

STATE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS  
AN ISTHISYOURS? AND INSITE ARTS PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH KOJO

# David Williamson's The Club

(AN ALL-FEMALE, THREE-ACTOR VERSION)



## Study with State

**STATE  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**"I love football and I love this club and it's a bit hard for me to understand someone who holds them both in contempt."**

**- Laurie, *The Club***

**RUNNING TIME**

**Approximately 110 minutes + 20 minute interval.**

**Suitable for 15+, Year 10-12. Contains language, drug use, adult themes and sexual content.**

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## SYNOPSIS

It's not 1977 anymore...

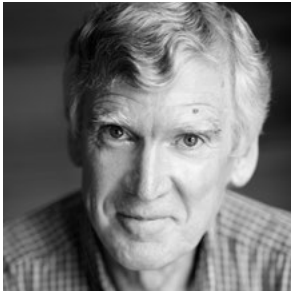
A football club on the brink of change; the old guard is being called into question and a new path must be paved. Williamson's classic satire of tradition, politics and the ruthlessness of men becomes a biting comedy for a new age in the hands of Adelaide theatre company isthisyours?

Six men from a Victorian football club argue about sport, money, loyalty, tradition, commercialisation and much more, each character showing a knack for hypocrisy, manipulation and aggression. It is a power struggle between men with very different ideas of what the football club should be.

This new version of *The Club* is stripped back and sharpened, with three women bringing to life some of Australian theatre's most infamous men. This is Australian comedy as it should be: irreverent, absurd and very, very funny.

*For more, watch the trailer for the show under the drop-down menu for The Club at: [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program)*

# Cast & Creatives



**David Williamson**

WRITER



**Tessa Leong**

DIRECTOR



**Renate Henschke**

DESIGNER



**Sue Grey-Gardner**

LIGHTING DESIGNER



**Catherine Oates**

COMPOSER &  
SOUND DESIGNER



**Meg Wilson**

LIGHTING SECONDMENT



**Louisa Mignone**

PERFORMER



**Nadia Rossi**

PERFORMER



**Ellen Steele**

PERFORMER

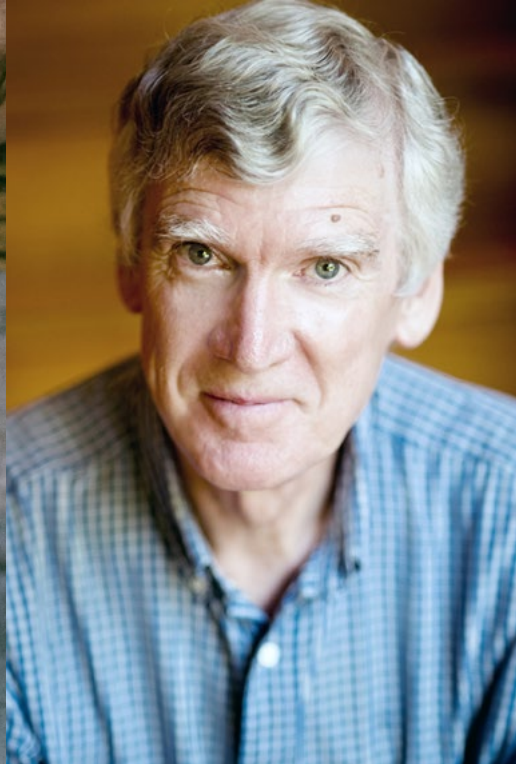


**Gabrielle Hornhardt**

STAGE MANAGER

Costumes made by State Theatre Company Wardrobe. Set made by State Theatre Company Workshop.





## A word from the writer

David Williamson wrote *The Club* in 1977. It has since been adapted multiple times to much acclaim. Here Williamson shares his thoughts on this all-female, three-actor version of the play.

I wrote *The Club* in 1977 as both a celebration and a satire on the great code of AFL. But more specifically, it was about politics and politicking. In a sense it was a satire of male, macho, competitive behaviour and how absolutely ruthless that can be. The truth is, the greatest target of my satire was the bad behaviour of males towards other males. A competitive, political world where treachery is called acumen.

I was interested when I heard the proposal from *isthisyours?* because it could heighten the satire on two levels: the male behaviour towards males can be delightfully heightened when females are playing the roles; and also the male behaviour towards women can get a boost.

I never thought I'd see an all-female production of the play, but as my aim was to satirize males behaving badly, who better to make the satire even sharper than a very talented team of clever female actors/comedians? They, like all women, have had to endure male bad behaviour all their lives. I anticipate that all men, including myself, will be doing a fair bit of squirming in our seats as *isthisyours?* offer their version of my play, but I'd be surprised if the women in the audience didn't respond loudly, and often.

PHOTO: TASH MCCAMMON (LEFT) AND PROVIDED (RIGHT).

Why did you write *The Club*? Why is the idea of an all-female, three-actor version exciting to you?

My original intention for *The Club* was that it was a satire of male competitive behaviour and ruthlessness when power and success were dangled before us. So originally it was a satire of bad male behaviour towards each other. I think males are trained to engage in combat with other males and that causes a lot of problems. But part of the play also deals with bad male behaviour towards females - it wasn't the main part of the play but it was certainly there. And no one is better to skewer bad male behaviour towards women than women! *isthis yours?* will very acutely increase the satire of men behaving badly and the idea of 'men being men'.

*The Club* is undeniably a classic Australian text. How do you see it as being relevant in 2019?

One of the things that sticks out to me is that male attitudes towards women in the 1970s that were considered normal at the time are now seen as distinctly not normal. So, in that respect, one of the things that *The Club* will underline is how much values have shifted or, at least, should have shifted. There was a feeling that when I talked to director Tessa Leong\* that males have got a lot better over the last 40 years at behaving more respectfully on the surface, but whether there's been a real big shift in their attitudes and behaviour towards females is not always readily apparent. When you look at the domestic violence statistics they seem worse now than they did forty years ago. When you look at instances of sexual harassment it's either that more of it is being reported now or that there's just simply more of it than there has been in the past. So all of these practical indicators show us that male behaviour hasn't, in fact, got much better over the years... at all.

