

Buthalangi and Munya's story.
A mother and daughter's journey back.



QPAC IN ASSOCIATION WITH
OOMBARRA PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

IS THAT YOU, *Ruthie?*

Written and Directed by Leah Purcell

Based on the books *Is That You, Ruthie?* –
first published by the University of Queensland
Press in 1999 – and *Buthalangi: A Maranoa
Woman* written by Dr Ruth Hegarty

2 – 16 December 2023
Cremorne Theatre, QPAC

 QPAC
QUEENSLAND
PERFORMING
ARTS CENTRE

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A MESSAGE FROM **LEAH PURCELL**



Photographer: Lyndon Mechielsen

Yowalla Ukaminbiya (Hello & welcome).

I don't think I have worked so hard on something that I hope will be so right, and that our shared experience in the theatre for the season of *Is That You, Ruthie?* will be unifying.

Embarking on the extraordinary journey of bringing Dr Ruth Hegarty's 94-year life story to the stage is an unparalleled privilege and a pivotal moment in my career as a writer/director. Navigating the intricate details and assuming the responsibility of conveying her narrative with the utmost respect is a professional milestone. This venture echoes the intensity of my earlier work on *Box The Pony*, marking an unparalleled commitment to ensuring the authenticity and resonance of this production.

Considering the narrative structure of *Is That You, Ruthie?* I chose to mirror the life path dictated by the government policy, The Act, upon Buthalangi and Munya. The narrative unfolds with a rich tapestry of truth-telling, understanding, and celebration. Also, taking a non-linear approach, reminiscent of how Mob recount tales, we embark on a journey that starts at a point, deviates purposefully, returns to the original storyline, and culminates in the purpose for this yarn. This storytelling technique, deeply rooted in our ancient traditions, keeps our cultural practices and protocols alive.

Through tears and laughter, this production invites you to witness a performance and an immersive experience where the essence of Aunty Ruth's life converges with the resilience of our shared history.

A heartfelt thank you to my creative team of exceptionally talented collaborators: Jeanette, Chloe, Pip, Ben, Wil, Justin, Alex, Kate and Kylie for your tireless dedication in bringing this play to fruition. Special gratitude to John Kotzas, Jono Perry and their dedicated QPAC staff for their unwavering support and belief in this new work. I sincerely appreciate each of you; you're all too deadly, u'fella!

A very special thank you and gratitude to my partner in life and business, Bain Stewart.

We are Gunggari. We share connection and story to Wakka Wakka Country. A heartfelt appreciation to Aunty Ruthie for your faith and trust in me. Noella nuggera Moira and Becky Bligh for your unwavering dedication and support in bringing this play to the stage. Special thanks are extended to the Hegarty and Duncan families.

To my incredibly talented actors, Melodie and Chenoa, you've got this! Big love!

May this theatrical journey resonate as a testament to the strength of truth-telling for stage.

Noella nuggera.

Aljteringa yirra Biame!

