

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

.....

BY TOM WRIGHT, ADAPTED FROM JOAN LINDSAY'S NOVEL

AUSTRALIAN SCRIPT CENTRE

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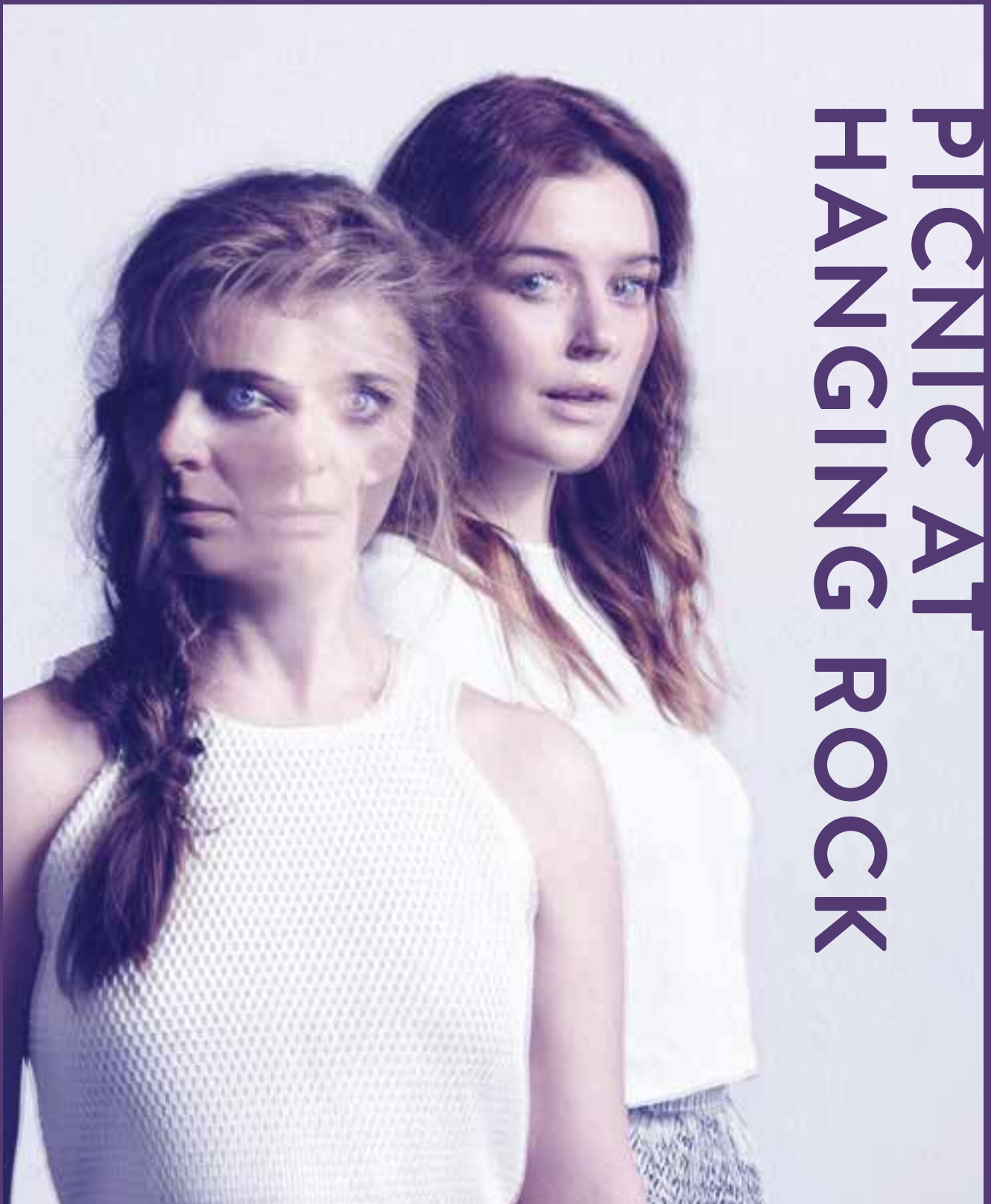
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PROMPT PACK / EDUCATION RESOURCE



PICNIC AT
HANGGING ROCK

THE COOPERS MALTHOUSE
Merlyn Theatre
26 FEB – 20 MAR

MALTHOUSE
PROMPT

CONTENTS

| | |
|---------|--|
| Page 2 | About Malthouse Theatre |
| Page 3 | Videos |
| Page 3 | Cast and Creative Team |
| Page 4 | Introduction to the Prompt Pack |
| Page 5 | Director's Note |
| Page 8 | Background Information |
| Page 10 | Malthouse Theatre's Adaptation |
| Page 11 | Timeline of <i>Picnic At Hanging Rock</i> |
| Page 13 | About the Director |
| Page 14 | ACTIVITY // Meet the Director Matthew Lutton |
| Page 19 | About The Writer |
| Page 20 | ACTIVITY // Meet the Writer Tom Wright |
| Page 26 | The Actors' Use of Expressive and Performance Skills |
| Page 28 | ACTIVITY // Meet Some of the Cast |
| Page 32 | Non-Naturalistic Devices and Conventions |
| Page 35 | Learn More |
| Page 36 | Cast & Creative Bios |

ABOUT MALTHOUSE THEATRE



Malthouse Theatre is at once, a theatre company, a creative site and an engine for change. It is also the imaginative expression of a committed team of artmakers reaching out to an even larger number of local, national and international artists. All are dedicated to an ongoing conversation with audiences of exciting diversity and character.

This conversation chooses contemporary theatre as its vehicle: a compelling annual program of adventurous, multi-disciplinary work inspired by writers, directors, designers, choreographers, sound artists and performers. Here, the combined possibilities of all theatre arts are offered centre stage – for entertainment, for inspiration, and even for fun.

// what happens next.