I think modern males pride themselves on being more sophisticated than males in the 1970s, but when you look at it, a lot of those behaviours and ideas from *The Club* are still there. They're just lurking beneath a more polite surface.

# A brief introduction to David Williamson

Born in Melbourne in 1942, David Williamson initially studied and worked in the field of engineering. He first began writing and performing theatre in 1967, before becoming more prominent in the early 1970s with the popularity of *The Removalists* (1971) and *Don's Party* (1971). He also studied and taught psychology, and wrote for television and film.

In an interview with the National Sound and Film Archive of Australia, Williamson spoke about the scarcity of Australian plays being performed in the 1960s. He described this lack as being caused by a mindset among the 'cultural elites' of the time that denigrated Australian creativity.

"There was no sense that theatre was about telling our own stories or discovering the uniqueness of our way of life, or the way we use language. Nothing," he said.

Williamson and other emerging Australian playwrights felt that "we had a right to our own stories, and that our country was not really a country, in a sense, until it could view its own stories."

From the beginning, Williamson's work has been a response to these ideas - his plays reflect Australia in their language, their settings, their themes and the mindsets of his characters.

Since he began writing in the 1960s and 1970s, Williamson has written over 50 plays, in addition to a number of teleplays and screenplays. There are a number of common themes that can be identified in much of his work - namely, politics, tradition, family and loyalty. The majority of his plays are firmly set in contemporary Australia.

Williamson announced his retirement from main-stage productions in 2005, but has continued to write and direct new plays. His most recent work, *Nearer The Gods* (2018), was performed by Queensland Theatre Company under the direction of Sam Strong in October 2018.





PERFORMERS ELLEN STEELE, LOUISA MIGNONE & NADIA ROSSI.  
PHOTO: TASH MCCAMMON.

## What next?

*Our “What next?” sections include questions and activities based on previous pages. These can be used for individual reflection or as class exercises.*

On page 8, playwright David Williamson speaks about seeing Australian stories and culture reflected in theatre.

What are some of the things that are uniquely Australian about *The Club*? Think about the themes, concepts, language and characters, as well as any other elements that come to mind. Discuss in a small group or as a class, or write down your responses.

## Supporting materials

An interview with David Williamson, writer of *The Club*  
David Williamson on telling Australian stories

Links to these resources are under the drop-down menu for *The Club* at:  
[statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program)



# Taking on *The Club*

AN INTERVIEW WITH TESSA LEONG, DIRECTOR

## Why did you decide on *The Club*?

isthisyours is really excited to do David Williamson's *The Club* because we thought it's really interesting as an all-female company, and as a company interested in making theatre, to have this conversation with the Australian canon. What we thought that *The Club* offered us was a really great way to look at gender and the performance of gender, and look into what may or may not have changed since 1977, when David Williamson wrote *The Club*, to now, in 2019.

We came up with the concept of why we wanted to do the show before we'd really delved into it. We thought that it was a great idea intellectually, and as theatre-makers we saw it as a great challenge to put on this piece. What we didn't realise was how much we would enjoy the characters and the situation that David Williamson has put them in.

## What do you see as the main themes of *The Club*?

*The Club* is full of some excellent and still relevant themes. We look at these six characters and we can really transport them into many different industries or sectors across time, from 1977 to now. We look at what changed in Aussie Rules from a really community-driven and grassroots game into something that became extremely corporate. It's hard for us, if you follow AFL, to remember that it was once about local clubs in the suburbs of Melbourne playing each other, where you would go to the ground and see your favourite players play every week. That's a big shift, and that's something David Williamson has been able to tap into. There are some characters in the play who really feel like the honour and loyalty of the club is more important than making money; that comes up against other characters.

On another level it's about the old guard and the new guard. What is it about the old ways that we should keep and revere? And what are the things that we should throw away when we're paving a new path?





### What do you see as the role of a director?

Being a director is many different things. In the context of being a director as a part of *isthisyours?*, our independent theatre company, it means that I am responsible for facilitating the conversation and process of how we take something from an idea to putting it on a stage for an audience. Quite often that original concept will come from the kind of experience we want an audience to have or something we feel like we yearn for or desire when we are audience members. Through our collaboration as artists in *isthisyours?* we really then shape what that could become.

Working with different companies and working with new actors outside the context of our company, it can very often be about coming up with an idea of what play you want to do and then pitching that idea to a company. If they like the idea then you begin putting the cast together. In the room, it's about shaping the aesthetic with the design team to create those moments and the drama or comedy moment-to-moment with actors.

### How did you become a director?

I was really into drama and theatre as a student. I was really lucky to have two amazing drama teachers, which I think is usually the story. I learnt that at Flinders Drama Centre there was a directing course so I applied to go there. I did a four year training course at Flinders Drama Centre as a theatre director. A lot of it was also because I was so interested during school, I made independent shows with friends and people I met. From there I built not only the skills and training from Flinders Drama Centre, but also a network of people who also wanted to play and make work.

*This interview is based on a series of video interviews with Tessa Leong, available at [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program)*

# About isthisyours?

IN THE WORDS OF THE THEATRE COMPANY

Since 2006, isthisyours? have delighted and intrigued audiences with innovative ideas and performances. They bring their creative process and collaborative spirit to State Theatre Company with this production of *The Club*.

isthisyours? is a theatre company that creates new performance interrogating serious ideas in a ridiculous manner and ridiculous ideas in a serious manner. We are Jude Henshall, Louisa Mignone, Nadia Rossi, Ellen Steele and Tessa Leong and we have been collaborating since meeting as students at Flinders Drama Centre. Launching as a company in 2006, we have created and presented four full-scale works, all of which have been devised entirely by the ensemble along with talented collaborators.

