

**MALTHOUSE
PROMPT**

**GOODBYE
VAUDEVILLE
CHARLIE MUDD**



LALLY KATZ & CHRIS KOHN

PROMPT PACK / EDUCATION RESOURCE

AUSTRALIAN SCRIPT CENTRE

This education resource is published and distributed by the Australian Script Centre, trading as AustralianPlays.org. The Australian Script Centre, a national not-for-profit organisation, has been selectively collecting outstanding Australian playscripts since 1979 and is home to a comprehensive and extraordinary catalogue of production-ready plays.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

This work is protected by Australian and international copyright law. You have a legal obligation to obtain permission before making copies of this education resource. Contact details for further information are provided below.

MAKING COPIES

Beyond this single use, you may not copy or print this education resource without the written permission of Malthouse Theatre, even if you are covered by a Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) statutory licence.

COPYRIGHT ADVICE

For detailed information on copyright issues, please contact the [Australian Copyright Council](#).

PRODUCTION RIGHTS

Before producing or performing any play you must obtain the permission of the relevant rightsholder. Fees will vary according to the nature and scale of the proposed production. They are set at the discretion of the relevant rightsholder (usually the playwright or their agent). As a general guide, AustralianPlays.org recommends 10% of gross box office receipts or \$100 per performance, whichever is greater, as the minimum fee for amateur production. Your [production enquiry](#) may be submitted through the AustralianPlays.org website.

PERMISSIONS FOR SOUND RECORDINGS & MUSIC

Some playscripts will require specific published sheet music or sound recordings for which performing rights may need to be separately licensed. Producers are advised to contact the [Australasian Performing Rights Association](#) (APRA) for more information on music licensing requirements.

MALTHOUSE THEATRE AND ARENA THEATRE COMPANY PRESENT

World Premier

2 hours 30 minutes (incl. interval)

MERLYN THEATRE

Previews: 6th March – 10th March Feb

Season: 11th of March – 28th of March

GOODBYE VAUDEVILLE CHARLIE MUDD



*"Come down by Swanston River.
Come remember us.
In the night before tomorrow ..."*

"To be forgotten is a treacherous thing."

MALTHOUSE THEATRE



EDUCATION NOTES

Malthouse Theatre Education & Youth Access Program and Arena Theatre Company have pleasure in presenting these Education Notes as a guide for students of Drama and Theatre. While the notes may be seen as a valuable resource for students and teachers, we at Malthouse Theatre certainly do not present them as a definitive study of the production. We would hope that students approach our productions with their own awareness in order to experience the performance as an evocative and engaging piece of theatre. We encourage students to interpret the production for themselves, to explore its innate theatricality, its relevance to their own and others' lives, and to place it in a contemporary Australian theatre context.

CONTENTS PAGE:	PAGE:
Cast and Creative Team	3
Background Information (style/form, playwright)	4
Song List	5
In conversation with:	
Lally Katz – Writer & Co-creator	6 - 8
Chris Kohn – Director & Co-creator	9 - 12
Mark Jones – Composer & Actor	13 - 16
Christian Leavesley - Blogger	17 - 18
BLOG	19
Reference Images	20
Questions for Analysis and Discussion	21
To think about...	22
Further Reading and Resources	23 - 25
Information on Malthouse Theatre & Arena Theatre Company	26

Arena Theatre Company

PO Box 179

North Melbourne, VIC, 3051

Phone: 9329 6266

Fax: 9329 0366

Email: info@arenatheatre.com.au

Web: www.arenatheatre.com.au

Malthouse Theatre

113 Sturt Street

Southbank VIC 3006

Phone: 9685 5165

Fax: 9685 5112

Email: education@malthousetheatre.com.au

Web: www.malthousetheatre.com.au

Fiona James – Education Program Manager

Mark Doggett – Education Assistant

© Malthouse Theatre Education & Youth Access Program 2009

GOODBYE VAUDEVILLE CHARLIE MUDD

Co-creators playwright **Lally Katz** and director **Chris Kohn** present the world premiere of their new collaboration of part funhouse ride, part creep-show nightmare, in *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd*.

Step back in time to a place where the Great Vaudevillian Halls were filled with freak shows, dime museums, knife-throwing dancers, comedians and minstrel musicians. Its 1914, just before the Great War began and Melbourne's Swanston River threatens to consume all in its wake, but not before one final night on the stage, one last chance to perform!

Charlie Mudd's Castle is a hangdog vaudeville haunt, struggling to stay above water. Inhabited by the dead spirit of the last great Stage Starlet, it's a place where men of mystery rub shoulders with mute acrobats and crook-finger pianists. And then there's Violet (**Julia Zemiro**) the new girl trapped on this sinking ship, who may just hold the key to their very survival. But time is running out and midnight is fast approaching.

CAST:

MARK JONES	Mr. Bones
ALEX MENGLET	Allarkini
CHRISTEN O'LEARY	Maude
JIM RUSSELL	Charlie Mudd
MATT WILSON	Knuckles
JULIA ZEMIRO	Violet / Ethelyn

CREATIVE TEAM:

BY	LALLY KATZ & CHRIS KOHN
WRITER	LALLY KATZ
DIRECTOR	CHRIS KOHN
SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER	JONATHON OXLADE
COMPOSER	MARK JONES
ILLUSIONS CREATOR	LAWRENCE LEUNG
SOUND DESIGNER	JETHRO WOODWARD
LIGHTING DESIGNER	RICHARD VABRE
DRAMATURGE	MARYANNE LYNCH
ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE & BLOGGER	CHRISTIAN LEAVESLEY

GOODBYE VAUDEVILLE CHARLIE MUDD

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd is a colourful, romp on the surface, but beneath this façade is a razor-sharp critique of Australia's current political climate, and an investigation into the construction of history.

It has been developed over two years including research undertaken by the director and writer into the history of Melbourne Vaudeville as part of A State Library of Victoria Creative Fellowship. The creators have delved deep into the hidden corners of Melbourne's theatrical past, finding hidden gems that contribute to the rich world of the show.

This season at Malthouse Theatre will be the world premier of this new Australian work.

• **STYLE/FORM:**

Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd encompasses a range of theatrical styles and forms including borrowing from traditional Vaudeville and musical theatre. It takes these styles and transforms them into a unique contemporary performance work.

The previous works of writer Lally Katz and director Chris Kohn (*The Eisteddfod*, *The Black Swan of Trespass*) have received considerable attention. They are seen as being in the vanguard of a new theatrical style growing directly from Melbourne's independent theatre scene. Confronting and adventurous, the form is highly distinctive and risk-taking. This production ploughs Australia's theatrical past to present an original and thought-provoking view of the present day.

Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd combines high emotions, live music, sideshow trickery, ironic humour and sheer gall to make an interesting non-naturalistic work.

• **PLAYWRIGHT: Lally Katz**

Lally Katz has received recognition as one of Australia's best young playwrights.

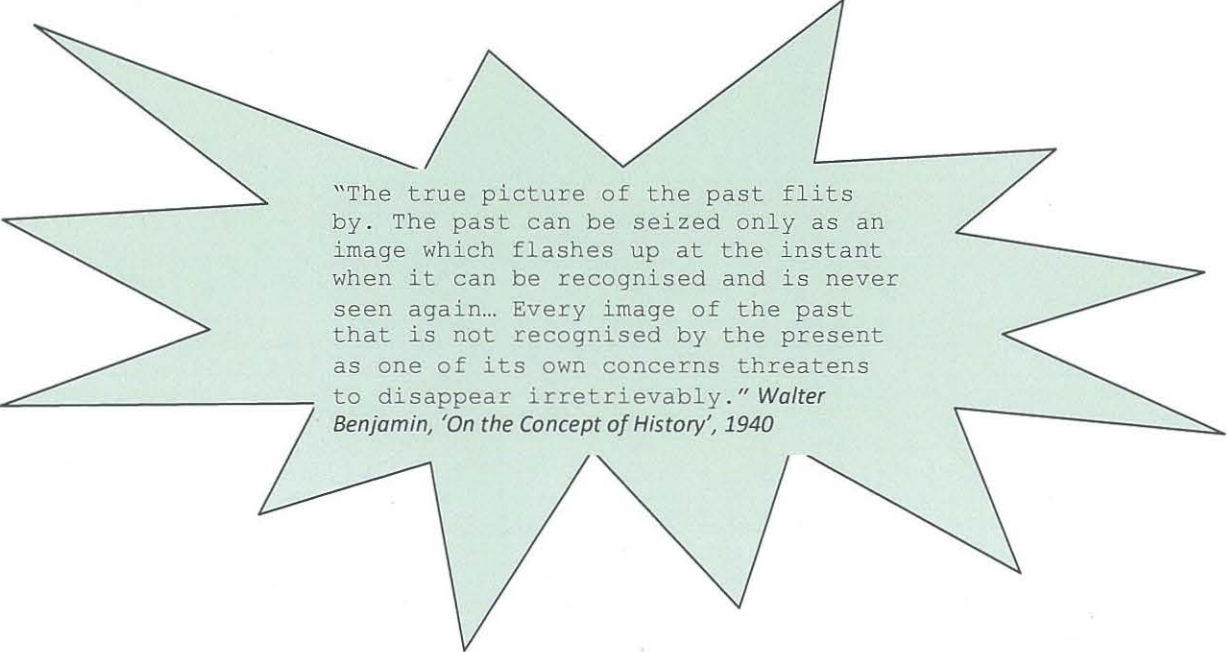
She attended World Interplay in 2003 and studied playwrighting at London's Royal Court Theatre. She is a core member of Stuck Pigs Squealing Theatre Company, for which she's written **The Black Swan of Trespass**, **The Eisteddfod** and **Lally Katz and the Terrible Mysteries of the Volcano**. These works have toured extensively and won several awards including The RE Ross Trust Playwrights' Script Development Award - Winner 2008. **Criminology** co-written with Tom Wright a commission for Arena Theatre Company and the Malthouse premiered in the Merlyn Theatre and **Goodbye New York**, **Goodbye Heart** premiered in New York.

Lally is developing **9 Days Falling** with NYC playwright Mac Wellman and has another play under commission with the Malthouse Theatre Company. She is currently under commission to adapt *Frankenstein* for Sydney Theatre Company. Most recently Lally's plays **Waikiki Palace** and **Hip Hip Hooray** premiered in Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf2loud program as a double-bill.

GOODBYE VAUDEVILLE CHARLIE MUDD

Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd ~ Song List

TITLE: PERFORMED BY:	
"1914"	Full Company
"Pony" Song	Christen O'Leary
"Countess Elizabeth Bathory" Song	Alex Menglet
"Here's Another One"	Full Company
"Why Should I Be Alone" Song	Jim Russell
"Long ago Ethelyn"	Julia Zemiro
"Long ago Ethelyn" - Reprise	Julia Zemiro
"Coon" Song	Mark Jones
"Long Ago Ethelyn - If I Could" - Reprise #2	Julia Zemiro
"Why Should I Be Alone" - Reprise	Jim Russell
"Everyone's Darling" - Song	Full Company
"Everyone's Darling" - Reprise	Full Company



"The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again... Every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably." *Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', 1940*

In conversation with...

In conversation with Lally Katz – playwright

February 2009

What was your initial response to the concept or to the idea of this production?

Originally, Chris asked me if I would be interested in writing something about Vaudeville after we knew we were doing the commission. My first response was “I don’t really know anything about Vaudeville”... but, what I quite like as a writer and how I have lived adventures in my own life is writing about things that I didn’t know beforehand. This way I get to experience something that I never would in my ‘real’ life. I was excited to work with Chris again and find our own way through it. I guess I was excited about having a Vaudeville adventure.



Would you briefly describe the process of creating an original script? Was there research involved? How do you begin?

We started off by having a research residency at the State Library, which was brilliant. We shared an office and were there for six months. I’m actually a really terrible researcher. I tend to go and research but then I get sidetracked or stuck in words... I’d be reading the old newspapers and read about half a paragraph and find myself getting caught up in the language or working out the placement of words; or I would read a story of someone drowning in the river and get obsessed with that. In terms of pouring through materials I’m probably bad at that; but, everything I read sticks with me and really affects me. The language of it and the world of it becomes inserted quite quickly.

The other thing about being at the library is that the library in itself is such a separate world and feels like it is from a different time. It was like I moved in there for six months. Chris was in there a lot but I was in there all the time... I started thinking that there were ghosts in there because sometimes I’d leave the desk and I’d come back and something would have fallen across my chair and at the same moment that this thing would have fallen the clock had stopped. So I started feeling like there were ghosts around.

