down style.

She wears a light blue-green silk blouse tucked into a similar-coloured plaid woollen skirt that ends just below her knees, and short black heels. When she is out and about, she also wears a long grey woollen coat with a grey striped woollen scarf.

Michael Hobbs – Oscar Bridges

Michael Hobbs is Walter and Emily's teenage son and Buddy's stepbrother. He is slim and shorter than his parents, with fair skin, a youthful face, and short blonde hair in a slick style, combed away from his face with a neat quiff.

He wears straight blue jeans with the hems turned up, a rust and white striped t-shirt, a padded navy-blue varsity jacket with white sleeves, and bright red Converse hi-top sneakers.

Jovie – Brianna Bishop

Jovie is a shy and reserved young woman befriended by Buddy. She is in her late 20s, above average height but shorter than Buddy, and slender, with light-coloured skin. Her long brown hair falls in loose curls to below her shoulders and is sometimes worn in a low side-ponytail over one shoulder. Light red lipstick, brown eyeshadow, and mascara emphasise her soft facial features.

When we first meet Jovie, she is dressed for her job as an elf at Macy's Department Store: a dark green tunic with a wide black belt around the waist and a jagged red collar with bells around the neck, white tights with horizontal red and green stripes that make her legs look like candy canes, knee-high black heeled boots, and a floppy red and green pointed hat with a white pom-pom on the end.

Santa Claus – Lara Mulcahy

Lara Mulcahy is in her mid-50s with fair skin and an average height and build and plays Santa Claus. Santa appears very old and has a round, bulging middle and round, rosy cheeks. His face is almost hidden in a jungle of long, white hair. His bushy white beard flows down to the middle of his round tummy, and he has a long white moustache that has been neatly curled up at the ends. On his head is his signature red, floppy Santa hat, with a band of white fur circling the brim and a gold tassel hanging from its point.

For most of the show, Santa is dressed in seasonal but comfortable clothes – loose red pants and white sandshoes, and a festively-patterned brown knitted sweater vest over a white t-shirt.

Toward the end of the musical, Santa is dressed for work, particularly sleigh-riding. He looks bit like a festive biker in a suit of matching red trousers and short belted coat, both decorated with panels of shiny green fabric up the side seams, along with black leather gloves, knee pads, and biker boots.

Santa's sleigh is the size and shape of a small, old-fashioned open-top car, except with long metal runners instead of wheels. It is painted red and has two silver headlights and a silver grill at the front. It has a front and backseat, with the backseat full of presents.

Lara Mulcahy also plays a Manager at Macy's Department Store, a small, stocky man with an untidy bowl-cut of light brown hair and slight moustache, wearing a uniform of dark-coloured trousers and matching waistcoat over a long-sleeved white business shirt, and a bright pink tie. He moves around the store with a slight swagger in his step, carrying a clipboard and barking shrill orders to the staff.

Deb – Madeleine Mackenzie

Deb is Walter Hobbs' secretary. The actress is young, but styled to look a bit more matronly, as Deb is in her 40s. She has an average build, fair skin, and a barely tamed mess of tight red

curls piled high on top of her head, making her appear around half a foot taller. She is kindly and outgoing, sometimes a little flustered.

Deb wears a retro business style: a deep purple, ankle-length skirt, lightly flared from the knee and split up the right side, with a matching peplum waistcoat flaring slightly over the top of the skirt. A light-coloured blouse spills out the top of the waistcoat's low-plunging neckline. Deb accessorises with a sturdy pair of strappy red heels, and glasses with black cats-eye frames, pointed at the top corners.

Mr Greenway – Andrew Dunne

Mr Greenway is the head of Greenway Press and Walter Hobbs' overbearing boss. He is middle-aged, about the same height as Walter with a stockier build. He has light skin, with a short tousle of light brown hair and a wiry, closely trimmed moustache, both flecked with silver. He is a brash man, often frowning and storming about the office.

Mr Greenway wears a 3-piece suit of matching dark green trousers and waistcoat with a lighter green plaid blazer and a green patterned bowtie, and black leather shoes.

Andrew Dunne also plays Mrs Claus, a large, burly woman with two dark grey plaited pigtailed and a wiry moustache. Mrs Claus wears a rustic red and white dress like a German dirndl, with red flared skirt over a white petticoat, a white apron decorating the front, and a red lace-up bodice over a puffy white blouse. She also wears black boots and a pointed red and white lace hat.

The Ensemble

Nine ensemble members make up the rest of the cast, depicting a variety of characters in the North Pole and New York City. Some of these characters are described below.

The Elves

Santa's elves are lively and cheerful, dressed in the same kind of elf costume and pointed hat as Buddy, theirs in block colours of red, orange, and purple. Their black pointed shoes have little white pom-poms on the toes.

The elves are also very small. Actors dressed all in black control the little arms and legs of puppet elf bodies attached to their torsos, with their own heads becoming the smiley faces of the elves.

New Yorkers

New York City is bustling with a diverse group of tourists and locals, most of them dressed for the cold in a vaguely retro style. This cast of colourful New Yorkers includes a busker wearing nothing but a cowboy hat and boots and a pair of white underwear, a small guitar strategically placed in front of his crotch; a hot dog vendor in a white apron; a homeless man in dishevelled clothes; a man with a white goatee jogging in a red tracksuit; a tourist snapping pictures; a couple on a date, arm in arm; and a newsboy in a flat cap and red puffer jacket, rolled up newspaper in the pocket.

Macy's Department Store Employees

The workers at Macy's Department Store are divided into two groups. Some are dressed in the same store uniform as the Manager: dark trousers and matching waistcoat over a white shirt and pink tie. The rest are dressed as elves in a similar costume to Jovie's: green tunic, white, red, and green striped tights, black shoes and belt, and a floppy red and green hat. They move busily about the store, struggling to put up Christmas decorations of tinsel, wreaths, and sheets of coloured wrapping paper.

Office Workers at Greenway Press

Mr Hobbs' employees at Greenway Press are a busy hive of editors, secretaries, and other admin staff, creating a constant buzz of activity around the office lobby as they write at desks, discuss printed documents, answer phones, and use the copier and shredder machines. They wear a slick, retro-inspired corporate style, each in their own unique combination of smart-looking pencil skirts, waistcoats, trousers, form-fitting dresses, business shirts, and ties, but all of them conforming to a similar colour scheme of deep blue, red, and purple, black and white.