We make performance to bring people together and challenge notions of what is certain. We forge connections with these people – in public, in private, in secret – and ask questions that mobilise new audiences. We are in cahoots with those who embrace adventure, ideas big and small. We aim to make an audience smile, converse and act upon these perceptions for days, hours and years to come. We create work that resonates with people and their own ideas. The world around us is ever-inspiring: full of tiny karaoke stages; abandoned cinemas; and studies of the brain that excite us no end.

isthisyours? makes work for everyday people who are inspired and excited by the tiny brilliances that can occur in live engaging performance.



REHEARSALS FOR *THE CLUB*.  
PHOTO: TASH MCCAMMON.

## What next?

Think about an older play, movie, book or TV show - it could be a favourite of yours, or could be something you've read or watched for school.

What themes in the work you have chosen are still relevant? Are there any other ideas or themes that could be changed to be relevant to today? Are there any themes, characters or actions that would not be acceptable today?

Write down your thoughts or discuss with a partner or small group.

## Supporting materials

What to expect from *The Club*

Key themes in *The Club*

Why David Williamson?

Falling in love with a classic Australian play

Becoming a director

Links to these resources are under the drop-down menu for *The Club* at:  
[statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program)





# Exploring the characters

*There are six central characters in The Club, but only three performers in this production. As such, each performer plays more than one character over the course of the play. Changes of wigs, specific postures and vocal elements are all used to help the audience to differentiate between characters. In Act 1, each actor takes on two characters; things are changed up in Act 2, bringing a different interpretation to each of the characters.*

## JOCK RILEY

Jock was a champion player for the club many years earlier, and holds the record for most games played with the club. He was the coach of the team during Laurie's time as a player, but the two did not get along and still hold grudges against one another. In the time the play is set, Jock is an influential member of the club's committee. He likes to know about everything that is happening and will intervene if he feels there is a need.

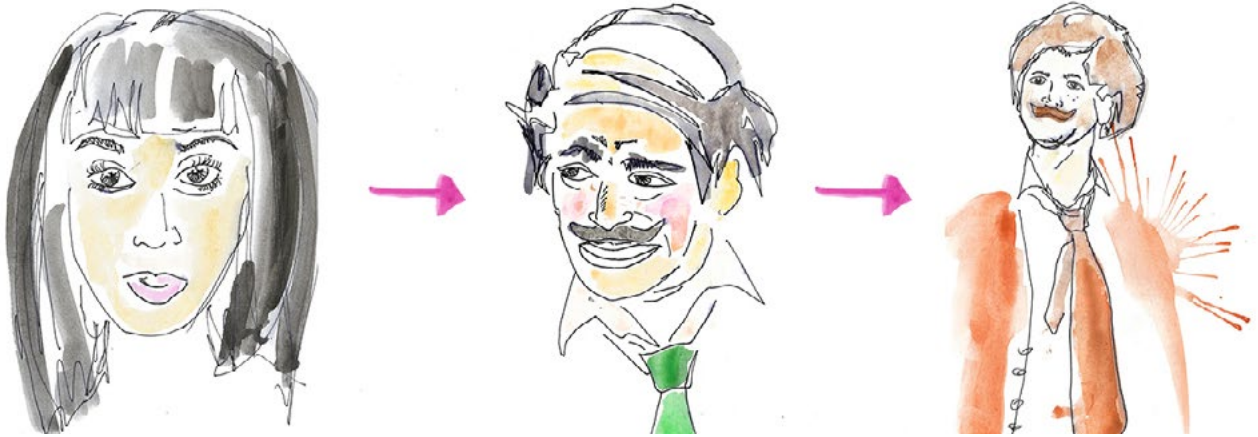
Played by Nadia Rossi in Act 1.

## TED PARKER

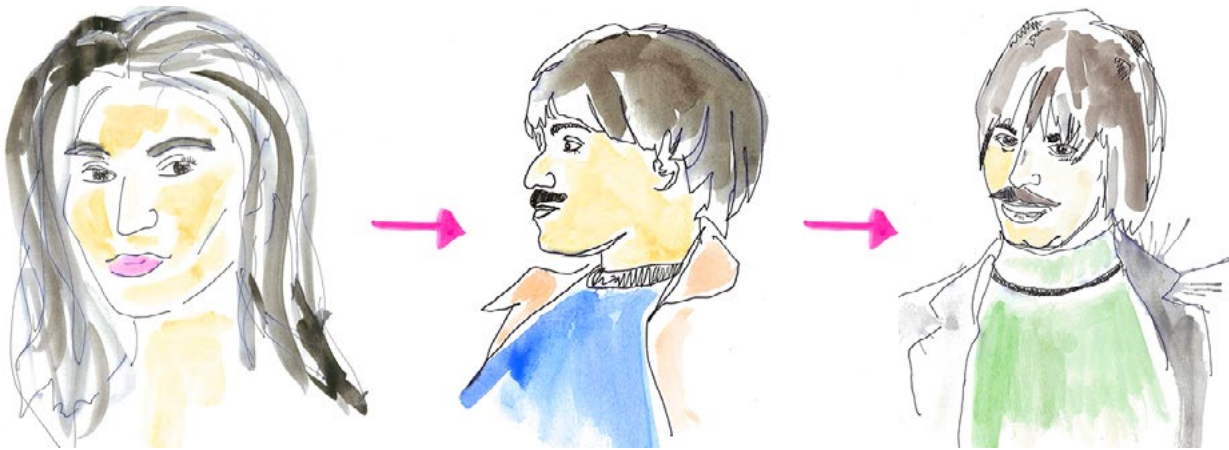
Ted is the club president and the owner of a pie factor, Parker's Pies. He has deep pockets and personally contributed funds to hire Geoff Hayward. Unlike most of the other characters, Ted has never played for the club – he's never had much playing ability, but is a long-time fan of the sport and the club. He likes to drink and is generally considered incompetent.

Played by Nadia Rossi in Act 1.

NADIA ROSSI AS JOCK RILEY. PHOTO: KOJO.