I was also spending a lot of time sitting outside the front of library just watching people. They all sit on the hill and it looks like they are all sitting on the banks of a river and Swanston Street is the river and the trams are like barges. I started singing songs to myself about Swanston River, and in my mind it became this alternate reality, this little bubble that I was in when I was at the library. So that’s how the theatre became set on Swanston River. I kept reading about people drowning in the Yarra... every newspaper article had these interesting little reports. It felt a bit like Chris and I were detectives. We met someone in the library who was doing a fellowship and she’d say, “You’ve got to meet such and such!” We met this man, Frank Van Straten, who is an historian for the Arts, and he is just brilliant. He put us in touch with all of these people and we went to Her Majesty’s, going up little stairwells and hearing about the ghosts there.

I guess what struck me was the feeling of loss. A lot of the stuff that really touched me about Vaudeville was all of these Vaudevillians after their time had passed, asking, ‘What happened to Vaudeville?’ ‘If we’d just done this’ ‘If we’d just done that’. I tried to capture that feeling of a time that’s passed, but, if that time still exists somewhere but not in anywhere where there is blood or movement getting into it.

What will be your role in the rehearsal room how is still evolving and developing?

It's different from project to project. So for the first two weeks my role was mainly rewriting – we always plan that we're just going to go in with the finished script, then straight away after the first reading we realize that: "We've got to rewrite this scene" "This bit doesn't make sense" "We'll need to cut an hour off this" ...etc... and so I have just been madly rewriting.

You learn so much about what is working and/or not working, or what is clunky when it is being heard and once the world comes alive. Once all of these other people become part of the world that world changes – in some ways its quite lucky that I can be there to adapt that world. There also comes a point when its better for me not to be there so that everyone can just invest in that world without feeling that it is too movable.

I'm also constantly emailing and texting Chris with 'I really think this' 'I really think that' –I think if I email my thoughts they really sink/seep in. Also, I'm there if people have questions and sometimes I know the answers and sometimes I don't, more often I know them now, especially after doing so many drafts of this script. I'm a part of the team and a part of that world that we are creating in the rehearsal room – after all that time of writing by yourself it is so much fun to suddenly be with everybody.

What is the story of Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd?

A young lady shows up at a Vaudeville theatre on Swanston River and she's not quite sure about it as it all seems quite strange. They keep calling her by the name of the old starlet who had been there and she is suddenly thrust right into the show before she knows what she is meant to do or anything – the show just starts. They seem to be doing some kind of ritual or something mysterious, almost like a cult thing to somehow endow her with the characteristics OR the part of the star that she's replacing. The first act is like a show, but a show where everything is going wrong. Then at the end of that act everything has gone completely wrong. You feel that the young lady is probably in quite a lot of danger, the curtains close and then there's interval.

After interval you come back and the show starts up again, but you realise it's a rehearsal and that something has happened and they've gone back in time. The lady that has come to play the part of the starlet has become the star and they are re-enacting what happened before to cause her disappearance – it's kind of magic. It is not like they've actually gone back in the past it's almost like they are recreating the past but with cracks in it and that works itself into a finale.

Can you tell me why you chose these particular characters in this particular story?

One day in the library, after reading stuff about Vaudeville, Chris and I just made a list of the types of characters we thought we should have. We thought that there should be an acrobat, a magician, a leading lady who sings dramatic songs and a like this guy we were reading about... I guess it was like picking ideas out of the air. Then once you do that you've got to find your heart in them.

To be honest it's quite difficult, it's been quite difficult. It took me a really long time and many drafts to get my blood into them and actually believe in them. It is such a different kind of writing than what I usually do. It's been hard to give them life. Now I feel like they are really alive and it has been worth it but some of the time I wasn't sure if they'd come alive. Some of them were alive straight from the beginning but for some of the others it felt like they were this moving corpse. In a way though I think that kind of what they are, they are these ghosts.

I sound like a crazy woman, but, everything I write I kind of have to live it as well; and with these particular characters I was kind of asking them to lose everything they cared about. So they didn't really like me! In a way they wouldn't let me in for ages. I got to the point where I would wreck things, cancel plans and wouldn't know why I've done it and I would be upset about it. Then I'd feel that maybe I could write that scene – because it was somehow fair that I had given up a little bit – a tit for tat thing. I know that it is just my imagination, but I felt like I had to earn it. So I'll be really glad when this play is on so that I can get on with my life?!

Were there any particular themes or concepts you wished to highlight in the play *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd*?

To be honest I never really know that. The stuff that has come out is being stuck, being afraid of reality and being afraid of change and the worlds we try and create to hide from that. After a while though, you can't keep the world out forever and you can't pretend that you can have a real life outside or hidden from the world. My whole life is like playing pretend but how do you remember that there has got to be a flow – you can't stand still in the tide.

There are all of these separate love stories in it – so I guess it's about love too.

What would you like the audience to be thinking/feeling/responding to when they leave the theatre?

I'd like them to feel as though they've been to this world, that they've been on Swanston River and they've been in this Vaudeville theatre and that they've gone through this massive shift in time – they've been to the past, they've been to the future, they've been outside of time - that when they leave the theatre they're kind of leaving a porthole.

What do you see as the role of playwrights in our society?

I used to go on these exercise walks with another writer Angus Cerini, from Melbourne. We went to the Collingwood Children's Farm on a Saturday morning where the café is. It was really crowded and there were all of these families and people, there were no tables, so we ordered our coffees and we sat on the grass.

After about five minutes, I looked around and thought, "We're the only grown-ups sitting on the ground". Angus was strung out waiting for his coffee and I felt a bit weird. Then I thought, "We are really outside of normal people", and then I thought well we might be a little bit to the side but we're not disconnected from it. So, to me, maybe it's your job to be a little bit to the side so you can see in better. I guess you have to be careful that you don't just become an observer, that you do have interactions, that you really feel stuff with people and that there's real stakes in your relationships.

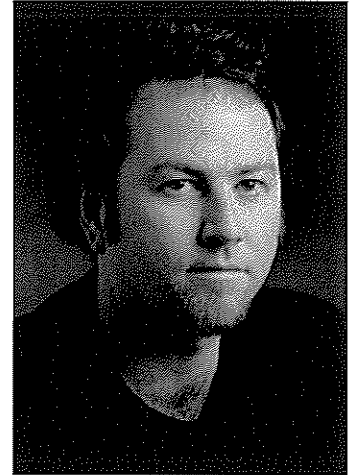
I guess the role is to take what's in society and then give it back to society in a way with a slightly different angle or in a way that helps people to see their situation in a different way or just to see it (from different eyes, or through their own eyes – sometimes it's hard to see things when you are right there in it) To look at the world in a different way.

In conversation with Chris Kohn – director

February 2009

The creative partnership between the Malthouse Theatre and Arena Theatre Company, how did that come into being?