Yantelour-oo

Leah Purcell

Stage Adaptation/Director

A MESSAGE FROM **DR RUTH HEGARTY**



Aunty Ruth Hegarty – image supplied by UQP*

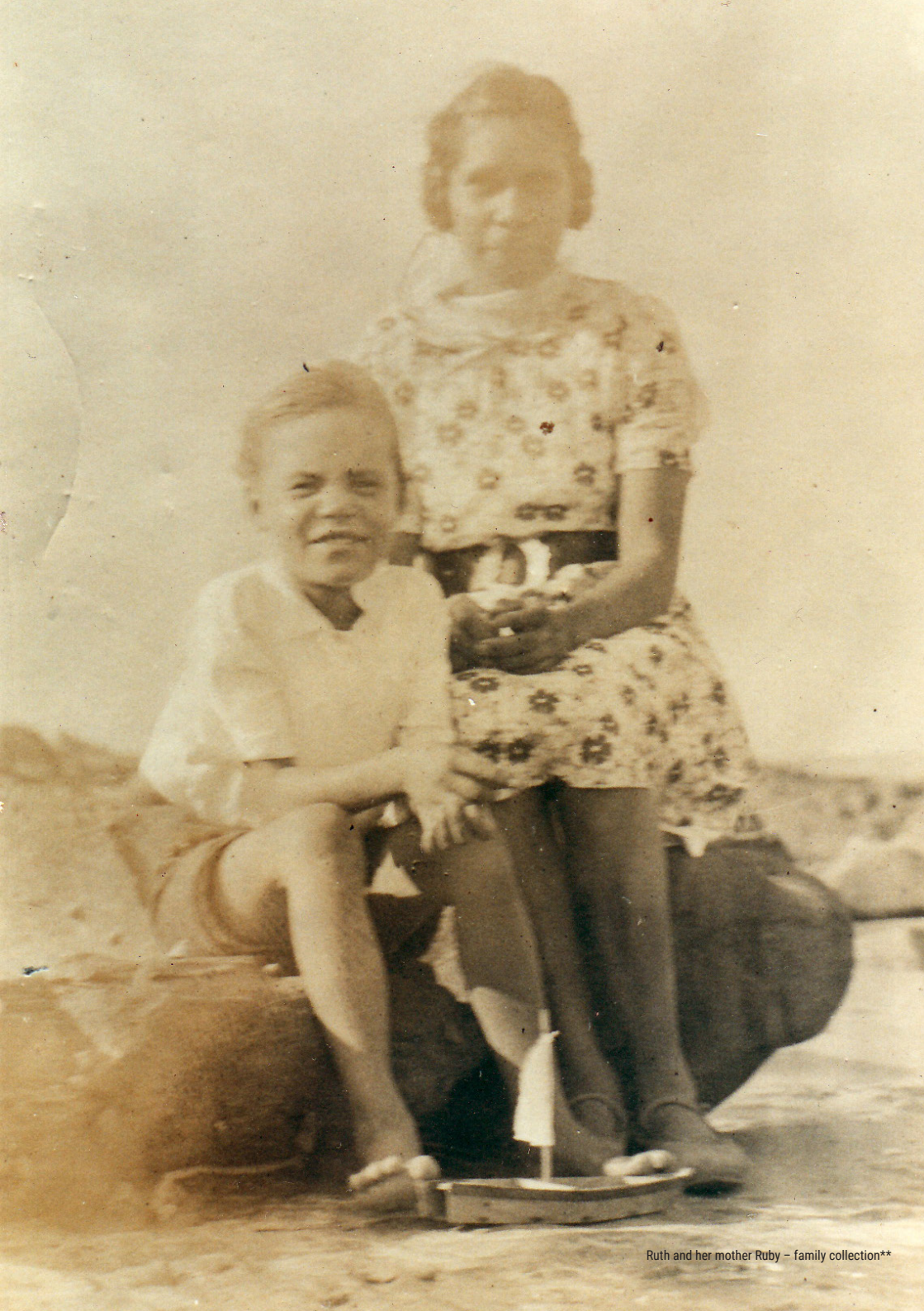
Writing the *Dormitory Girl* story was always something I had to do and when I finished *Is That You Ruthie?* I had fulfilled the promise I made to my dormitory sisters and to my children to understand my early life.

To have Leah take that story and adapt and translate it to stage has given it new life and sounds beyond my imagination. I am a storyteller but she is a creative artist and together we have built something that will hopefully resonate and educate the wider community about the rules and regulations that dictated every aspect of mine and my mother's life under the 'Act'.

My legacy is that my people and in particular my dormitory sisters are recognised and rightfully given their place in Australia's history, not as the poor cousins, but as a group of people who endured in a time of oppressive racist policies that tried to break our spirits, and turn us into imitations of the white society.

Aunty Ruth Hegarty

Ruthie?



Ruth and her mother Ruby - family collection**

A MESSAGE FROM **JOHN KOTZAS**



'This is what our ancestors blessed us with: our voice and our ability to perform... we are the storytellers, and we must continue.'

Aunty Ruth Hegarty (via Leah Purcell)

It's statement at once beautifully lyrical and filled with steely determination to ensure that the truth be heard. Aunty Ruth's resolve to share her story comes from a passionate belief in the power of truth-telling to make change for the better.

