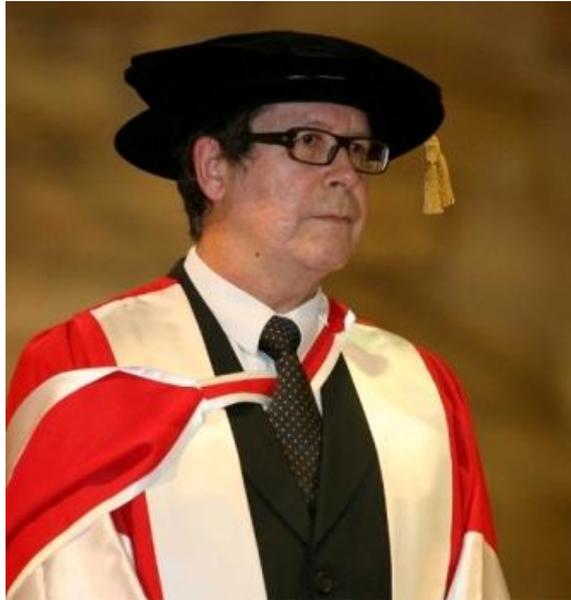


## Mr Neil Armfield

The honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred upon Neil Armfield at the Faculty of Arts graduation ceremony held at 4.00pm on 21 April 2006.



Neil Armfield, *photo, courtesy UniNews.*

### Citation

Professor Masters, I have the honour to present Neil Armfield for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).

While Neil Armfield is still only at the midpoint of his brilliant career, he has already made a distinctive contribution to the Arts and Humanities, especially through his work as a director of plays, operas and films, both within Australia and overseas.

Neil was born in Sydney and is a graduate of this University, completing his Bachelor of Arts with Honours in English in 1977. While at university he began directing plays for Sydney University Dramatic Society, with such success that he was invited to direct his first professional production for the Nimrod Theatre Company in 1979. This production of David Allen's *Upside Down at the Bottom of the World*, a new play about D H Lawrence in Australia, was also a great success and the production was subsequently invited to the 1980 Edinburgh Festival. Neil Armfield became artistic co-director of the Nimrod Theatre Company from 1980-82, confirming his special affinity for new Australian plays with landmark productions of Stephen Sewell's *Traitors* and *Welcome the Bright World* and Louis Nowra's *Inside the Island*. In 1983 he was appointed associate director of the Lighthouse Company in Adelaide. He is, however, most strongly associated with the work of Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre, having been a member of Company B since its inception in 1984. Ten years later he became Belvoir Street's inaugural artistic director and has ensured that it remains the leading Sydney theatrical venue. His many memorable productions over the years have included premiers and revivals of plays by Patrick White, Sewell, Nowra and many other Australian and international writers. He has also presented some outstanding reinterpretations of Ibsen, Chekhov and Shakespeare. Some of these, such as *The Tempest*, used Indigenous Australian actors to give the classics a postcolonial twist. In recent years, Armfield has worked closely with Indigenous playwrights and directors, making their work a regular feature of Belvoir Street seasons. His epic production of *Cloudstreet* toured Australia, as well as being seen in Dublin (where it was judged Best Production of the Dublin Festival), Zurich, London, New York and Washington.

As well as directing for all major theatre companies in Australia, Neil Armfield has been increasingly in demand as a director of opera. He has worked for Opera Australia for many years, directing ten different operas for them, ranging from classics like *Tristan and Isolde* to contemporary Australian works such as *The Eighth Wonder* and *Whitsunday*. His production of *Billy Budd*, for Australian Opera and the Welsh National Opera, has won several awards. He has also directed for Canadian Opera, Zurich Opera, English National Opera, the Royal Opera at Covent Garden, and Chicago Lyric Opera. He won an AFI award for direction of the television mini-series *Eden's Lost* and has recently written and directed a film based on Luke Davies' novel *Candy*. Besides many awards over the years for individual productions, Neil Armfield won the Sidney

Myer Performing Arts Award in 1989 for outstanding individual achievement and was an Australian Artist Creative Fellow in 1992-94.

Professor Masters, I have great pleasure in presenting to you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa), the distinguished artistic director and much-loved man of theatre, Neil Armfield, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.