ACTOR NADIA ROSSI (LEFT) PERFORMS AS JOCK RILEY AND TED PARKER.  
DRAWINGS BY ANTHONY NOCERA FOR STATE THEATRE COMPANY.



ACTOR LOUISA MIGNONE (LEFT) PERFORMS AS GEOFF HAWYWARD AND GERRY COOPER.  
DRAWINGS BY ANTHONY NOCERA FOR STATE THEATRE COMPANY.

## GEOFF HAYWARD

A new recruit with a reputation as a star player, Geoff was bought from his old team for a huge sum of money (at least for the time). Despite playing well for the club at first, Hayward has been distracted on the field. He is concerned about being treated as a commodity and doesn't appear to have much remaining passion for football.

Played by Louisa Mignone in Act 1.

## GERRY COOPER

An administrator, Gerry sees the club as a business and approaches problems with less emotion than those who are passionate about it. Gerry wants to make business operate as smoothly and effectively as possible, but his motives are generally self-interested.

Played by Louisa Mignone in Act 1.



ACTOR ELLEN STEELE (LEFT) PERFORMS AS LAURIE HOLDEN AND DANNY ROWE.  
DRAWINGS BY ANTHONY NOCERA FOR STATE THEATRE COMPANY.

### LAURIE HOLDEN

The coach of the club, Laurie is respected by players, but is not well-loved by the club's management. As a coach, he rules through discipline, but clearly cares a lot about his players. Laurie previously played for the club himself, but his champion playing career was ended by injury. He fell just short of beating the record for most games played. Laurie has been far less successful as a coach, and is under pressure to secure a grand final win to avoid being sacked.

Played by Ellen Steele in Act 1.

### DANNY ROWE

Danny is the captain of the team and a solid player. The club are considering trading him before anyone realises his playing abilities have started going downhill. He is fiercely loyal to Laurie and enraged by the way business and money have begun to have such influence in the club.

Played by Ellen Steele in Act 1.

*"I've got twenty-five kicks a match for ten years. Game in, game out, and the first time I have a bad day he's onto me. What right have you got to sit in judgement on me, you fat turd? Get back to your pie factory."*

- Danny





# Creating characters

AN INTERVIEW WITH PERFORMERS ELLEN STEELE & NADIA ROSSI

## Why did isthisyours? decide to perform *The Club*?

**Ellen Steele (ES):** We've been making work for 11 years, we're a collective of women who all met at Flinders University Drama Centre and we've always been interested in creating work that has an interesting impact for the audience. Be we don't usually work with a script.

**Nadia Rossi (NR):** We self-devise and make our own work, usually. On our last show, *Angelique*, we worked with [playwright] Duncan Graham and we wrote the script. So this is the first time we've used a very, very well-known play.

**ES:** We're taking on a classic in such a way that we can absolutely say to an audience, 'you've never seen *The Club* done this way before'. Which is pretty exciting for us as a company, taking it away from the classic model of six men, we're doing it with three women. Part of the appeal also was, it sounds silly, but it's quite liberating having to work within restrictions. We can't touch the script – the script stays as is. It's the classic text that everyone knows and loves. But we're reinterpreting it to have three women saying all the words. That, for us, was a really exciting challenge.

## What do you want the experience of seeing *The Club* to be?

**ES:** One thing that has always interested isthisyours? as a company is to examine serious ideas in a ridiculous manner, and ridiculous ideas in a serious manner. *The Club* kind of ticks that off for us. David Williamson's writing is so scathingly hilarious – it's that iconic biting text, with that really Aussie vernacular that everyone knows and loves so much about his work. But it's so different when those words are coming out with a female voice. I think, for us, there were times that it makes it even more ludicrous.

ELLEN STEELE, LOUISA MIGNONE AND NADIA ROSSI.  
PHOTO: TASH MCCAMMON.



**NR:** We're exploring what it makes the audience feel when the words are coming out of a woman's mouth and body, even though she is clad to look like a man. What does that mean? How does that make you feel? On the other hand, there are themes that come out of the show that are not so hilarious. You can read the script, and you can watch the play, and you can see it as just a footy club going through the trials and tribulations of a footy club... But underpinning that there's this kind of casual violence between men and women, the casual way that women are spoken about in general. Having a male character saying that, by a female actor saying it, adds another layer to how those words feel and what they mean. I think you see it through a different lens, and you feel it in a different way. You feel it in a different way, as well, performing it.

## How do you create a character? What are the challenges in playing a character of a different gender?

**ES:** One of the big themes of the show is this very toxic masculinity that's present in the work. When it came to us taking on different genders in the role, it was about performing masculinity rather than playing men. It's performing caricatures of that gender. This is definitely a heightened show – it's not naturalism, which was very liberating as an actor. We go through quite a few incantations of each character in our interpretation of the script so it was really fun to look at the performance of gender, whether that's playing a woman or playing a man, particularly in the time the show is set in the 1970s.

**NR:** Looking to those kind of men or the kind of masculinity of that time and taking that on is really fun.





## Each of the actors takes on multiple characters in this performance. How do you switch between characters?

**ES:** Because we are taking this show on as three actors playing six characters – characters who are often in the room at the same time – definitely means it's a different process than it would be if it was a walk-on walk-off scenario with a quick change. It's about embracing those characteristics and always thinking 'how are the audience tracking that character?' or 'how can I help an audience member stay with that person and recognise them?' We look at signifiers, whether it's a physical pose or a costume item, that's just enough to read the character.

**NR:** The changes are very quick so there are instances where you may have an argument with yourself, essentially – where the two characters you play may have an argument with each other. In acting this out, we look at how to keep the pace up, keep up the momentum of an argument between two characters, and how the audience stays on board. That's all taken into account.

## Supporting materials

An illustrated guide to *The Club*

Playing the man: interview with Ellen Steele & Nadia Rossi

Taking on a classic: interview with Ellen Steele & Nadia Rossi

Links to these resources are under the drop-down menu for *The Club* at: [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program)

LEFT: NADIA ROSSI. RIGHT: ELLEN STEELE.  
PHOTOS: TASH MCCAMMON.