**MALTHOUSE
THEATRE**

VIDEOS



Director Matthew Lutton discusses Picnic at Hanging Rock

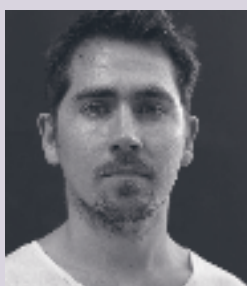


Writer Tom Wright discusses Picnic at Hanging Rock

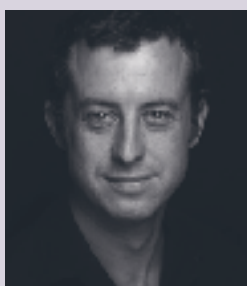


Actors Arielle Gray, Nikki Shiels and Elizabeth Nabben discuss Picnic at Hanging Rock

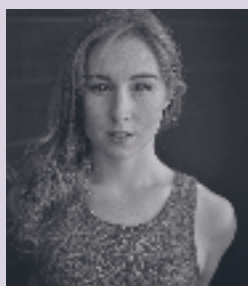
CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM



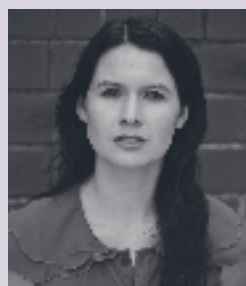
Matthew Lutton
DIRECTOR



Tom Wright
WRITER



Harriet Gordon-Anderson
CAST



Arielle Gray
CAST



Amber McMahon
CAST



Elizabeth Nabben
CAST



Nikki Shiels
CAST



Zoë Atkinson
SET & COSTUME DESIGN



Tia Clark
STAGE MANAGER



J. David Franzke
SOUND DESIGN



Ash Gibson Greig
COMPOSITION



Lyndie Li Wan Po
ASSISTANT STAGE
MANAGER



Paul Jackson
LIGHTING DESIGN



Joan Lindsay
AUTHOR

Matt Alden / MONASH PLACEMENT, SOUND DESIGN **Leticia Brennan-Steers** / MONASH PLACEMENT, DIRECTING
Claire Springett / BESEN PLACEMENT, LIGHTING DESIGN **Aseel Tayah** / BESEN PLACEMENT, SET & COSTUME DESIGN

PROMPT // CUE, INDUCE, MAKE, MOTIVATE, PERSUADE, ENCOURAGE, STIMULATE, IMPEL, INSPIRE

Welcome to Malthouse Theatre's Prompt Pack for *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. When an actor forgets a line in rehearsals they may call for a prompt to provide a clue or a cue so that they can keep telling the story. This document aims to provide just that – a next step, a reminder, a series of provocations. This pack is full of information, but also poses many questions and discussion points for the audience. The Prompt Pack invites us to see how relevant and exciting contemporary theatre can be.

As a resource, these pages are by no means definitive, but we hope they'll take you on an interesting journey and keep you travelling through the world of the play well after the curtain call. We encourage you to make particular use of the in-depth video interviews with members of the cast and creative team. Many of the questions and discussion points that we have outlined in this resource are a direct response to the videos. We hope that this Prompt Pack will help you to engage deeply with this work.



Vanessa O'Neill /
Youth & Education Manager

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK



This production of Joan Lindsay's novel is told by five schoolgirls. They know the myth as if they were there in 1900, as if they are schoolgirls trapped in the wrong time. They have access to the mystery, and will play for us the moments we might be able to understand.

The production begins with a recitation of the fateful day in 1900 when Miranda, Irma, Marion and Miss McGraw disappeared. They speak about the malleability of time, of crossing creeks and sleep, and of colonialism, of the white Australian ignorance of what surrounds them, the land we are foreigners in, the land we fail to listen to, the land we have tried to tame with 'Englishness' and 'naming'.

The disappearance of the girls is a horror beyond comprehension for the community at Appleyard College. It is a trauma that all respond to. The girl from the orphanage, Sara, her body contorts from the horror of being left behind. The Headmistress, Mrs Appleyard, insists on more vigilant teachings

of restraint to help Australia 'mature'. The young English visitor, Michael, sheds his 'Englishness' because of an obsession with Miranda, a girl with golden locks, whom he saw only for a moment, hanging in the air, leaping across a creek.

The central character of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* however is nature. It releases and disturbs all the characters. There is no literal representation of the Rock in this production; it is a presence, frequently evoked by language. But sometimes we see nature *thinking* in the sign over the stage, or glimpse a physical manifestation *hanging* in the shadows, or sense its infiltrating presence in the darkness.

Malthouse Theatre invites you into the Australian myth of Hanging Rock, one that has been in our national imaginations for decades, and one that will undoubtedly be retold for many decades to come.

Matthew Lutton /
Artistic Director/Co-CEO





PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK // SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION



Picnic at Hanging Rock is a novel written by Melbourne author Joan Lindsay in 1967. The story begins with the disappearance of three schoolgirls and their teacher on a Saint Valentine's Day school picnic in 1900, at the site of Hanging Rock, an enormous rock formation on the plains below Mount Macedon. The novel explores the reverberations that the girls' disappearance has upon the entire community, as *'the pattern of the picnic continued to darken and spread.'*

One of the significant achievements of Joan Lindsay's novel is its ability to blur fact and fiction. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was written implying that what takes place in the novel is historical. Many readers still believe that Lindsay was writing non-fiction. The novel's ability to create a piece of faux Australian history, one that has haunted the Australian psyche for almost fifty years, is a key starting point for the Malthouse Theatre production, adapted by Tom Wright from Joan Lindsay's novel.

It is really interesting the amount of people who think these events actually happened, that people will still ask, 'did they ever find those girls?' For some reason this is one story that people have latched onto, perhaps because they want to believe it. And children did go missing in the Australian bush in the 19th century and early 20th century. And that was a very frightening prospect. But Lindsay made this up. It is a constructed myth. When a story has such power that it is no longer viewed as a fabrication, and it assumes a significance to living, breathing people, then it's no longer just a story and it becomes a myth. — Tom Wright

The novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* concludes with the following newspaper report, purporting to be written thirteen years after the picnic:

(Extract from a Melbourne newspaper, February 14th, 1913)

Although Saint Valentine's Day is usually associated with the giving and taking of presents, and affairs of the heart, it is exactly thirteen years since the fatal Saturday when a party of some twenty schoolgirls and two governesses set out from Appleyard College on the Bendigo Road for a picnic to Hanging Rock. One of the governesses and three of the girls disappeared during the afternoon. Only one of them was ever seen again. The Hanging Rock is a spectacular volcanic uprising on the plains below Mount Macedon, of special interest to geologists on account of its unique rock formations, including monoliths and reputedly bottomless holes and caves, until recently uncharted [1912]. It was thought at the time that the missing persons had attempted to climb the dangerous rock escarpments near the summit, where they presumably met their deaths; but whether by accident, suicide or straight-out murder has never been established, since the bodies were never recovered.