Well, originally this show was commissioned by Malthouse Theatre and it had nothing to do with the Arena Theatre Company. Then, when I became Artistic Director of Arena Theatre Company, I was thinking about the programming and how this show would sit really well in the Arena program in terms of the audience of 15 – 25 year olds as the age range. We'd also had the previous success of the co-production *Criminology* and we were able to bring a lot of people in the 15 to 25 age group to the show and it was a really good partnership for Arena and Malthouse in that regard. So this seemed like a good opportunity to do something similar and build on that experience. So I talked to Arena and Malthouse – Arena came on board fairly late in the game in terms of the partnership – It was one of those great little coincidences that came together.



Chris, what first attracted you to the Vaudeville style? What is Vaudeville? How would you define it?

The style of the show references Vaudeville and the first half of the show uses a lot of Vaudeville style performance; although the show itself is not Vaudeville. It is a drama that draws on the world or is based around the world of Vaudeville and the kind of characters that inhabit that sort of world.

Specifically we are interested in the early 1900s Vaudeville – the only thing that has survived from then is some recordings, some film and a lot of peoples writing about it at the time; contemporaries recording descriptions and reviews. Therefore, it is impossible to reproduce, its not possible to make a faithful reproduction nor is it what we are particularly interested in.

Early Vaudeville wasn't just song and dance it was kind of magic, circus, scientific experiments and all of this stuff on stage; that was the essence of Vaudeville. It was broad entertainment that would bring the wealthiest and the poorest people together, in different sections, and families as well, to watch this. It was really broad, the weird and the wonderful and we really tried to tap into that as much as possible. That's what gives the show its colour and the characters their colour. The characters are inspired by actual people that we found out about through our research. We haven't tried to reproduce that era on stage but we certainly draw on it for inspiration.

You mentioned the research process. How long was this research period and why was it such an important part of *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd*?

Lally and I had a three month residency at the State Library as a part of a Creative Fellowship that really spread out over about six months as we were very part time. We had an office and we spent a lot of time looking over primary resources – like old programmes, people's notebooks, hand written joke books of comedians, clippings, lots of old newspapers - so it was quite a lengthy process; but not that far into the process Lally actually began the process of writing. She was writing in response to the ideas that would come up for her.

We had a few creative developments along the way. In our first development in 2006 we tested out some of our theatrical ideas. So the research has partly being about being in a library. The research has also been about chance conversations with people whose family members were Vaudevillians, or, the research that happens in a room with actors where you try testing out lines and trying out songs. It is important because it is all adding to the richness of the text, and all of the subtleties of character, and a sense of authenticity. So it feels like there's a consistency because it is all inspired by stories that we have discovered and people that we have read about there's a truthfulness about it, I think. It feels like a very textured show and without that research I don't think it would have been that textured.

Chris, what has it meant for you to be both writer/creator and director for this production? How do those processes differ and where do they meet?

I'm really the co-creator and Lally is very much the writer on the project in terms of the dialogue and most of the lyrics as well. So I don't feel that they are separate when you are working on a new work closely with a writer. My directing role includes all of the conversations about dramaturgy, structure and characters.

When Lally and I started working on creating this show, there were no characters, there was no story, the only idea was that it was going to be inspired by Vaudeville. So it just means that you get to a point that you can't remember where the ideas originated, some of them have come from the actors through development and things like that. To me, they are all tied in together.

I guess, now in this four weeks, it is more about being on the floor with the actors. I direct the writing as if I'm encountering it for the first time with the actors because Lally is there we can make some changes, but we have deliberately gone into the rehearsal process with a pretty solid script so that we are finding solutions through the action not through trying to keep changing the writing... although that does happen inevitably.

Right now I'm the director acting as if I've received a script from someone and am making that come alive – so I separate the creator side of it from this process to a degree.

How do you feel the actors, jugglers, ventriloquist, musicians, are working in the rehearsal room in relation to bringing the play from the page to the stage? How is this piece evolving?

It is different for each actor. For example, Matt Wilson, who is a circus performer, has come with a whole bag of tricks. He has just been showing us things and we've been incorporating them into the action. Lally has also rewritten, in the last couple of drafts, according to what his skills are. For him he just brings a whole lot of abilities – the challenge for him is that he wouldn't usually be working so much on a character with a through line. So I'm working with him as more of an actor than his usual role.

With someone like Christen, who is doing ventriloquism, which she has never done before. It has been just starting from scratch and the basic principles of ventriloquism. We have had the dummy from day one so she can get really comfortable with manipulating it and the facial expressions. We haven't had a coach come in, but, we have been looking at old footage on *You Tube* of ventriloquists and looking at the basic principles. That's been using my own directorial eye to unpack what ventriloquism is and how it works effectively. Christen's had a little book that she's been working on, to work out how to speak without her

mouth moving. Inevitably she is not a professional ventriloquist but the character is also not supposed to be all that good as well. She is doing incredibly well.

We have an illusion consultant who has drawn up a plan for all of the illusions. We have been following this plan as a 'bible' for the illusions. He has been coming in more at this latter stage to refine it. All of this has involved a lot of work with the designer and the workshop because it is very technical and the way things are made is very important. The idea with the illusions is that they look very, very simple but all of the complexity is hidden, therefore that it a lot of work. It has been the hardest work in a way, because teaching someone to sell an illusion is very complex. Traditionally, the idea of it is like ventriloquism, the better it is the smoother it looks and the more complex the things are that are going on. So this aspect has been a really long process.

In terms of songs and dances we have been breaking the day down. We have singing rehearsals at the beginning and end of most days. Instead of just breaking down into scene work you end up breaking it down into singing, illusion, dancing, close work on ventriloquism and it all just becomes part of the schedule.

Talking about the visual aspect and stagecraft of this piece, did you have much input into the design of this piece?

I have had a lot of input into the design, Jonathan and I, since he was first on the project, have been talking a lot.

I sent him reference images from the research to begin with and he sent back initial sketches, images and ideas. Probably the basic idea of the set being like a little Vaudeville theatre was already in place – that was a part of the brief given to Jonathan. It has been his job to flesh it out with the colours and the ideas; he has also been liaising with all of the technical stuff that has to happen.

I've given him my character breakdowns but then he has come up with the costume ideas, brought them back to me, we talk about it. This aspect of design has become a bit of a conversation with Lally and the actors as well. Jonathan is also an illustrator; he has this wonderful ability to create really evocative visual representations of the set and the costumes and props. So he will come up with ideas that I would not be able to come up with myself. The way that he responds to the task and brings in ideas is such an important part of the design of this production.

***Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd* is such a large scale production. What obstacles, challenges or delights have you encountered because of the scale and the Vaudeville style of the piece?**

The scale – I feel like we've really pushed the capabilities, especially for a Beckett show.

Originally the idea was that it was going to be a show in The Merlyn, but for different reasons early on it became the case that it wasn't going to be. At the time, I was disappointed but now I'm really glad because if we'd tried to have the same level of detail in The Merlyn it would have just been impossible to achieve; so because the Beckett is a more intimate space we can be more detailed.

Probably the joys have been that you can request a giant backcloth with the painting of spider web and then go down to the workshop and seeing that someone's actually done it is just amazing. It is very exciting working in a place with resources like this. You are also doing very detailed acting work in the room up here and then you go down to the workshop and see that there is all of this other stuff going on that even the

actors aren't fully aware of. It has been a delight to see the amount of work that is going into this from all aspects of the company.

Some of the joys have come from the variety of types in the cast, the physical and vocal make-up of the cast is really diverse and interesting, and it has been really great to discover just how much texture there is in the show because of that. One of the wonderful delights was when Lawrence Leung came on as the Magic Consultant, and just because he wanted to, created this beautiful little magic book with only four editions made. It looks like it's from the 1900s and so similar to all of the books we found in the library. It is a personalised magic book that he has made up for the show. That was a surreal moment of just delight.

Probably the one thing that has happened this week is that we've broken down the play, looking at the action and dramaturgical structure, and through this process we discovered yesterday how everything adds up; everything that might seem incidental makes so much sense. Maybe this has occurred through all of the dramaturgical work that we've done, and through Lally's own secret thinking that she does herself. It has been great to realise that even though it seems like a bit shaggy dog of just characters and events that there's a really clear through line - which I've only really just discovered in the last couple of days and that has been really good.



The rehearsal set in The Bagging Room @ The CUB Malthouse



As composer...

Mark, how did you initially respond to the story of Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd?

The interesting thing for me was that there wasn't a story when I was first engaged to start working on the piece. There was initially a workshop in which Lally and Chris were just exploring the world, the time and also some of the characters. The characters have developed over that period. It must be about 2 years since I was first introduced to the world of it. I guess we just got together and they had booked me to play one of the parts; and then, as part of the process, Chris asked me to play around and set music to the lyrics that Lally had written. So I did, and those bits worked out okay. Then they spoke to me about actually composing for it.

I loved the world, I loved the era (it is set in 1914) and I'm really quite fond of the popular song from that time through to the forties – Gershwin, Irving Berlin and that kind of stuff – so that sparked my interest. I really responded to the play, the era and the kind of songs that would need to be written for it.

What has been the creative process for you in terms of composing the music for this piece?

The process for writing the songs started with that initial workshop there was only one song from that stayed for a while through the consequent developments but that has now dropped off as well. We had an intensive week in which there was a lot of discussion and work based around the script. At that time, I composed a couple more songs, of which one is still in the show.

As subsequent drafts have come there have been new lyrics or ideas for songs. Sometimes I would set a lyric that Lally had written and sometimes I would take the germ of an idea that was in the lyric and make a melody; and then Lally or Chris, who have both written lyrics at certain points in the process, would set those lyrics to the melody I had created/written – sometimes the other way around. And it has just continued up until the week before we started rehearsal where I wrote a couple of things.

I guess, as with any creative process, it came in fits and starts, and particularly because this piece has developed in such a way that it really was about the world and the characters that were developed first or focussed upon and plot and structure came after that, a lot of the sense of where a song might be appropriate came quite late in the process, so that made it interesting. Certain songs felt strong enough and useful enough that places were found for them but in the end the songs have been written around certain ideas.

How does your music/composition reflect the period in which the play is set and does the historical nature of the play provide any particular challenges or restrictions?

I would hope that most of it feels like the era. I would imagine, as any creative person, you respond to what existed or the styles; and then, in the end, it hopefully becomes your own language. My own musical language and I feel like that is the case here. Certainly, just as Lally's world is not literally faithful to the period, mine is possibly in a similar way – I think it feels like the period, although not literally being music of that era, or not even necessarily trying to be dogmatically faithful to that. Hopefully, when people come, they will feel that this feels like another time, around 1914.

What role do you think that music plays in the theatre?

I think that's an interesting question – and from piece to piece music can have different functions.

A lot of plays have underscore, sound scape or scene change music that will take you from one scene to the next and we have a certain amount of that in this piece too. In *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd* because it is set in a Vaudeville show (particularly in the first half) it is basically a certain part of their performance. They are literally singing as they would in one of these kind of shows and you get a lot of energy from that. It is kind of exciting – it can be –and I feel like it maybe within this piece.

There is an opening number in this show, it doesn't happen right at the start of the play, but a couple of scenes in this Vaudeville performance actually opens. I hope that it will be exciting in the way that those kinds of numbers can be. In this instance, it can inject a lot of energy. Also there is a certain emotional connection that happens, particularly when people sing to you, there is a direct connection, it's like they are opening their heart. I think there are moments in this play when that's the case.

There are also quite functional qualities of the music – scene changes, the atmosphere that music can create really quickly, and the kind of feeling in the space.

Would you talk about your dual role as composer and actor? Has it been a difficult undertaking?

Yes, it is always difficult to do more than one thing.

The way the part is written (it's not a huge part) I have a monologue and the start and a monologue at the end and a couple of key scenes. I don't have a lot of dialogue, I'm a presence, he watches a lot, he is an observer. So in that instance the acting workload is not great on me. But still there is a kind of a focus shift, a split focus, that is challenging and it takes a lot of energy in a way to do both.

I'm enjoying that, I always do, and I do it quite a lot. It gets to a point, particularly the music, I don't have to worry about that anymore and that's what I'm looking forward to. We're nearly there. That is when I can start to inhabit the character a little more.

As an actor...

Mark, what attracted you to this particular character Mr. Bones?

This character is a minstrel, in the black and white minstrel sense, so his face is 'blackened' with burnt cork (which is what they used to use in the day) and he has big white lips. He never takes his make-up off he actually believes that he is a 'black man' – *I'm not sure if you are able to say that anymore but in the time you were*. He actually believes that he is a black man. In that sense it is pretty intriguing as an actor.