NADIA ROSSI, LOUISA MIGNONE AND ELLEN STEELE IN REHEARSALS FOR *THE CLUB*.  
PHOTO: TASH MCCAMMON.

## What next?

Pick a character from *The Club*. What are the key differences between the chosen character and the other characters in the story? How might they be similar to other characters?

List their physical features, their emotions and what they are aiming for in the story. Come up with ideas about their speech, posture, mannerisms and gestures. Why do you think these work for the character? For example, if a character gestures with their hands a lot, does that mean they're passionate? Stressed? Something else?

Choose a particular event that takes place in the play or is mentioned by other characters as having occurred in the past or off-stage. For example, the hiring of Geoff Hayward or the release of the media story about Gerry and the stripper. Write a diary entry from the point of view of your chosen character as they reflect on this event.

Perform the diary entry as a monologue. Remember to keep the list of their physical features, emotions and other characteristics in mind in your performance.



## Setting: the 1970s & beyond

Written in 1977, *The Club* reflects what was happening in the Victorian Football League (which became the Australian Football League in 1990) during the mid-70s.

This version of *The Club* maintains a naturalistic 1970s setting in Act 1, specifically a 70s era boardroom at the club. The set, costumes and hair have been chosen to reflect this time period and the Australian setting. (More about these design elements on pages 22-24.)

In the second half of the play, the setting fractures. While elements of the 70s are still featured in Act 2, so are more absurd, non-naturalistic and contemporary design features.

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## Naturalistic & non-naturalistic design

Naturalistic design aims to reflect real life back to the audience. This type of setting is often used to transport audience members to the world the characters inhabit.

Non-naturalistic design is often used to jolt audiences into thinking about the fact that they are watching a play. This allows the audience to consider why certain decisions have been made by the director and creative team. Non-naturalistic design often uses symbols and metaphors that can be used by the audience to interpret meanings in the work.





# Design elements

AN INTERVIEW WITH RENATE HENSCHKE, DESIGNER

**What do you see as the role of a designer on a theatre production?**

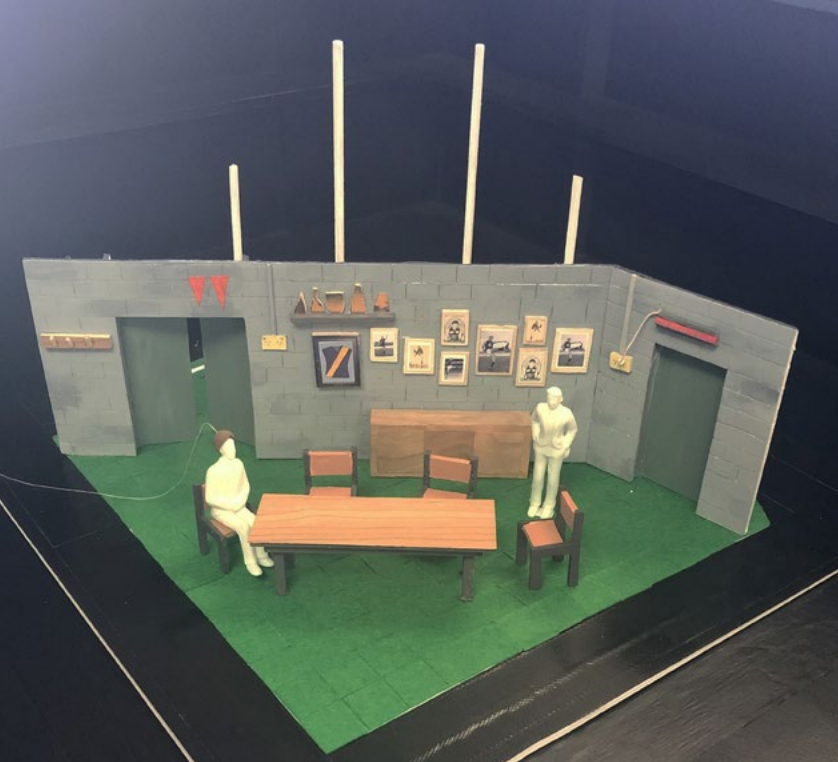
My role as the designer in a theatre production is to create a visual world that supports both the story and the director's vision. Bringing the characters to life through costume is a great joy in this process. Together with the director, we analyse the script and pull together ideas and images to form the elements of the space we want the actors to play in.

**What sort of feel are you trying to create in the design for *The Club*?**

*The Club* is a classic Australian play written in the 1977 by David Williamson which looks at the power struggle in the board room of a footy club. As designer I wanted to be true to the fashion and styles of this well documented era. The action takes place in the boardroom of the team's football stadium. I was inspired by the structure of Adelaide's own Footy Park, which was built around the same time that the play was written. I was drawn to the practical and simple nature of the building materials found in many sports centres of that era - besa bricks, vinyl chairs, laminate tables and visible electrical conduit on the walls.

In the text there are multiple references to the importance of the history of the club and upholding traditions or breaking them. I was interested in representing the history through the images on the wall and the ephemera in the room while creating a current 1970s space. The characters in the play are various members of a long running football team.

Once we enter into Act 2, all rules of gender and time are broken and this is where we have some fun changing the visual representation of the characters. Male characters change gender and jump forward in time. The challenge is to keep the audience focused on the story and follow the characters through these changes through palette and styling choices.



LEFT: SET MODEL BY RENATE HENSCHKE. RIGHT: MOVING FURNITURE IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM.  
PHOTO: TASH MCCAMMON (RIGHT PHOTO ONLY).

## What was the process of creating the design for *The Club*?

The process for this production was a little unusual as *isthisyours?* had already created the show for a season at Belvoir in Sydney earlier in the year with minimal design elements. Tessa [Leong, the director] then invited me to help build upon their ideas and bring the story to the larger stage, along with the other designers, Catherine Oates and Sue Grey-Gardner.