When Leah Purcell first approached us to co-present a stage adaptation of Aunty Ruth's acclaimed memoir, we immediately recognised its potential and the power of premiering a Queensland story here at QPAC.

Aunty Ruth's story doesn't shy away from the harrowing and heart-breaking, yet, it is a truth told with light and shade, laughter and tears, made only more visceral with Leah's talent for bringing stories to life on stage. We share both Aunty Ruth and Leah's passion for truth-telling and the staging of this production is a part of QPAC's commitment to present art that fosters empathy and understanding.

It is essential that art on our stages should reflect the full breadth of the community we serve and, in presenting a story like Aunty Ruth's, we hope that others with similar lived experiences may benefit from seeing a story like theirs being told.

We wish to thank Aunty Ruth for sharing her story with us, for gifting it to Leah to adapt, and for entrusting us as a venue to be a place for this production to develop creatively and ultimately premiere on our stage.

John Kotzas AM

Chief Executive
QPAC

IS THAT YOU, *Ruthie?*

Is That You, Ruthie? is a poignant exploration of a mother and daughter's enduring connection; a deeply moving play that delves into the complex aftermath of a government removal policy that separated a mother (Ruby) and daughter (Ruthie) from 1930 to 1957, leaving scars that could never fully heal.

The adaptation of Dr Ruth Hegarty's David Unaipon award-winning novel *Is That You, Ruthie?* for the stage by Leah Purcell shares a personal and profound chapter of Australia's truth-telling history. We witness a relationship forever altered by the dormitory system's cruel legacy. Though they tried to rebuild what was lost, the bond between mother and daughter would never be the same.

CAST AND CREATIVES LIST

Stage Adaptation/Director Leah Purcell

Cast Melodie Reynolds-Diarra and Chenoa Deemal

Choreographer Jeanette Fabila

Lighting Designer Ben Hughes

Composer & Sound Designer Wil Hughes

Video Designer Justin Harrison

Set & Costume Designer Chloe Greaves

Design Associate Ben Mills

Design Coordinator Wendy Rix

Dramaturg Alexander Bayliss

Stage Manager Pip Loth

Production Manager Kylie Mitchell

Producer – Oombarra Productions Bain Stewart

Producer – QPAC Kate Driscoll-Wilson

CREATIVES & CAST



Leah Purcell AM Stage Adaptation/Director

Leah Purcell AM is an internationally acclaimed director, writer, actor and producer and a proud Goa-Gunggari-Wakka Wakka Murri woman from Queensland. *The Drover's Wife The Legend of Molly Johnson* is Leah's debut feature film which premiered at SXSW as part of their Narrative Spotlight program in March 2021. The film is directed by and written by Leah, co-produced by her production company Oombarra Productions, and sees Leah star in the leading role of Molly Johnson. Her previous adaptations of *The Drover's Wife* include the multi-award-winning theatrical play which was a sell-out success at Belvoir Theatre, and the novel which is currently available through Penguin Random House. Leah's theatre directing credits include *Breaking The Castle* (QPAC), *Brothers Wreck* (Belvoir Theatre), *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (a play she also co-devised and starred in at Belvoir Theatre), *Stolen* (Sydney Theatre Company Theatre in Education), *The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table* (QPAC), *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Sydney Theatre Company), *Reflections: 40 Years and to the Future* (ACPA/QPAC), *Howie The Rookie* (Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts).



Melodie Reynolds-Diarra

Melodie is a Wongutha Nadju woman from Western Australia. She made her acting debut at the age of 16 in *No Sugar* at Belvoir St and went on to graduate from the Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) in 1996.

Melodie has performed in several ABC radio plays and recorded the audio book of *My Place* by Sally Morgan. Some of her theatre credits include *Coranderrk – We Will Show the Country* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company/Sydney Opera House), *The Dirty Mile*, *Chopped Liver* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company), *Black Sheep*, *Glorious Bastards* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company/Melbourne International Comedy Festival), *Headhunter* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company/Polyglot), *Wild Cat Falling*, *Honey Spot*, *King For This Place*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Dreaming Festival/STC), *Actors at Work* (Bell Shakespeare), *Holy Day* (Playbox), *Stolen*, *Shrunken Iris*, *MasterBuilder*, *Quilting the Armour*, *Yandy* (Black Swan State Theatre Company), *Yibiyung* (Company B), *The Man from Mukinupin* (Melbourne Theatre Company), and *Jackie* by Elfriede Jelinek (Red Stitch Theatre).