So he'll never take the make-up off, there is one point in the show where somebody tries to take it off him which is quite intense. And finally, without giving away the plot, there is a moment at the end, where he comes to the point where he can. So I think somebody that can do that over the time is attractive to play.

They are kind of a wounded bunch and that kind of kind of dark and intense thing is really challenging and intriguing to get your teeth into as an actor and I like that. I like that he plays the piano, I play the piano. That is his function within the show, he does that, and it is my function within the play. I guess we have a lot in common, I don't think I'm quite that twisted, a little bit, but not quite that twisted. He is dark and he is introverted and he is an observer; which I think is true of me.

How have you engaged with the Vaudeville style? Has it influenced your characterisation?

Most of the characters actually retain their Vaudeville persona when they're not in 'the show'.

The Vaudeville style has completely influenced my characterisation because *"He talk like dis"* He speaks with a fake negro voice and always has his 'black face' on – so everything about him, his physical, his vocal, everything. He is like he is stuck on stage, he's stuck in Vaudeville. In a way that's what the piece is about too, all of the characters are stuck in this show, in this time and they can't move on.

Has it been difficult or tricky playing the traditional part of the 'blackface' as Mr. Bones?

I don't think it can be - this is a period piece. As with any piece like this you just have to engage with it in context. If we were using it to make some kind of offensive statement it would be difficult but we are not. It is just part of the world and the interesting thing is it's almost never dealt with in the piece – the fact that he has taken on this persona and won't let go of it, it's just there. There is one point where one of the characters that enters the piece asks him if it's difficult to put on the make-up and he says "What make-up". One of the characters is a ventriloquist and the doll is completely alive to her and also to everyone else in the troupe. They treat this doll as if she was a real person and they treat Bones as if he were actually a Negro.

This is the world of the play, so I can't imagine people being offended by it because it is so clearly placed in that time.

What have been some of the joys or delights that you have discovered in this process either as composer or actor?

I think it is always fun to get together with a bunch of talented (and we have a supremely talented and gifted) cast and production team. It is always delightful and joyful to come into a group like that and then be a part of the making of work. I have joys and delights everyday but there's also frustration and exhaustion. There are those moments (and it usually happens a few times a day) where its like you find something or you observe other people finding – and this happens lots of times – everyday you see something and think *“Where did that come from?” “Isn't that great?”*

My joy is the process and working with the people that I get paid to play with as we make good work. It's exciting.

Mark, what is important about theatre in our society?

I think the communal experience is important. There's something wonderful in the story of theatre, cinema is great, but it's not alive in the same way that theatre is. I think that theatre at is best is entertaining. It is that thing about from sitting in an audience and also being on stage when you experience the audience. There is something about when the audience comes together, they enter as individuals and you feel them suddenly unite; create a community, so that's exciting. If theatre can provoke thought about the society or if it can reflect the society that we live in, whether that be in great ways or ways that make us stop or question then I think it has a great role to play in that sense as well. Its not like you make a film and millions of people see it, it is a small boutique experience, certainly here at Malthouse Theatre – *Get your tickets now!*



Mark Jones & Julia Zemiro in rehearsal

What was your initial response to the concept or to the idea of creating a blog for this production? Why do you think it is a valuable addition to the process?

The blog has been a response to Arena's desire to move into the online space. It is essentially a pilot project and is something that Arena has had in their business plan and in their strategy as something they really wanted to do. This kind of undertaking actually requires more time and resources than it seems. This project was really about trying to begin something.

As an analogy – let's say you are a theatre maker and television is available; there has never really been a sense that just because you do theatre you'll do TV – but there seems to be a sense around theatre that somehow theatre companies or theatrical productions should somehow be on-line and have an on-line presence. But exactly how you should go about that, why you should go about that and what sort of value it adds is one of the questions that needs pulling apart because it is not obvious.

In fact, in terms of the value that it's adding, I'm hoping that what it does is to create a sense of backstage of the play. There is a fairly large desire to get backstage of all kinds of things these days. It is what the internet does particularly well. It gives us the opportunity to bring the audience closer to the work but at the same time it is also its value is being determined as it goes along. This is probably something we will assess after, post production, at the moment I am just doing it.

Would you briefly describe the process of creating a blog? How do you begin?

Technologically it is really easy. I've run the website of Uncle Semolina and Friends (another company that I work with) and so I am quite familiar with buying service base and domains and file transfer protocol and all of that kind of stuff that you do when creating a website. Blogging is easier than that by two hundred percent. I'm just using *blogger*, which is a free service, and essentially it's really user-friendly, you just follow the instructions. It is a simple thing to do – quite easy – it is time that is the killer. I'm really a journalist writing a story every day. I'm trying to get as much sound, video and stills – multimedia – onto it as I can; as well as writing a post; it's like being a journalist filing a story everyday.

What are some of the key ideas that you have included in the blog? What has been the reasoning behind incorporating these key ideas?

The key ideas that I have been looking at are stages of the process of the work.

I am trying to demythologise the making of theatre as an art form because it seems to me that a lot of artists, particularly in theatre, like to shroud their process in mystery to provide a little bit of glamour. Also perhaps as a bit of a defence mechanism that what they are doing is a little bit simpler than what you might think and perhaps by shrouding it in mystery it makes it all the more exciting. So I am actually trying to demythologise that in some respects. As theatre, in some respects is very easy to make, anyone can do it if you have the inclination towards it. But, at the same time, I'm also trying as best I can to suggest the complexity of it, that even though in some respects it is very simple the way that professional theatre is made is actually almost infinitely complex conceptually and the process of doing it is as important as the content.

What would you like the people who read the blog for Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd to get out of it?

I think context for the piece. One of the big battles (it is also a real strength of theatre) quite often work is not received in the context of knowledge or understanding that you think it is. Particularly when you are a theatre maker and are 'inside it'; even though you realise that not everybody is as absorbed in the subject matter as you are, you still quite often think that: "they will know such and such" and "We don't have to talk about so and so because everybody knows that" when, in fact, quite often people know far less than you think that they know. In some ways I'm just trying to provide some keys into the world, so that when they come to see the play those things are contextualised and they are (guided) reading the play in the way that perhaps it's intended.

Do you think that blogging will be increasingly used as a tool to access/document the rehearsal and production process? Why?

The easy answer is that its way too early to tell.

Blogging is used a lot already – you can get on-line and Google theatre blogs and there are quite a lot of them. If it is going to be used, I think there is going to be some sort of revolution (if you like) surrounding precisely what it does in response to the show. I feel that perhaps instead of being a process of sort of documenting and adding insights probably more likely if it is going to be a successful and ultimately funded part of these projects it is going to have to have its own life. It is going to be something that is going to need to be as artistically driven as the show itself.

