



Audio Description Pre-Show Notes: Coriolanus

The Venue

Bell Shakespeare's 'Coriolanus' will be staged in The Neilson Nutshell at Pier 2/3 in the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct.

The entrance to the venue is located mid-way down the heritage-listed finger wharf. A wide staircase and a lift lead up to an expansive foyer on the first floor, which has timber floorboards and a double-height ceiling of timber beams. Large glass windows on either side of the foyer look out to the surrounding harbour.

The Box Office Counter is located at the far end of the first-floor foyer, opposite the staircase and lift. At the top of the staircase and to the right is a Theatre Bar. A long hallway with its opening on the other side of the Theatre Bar leads to the entrance of the Neilson Nutshell Theatre. The entrance to the toilets is also located half-way down this hallway, on your right-hand side as you approach the theatre.

The Neilson Nutshell is an intimate "theatre in the round" performance space, seating about 300 people. It is a box-like room, 19 metres by 19 metres, with walls covered in large, dark-stained plywood panels and a black scaffolded ceiling hung with lights. A wide strip of the floor spans the full length of the room to form an unraised stage area.

On entering the theatre from the back, audience members will take their seats in one of the two seating banks that stretch out along either side of this stage area, facing each other across the divide. Each seating bank contains 5 tiered rows of folding seats with deep brown timber backs and golden yellow upholstery.

In the world of 'Coriolanus', these two opposite seating banks will represent the two opposing worlds of Roman society: the ruling class of Patricians, and the commoner Plebeians. Whose side will you find yourself on?

The Set

The stage area is covered with timber floorboards, stained in warm reds and browns. At the front end of the performance space is a raised rectangular platform made of a similar dark timber. Small wooden crates are dotted around the edges of the platform.

This platform has hidden wheels underneath it, allowing it to be pushed to different positions up and down the floorboarded area during the play. To guide the movement of the platform, an actor will hold onto a 1-metre-long black steel rod placed into one of its corners.

Throughout the play, a projector mounted above the stage area will illuminate the names of various locations onto the floorboards in large white capital lettering.

At the beginning of the play, five shabby yellow plastic chairs with metal legs, like old classroom chairs, are scattered around the platform at the front end of the theatre. Another one of these chairs sits on the left-hand side of the platform.

Throughout the play, the stage area will be reconfigured with different pieces of furniture to become different locations in and around Rome. Some of these locations are described briefly below.

The Home of Caius Martius 'Coriolanus'

A stylish and comfortable room. The raised platform is set at the back of the theatre, in front of a large sheer white curtain. On top of the platform is a mid-century modern daybed with a dark green leather top and matching cylindrical headrest cushion. At the end of the daybed sits a mint-green rotary telephone. A couple of magazines are strewn on the floor. An orb-shaped lamp perched on a tall, slender stand casts a warm glow over the room.

A Military Encampment

The platform is at the front of the theatre and is scattered with grey-green wooden crates and ammo boxes. A small foldable camp stool, with short metal legs and a square of canvas for the seat, sits at the back left corner of the encampment.

A Senate Hearing at the Capitol

The platform is set at the back of the theatre. The sheer white curtain is open in the middle, its two halves gathered up to become tall columns framing the platform on either side. A long table stretches across the platform, covered in a wine-red silk tablecloth with a vine leaf pattern.

Behind the table are four mid-century modern dining chairs, with sleek timber frames and dark green leather upholstery. Like at a press conference, three short microphones sit on the table facing the chairs.

In the middle of the stage area facing the platform are two of the same wooden chairs with a tall microphone stand in front of them.

The Forum

A bustling marketplace. The platform is in the middle of the stage area with a plastic trestle table at either end. The market is scattered with baskets and wooden crates containing colourful flowers, fruits, and vegetables.

The Home of Aufidius in Antium

A kitchen. A table sits on the platform in the middle of the stage area. It is covered in a white cloth and lined with silver trays of assorted canapes.

The Office of the Tribunes

A dingy little office space. On the floor at the back of the theatre sits a short, two-drawer filing cabinet, a little scuffed and rusted. On top of the filing cabinet sits a dark green rotary phone. To either side of the cabinet are two yellow plastic chairs.

The Cast and Characters

An ensemble cast of ten actors will become the citizens of Ancient Rome and their Volscian enemies. Most of the actors will play multiple roles throughout, including senators, consuls, and tribunes, generals and soldiers, civilians and servants.

The Patricians

As the elites of Rome, the Patricians exude wealth and power. The men are dressed like Italian crime bosses in smart black well-fitted suits, while the women are dressed like socialites in opulent creams and off-whites.

Hazem Shammam plays Caius Martius AKA Coriolanus.

Already a fierce and esteemed warrior, Coriolanus is ambitious for more power in the Senate – in fact, he feels entitled to it. He is an intimidating presence, moving about the stage area like a viper: appearing smooth and laid-back, but full of repressed force, always on the verge of striking out.

He is a short, lean and athletic man, about 50 years old. He has olive skin and short dark curly hair greying slightly at the temples. His deep-set dark eyes and thick dark eyebrows are expressive, often betraying a cold severity and bitter disdain.

Coriolanus wears a black double-breasted suit over a black business shirt which is unbuttoned at the neck. He also wears black leather loafers, a silver chain bracelet around his left wrist, and a couple of plain but expensive-looking rings.

[Peter Carroll plays Menenius Agrippa.](#)

Menenius is an experienced Senator who acts as a mentor to Coriolanus and a mediator between the Patricians and Plebeians.