Melodie's television credits include *Natural Justice*, *Broken Shore*, *Hard Rock Medical* and *Redfern Now* (series 2). In 2013 Melodie made her debut in an associate directing role in *The Shadow King* at Malthouse Theatre.

Melodie has recently appeared in the successful 2017, 2018, and 2019 seasons of *Black is the New White* for Sydney Theatre Company.

In 2018, Melodie's first play *Skylab* made its world premiere in Perth, as a co-production with Black Swan Theatre and Yirra Yarkin Theatre.

CREATIVES & CAST



Chenoa Deemal

Chenoa Deemal is a proud Thiithaarr Warra (Guugu Yimithirr), Kaanju and Ayapathu woman from Cape York in Far North QLD. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting) from Queensland University of Technology, and an Advanced Diploma of the Performing Arts from the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts (ACPA) in Australia. In 2022, Chenoa played one of the lead roles in *TIDDAS* at La Boite Theatre.

Chenoa was also the lead in Queensland Theatre's *The Longest Minute* which received a Matilda Award Nomination for Chenoa – Best Actress in a Leading Role. In 2019 She travelled to New York to perform in Andrew Bovell's play *Holy Day* at the New Ohio Theater in Greenwich Village. Chenoa also appeared in the world premiere production of David Williamson's *Sorting Out Rachel* at Sydney's Ensemble Theatre in 2018. Her stand-out one-woman performance in the Queensland Theatre/Grin and Tonic co-production *The 7 Stages of Grieving* garnered huge critical acclaim both nationally and internationally; the production has been performed in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland as well as visiting London for the 2017 Border Crossings' Origins Festival and in 2019 was performed in Los Angeles, CA in a month-long stint at the Skylight Theatre for United Stages Production Company. Other theatre credits include *Rainbow's End* (Riverside Theatres – Australian tour), *An Octoroon*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *St Mary's in Exile* (Queensland Theatre), *The Voice in the Walls* (Imaginary Theatre), *Mr Takahashi & Other Falling Secrets* (Corrugated Iron) and *A Man with Five Children* (Darlinghurst Theatre). Chenoa's screen credits include the ABC television series *Troppo* (season 1 & 2), *Summer Love* as well as *Safe Home* for SBS.



Jeanette Fabila Choreographer

Specialising in Indigenous Contemporary dance Jeanette is a teacher, choreographer, cultural consultant and performing artist. Her experience spans over 25 years of performing and teaching audiences locally, nationally and internationally about her Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island, Papua New Guinean and SE Asian heritage. Career highlights include: 2008 Welcome to Country Ceremony at the 42nd Parliament House in preparation for the National Apology; then later 5th Anniversary of the National Apology in 2013. 2016 Choreographed the Indigenous Contemporary section for the NRL Indigenous All Star Opening Ceremony with Nunukul Yuggera Dance Group and local Indigenous school. 2021-2023 Cultural Residency representing Moa Island under the guidance of Dujon Niue at NAISDA College of Dance, Kariong NSW. Jeanette continues developing Indigenous Contemporary Dance groups in schools across Brisbane for their NAIDOC Celebrations and Awards nights, in between her own performances and major tours.