The blogs that do work for live art forms, the ones that people go to a lot, tend to be linked to television; like Dancing with the Stars, So you Think you can Dance and Big Brother. It seems to me that they have a live component and then other shows in the week, both live and not live and a blog component - every week there is a reason to go back to the blog. For us, in theatre, you have four or five weeks where there is no action in the public domain, so there is no real reason to drive traffic back into the site. It seems to me that if blogging and online components of shows are going to be important and useful in theatre it is going to have to find a way to have its own life, its own artistic life.

What do you see as the role of technology in contemporary theatre?

It is always all about how it's used.

Actually, I will just rescind that a little bit – its not always about how its used because sometimes you go to a piece of work and they have used a particular sort of technology and you come out of it and think that the show wasn't all that great but the way they used that technology was interesting but it was worth going to see it just for that. That can go either way though; as you can see something that is totally driven by technology and you feel that it is kind of a waste of time and you think there is no life in it.

The marriage between the immediacy and the vitality of theatre with technology is probably the future if it. I don't really have a position on how useful it is or not. In my own work, I don't use it a great deal, I'm much more about building work that is from our own experience and therefore cutting edge technology doesn't necessarily work into that sphere.

The great thing about theatre is that it can go anywhere as long as imagination marries it with ideas and energy.

<http://goodbyevaudeville.blogspot.com>

On the BLOG you will find...

GOODBYE VAUDEVILLE CHARLIE MUDD



- **Facts like:**

- **DID YOU KNOW??**

- The street that is now Swanston St used to be a river.
But over one hundred years ago it ran dry.

- The street is named after the now dry Swanston River.

- **Background of Vaudeville in Melbourne on:**

- [Harry Clay](#)

- [Paul Cinquevalli](#)

- [Harry Rickards](#)

- [Houdini in Melbourne](#)

- [The Tivoli](#)

- ["Tivoli Lovelies"](#)

- [John Wren](#)

- [Magic in Old Melbourne](#)

- **Footage of old American Vaudeville**
- **Daily rehearsal posts by Christian Leavesley**
- **Multi media and images**
- **Recorded Interviews**

Visit this blog for invaluable insights into the production process and so much more...

REFERENCE IMAGES – found on the ‘inspiration/imagination wall’ of the rehearsal room:
 (Images and reproduced advertising: La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)



UNITED STATES AND FOREIGN PATENTS AND TRADE-MARKS
 AND FOREIGN COPYRIGHTS

A COPYRIGHT
 WILL PROTECT YOU FROM PIRATES.

And make you a fortune. If you have a PLAY, SKETCH, PHOTO, ACT, SONG or BOOK that is worth anything, you should copyright it. Don't take chances when you can secure our services at small cost. Send for our **SPECIAL OFFER TO INVENTORS** before applying for a patent, *it will pay you.* **HANDBOOK on patents sent FREE.** We advise if patentable or not. **FREE.** We incorporate **STOCK COMPANIES.** Small fees. Consult us.

WORMELLE & VAN MATER,
 Managers,
 Columbia Copyright & Patent Co. Inc.,
 WASHINGTON, D. C.



Questions for Analysis and Discussion

- 1) What theatrical styles can you identify in this piece?
- 2) What impact does it have to hear the humour that belongs to a past age on a contemporary stage? (E.g. sexism, racism...)
- 3) What archetypal characters can you identify in *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd*?
- 4) Whose journey is it?
- 5) Why have the creators of this piece consciously referenced a previous era (*almost 100 years ago, in 1914*) to comment on our society? What was happening at that time? How might it be similar to our time?



Julia Zemiro & Jim Russell in rehearsal

To think about in relation to *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd*



Costume Design illustration Jonathon Oxlade

“A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

This storm is what we call progress.” Walter Benjamin, *‘On the Concept of History’*, 1940

Further Reading & Resources

CREATING YOUR OWN – PERFORMANCE MAKING WITH HISTORICAL MATERIAL

Based on 'Digging deep – transforming historical research into compelling performances'

By Chris Kohn

Gradually and accidentally Chris Kohn and Lally Katz have developed something of a methodology for dealing with historical material in performance. An overview of this methodology follows to serve as a model for a particular approach to performance making with historical material.

(The ideas addressed here are not intended to be meant as absolutes or rules, but instead they are a reflection on the kind of historically based work that Chris and Lally have found themselves making and what it all means.)

1. Primary sources are gold

We have an incredible resource at our fingertips, and anyone can access it. It is called the Heritage Collections Reading Room at the State Library of Victoria. As stated on the library website, it contains thousands upon thousands of "manuscripts, ephemera, newspapers, pictures, maps and rare books from Victoria and beyond." The database can be searched on the online catalogue so that material can be found and requested before visiting the library. Some material is stored on site and can be accessed within an hour, and other material may take a day or two. It is something of a lucky dip, as the descriptions in the catalogue just give a hint of the treasures held within. There are seemingly endless resources. For example, the Tivoli Theatre material takes up about thirty metres of shelves in a vault in Ballarat.

The material is incredibly diverse. In our research about the early days of Melbourne Vaudeville theatre, we found everything from original programs, personal photographs, a gag book handwritten by a working comedian, to a card file index listing all the performers who had worked for a particular theatrical agent, listing their skills and faults. We found scrapbooks created by one dedicated fan who had cut out newspaper and magazine clippings about local and touring Vaudevillians over more than three decades, complete with annotations.

This type of primary material is gold when it comes to creating theatre. Any hand-scrawled joke, artist's name or fan's note could be the key to unlocking the world of your play. Because the resources held here are often the writings, photographs or work of everyday people from that time, they offer glimpses into a time and place through the eyes of someone living there. This is far more compelling as dramatic resource material than the theoretical, often reductionist opinion of a historian's view, such as those often available in secondary materials.

Exercise One:

Select an historical event or place.

Then pretend that you will be devising a show based that particular historical event or place. Find out five "insignificant facts" pertaining to the subject. (Often, insignificant details are more interesting than "significant" facts, like key dates or places. They can function as a direct line to a place and time.)

2. Breathe it, see it, hear it, taste it, feel it

Another inspiring exercise is to make a trip to the location of a historical event – and not just the obvious ones.

In our research about Vaudeville, Lally and I would take breaks from the library and walk down back alleys of Melbourne's old theatre district, seeking out secret passageways and old buildings that had survived the march of time. We also had a tour of the backstage of Her Majesty's, which has informed our rendering of the backstage of our fictional Vaudeville theatre. These experiences are so much richer than reading about these places in books.