He is a slender old man in his 80s, with pale skin, short white hair, and a white goatee beard. He wears a black pinstripe suit over white business shirt and grey tie, with black leather shoes and a black trilby hat.

He walks with a slight shuffle to his step, his shoulders a little hunched. This makes him appear gentle and unhurried, although his sharp gaze indicates that he is always paying attention. He approaches others with openness and warmth.

[Gareth Reeves plays Cominius.](#)

Cominius commands the Roman army and is a close friend of Coriolanus.

He is about the same age as Coriolanus and slightly taller than him, with a slim build and white skin. His short brown hair is styled neatly away from his face, and he is clean-shaven. He wears a black suit, white business shirt and grey tie, with black leather shoes.

He stands in a relaxed military posture, with his feet planted apart and his arms held together behind his back.

[Septimus Caton plays Titus Larcus.](#)

Titus is another leader of the Roman army, around the same age as Coriolanus and Cominius. He is very tall, looming over his peers. He has pale skin, short dark hair and a short, bushy beard flecked with grey. He wears a black suit over a white shirt and dark grey tie, with black leather shoes, and he walks with a wooden cane.

[Suzannah McDonald plays Virgilia.](#)

Virgilia is Coriolanus' loyal wife. She is a petite woman in her late 40s, with pale skin and shoulder-length blonde hair styled into large, luscious curls.

She wears a flowy knee-length cream silk skirt, a sleeveless white blouse with a long strand of pearls around her neck, and thick-heeled pump shoes covered with a similar cream silk fabric as her skirt.

Virgilia is poised and graceful, perfectly playing the role of politician's wife. Her movements are refined and dainty, her face often plastered with a prim smile.

Brigid Zengeni plays Volumnia.

Volumnia is Coriolanus' strong-willed mother, whose ambitions for her son are even greater than his own.

Her light brown, freckled skin is smooth – her mature age is only betrayed by the fact that her long, voluminous brown hair has a touch of grey in it. She wears her thick, tight curls pulled back into a practical ponytail.

Her slender figure makes an imposing silhouette in a cream-coloured pantsuit made of textured taffeta, with a billowing white long-sleeve blouse underneath. She strides with strong, purposeful steps in thick-heeled pump shoes covered with a cream-coloured fabric.

The Tribunes

The Tribunes are the Plebeian representatives in the Senate. They are dressed like civil servants in grey business attire. Although equally ambitious and driven, they appear a little out of place in the halls of power compared to their Patrician counterparts. Their eyes have a glint of primal hunger in them, like hounds fresh on the scent.

Marco Chiappi plays Junius Brutus.

A tall and lanky middle-aged man with lightly tanned skin and short, curly grey hair that sticks out a little from his head. He wears a slightly baggy and ill-fitting charcoal grey suit over a light pink business shirt, unbuttoned at the collar with no tie, and black leather business shoes. There is a small metal pin on his left lapel, perhaps representing his political affiliation.

Junius tends to walk and stand with a slouch, his shoulders hunched, his hands shoved into his pockets. He rarely smiles. Some might assume he is disinterested, while others might call this cunning.

Matilda Ridgway plays Sicinius Velutus.

A young woman in her 30s with pale skin, similar in height and build to Virgilia. Her curly blonde hair is worn in a bouncy high ponytail, with short curtain bangs parted over her forehead.

She wears a light grey power suit with a knee-length pencil skirt and matching blazer over a brown and cream retro-patterned blouse, with black suede short-heeled pumps.

Sicinius is professional, but often conducts herself with a poorly concealed eagerness, a hint of a smirk revealing her enjoyment of the political game.

The Plebeians

The Plebeians are the common folk of Rome, often found gathering in the Marketplace or other public spaces. They are mostly treated as a nameless mob.

They wear rustic casual clothes in a range of faded colours: the men in tattered or faded trousers, cotton button-up shirts worn open over grimy undershirts, and sturdy, well-worn canvas jackets; the women in cotton skirts with cardigans and shawls, often with their hair wrapped in a bandana or scarf.

Jules Billington plays a Plebeian Citizen.

Full of brash confidence and a visible disdain for the Patricians, they act as the leading voice of protest amongst the people, stirring them into action.

They are in their 30s, and are tall and slim with fair skin. Their short pixie cut hairstyle is dyed blonde on the top with a brown buzz cut around the back and sides.

They wear faded blue straight-leg jeans, a white t-shirt with dark horizontal stripes under an electric blue leather jacket, and scuffed brown leather lace-up boots.

The Roman Army

Members of the Roman Army, including Coriolanus and the other Patricians when in combat, wear a uniform of military fatigues: charcoal grey cargo pants tucked into heavy brown combat boots, and a dark green canvas field jacket with pockets down the front and a belt of the same fabric fastened at the waist.

The Volscians

The Volscians are a neighbouring tribe and enemy of the Romans. Their politicians tend to wear suits in a brown colour scheme to contrast with the blacks and greys of the Roman

Patricians. Similarly, their armies wear a uniform of military fatigues, but with a dull brown field jacket instead of green.

[Anthony Taufa plays Tullus Aufidius.](#)

Aufidius is the leader of the Volscian soldiers and the sworn military rival of Coriolanus.

He is a tall, solidly built man, with olive skin, short black hair, and a thick dark beard that he keeps well-trimmed. He wears a dark brown suit over a pale brown business shirt, and polished dark leather shoes.

He is a man of confidence and dignity. He moves about the stage in a purposeful stroll, giving each movement weight but also appearing relaxed, as if he knows he can take his time.