CREATIVES

Bain Stewart

Executive Producer –
Oombarra Productions

Bain Stewart is a Ngugi-Goenpul-Noonuccal man and a Traditional Owner of Quandamooka, that includes Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) Queensland. Bain is also the Managing Director and Executive Producer of Oombarra Productions and a leading producer of creative content across film, TV, events and a mentor to First Nation artists across the creative industries. His producing credits include the IF Award winning documentary *Black Chicks Talking*, the Helpmann Award winning play *The Drover's Wife*, the play *Box the Pony*, and the short films *She. Say* as well as *Aunty Maggie and the Womba Wakgun*. Most recently he was Executive Producer for the AACTA award winning comedy, *All My Friends Are Racist* and Producer for the award winning feature film *The Drover's Wife The Legend of Molly Johnson*. Bain is currently producing *Is That You, Ruthie?*, the award-winning novel by Dr Ruthie Hegarty for the upcoming Qld Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) season in December. He also has numerous projects in development, more notably; *I am Molly* (Premium Limited Series), *Koa Kid* (Feature Film) and *Netball* (series). Bain is also a Producer with Oombarra Taxi, a new strategic alliance between Oombarra Productions and Taxi Film Production, created to bridge the gap in narratives and content for the inclusion of First Nations talent, especially in commercial production.

Ben Hughes

Lighting Designer

Ben Hughes' lighting design spans theatre, dance, opera, concerts and events, including: for Brisbane Festival, *Banaland*, *Salamander*; for Queensland Theatre, *Othello*, *The Almighty Sometimes*, *The Sunshine Club*, *Return To The Dirt*, *Boy Swallows Universe*, *Triple X* (with STC), *Mouthpiece*, *Antigone*, *L'appartement*, *Twelfth Night*, *Good Muslim Boy* (with Malthouse), *Scenes From A Marriage*, *An Octoroon*, *Noises Off!* (with MTC); for QPAC, *Singin' In The Rain* (with Prospero Arts), *Breaking The Castle* (with Oombarra Productions); for Sydney Theatre Company, *Poison Of Polygamy* (with La Boite), *Black Is The New White*, *The Effect* (with QT); for Australasian Dance Collective, *Three 2.0*, *Forgery*, *Aftermath*, *Converge*, *Mozart Airborne* (with OQ), *The Dinner Party*, *Carmen Sweet*, *Propel*; for Queensland Ballet, *Strictly Gershwin*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Peter And The Wolf*, *The Masters Series*, *Flourish*, *Giselle*, *A Classical Celebration*; for Opera Queensland, *Don Giovanni*, *Snow White*; for La Boite, *IRL*, *The Last Five Years*, *Away*, *The Time Is Now*, *Naked & Screaming*, *The Neighbourhood*, *From Darkness*; for Adelaide Festival, *Two Feet*; for Dead Puppet Society / Legs on the Wall / Brisbane Festival / Sydney Festival, *Holding Achilles*. Ben lectures in lighting design at Queensland University of Technology.

Girls' dormitory building at Cherbourg, 1933
– State Library of Queensland***



CREATIVES

Wil Hughes

Composer & Sound Designer

Wil's credits as a composer, songwriter and sound designer for theatre have ranged from contemporary ballet to musicals, and include *IRL*, *Capricorn*, *TIDDAS*, *Single Asian Female*, *The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek*, *The Village*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Wind in the Willows* (La Boite Theatre); *Blue* (Belvoir St); *Face to Face* (Playlab); *Lucie In The Sky*, *Arc*, *Still Life* (Australasian Dance Collective); *Propel* (Expressions Dance Company); *Mind Your Head*, *From Within*, *Sonder*, *B-Sides* (Queensland Ballet); *Every Brilliant Thing*, *Kill Climate Deniers* (That Production Company); *Elizabeth I* (Monsters Appear/Wonderland Festival); *Rice*, *The Scene Project 2018* (Queensland Theatre); *Day After Terrible Day*, *We Will Not Kiss/Touch/Frighten You in the Dark*, *Caligula* (The Danger Ensemble); *The Theory of Everything* (Brisbane Festival/Metro Arts); *Dust Covered Butterfly* (Metro Arts); and *Sweet Meniscus* (Anywhere Theatre Festival). Wil is also an internationally acclaimed composer for film, television and other media, awarded Composer of the Year in 2018 by the California Independent Film Festival and most recently winning Best Music for a Short Film at the 2022 Australian Screen Music Awards.