Intensive search by police and public of the relatively small area provided no clue to the mystery until on the morning of Saturday, February 21st, the Hon. Michael Fitzhubert, a young Englishman holidaying at Mount Macedon (now domiciled on a station property in North Queensland), discovered one of the three missing girls, Irma Leopold, lying unconscious at the foot of two enormous boulders. The unfortunate girl subsequently recovered, except for a head injury which left her without memory of anything that had

occurred after she and her companions had begun the ascent of the upper levels. The search was continued for several years under great difficulties, owing to the mysterious death of the headmistress of Appleyard College within a few months of the tragedy. The College itself was totally destroyed by a bushfire during the following summer. In 1903, two rabbiters camped at the Hanging Rock found a small piece of frilled calico, thought by the police to be part of a petticoat worn on the day of the picnic by the missing governess.

A somewhat shadowy figure appears briefly in this extraordinary story; a girl called Edith Horton, a fourteen-year-old boarder at Appleyard College, who had accompanied the three other girls for a short distance up the Rock. This girl returned at dusk to the other picnickers by the creek below in a state of hysteria, and was unable then, or ever after, to recall anything whatever that had occurred during the interval. In spite of repeated enquiries over the years, Miss Horton recently died in Melbourne without having provided any additional information.

Countess de Latte-Margeury (the former Irma Leopold) is at present residing in Europe.

From time to time the Countess has granted interviews to various interested bodies, including the Society for Psychical Research, but has never recalled anything beyond what she was able to remember after first regaining consciousness. Thus the College Mystery, like that of the celebrated case of the Marie-Celeste, seems likely to remain forever unsolved.

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK // MALTHOUSE THEATRE'S ADAPTATION



PHOTO BY GABRIELLE / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

'The Rock is a nightmare, and nightmares belong to the past'

Malthouse Theatre's adaptation of Joan Lindsay's novel, features five female performers, dressed initially as contemporary schoolgirls, retelling an Australian myth, a story that is being revisited and retold. Tom Wright's adaption of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* focuses on communicating landscape and horror through words – there is no attempt to manifest the scale of nature in a literal way. The experience is conjured aurally – primarily through language, music and sound.

This adaptation of Picnic At Hanging Rock isn't designed to be a dramatisation of Lindsay's novel, at least, not in the traditional sense. It's written for five female voices, who retell the story, occasionally playing the roles from the novel, occasionally taking on Lindsay's narrative voice, and often directly addressing the audience. It's as much a play about how we choose to describe our past as it is about annihilation in a foreign landscape. – Tom Wright

Picnic at Hanging Rock taps into our obsession with the mystery genre and inconclusive narratives. Lindsay famously provides no solution to the mystery (one was written, but only published after her death) and by doing so revels in the primal terror that

arises when we are unable to rationalise the world. The story speaks to our contemporary need for meaning, our impulse to simplify and comprehend a world that is ultimately incomprehensible, and our fear of engaging with the unknown and/or less tangible.

The Australian landscape is a significant aspect of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* - the way it dwarfs us, humbles us, and can never be tamed. All of Lindsay's characters are ill suited to the land they occupy. They are part of a society struggling with change - a society fighting to shake off its 'English' ancestry, its conservatism and naivety. The Headmistress Mrs Appleyard speaks of the need to 'tame', 'cultivate' and 'civilise' this land, through 'restraint', 'vigilance' and 'cleanliness'. But she is no match for the Australian landscape – to which she ultimately surrenders.

Time itself is probably Joan Lindsay's greatest preoccupation. Her writing investigates our ongoing wrestle with time, its subjectivity and fluidity, our desire to control it, and our fear that it is beyond comprehension. Hanging Rock is a place where time literally stops. (The two characters who have watches at the picnic both discover that they have stopped at midday.) In the Malthouse Theatre production, time is deliberately fluid. Different periods of time exist concurrently onstage and are in conversation with each other.

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK // TIMELINE

Tom Wright has put together a timeline that charts a number of events and sources that are referenced throughout *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

.....

- 55 million years ago** – Bracken evolves
- 6 ¼ million years ago** – Hanging Rock formed from magma seeping from a vent
- c. 250 A.D.** – Saint Valentine dies
- 1480s** – Botticelli paints *The Birth of Venus*
- 1687** – Isaac Newton publishes his *Principia Mathematica*
- 1826** – Felicia Hemans writes *Evening Prayer at a Girls' School*
- 1836** – Major Mitchell sees Hanging Rock
- 1842** – *The Wreck of the Hesperus* is written by Longfellow
- 1843** – Mrs Appleyard born
- 1844** – Hanging Rock is incorporated into a sheep run
- 1844** – Huddle names Hanging Rock Mount Diogenes
- 1851** – Last Wurundjeri initiation ceremony on Hanging Rock
- 1851** – Black Thursday fires sweep Hanging Rock
- 1875** – *At The Hanging Rock* is painted by William Ford
- 1882** – Miranda born
- 1896** – Joan Lindsay born
- 1900** – The picnic, from which everything darkens and spreads
- 1903** – A pair of rabbiters find a scrap of calico on the Rock
- 1912** – The volcanic holes and caves of the rock are charted and mapped
- 1913** – Edith dies
- 1928** – The gardener, Mr White, dies at the age of ninety-five
- 1950** – Mademoiselle tells her grandchildren of the unforgettable hysteria of the girls attacking Irma
- 1966** – Joan Lindsay writes *Picnic At Hanging Rock*
- 1975** – The film *Picnic At Hanging Rock* is made by Peter Weir
- 1980** – *The Murders at Hanging Rock* is published by Yvonne Rousseau
- 1984** – Joan Lindsay dies
- 1987** – *The Secret of Hanging Rock*, Lindsay's 'missing' chapter, is published



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR MATTHEW LUTTON



Matthew is Malthouse Theatre's Artistic Director. Prior to this, he was Malthouse Theatre's Associate Director, and the Artistic Director of Perth-based theatre company Thinlce. For Malthouse Theatre he has directed *I Am a Miracle*, *Night on Bald Mountain*, *The Bloody Chamber*, *Dance of Death*, *Pompeii*, *L.A.*, *On the Misconception of Oedipus*, *Die Winterreise*, *The Trial*, and *Tartuffe*. Other directing credits include *The Mysteries: Genesis* (Sydney Theatre Company), *The Duel* (Sydney Theatre Company/Thinlce), and *Love Me Tender* (Belvoir/Thinlce). His opera directing credits include *Make No Noise* (Bavarian State Opera), *Elektra* (West Australian Opera/Thinlce/Opera Australia), and *The Flying Dutchman* (NZ Opera).

