

Dastardly and loving it

Thank goodness for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang's* bungling baron writes Chris Herden

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang's dastardly Baron Bomburst misbehaves like a spoiled child. The pompous dictator gets anything his scheming heart desires. He loves birthday parties, toys, blowing up things and a bit of sexy royal shenanigans with the voluptuous Baroness Bomburst. Little wonder that stand-up comedian, actor and television host Shane Bourne, who plays the self-centred ruler of Vulgaria, is having the time of his life.

"I love playing this childlike character who has a completely deluded self-obsession and is a raging narcissist when he doesn't get his way. His opening lines are 'I want it, I want it, I want it'. He throws tantrums and runs riot," Bourne says.

He has been experiencing a heightened reality since taking over the role from Spicks and Specks funnyman Alan Brough who abdicated the Baron's crown for the Perth and Brisbane seasons.

"I get to wear capes and military regalia and there's an old-world sense about everything; it makes for a very positive space," Bourne says.

"And there is something good about having those wonderful orchestral sounds as part of a normal working day."

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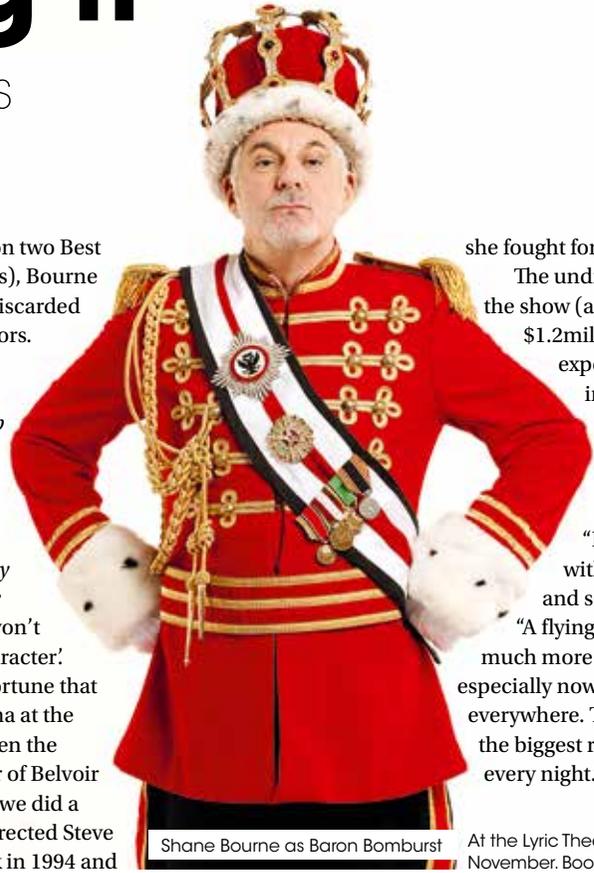
Recently seen alongside Geoffrey Rush in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Bourne is a consummate performer who has shown dramatic flair in shows such as *City Homicide* and *Kokoda*, the highly acclaimed account of the gruelling World War II campaign. He first grabbed the TV spotlight telling the 'Great Aussie Joke' on *Hey Hey It's Saturday* and more recently as the chirpy presenter on the improv comedy series *Thank God You're Here*. Prior to winning the role of medical lawyer Bill 'Happy' Henderson in the ABC TV series *MDA*

(for which he won two Best Actor AFI Awards), Bourne was frequently discarded by casting directors.

"I'd get the occasional guest role on *Cop Shop* or *The Sullivans* but there was this perception of 'no, he's the comedian on *Hey Hey It's Saturday* and audiences won't buy him as a character'. I had the good fortune that the head of drama at the ABC had also been the general manager of Belvoir St Theatre when we did a Neil Armfield-directed Steve Martin play back in 1994 and

she fought for me."

The undisputed star of the show (and at a reported \$1.2million the most expensive theatre prop in history) is the magnificent car that after restoration, begins to exhibit a character of its own. "It's a great production with lavish costumes and sets," says Bourne. "A flying car on stage has so much more impact than on film, especially now with CGI being used everywhere. That's why the car gets the biggest round of applause every night."



Shane Bourne as Baron Bomburst At the Lyric Theatre, QPAC, from 19 November. Book www.qpac.com.au

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