Justin Harrison

Video Designer

Justin is a sound and video creative working across theatre, film and television, and videogames. He has previously created video and sound design for Queensland Theatre, Melbourne Theatre Company, Belvoir St Theatre, La Boite Theatre, and has been the resident designer and technical manager of The Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe for 14 years. His most recent credits include *Vietgone* (programming and mapping) for Queensland Theatre; *PodSquad* for QPAC and Dept. Health and Wellbeing; *The Lucky Country* for Hayes Theatre Company; *Lucky and the Flight of the Sky Puppies* for Grin and Tonic and the Simoni (2023 Brisbane Powerhouse, 2022 Cairns Children's Festival); *Ishmael* (2023 Tour, 2021 Brisbane Festival), *The Wider Earth* (2022 National Tour, Natural History Museum, London and Sydney Festival 2018, Brisbane 2016) and *Laser Beak Man* (National Tour 2019/20, Brisbane Festival 2017) for Dead Puppet Society; *An Ideal Husband and Caesar* for La Boite Artist; *Fangirls* (2022 Sydney Opera House, 2021 National Tour, 2019) for Belvoir St Theatre and Queensland Theatre, *Storm Boy* for Melbourne Theatre Company; and *Death of a Salesman* (2019), *My Name is Jimi* (2018 Sydney Festival, Cairns, Brisbane and Thursday Island 2017) and *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Los Angeles 2019, Montreal 2018, National Tour 2016-17, Brisbane 2016) for The Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe and Queensland Theatre. In 2016, his work on *The Wider Earth* was awarded the inaugural Matilda Award for Projection Design, and he has since been nominated for Helpmann, Olivier, APDG and BADC awards.



CREATIVES

Chloe Greaves

Set & Costume Designer

Chloe Greaves is a costume and set designer working in film and theatre across Australia and internationally. She was born and trained on the land of the Wurundjeri of the Kulin nation and is now based on the land of Turrbal people. Chloe acknowledges all elders past, present and emerging and the strong tradition of storytelling on this land. She studied at Victorian College of the Arts completing a bachelor of theatre production in 2008. Her theatre work has seen her design for companies including Belvoir, Malthouse, Chunky Move, Melbourne Theatre Company, Red Stitch, La Boite, Dance North, Queensland Theatre and The Juilliard School. In the film industry, she has worked with companies including Madman Productions, The Directors Group, Pixel Kitchen, Otto Empire, Pancho and Guilty. She has designed music videos for artists including Guy Sebastian, Alison Wonderland, DZ Deathrays, Montaigne and San Sisco. From 2017-2019 she was a panellist for the Greenroom Awards Theatre Companies panel. In 2021-2022 Chloe was the designer in residence at La Boite Theatre. She is a member of the Australian Production Design Guild.

Ben Mills

Design Associate

Ben is a Stage Manager primarily working in Ballet. Credits include: Queensland Ballet: As Stage Manager: *The Little Mermaid* (2023). As Assistant Stage Manager: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2023 Regional Tour & Canberra Tour), *The Nutcracker* (2022), *Peter and the Wolf* (2022), *Bespoke* (2022), *The Sleeping Beauty* (2022 Tour). As Swing Assistant Stage Manager: *Manon* (2022). CDP Theatre Producers: As Company Stage Manager: *The Gruffalo* (2021-2023 Tours), *The Snail and The Whale* (2023 Tours). Opera Queensland: As Assistant Stage Manager: *Festival of Outback Opera* (2023). La Boite: As Assistant Stage Manager: *The Last 5 Years* (2022). Shake & Stir: As Production Assistant & Dome Operator: *A Christmas Carol* (2019 - 2021). Cluster Arts: As Production Manager: *High Tea with Booff* (2021 - 2022 Tours). Training: Bachelor of Fine Arts (Technical Production), Queensland University of Technology.

Wendy Rix

Design Coordinator

My name is Wendy Rix and I am a contemporary visual artist and proud Yuwaalaraay woman. I live in Redcliffe, Queensland and my family are from Goodooga, New South Wales. These places are very special to me, and I call both of them home. I paint with acrylics mainly, on canvases, timber, handcrafted crosses, and murals. I also do art workshops in schools and the corporate sector. Fabric design/cloths and cards are also a large part of my life too.