ACTIVITY // MEET MATTHEW LUTTON, DIRECTOR

In this interview Matthew Lutton shares his vision for this production of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. He discusses the transformation of time, place and character; explains the contrasting use of stillness and movement in the show; outlines his vision for the set, lighting and sound design; and discusses how menace, horror and terror are evoked within this work.

**WATCH THIS INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW LUTTON
(DIRECTOR OF THE PLAY)**

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING

1 // THE SHIFTS IN TIME, PLACE AND CHARACTER

'We begin in very contemporary costumes, with contemporary schoolgirls and they are our 2016 narrators; then as the show progresses that time blurs. The idea at play is that when the narrators narrate returning to the rock, that it opens a portal of time in the show, and suddenly they re-emerge in period costume.'

—Matthew Lutton

- As you watch the play, look out for the use of 'jump cuts' to shift through time and pay attention to the instances when different times co-exist on stage simultaneously.
- The five actors in the production are working with frequent shifts in time, and shifts in points of view. As you watch the play, notice how these shifts are made by the actors, as they move seamlessly between time, place and character.
- Consider the juxtaposition of contemporary and period costumes. What effect do you think this contrast has?

2// USE OF DIRECT ADDRESS AND INHABITING CHARACTERS

'This is a piece for language on stage.'

—Matthew Lutton

- How successfully do you believe the actors convey different characters through the use of their voices (accent, tone, pitch, pace, volume) throughout this production?
- Matthew explains that the actors have been asked to embody the quality of a character. As you watch the production, consider how well you were able to understand each character – without necessarily seeing a complete physical transformation.

3// USE OF STILLNESS AND PHYSICALITY IN THIS PRODUCTION

'The show is staged with the philosophy of doing one thing at a time. We try to gain clarity of the text by asking an actor to be incredibly still. It contradicts naturalism. It is about clearly delivering an idea, moving to shift energy, then clearly delivering the next idea. It comes from the belief that stillness and intensity of text will make an audience want to lean in.'

—Matthew Lutton

- Consider the use of stillness throughout this production. Did it help you to listen more clearly to the complex text?
- Consider the contrasting use of movement and physicality throughout the play.

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING

4 // EVOKING A SENSE OF MENACE AND HORROR ON STAGE

'The actors' body is really important, particularly in the last third of the show – where their bodies go from moments of stillness to very Artaud like physical gestures, which are often very grotesque – almost like Francis Bacon like images and paintings.'

–Matthew Lutton

- How was terror and distress conveyed through the use of actors' bodies onstage?
- How was the menace of the landscape captured?
- How was a mood of suspense and horror evoked through music and sound?
- What were some examples of Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* in the physicality of the actors?
- How was lighting used to conjure suspense and mystery throughout the production?
- How did you feel as an audience member being plunged into complete darkness throughout the production?

5// THE STAGE DESIGN

'The stage design came from the idea of a space with no entrances or exits because a key part of the vision is that there are actors onstage that keep disappearing, just as the girls disappear in the story. The actors appear and disappear without explanation.'

–Matthew Lutton

- There is no rock onstage, no naturalistic landscape – but the large overhanging sculpture is a symbol of the vastness and danger of the Australian landscape. What feelings did this overhanging structure evoke within you during the production?
- Consider the effect of actors suddenly appearing and disappearing onstage throughout the show.

6// PERFORMANCE STYLES OF THEATRE IN THE PRODUCTION

'You would call it a post-dramatic production because it uses an eclectic range of styles and the styles change throughout the production... We set up a few styles and then start mashing them all together.'

–Matthew Lutton

- As you watch the production, take note of the eclectic range of performance styles and conventions. In his summary Matthew mentions: recitation / direct address, classicism, naturalistic dialogue, expressionism, Artaud-like physicality – and then towards the end of the play a mash up of all of these styles at once.
- How effective do you believe it was to experience this range of styles and conventions throughout the production?
- Matthew identifies this work as fitting into the genre of Australian Gothic. He characterises the genre as primarily being concerned with landscape, the individual and a palpable sense of otherness. See what else you can discover about this genre of theatre.





PHOTOGRAPHY / Pia Johnson

ABOUT THE WRITER

TOM WRIGHT



Tom has written a number of award-winning plays and adaptations, including *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The War of the Roses*, *The Lost Echo*, *Lorilei*, *Medea*, *Babes in the Wood*, *Baal*, *Optimism*, *On the Misconception of Oedipus*, *The Histrionic*, and *Black Diggers*. He was Associate Director of STC from 2004 to 2012, and has worked as an actor and director at Playbox (now Malthouse Theatre), Melbourne Theatre Company, State Theatre Company SA, La Mama, Company B (now Belvoir), Anthill, Gilgul, Mene Mene, Bell Shakespeare, Chunky Move, Black Swan, and Chamber Made Opera.

ACTIVITY // MEET TOM WRIGHT, WRITER

In this interview Tom Wright discusses the process of adapting Joan Lindsay's novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* for the stage. Over the space of twelve months Tom wrote a pre-draft and then wrote nine subsequent drafts of the script, in close collaboration with the director Matthew Lutton. Tom also discusses his use of poetic language in the play, the play's fluid notions of time and place; as well as the use of titles throughout the production.