By the time we started on the project, the company had already worked out the structure of the play and addressed some of the many challenges of having three female actors playing the roles of six men. They achieved this by having wigs drop from the ceiling with bull clips on wire and the actor ran from one wig to the next to change roles. The ridiculous slapstick nature of this was so enjoyable for audience members that we felt this was key to keeping the 'crafftastic' nature of the show. We are asking the audience to believe that all the male roles are being played by female actors, but the styling of the men is fun and playful.

## Set design

In Act 1, the set design for *The Club* reflects a 1970s boardroom at a football stadium and is naturalistic in style. The furniture, light fittings, wall finishes, carpet tiles, heater and accessories all reflect this time period. The walls of the room are adorned with football paraphernalia, reflecting the glory of former players and club members. The set also includes a pulley system to assist with changing wigs.

In Act 2, the set changes. A crepe paper football banner replicating the boardroom is utilised, as well as goal posts. This part of the play takes a turn for the absurd and is less naturalistic, and the set begins to reflect this change.



# Costume design

The costumes used in Act 1 are fairly naturalistic for 1970s men – football guernseys, short-shorts, wide ties, vests and lots of 70s browns and yellows. However, the false moustaches and obviously fake wigs bring a sense of the absurd to the costumes in this part of the play.

The costumes change significantly from the beginning of Act 2. The costumes become absurd and their relation to both the original time setting and the gender of each character changes.



COSTUME DESIGNS FOR ACT 1 BY RENATE HENSCHKE.



## Sound design

AN INTERVIEW WITH CATHERINE OATES,  
SOUND DESIGNER & COMPOSER

What do you see as the role of a sound designer in theatre?

I think the role of a sound designer is to support the work in any way possible, using underscoring and atmospheric scene setting sounds and effects.

What sort of feel are you trying to create with lighting for *The Club*?

This version of the play has two completely different acts - it's difficult to describe without giving anything away. Let's just say the first act is set in the 70s, but the second act changes. Rather a lot. In both acts, sound is generally used for dramatic effect and is non-diegetic, meaning it's not drawn from the setting and action occurring on the stage.

What sorts of processes have you used to create the sound design for *The Club*?

I have researched lots of archival footage and sounds to try to get the right 'feel' of the 70s and the noises of football.

*"I was elected by the members to lead this club and I'll bloody well lead it, and if anybody tries to stop me I'll crush them."*

- Ted



# Lighting design

AN INTERVIEW WITH SUE GREY-GARDNER,  
LIGHTING DESIGNER

What do you see as the role of a lighting designer in theatre?

On a basic level, the lighting designer's role is to illuminate the stage and whatever is on it. Beyond that, it's a lighting designer's job to create atmosphere and mood, as well as contrast and dimension. The design needs to align stylistically with the direction and other creative elements, such as set, costume and sound design. The lighting design also underpins the emotional journey of the performance.

What sort of feel are you trying to create with lighting for *The Club*?

In Act 1, the setting is naturalistic and takes place in a 1970s boardroom. I am completely supporting this using conventional light fixtures and creating an 'old world' look with dusty, beige overtones.

In Act 2, the show becomes wackier and quite non-naturalistic, so I am following suit!

What sorts of processes have you used to create the lighting design for *The Club*?

First, I studied the script and the set design. I had conversations with the director and other designers, as well as doing my own research into 1970s interiors and lighting. I formulated some 'looks' based on what I gleaned and how I thought I might be able to contribute to the overall feel.

I also looked at the emotional content of the play to give me ideas for shifts in the lighting.

LEFT: SUE GREY-GARDNER. RIGHT: SUE (FAR RIGHT) AT REHEARSALS FOR THE CLUB.  
PHOTO: TASH MCCAMMON (RIGHT PHOTO ONLY).





LOUISA MIGNONE AND NADIA ROSSI.  
PHOTO: TASH MCCAMMON.

## What next?

The design for Act 1 of *The Club* is mostly naturalistic and draws on the time period it is set in - the 1970s. The use of wigs and fake moustaches, which are changed as the actors swap characters, do bring more of a sense of the absurd to proceedings, but the style of these hairpieces generally fits with the 70s aesthetic.

In Act 2, the design elements take a turn for the absurd, mixing naturalistic and non-naturalistic elements.

Choose a type of design to focus on - set, costume, lighting or sound. Think about what sort of direction you might take with your design.

Would it reflect design elements from 1970s Australia? Or would you choose a different time or place? Or something more abstract? If going for something naturalistic, what sort of location would you use (indoors, outdoors, kitchen, club room, grounds, cafe, etc.)?

Create a mood board for your design - focus on a particular scene if that is helpful. For set, costume and lighting design, find or draw images and diagrams related to your vision. For sound design, find sounds or songs to create the feel you are looking for.

Explain why you have made these choices and how your design connects with the story of *The Club*.



# Themes

## Tradition: A changing of the guard

The changing of guards, from old to new, and ideas about tradition are overarching themes in *The Club*. These concepts are directly tied to many of the other themes and issues addressed within the play.

The story of *The Club* tracks a time of transition for Victorian football clubs. What had started as a semi-professional league with players from each local area had grown to become the modern, professional business we currently know – the sport had begun to be commercialised, moving away from many of its traditions.

We see this in the way the club seeks out players and coaches with known 'names' – those that have star power or are perceived to be winners – over loyal, consistent team members. It is further emphasised by the willingness of those running the business side of the club to pay big money for players they think will win them games and the support (and money) of fans, and for coaches they think will get them a win – even if hiring them means bucking club traditions.

The change from grassroots to business is also reflected in the way the club is structured – the power of its board (Jock and others), the appointment of an administrator (Gerry) and the fact that the club president (Ted) has been appointed due to his wealth, rather than sporting ability (more on that below).

This version of *The Club* embraces these themes to an even greater extent. While the play has traditionally starred men, this time it is being played entirely by women. This bucks not only the tradition of the play, but the prevalence of men in theatre and particularly in roles that are violent and ugly. This version also comes at a time when women are beginning to be recognised on the football field, with the rise of the AFLW and rise of stars like Erin Phillips – a new guard that, while certainly not overtaking the old, is becoming an increasingly significant presence in the sport.



