Melbourne French Theatre presents Australian premiere of *From Roses to Poison*

The Melbourne French Theatre (MFT) is preparing to debut its 110thproduction – a powerful historical drama titled *From Roses to Poison (Après les Roses, le Poison)*.

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It marks the first time the play will be performed in French anywhere in the world.

Adapted from an original English script by playwright Marijke Eysbertse-van Schaik, *From Roses to Poison* explores the final chapter in the life of Napoleon during his exile on St Helena.

"It's a fascinating play," founder and director of MFT, Michael Bula said.

"There are very few plays on Napoleon. The whole thing came about because I saw the play in English at The Briars in Mount Martha."

The venue on the Mornington Peninsula has a curious historical connection to Napoleon through the Balcombe family, who were close to the exiled emperor on St Helena.

"After he died, they were granted land as a compensation by the British Crown in Mount Martha, and The Briars was created."

After seeing the performance in 2009, Michael was so taken with it that he approached Marijke about translating it into French.

This April, MFT will present *From Roses to Poison* as a "rehearsed and costumed reading" – a deliberate choice to test the newly adapted French script.

"Because it's never been tested, we've got to do it as a rehearsed reading," Michael told *Inner City News*.

Directed by Canadian theatre veteran Donald McManus and featuring a diverse cast of 10 actors, the production blends French performance with English surtitles.

The multilingual cast includes French, Australian, Mauritian, Vietnamese, and African performers – all with high French proficiency.

"No actor gets on that stage without high proficiency French. Mastery and fluency is the point," Michael said.

The six performances will run from April 30 to May 3 at La Maison de Maître, MFT's Carlton home.

The final weekend will also be attended by Marijke herself.

"She wouldn't miss it for the world," Michael said.

For lovers of language, history, or theatre, this is a rare Australian cultural first not to be missed. ●