**WATCH THIS INTERVIEW WITH TOM WRIGHT
(WRITER OF THE PLAY)**

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING

1 // THE PROCESS OF ADAPTING PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

‘Theatre does a great thing when it picks up a story that people feel they are already familiar with. And one of the great things about Picnic at Hanging Rock is that people feel that they know the story and yet at the same time there is also an air of mystery about it. The clash between familiarity and strangeness is something that theatre does really well.’

—Tom Wright

- After you have seen this production of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, consider which aspects of the story you were already familiar with (either from the novel or the film). Which aspects were surprising or strange and challenged your ideas about this well known story?
- Tom speaks about the fact that this play opens up some big poetic questions – about landscape, female identity, colonialism and being in an unfamiliar land. Consider which of the plays themes resonated most strongly with you.

2 // THE USE OF RICH AND POETIC LANGUAGE

‘The text is designed to have a poetic quality. This isn’t a play with a sequence of naturalistic, psychological situations. It is far more a text for a group of actors to wrestle with the idea of what it is to retell the story of Picnic at Hanging Rock in 2016. A sequence of poems, and a sequence of language responses to history, to time, to space and to nature.’

—Tom Wright

- As you watch this production, consider how the heightened and poetic language is used to create mood, rhythm, and tension throughout the production.
- Consider the significance of Tom referring to the scenes in the play as a ‘sequence of poems’. How does the poetic language work to evoke images and create a sense of the landscape in this production?

3 // SHIFT BETWEEN DIRECT ADDRESS AND PLAYING CHARACTERS

‘The five young women that you see in this play aren’t pretending that they are trapped in the world of 1900. They are of the contemporary world and will quite often turn to you as the audience member and start talking to you...But then on occasion, you will also have the actors becoming the characters, and this will constantly shift.’

—Tom Wright

- As the five actors shift between directly addressing the audience and playing a range of characters, what do you notice about how they use their voices, movements, gestures and facial expressions?
- Tom refers to the fact that the tradition of direct address has been used in plays since Greek theatre. Consider the different ways that direct address is used throughout this production.

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING

4 // THE FLUID NOTIONS OF TIME AND PLACE

‘Post-naturalistic theatre doesn’t exist in any one time. It exists in many different times at once. Good quality contemporary theatre is always wrestling with what the past meant – and in doing so it also drags the past into our world.’

—Tom Wright

- Consider the ways in which this production of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* manages to exist within many periods of time all at once.
 - The author Joan Lindsay was interested in exploring the notion that time was not only linear. Consider how this production explores many notions of time – for example, geological time, natural time, dream time and memory time.
 - Consider the range of places that are evoked within this play – and how they are captured primarily through language.
-

5 // THE USE OF TITLES THROUGHOUT THE PLAY

‘The titles are a deliberate theatrical and writerly device – to draw attention, as we should at all times – to the fact that we are a group of Australians in a room, trying to grapple with what it all means.’

—Tom Wright

- As you watch the play take note of the use of titles on the screens, and consider which of them are factual and descriptive – and which are titles are more mysterious and poetic.
 - Consider how having titles during the production affects your experience of the play. What do you think about Tom’s suggestion that it also represents the idea of the production ‘commenting upon itself’?
-







THE ACTORS' USE OF EXPRESSIVE & PERFORMANCE SKILLS



Harriet Gordon-Anderson
CAST



Consider the ways that **Harriet** uses her voice, gestures and facial expressions when playing the French schoolmistress – especially in the scene after they return from Hanging Rock.

Take note of how **Harriet** uses her voice, gestures and posture differently when inhabiting the character of Albert.

Every inch of that bloody Rock has been gone over with a toothcomb

What the Hell do you think you can do?



Arielle Gray
CAST



Pay attention to the ways that **Arielle** use her movements and facial expressions to convey the internal feelings of Sara, which can only be whispered, but never spoken aloud.

How does **Arielle** use her voice, timing and movements to convey Edith in her hypnotised state, on the Rock, replaying the events of the picnic?

***Oh mercy!
She looks so funny***



Amber McMahon
CAST



Consider the ways that **Amber** uses her voice and physicality to convey Michael exploring Hanging Rock alone at night.

Contrast this with **Amber's** use of voice and movements to convey Michael's disorientation after returning from the Rock, and shock upon realising that it was not Miranda who was found on the Rock.

I'm an expert on Nightmares since I came to Australia...

mine are so real sometimes I can't even be sure they are dreams.

DISCUSS



Elizabeth Nabben
CAST

.....

Consider the ways in which **Elizabeth** uses her voice, posture, gestures and facial expressions to convey the status and class of Mrs Appleyard – particularly in contrast to the character of Sara.

Compare this with **Elizabeth's** use of posture, focus and gestures as Mrs Appleyard in the final scene of the play

***This country
In its childish state
Its state of nature
You may see
At first it needs taming.***



Nikki Shiels
CAST

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

Pay attention to the ways that **Nikki** uses her posture, focus and voice to convey the high status and command of the Policeman in the play.

Consider how **Nikki** conveys the character of Irma, once she has been saved from the Rock, in the scene where she is sipping tea in the garden, through her use of voice, facial expressions and gestures.

***He says the Rock
is a nightmare***

***And nightmares
belong in the past.***



AFTER SEEING THE MALTHOUSE THEATRE PRODUCTION OF PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

- How did the actors use their expressive skills (facial expressions, voice, movement, gestures) to convey different characters?
- How did each of the actors use their performance skills (focus, timing, energy, actor-audience relationship) when narrating the story and directly addressing the audience?
- How did the actors use the acting space – both through their use of movement and their use of stillness and silence?
- What sort of a relationship was established throughout the performance between the actors and the audience?
- What was the effect of having characters appear and disappear throughout the production?

ACTIVITY // MEET SOME OF THE CAST

In this interview three of the cast members from *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Arielle Gray, Nikki Shiels and Elizabeth Nabben spoke to us at the beginning of Week 2 of the rehearsals. They discuss the challenges of shifting between direct address / narration and inhabiting characters in the production, the key skills that they use to shift between a variety of characters, working with Tom Wright's rich and poetic text, and their use of stillness and movement.