Alexander Bayliss Dramaturg

Alexander Bayliss is a playwright and dramaturg from Brisbane. In 2019 his play *Squad Goals* was produced by Share House Theatre Company and the script published by Playlab Theatre. Alexander has worked as dramaturg on a number of mainstage productions and creative developments including Playlab Theatre's 2022 and 2023 productions of *Face to Face* by Emily Wells and Queensland Theatre's 2023 production of *don't ask what the bird look like* by Hannah Belanzky.

Pip Loth Stage Manager

Pip holds a Bachelor Degree in Technical Production from the Queensland University of Technology, a Diploma of Live Production and a Certificate II in Furniture Making and Finishing. Pip has worked as a freelance Stage Manager for the past 12 years both within Australia and internationally. Some of the highlights include Stage Manager for *GWB's Jagged Little Pill*, Crossroad's Australian tour of *Agatha Christie's The Mousetrap*, EMS Entertainment's East Pacific tour of *Barbie Live! The Musical*, Deputy Stage Manager on Brisbane Festival's *Bananaland* and Assistant Stage Manager on Dreamworks & Global Creatures North American tour of – *How to Train your Dragon – Arena Spectacular* and Gordon Frost's production of *Driving Miss Daisy*. Others include working with Queensland Theatre as Stage Manager on *Othello*, *City of Gold*, *Constellations* and *My Name is Jimi* and with La Boite on shows like *Bigger and Blacker*, *From Darkness* and *The Neighbourhood*. Pip has also worked with Queensland Theatre as Production Coordinator and at the University of Southern Queensland as a lecturer in Stage Management & Technical Theatre.

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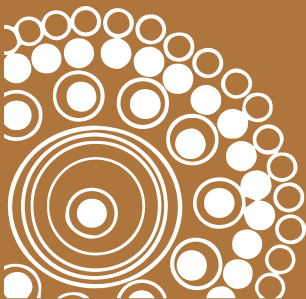
Director-General, Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts: Ms Clare O'Connor

We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors of this land, their spirits and their legacy. The foundations laid by these ancestors – our First Nations Peoples – gives strength, inspiration and courage to current and future generations, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, towards creating a better Queensland.

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

QPAC warmly thanks our key donors who help us engage broadly across the state and continue enriching lives through performing arts.

Tim Fairfax AC and Gina Fairfax AC, Dr Lee and Professor Peter Coaldrake AO, Leigh Tabrett PSM, Susan Rix AM, Julian Meyers, Dr Sally Pitkin AO, Dare Power, Dr Cathryn Mittelheuser AM, Queensland Community Foundation, de Groot's Charitable Fund, Sandi Hoskins, Klaus Beckmann, Barbara Snelling, Jill Hutchins, Leigh Wheeler, Joachim and Paula Erp, Frank and Karen Alpert, Alison Iverach, Jenny Morton, John Ryan, Margaret Heggie, Natalie Nelson, Ben Castleton, Meg Bock, Anthony Wade-Cooper and several donors who wish to remain anonymous.



OOMBARRA PRODUCTIONS

Oombarra meaning 'Ironbark Tree' in Gunggari language began as the producing entity for the creative content of Leah Purcell. Oombarra Productions has grown to become a leading Australian First Nation production company, producing and collaborating with industry leaders

including; Roadshow Films, Memento Films International FR, Samuel Goldwyn Films USA, Modern Films UK, Foxtel, Fremantle Media, ABC, SBS, Screen Australia, Create NSW, and Screen Queensland.

With a priority of developing First Nation talent, Oombarra also partners across the creative industries with companies such as QPAC, Belvoir Street Theatre, Bunya Productions, Hoodlum Entertainment, Melbourne Theatre Company and others.

Oombarra Productions is an innovator in collaborations to champion inclusion and cultural diversity, establishing new development and investment partnerships with Taxi Film Production, Indigenous Business Australia, Artology, Balnaves Foundation, and long-time associate Creative Economy.

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Two hearts breaking
Silently waiting to touch
No one hearing the sounds
Unable to see the tears
Across the large rooms
Their silence pounds
A message of love breaks
Their hearts – explode
Not hearing
Yet knowing
I am here.