Exercise Two:

Find an exact address relating to your area of research, and visit that place if possible.

(It is a great exercise to imagine what has changed, what is still the same. Take in the smells, sounds and textures of this place, and then see it through the eyes of someone from the era you are researching.)

Take photographs, rubbings, collect artefacts, and add these to your show building scrapbook.

3. Read all about it

Another wonderful resource at the State Library of Victoria is the newspaper collection, with microfilms dating back to the earliest days of publishing in Australia. Digging through old newspapers can be useful in different ways. First of all, it offers the opportunity to see how historical events were viewed by people at the time. I spent a few distracted hours looking through newspaper articles tracking the Kelly Gang story as it unfolded. The accounts offered a very different perspective than those presented in recent film and literary adaptations. These accounts were not necessarily any less biased or any more accurate, but they did offer reflections on the events, seen through the *values* of the time.

In our Vaudeville research, we read through many newspapers from the papers of record such as *The Argus* through to entertainment papers such as *Table Talk*. These provided a plethora of largely insignificant yet fascinating facts, gossip, images and opinions which have coloured the content of our play. We have adopted some of the phraseology and style of columnists into the speech of some characters. Something specific that has informed our play is the attitudes towards race and ethnicity prevalent in early 20th century Melbourne. I found one article in particular which talked about the relative intelligence of white and black performers, arguing that only a white man would ever have the intelligence and insight to play Othello, but that Africans playing non-speaking slave parts added a necessary "authenticity" to certain operas. Articles expressing such attitudes, combined with images and texts from blackface routines of the time, inspired a blackface character in our play, through which we unpack these values.

Exercise Three:

Read different newspaper and magazine reports of the same incident, in order to discover different attitudes that may have prevailed at the time. Also look at accounts during and after an event, to see how public opinion may have shifted as more information became available.

4. Allow yourself to get distracted

It can be very fruitful to do parallel research, following news stories that are contemporary to your own area of research, but otherwise unrelated. It can be a good way of finding plots and characters for your play. While researching Vaudeville of pre-First World War Melbourne, we found that there was an unusual number of reports of drowned children in the Yarra around the time. This provided us with inspiration for the setting for our Vaudeville play – on the edge of a muddy river whose waters were rising and threatening to engulf the protagonists.

Another great thing about these old papers is the advertisements. There is no clearer expression of the values and beliefs of a time than what can be seen in its advertising.

Exercise Four:

Look at the births, deaths and marriages of a day around the time you are researching. Construct a small scene involving one of the reported events. Include a reference to a product advertised in the same newspaper.

5. Choose a day to put aside your research

Good theatre is about drama, and not a history lesson. At a certain point in the creative process, you will need to discover the heart of the drama. Drama calls for a protagonist, antagonists, a central problem and a dramatic spine. In a lot of historically based plays, the main characters are famous historical figures, and the central problem is closely related to a historically significant event. We have preferred in our own work to create central characters who are fictional, but whose problem lies at the heart of greater historical problems.

It can be useful to mark a date in advance after which you will do no more research. From this point on you will rely entirely on your own scrapbook of images, notes and ideas. You can then let your imagination be your guide and release yourself from any burden of teaching a history lesson. By the time you move on to this stage, you will have fully immersed yourself in the world and you will be able to create the play with confidence that you have got “under the skin” of the time and place.

Exercise Five:

Dedicate a wall in your rehearsal room to be a repository of all research materials. Images, notes, facts, articles, scenes and so on can be posted here. Use post-it notes to highlight details which spark the imagination. You can begin to make an “imagination grid” linking different pieces of information with drawing pins and string. Find two or three completely unrelated details and link them, and then write a scene or idea for a scene which incorporates these details and links them in some way. Add this new scene or idea to the wall. These links can be made blindly, through a “pin the tail on the donkey” approach. This can yield surprising results, forcing you to think and create very laterally.

Links to the library resources can be found below.

We highly recommend making a personal visit and talking to one of the many very helpful librarians there.

Resources:

www.slv.vic.gov.au/about/visiting/spaces/hcrr.html

www.slv.vic.gov.au/about/visiting/spaces/newspapers.html

MALTHOUSE THEATRE

Malthouse Theatre's artistic vision is to dedicate the Company to the development, production, and promotion of contemporary Australian theatre through a diversity of theatrical expression and form.

Artistic risk-taking and experimentation underpin all programming and curatorial choices. This vision extends to provoking the living entity of theatre itself through new approaches to commissioning, partnering and collaboration. This vision rejects the concept of 'putting on an Australian play' and aggressively promotes the more dynamic and experiential promise of "creating contemporary Australian theatre" by giving equal value to all aspects of theatre art. In order to engage with a diverse range of artists making contemporary Australian theatre, **Malthouse Theatre** has prioritised production resourcing, flexibility and responsiveness to exploratory models of practise. In recognising that contemporary theatre is interdisciplinary and collaborative, and cannot be 'made', like a play in just four weeks, we have endeavoured to adapt our resource structure to an approach that can accommodate working models that encourage longer collaborations between key artists.

For more information visit malthousetheatre.com.au



About Arena Theatre Company

Arena Theatre Company produces adrenaline-pumping performances for young audiences aged 5 to 25. With a forty-year history, the company is Australia's longest running producer of theatre for children and young people. Arena's longevity is a testament to the company's mission to create dynamic, sophisticated, contemporary theatre that engages young audiences. The recipient of numerous awards, Arena Theatre Company is recognised internationally for excellence in creating performances for young people. The company creates theatre of varying scales for regional, national and international touring, from small in-schools touring productions, to large-scale, site-specific multimedia works that combine a seamless fusion of cinema, theatre, animation and surround sound.

Arena's program allows the company to reach a broad audience of young people through families, schools and the general public. The company pursues a constantly evolving relationship with young people aged 5 – 25, artists and contemporary culture. Arena's creative processes see Australia's best and most exciting artists come together to create work in collaboration with young people. This allows the scope of our work to extend from community partnerships, through to regional and national touring and also major international arts festival forums. Over recent years, the company has been an Australian leader in the creation of theatre that fuses film, video art and new music technologies.

Arena Theatre Company is based in Melbourne, Victoria, and each year the company tours its work regionally and nationally. Internationally, the company has toured to the United Kingdom, Asia, North America and New Zealand and has embarked on international collaborations with companies in Manchester and Tokyo.