**WATCH THIS INTERVIEW WITH ARIELLE, NIKKI & ELIZABETH
(SOME OF THE CAST OF THE PLAY)**

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING

1 // USE OF DIRECT ADDRESS AND PLAYING A CHARACTER

'Moving between direct address and inhabiting a character is one of the most interesting and challenging things about this production. And there is a mid point as well, where you are talking in direct address but very slightly inhabiting the characters.' —Arielle Grey

- As you watch the production, pay close attention to the shifts between direct address and the moments when the actors are inhabiting the characters. What are some of the differences that you notice – particularly in the actors' use of voice and focus?
 - Matthew Lutton asked the actors in rehearsals to work towards shifting seamlessly between the different modes of performance. How seamless do you think these transitions were – especially in the first scene of the play?
-

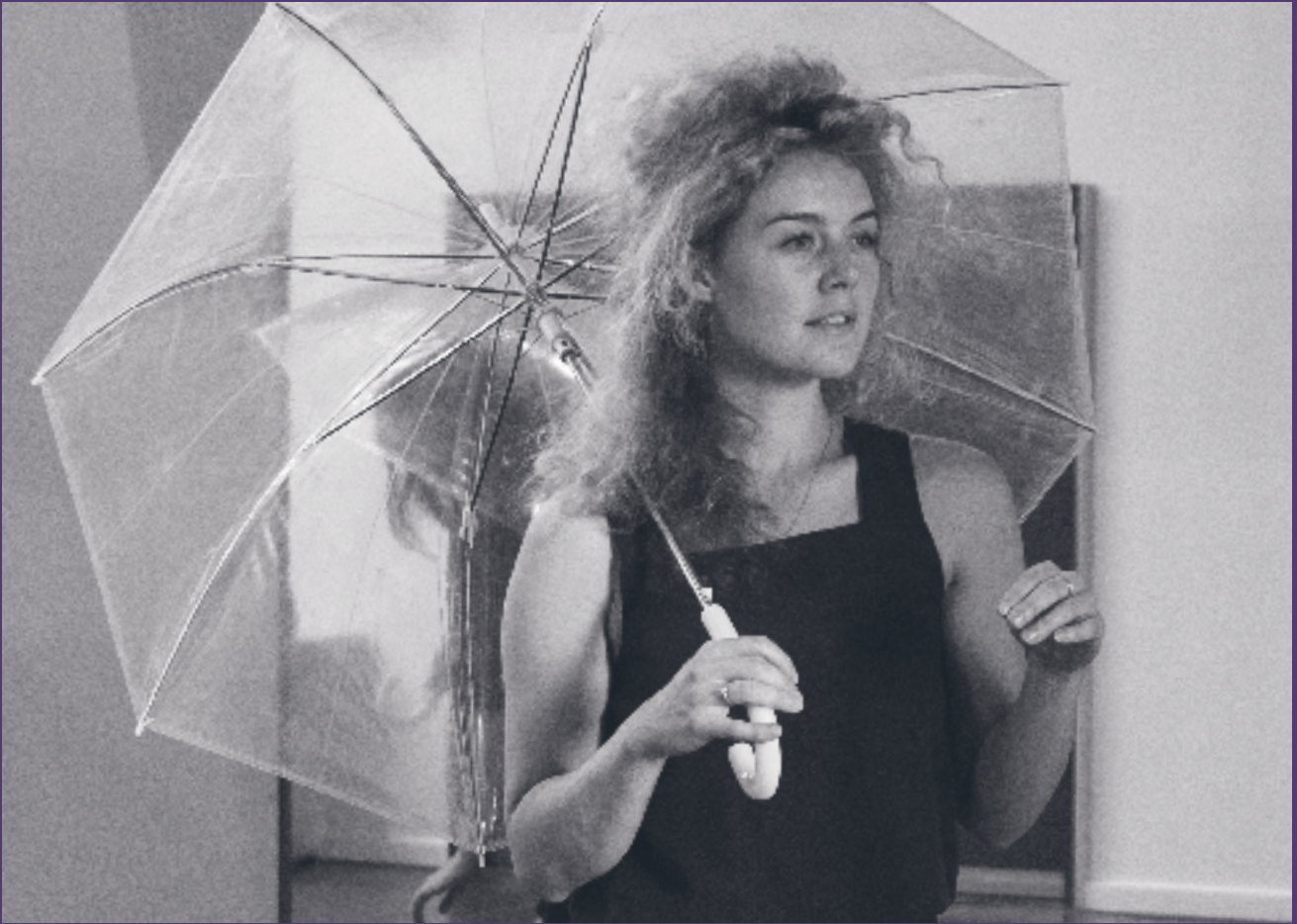
2 // INHABITING CHARACTERS

'I'm playing a Headmistress. I'm a 26 year old playing a 57 year old. And some of the things that Matthew and Tom have been stressing is to do with posture, status and vocal status – and finding vocal differences.'

—Elizabeth Nabben

- As you watch Elizabeth inhabit the character of the Headmistress, Mrs Appleyard, take note of how she uses her voice and posture in different scenes throughout the play.
 - One of the particular challenges that Elizabeth faced is that she is in the costume of a school girl, whilst inhabiting the role of the Headmistress – usually with Arielle who is dressed identically to her, playing the young school girl Sara. As you watch the scenes between Elizabeth and Arielle, pay close attention to how they make use of their voice, gestures, physicality and status to inhabit the roles of Mrs Appleyard and Sara.
 - Pay attention to the different characters played by Nikki Sheils throughout the play. Take note of the different ways that she uses her voice and movements when speaking as the Policeman as distinct from Irma Leopold.
-

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING



3 // THE USE OF STILLNESS AND PHYSICALITY THROUGHOUT THE PLAY

'The language itself is quite physical. It has got a very muscular energy to it. In the moments of stillness, I'm trying to put all of the energy into my body, into my tongue and my articulation...And then there are moments in the play that are so powerful that language fails you, and physicality replaces language.' —Nikki Shiels

- Pay attention to the moments where physicality replaces language in the play. What is the effect of the characters moving beyond language – or losing the ability to speak?
 - Take note of when Arielle as Sara disintegrates into physicality, and channels her internal feelings into extreme and tortured movements.
 - Also pay attention to the scene of wild hysteria amongst the school girls in the gymnasium, towards the end of the play, where there is a release of the tension that has been building up throughout the entire play.
 - Consider the moments of stillness in the play, where there are very subtle and pared back movements and contrast this with the physical movements that are much more extreme and exaggerated. Why do you think Matthew Lutton has chosen to work with such a contrasting use of physicality in this production?
-



PHOTOGRAPHY / Pia Johnson

NON-NATURALISTIC DEVICES AND CONVENTIONS



As you watch this production of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, keep in mind that Matthew Lutton makes use of an eclectic range of performance styles, so throughout the production, the ways that dramatic elements and conventions are used will vary.