## Class & money

The change of the old guard for the new, described to the left, also emphasises the disparity of class, wealth and status between those who have been involved in the club for years and those who have only recently become involved.

While Ted has always been a fan of the club, he only becomes a significant presence when he's willing to contribute the wealth he has accumulated as the owner of a pie factory, and hence improve the status of the club. Similarly, while Geoff has demonstrated a skill for football elsewhere, he only becomes an acceptable presence in the club because of his financial potential. Without the ability to pave the way for increased 'profitability' as a business, neither of these two characters would hold as much power. This continues to dominate the sporting industry today.

Those with little money, and a strong affinity for the 'community ideals' of the club, particularly loyal player Danny and to a lesser extent Laurie, are often shown as resentful of the wealth these individuals have amassed and the influence it allows them to have over the club. They still very much believe in the patterns and behaviours of old, mentioned above.

## Masculinity

*The Club* is an exploration of the relationships between men, particularly the ways in which they compete with and are aggressive towards one another.

Aggression is apparent in the physical violence that is discussed as being perpetrated upon one another, upon other men and upon women.

It is also evident in the manner in which they present their opinions to one another – with rage, belligerence, manipulation, intimidation tactics, and certainty that they are right. These conversations tend to centre on areas often seen as particularly important to men – sports and matters of reputation.

Toxic masculinity is a popular term in public discourse at the moment, and this is certainly at play in *The Club*. The term is often used to describe feelings of entitlement and anger displayed by men, as well as their urge to intimidate and/or dominate others.

This version of *The Club* focuses on the performance of masculinity. With women playing the roles, the braggadocios attitudes, the casual mentions of violence towards women and the level of aggression they display towards one another is exaggerated.

## Loyalty

The loyalty of players, club members and staff, and fans are all addressed directly and indirectly in *The Club*.

Several of the characters in the club are focused on tradition, fairness, teamwork and the sport itself, particularly Laurie and Danny. These characters see loyalty to the team rewarding those who have put in the hard yards.

For those who are more interested in making the club a success, loyalty is also important, but in a very different way. They want to ensure fans continue to be loyal to the club by securing wins. Loyalty is largely important as a way to keep money coming into the club.

For those who are more self-interested, particularly Jock and Geoff, loyalty doesn't come into play as much.

## What next?

Select one of the themes from *The Club* listed on pages 28-30 or choose another theme that you noticed in the play.

Provide examples of instances where this theme is present in David Williamson's original text - include any applicable quotes or stage directions.

After seeing the play, think about any additional concepts, line delivery, costuming or other elements that emphasised your chosen theme.

Write about how the original text and technical elements of the play send a particular message or emphasise a particular point related to this theme. Use quotes and direct examples to support your argument.

## Supporting materials

Key themes in *The Club*: an interview with director Tessa Leong  
An Iconic Australian Satire of Toxic Masculinity, Reimagined With an All-Women Cast

Links to these resources are under the drop-down menu for *The Club* at:  
[statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program)

# Theatrical style & concepts

## Satire

Satire is a genre of literature in which people's shortcomings, vices and abuses are presented to readers to criticise, laugh at and examine. While it is meant to be funny, the aim of satire is usually to interrogate and shame poor behaviour by individuals, groups of people, political parties and/or organisations. Allegory, sarcasm and irony are often features of satirical work.

Satire is present in works beyond literature – it's found in the theatre, on television, in films, and on the internet (particularly in memes).

## Farce

The use of wigs, fake moustaches and other absurd elements in this version of *The Club* takes the play beyond satire to farce. A farce is a comedy that aims to entertain an audience through exaggerated, improbable situations. It is characterised by use of physical humour, over-the-top characters and absurdity.

## Dramatic irony

Dramatic irony occurs where an audience or reader's understanding of a situation exceeds or differs vastly from that of the characters in the work. The audience is privy to everything that happens on stage, while characters will inevitably miss the action that occurs while they are off-stage. This means that the words and actions of certain characters may take on a different meaning to the audience – often a meaning that contradicts the understanding on the characters on stage.





# Education activities

BASED ON DAVID WILLIAMSON'S *THE CLUB*  
(AN ALL-FEMALE, THREE-ACTOR VERSION)

## WRITTEN RESPONSE

Write a review of this production of *The Club*, taking into account direction, acting, design elements and audience response.

For guidelines on how to write a review, see our review writing resource linked in the drop-down menu for *The Club* at [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program).

## ACTIVITY

Design a front of house experience or poster for this production of *The Club*. Think about the audience, themes and messages of the production. How might you emphasise these in your design? Come up with colours and concepts, list your ideas and sketch them out. Create a final product (a poster, model or final design sketch). Ensure everything that is included is there for a reason.

## WRITTEN RESPONSE

How do the themes of *The Club* relate to the world we live in today? Connect an issue we face today with an issue explored in the play. For example:

- A move from grassroots to commercialisation – Instagram and/or YouTube moving from small users to influencers and fame
- Masculinity – Ted harassing and hitting a woman and this story's exposure in the media – the rise of #metoo

Write down your thoughts and comparisons, using examples from the play (quotes, characters, events) and from real life (news media, films, discussions with friends or family). You may be able to use quotes from Tessa Leong (director) or David Williamson (writer) to support your argument – see the study guide and other resources at [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program) for more information.

## WRITTEN RESPONSE

What were the central themes of *The Club*? Identify one or two themes (e.g. power, masculinity, corruption, leadership, etc.) and explain how and where they were used in the play. Use specific examples and quotes.

## WRITTEN RESPONSE & ACTIVITY

*The Club* focuses on a power struggle between six men involved in a Victorian football club in the 70s. Think about the power struggles that happen at your school or in your home. For example, fights over the remote control or over who sits in a particular spot at lunch time.

