

Ferntree Gully Belgrave Mail

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Director goes French

By Casey Neill

UPWEY director Matthew O'Sullivan is leaping language barriers in his latest production.

The 67-year-old has refused to let his lack of French stop him taking on Melbourne French Theatre's production of *Elle t'attend* (She is waiting for you).

"I've never directed anything in a foreign language before," he said.

"I thought quite long and hard before deciding to do it. But it's actually worked out much easier than I thought."

Mr O'Sullivan has an English script and a French assistant to help him through.

"It's a strange thing," he said.

"You get so familiar with the scenes that after while, even though they're talking in French all the time, you know more or less what they're saying."

The French-speaking cast has helped him capture the essence of France.

"Getting the sensibility of the play is a much more elusive thing, and whether we're



Matthew O'Sullivan is proving language is no barrier. 34872

getting it or not, I haven't a clue," he said.

Mr O'Sullivan came across Melbourne French Theatre after moving to Upwey from Sydney and sent an application.

The company contacted him months later to offer him the production, the company's 75th in its 30-year history.

"I read the script and thought 'yeah, that's an interesting piece, I'll do it'," he said.

The play, by young French literary star Florian Zeller, debuted in Paris late last year.

It follows a woman whose lover leaves his wife and children for her, only to disappear during a walk in the mountains.

"So it's the repercussions of his disappearance that make the play," Mr O'Sullivan said.

"We gradually learn what has happened to him and why he's vanished. So it's a mystery story, but it's a romance."

He said the production was 'so French', but English subtitles made it accessible to everyone.

"There is an identifiable quality about French cinema," he said.

"They have a particular way of dealing with particularly human relationships that I've never seen in any other sorts of film or plays. This is very much in this genre."

Mr O'Sullivan worked for Sydney's Globe Shakespeare Centre and has directed more than 50 plays.

"The real core of the job is just working out the scenes," he said.

"That's the really enjoyable part of the job, working with the actors, just finding how the whole piece ticks."

He has starred in close to 100 as an actor and has also worked in television, but prefers directing.

"But that's only because acting tends to get a bit more difficult and frightening as you get older," he said.

"It's just harder work. It's harder to learn lines."

"I wouldn't say directing is the easy option, but at least you don't have to go out on stage every night and try to get through it."

Elle t'attend is on at Collingwood College Theatre from 25 August to 29 August.

Tickets are priced from \$11 to \$29 and are available by calling 9349 2250 or visiting www.mftinc.org.