PERFORMANCE STYLES AND POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

Matthew Lutton refers to this production as having a range of performance styles. These include recitation / direct address, classicism, naturalistic dialogue, expressionism, and stylised physicality. Towards the end of the play there is a mash up of all of these styles at once.

This eclectic range of styles is typical of postdramatic theatre. Some of you may be unfamiliar with this term.

The term 'Postdramatic Theatre', has become an increasingly important one since the publication of Hans-Thies Lehmann's book Postdramatic Theatre (German 1999; English translation 2006). It covers a wide range of contemporary theatrical forms, including devised work and live art. Postdramatic plays differentiate themselves

from representational theatre by offering actors and audiences theatrical experiences that are not tied to either character or plot but seek to investigate broader issues, free of drama's limitations. The orientation provided by recognisable characters or plotlines dissolves, and spectators have to negotiate the production of postdramatic plays by working through a new set of conventions. (Source – Drama Online)

In summary, postdramatic theatre is experimental in nature, incorporating a range of performance styles and defying more conventional notions of plot or character.

See the the interview with Matthew Lutton for further information about the performance styles within this production.

SOME THE CONVENTIONS USED IN THE PRODUCTION

DIRECT ADDRESS

Used frequently throughout the production, especially in the first scene of the play: for narration, storytelling, recitation, commentary, reporting, and description.

TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER

The five actors shift between different characters throughout the play. They may inhabit a character very briefly, or for an entire scene.

TRANSFORMATION OF TIME AND LOCATION

The play moves between different periods of time and locations. Characters from different periods, locations and scenes may co-exist within the one scene.

HEIGHTENED LANGUAGE

Tom Wright's text is rich, complex and poetic. The language is used to evoke the landscape and bring the stories to life. The text is written as a sequence of poems.

STYLISED MOVEMENT

There are moments when some of the characters lose language or have no words for the enormity of their feelings. They may convey these extreme emotions through their physicality. These stylised movements are at times reminiscent of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.

TITLES

Titles appear periodically on a screen above the stage. They are sometimes factual and descriptive, and at other times more mysterious, and poetic.

INTERLUDES

Throughout the production there are occasional visual interludes. They are purely visual, briefly interspersed between blackouts.

STILLNESS

Stillness is used very often by the actor who is speaking the text. This is done to help the audience listen to the rich language.

TABLEAUX

Tableaux are used throughout the production by the ensemble of actors. In the first scene, note how the actors shift their positions very subtly. In other scenes, a group of actors might be upstage in a tableau, whilst actors downstage engage in dialogue.



SOME OF THE DRAMATIC ELEMENTS USED IN THE PRODUCTION

CONFLICT

Consider the conflict in the production between the natural landscape and the characters that wish to 'tame' and 'cultivate' their environment. Pay attention to the internal conflicts within the characters and how this frequently manifests itself physically.

RHYTHM

The language itself has very strong rhythms. Also pay attention to the varying rhythms of the scenes themselves throughout the production.

SOUND

Music and sound are used constantly throughout this production. Sometimes they operate at a subtle, subliminal level, evoking mood and helping to create a sense of unease and menace. At other times the music is classical and lyrical and at times it is distorted and harsh. Some of the sounds include girls' voices and laughter. If you listen very carefully you will also hear the sounds of nature (some of which were recorded overnight on location at Hanging Rock!)

SYMBOL

Consider the symbolism of the large structure hanging overhead throughout the production, evoking the fears and terror associated with the landscape.

CONTRAST

Contrast is used throughout the production, between stillness and exaggerated movement, in performance styles and in the varying use of sound.

MOOD

Pay attention to the ways in which mood is captured through the use of sound and lighting design in this production.



PHOTOGRAPHY / Pia Johnson

LEARN MORE ABOUT

[An interview with author Joan Lindsay](#)

[An interview with director Matthew Lutton for The Saturday Paper](#)

[Malthouse Theatre's staging of an enduring myth](#)

[How Malthouse Theatre plans to bring Picnic at Hanging Rock to the stage](#)

[Picnic at Hanging Rock Program](#)

[Picnic at Hanging Rock rehearsal room photos](#)



CAST & CREATIVE BIOS



Harriet Gordon-Anderson
CAST



Picnic at Hanging Rock is Harriet's Malthouse Theatre debut. Her other theatre credits include *Moving On Inc.* (Perth Fringe), *Never Hurt Anyone* (Griffin), *The Staffroom* (Sydney Fringe).

Her West Australian Academy of Performing Arts [WAAPA] credits include *Tender Napalm*, *All My Sons*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Her screen credits include *Little Girl Lost*; *Your Mob, Our Mob*; *Swiss Avalanche*; and *Splendours of a Mind*. Harriet won the 2015 WAAPA Leslie Anderson Award for Excellence in Acting, a Speech and Drama Teachers Poetry Recital Award, and is a Deadly Award nominee.



Arielle Gray
CAST



Arielle Gray is a performer, theatre-maker, puppeteer, improviser and co-founder of theatre company The Last Great Hunt. Arielle co-created and performs in Helpmann nominated *It's Dark Outside* (ArtsHub Critics' Choice Award winner) and *Falling Through Clouds* (Sydney Festival). Other recent shows include *All That Glitters*, *Old Love*, *Yoshi's Castle*, *Monroe & Associates* (FringeWorld Martin Sims Best New WA Work), *Minnie & Mona Play Dead* (FringeWorld Martin Sims Best New WA Work), and many more.