In a group or individually, write a scene in a satirical style that dramatises one of the power struggles you have come up with, making sure to use fictional characters and names instead of real ones. Research satire (see page 31 of the study guide for a definition) and keep this in mind when writing the scene. Remember that artistic license is allowed – you can make the characters much more over-the-top and melodramatic than real life people. Remember to write the scene in script form with characters, lines and direction.

Act out the scene with a small group, thinking about how to make it funny and communicate the message of the power struggle.

## DISCUSSION OR WRITTEN RESPONSE

Do any of the characters in *The Club* have any redeeming qualities? Which character do you think is most committed to the well-being of the club? Why? Provide examples in your discussion or in a written response.

## DISCUSSION OR WRITTEN RESPONSE

David Williamson said: "My original intention for *The Club* was that it was a satire of male competitive behaviour and ruthlessness when power and success were dangled before us."

What are some examples of this idea being played out within the play? How does this production of *The Club* reinforce and/or subvert this intention? Write a response or discuss in small groups or pairs, drawing on specific examples from the play.

## WRITTEN RESPONSE

*The Club* is a uniquely Australian story and also utilises a lot of Australian language, particularly slang. Identify some examples of events and language used in the play that are uniquely Australian. Why do you think Williamson used this kind of language? Can you think of any contemporary examples of plays, TV shows, films or books that use slang language that is unique to Australia?

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

Other activities related to this production are available in the study guide and the "Things to Think About" page, both available under the drop-down menu for *The Club* at [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program).

# Review writing

THE FOLLOWING HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM THE DRAMA REVIEW GUIDELINES WRITTEN BY HANNAH MCCARTHY-OLIVER FOR STATE THEATRE COMPANY'S 2018 PRODUCTION OF *THAT EYE, THE SKY*.

## Drama Review Preparation

### INITIAL RESPONSES

- When the audience entered the theatre, what did they think, feel and see?
- List up to six adjectives to describe the experience of the production.
- Source/record a number of direct quotes from the performance. Use these throughout your review to enhance the points you make.
- Write a one sentence statement introducing the play to someone who has never seen it.
- Who is the author of the original story? Who is the playwright?
- What is the plot?
- What messages were the author and playwright trying to communicate to their audience?
- List the central themes that were explored in the show.

### DIRECTION & CAST PERFORMANCE

- What was the director's intention? What did they want the audience to experience?
- What are some examples of how the cast brought their characters to life? E.g. Vocal and physical expression, energy, focus, interpretation of role etc.
- Did they do this successfully – were they convincing? Why? Why not?

### TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

*The key here is to be as descriptive as possible and to show that you understand how all these elements worked together to create the audience's experience of the play and to tell the story. You need to read the show 'visually', listen, observe and evaluate.*

- Describe the overall look and feel of the design for this show.
- Choose four adjectives to describe each of the following: the performance space, set, costumes, music, lighting and soundscape.
- Who were the designers?
- Did the set/performance space look like anything you have seen before? Describe.
- Did the design elements enhance the story being told? Were they successful? Why? Why not?
- Describe and evaluate the lighting choices used in this show.
- How did the lighting assist in creating different moods and atmospheres?
- How did the lighting direct the audience's focus to different locations in the performing space?



- Describe and evaluate the costumes, accessories and makeup choices.
- How did the design of the costuming and makeup aid in visually showing the audience who the characters were?
- Who was the music/audio created and performed by? What do you think their motivation and intentions were?
- Describe and evaluate the music choices/soundtrack used in the show.
- How did the music assist in creating mood and evoke emotional responses from the audience?
- Choose one key scene. Describe in detail everything the audience saw, heard and felt during this scene. How did all the technical elements work together to create this scene?

## AUDIENCE REACTION

- How did the audience respond to the scene listed above?
- How did the audience respond/react to the play as a whole?
- What would the audience be thinking about as they left the theatre?
- What did the audience experience and learn from viewing the play?

## FINAL STATEMENTS

- Come up with one statement to summarise the play.
- Can you source a quote from someone else or the script that you think also summarises the whole show? (See quotes and interviews in this guide.)
- How are the themes explored in the story relevant to today?

# Write your review

When writing a Drama review, you are required to describe and evaluate the choices made by the cast and technical team. Your writing should capture the whole experience, going into detail about specific technical elements and evaluating what you witnessed.

## REVIEW WRITING TIPS

- It is preferable for Drama reviews to be written in past tense. The show you saw is over.
- Throughout your review, write the show title in italics or underline.
- Write as if the person reading your review has never seen the show.
- Ensure that the spelling of all names and theatrical terminology is correct.
- When writing about specific designers, directors, actors etc., write their full name the first time you mention them. When you reference them again, you only need to use their last name.
- Ask someone else to read through your review and seek their feedback, particularly whether they understand everything you have written.
- Avoid using the words 'I' or 'You'. Instead write from the perspective of 'the audience'.



# Things to think about

DURING OR AFTER THE SHOW

*Think about the following questions and ideas as you watch David Williamson's The Club (an all-female, three-actor version) or after the performance has finished. Write down your thoughts or discuss with a partner or small group.*

## ACT 1

- When the characters were running between their wigs, what did it make you think about the theme of power and politics?
- How did you feel during the parts of the show where the characters were sexist or talked about violence? Did the fact that you were hearing from female actors make a difference to the way you understood the action? How did the set and costume decisions factor into this?
- How did the actors perform masculinity? Was it natural or did it feel over-the-top, like a caricature? How did this connect to the themes of the play? What did you like about it?
- What was the funniest part of the first act?

## ACT 2

- There is a really big change in the second act. Try to describe it in three sentences or less.
- What was funniest part of the second act?
- How did the changes in the second act make you think about the idea of power expressed in the play?
- Why do you think time and space shift in the second act? How does that relate to the themes of the play? Do you think it was successful?

**ADDITIONAL VIDEO RESOURCES**

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLs02jpaCyX1xePTcUbL3fC0wZ\\_IkVGw0k](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLs02jpaCyX1xePTcUbL3fC0wZ_IkVGw0k)



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