Amber McMahon
CAST



Amber trained at Flinders Uni Drama Centre and won the Adele Koh Scholarship to study at the Stella Adler Company & SITI Company in NYC. Her theatre credits include *Optimism* (Malthouse Theatre), *North by Northwest* (MTC/Kay & McLean), *Angels in America* (Belvoir), STCSA and Windmill's *Girl Asleep*, and *School Dance* (Helpmann winner for Best Supporting Actress in a Play). She was also a founding member of STC's Actors Ensemble, appearing in several productions including *The War of the Roses*, *Season at Sarsaparilla*, and *The Lost Echo*. Amber's screen credits include *Girl Asleep*, *The Hamster Wheel*, *Yes We Canberra*, and various short films.

CAST & CREATIVE BIOS



Elizabeth Nabben
CAST

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Elizabeth is a 2010 graduate of the VCA. Her theatre credits include *Antigone* and *'Tis a Pity She's a Whore* for Malthouse Theatre, *Dance Better at Parties* (STC; nominated for Sydney Theatre Award for Best Newcomer), and *The Crucible* (MTC), as well as *Triangle* and *The Trouble with Harry* for MKA. In 2014, Elizabeth was nominated for a Green Room Award for Female Performer for her title role in TheatreWorks' *Therese Raquin*. Elizabeth's screen credits include *Childhood's End*, *Winners and Losers*, *Neighbours*, *The Doctor Blake Mysteries*, and the US feature film *Truth*.



Nikki Shiels
CAST

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A graduate of the VCA, Nikki's Malthouse Theatre credits include *Night on Bald Mountain*, *The Dragon*, and *Elizabeth: Almost by Chance a Woman*. Her other theatre credits include *The Cherry Orchard*, *True Minds*, *Top Girls*, and *Don Parties On* for MTC; *The Unspoken Word is 'Joe'* (Griffin/MKA/La Mama); *The Dream* (Bell Shakespeare); *M + M* (Melbourne Festival); and *The Dollhouse* and *Peer Gynt* for Daniel Schlusser Ensemble, of which she is a core member. Her screen credits include *Neighbours*, *Perfect Pair*, *Childhood's End*, *The Greatest Love of All*, and *Little Acorns*. She was a recipient of the 2015 Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship, and is a two-time Green Room Award nominee.



Zoë Atkinson
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

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Zoe studied scenography at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts, The International Institute of Figurative Theatre (Czech Republic), and at the Institut Internationale de la Marionnette (France). For Malthouse Theatre she has designed costumes for *The Odyssey* (2006 Helpmann Award Best Costume Design), and *On the Misconception of Oedipus*. Other work with Matt Lutton includes the operas *Elektra* and *The Flying Dutchman*. Zoe has most recently been working as Artistic Associate and Designer for the 2016 PIAF opening event *HOME*, with director Nigel Jamieson.

## CAST &amp; CREATIVE BIOS



Tia Clark  
STAGE MANAGER



Since graduating from WAAPA in 2009, Tia has worked as a Stage Manager in various sectors across the entertainment industry.

Selected Malthouse Theatre shows include *I Am a Miracle*; *Timeshare*; *Hello, Goodbye and Happy Birthday*; *Walking into the Bigness*; *Ugly Mugs*; *The Government Inspector*; *The Bloody Chamber*; and *Dance of Death*. Tia has also worked on *Grease* (Gordon Frost Organisation [GFO]), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (GFO) and various live events both in Melbourne and around Australia.



J. David Franzke  
SOUND DESIGNER



David is a composer and sound designer whose work spans film, theatre, visual art installation, and album production. His Malthouse Theatre credits include *Night on Bald Mountain* (Green Room Award winner for Composition & Sound Design; Helpmann-nominated) and *Pompeii, L.A.*. David's other recent theatre credits include *Song*, *Intimacy*, and *Holiday* for Ranters Theatre; *The Beast*, *Australia Day*, and *The Joy of Text* for MTC; and *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (STC).

He has collaborated extensively with visual artist David Rosetzky, and with composer Bernd Friedmann on various album projects.



Ash Gibson Greig  
COMPOSER



Ash has composed the music for over 50 plays, over 100 hours of TV, and in many other mediums. Ash last worked with Matt Lutton at Malthouse Theatre on *The Trial*. Recent theatre work includes *The Red Balloon* with *Black Swan*, and *Falling Through Clouds* with *The Last Great Hunt*; recent screen work includes *Frackman*, *Who Do You Think You Are*, and *The War That Changed Us*. Ash has won an AACTA Award (eight further nominations), an APRA/AGSC Award (two further nominations), and six WA Screen Awards.

## CAST & CREATIVE BIOS



Lyndie Li Wan Po  
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER



Lyndie has worked in stage management in theatre and live events both internationally and across Australia. Selected Malthouse Theatre shows include *The Good Person of Szechuan*, *Timeshare*, *I Am a Miracle*, and *Blak Cabaret*.

Lyndie has also stage managed *Grug* (Windmill, Shanghai 2015), *Separation Street* (Polyglot, 2015) and production managed for *The Rivers of China* (Theatre Works, 2015). In 2012, she was the recipient of the Daryl Wilkinson Encouragement Award.



Paul Jackson  
LIGHTING DESIGNER



Paul has designed for most of Australia's major and independent performing arts companies. Recent designs for Malthouse Theatre include *Love and Information*, *Night on Bald Mountain*, *Meow Meow's Little Mermaid*, and *I Am a Miracle*. He has taught at Melbourne University, RMIT University and VCA, and his work has featured in festivals and programmes in the United States, Asia, Europe and the UK. Paul was listed in the Smart 100 in 2004, is a Churchill Fellow and was an Artistic Associate at Malthouse Theatre from 2007-2013. He has received four Green Room Awards, a Helpmann Award and a Sydney Theatre Award.



Joan Lindsay  
AUTHOR



Joan Lindsay was born Joan à Beckett Weigall in Melbourne in 1896. She attended Clyde Girls Grammar School – the model for Appleyard College in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* – and the National Gallery of Victoria Art School, where she studied painting. On Valentine's Day 1922 she married Daryl Lindsay in London. She chose Valentine's Day 1900 as the setting for *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, her best-known work, which was first published in 1967 and is the basis for the 1975 film of the same name by Peter Weir. She died in Melbourne in 1984.

[malthousetheatre.com.au](http://malthousetheatre.com.au)



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