

SINGLE ASIAN FEMALE



16 FEBRUARY-25 MARCH 2018

LEARNING RESOURCES

BELVOIR



Belvoir presents a La Boite Theatre Company production
Single Asian Female

Writer **MICHELLE LAW**

Director **CLAIRE CHRISTIAN**

This production of *Single Asian Female* opened at Belvoir St Theatre on Saturday 17 February 2018.

Set & Costume Designer **MOE ASSAAD**

Composer & Sound Designer **WIL HUGHES**

Lighting Designer **KEITH CLARK**

Stage Manager **PETER SUTHERLAND**

Assistant Stage Manager **KEIREN SMITH**

With

EMILY BURTON

LUCY HEFFERNAN

PATRICK JHANUR

ALEX LEE

COURTNEY STEWART

HSIAO-LING TANG

Single Asian Female was commissioned by and premiered at La Boite Theatre Company in Brisbane in 2017. The work was developed with the assistance of the Lotus Playwriting Project, an initiative of Playwriting Australia and Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (formerly Performance 4a). The premiere season was supported by Philip Bacon Galleries.

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which Belvoir St Theatre is built. We also pay respect to the elders past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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ABOUT BELVOIR



One building.

Six hundred people.

Thousands of stories.

When the Nimrod Theatre building in Belvoir Street, Surry Hills, was threatened with redevelopment in 1984, more than 600 people – ardent theatre lovers together with arts, entertainment and media professionals – formed a syndicate to buy the building and save this unique performance space in inner city Sydney.

Thirty years later, under Artistic Director Eamon Flack and Executive Director Sue Donnelly, Belvoir engages Australia's most prominent and promising playwrights, directors, actors and designers to realise an annual season of work that is dynamic, challenging and visionary. As well as performing at home, Belvoir regularly takes to the road, touring both nationally and internationally.

Belvoir Education

Our Education Program provides students and teachers with insights into the work of Belvoir and first hand experiences of the theatre-making process.

Belvoir Education offers student workshops, teacher professional development workshops, work experience, VET placements, archival viewings and a wealth of online resources designed to support work in the drama classroom. Our arts access programs assist schools in Regional NSW and Western Sydney to access the company's work.

Explore our education pages at www.belvoir.com.au/education

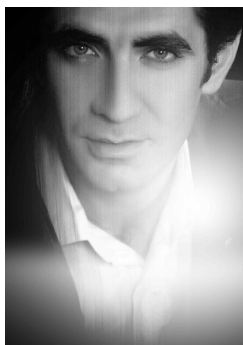
CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM



Michelle Law
Writer



Claire Christian
Director



Moe Assaad
Set & Costume
Designer



Emily Burton
Katie



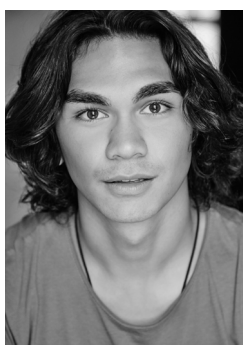
Keith Clark
Lighting Designer



Lucy Heffernan
Lana



Wil Hughes
Composer & Sound
Designer



Patrick Jhanur
Paul



Alex Lee
Zoe



Keiren Smith
Assistant Stage
Manager



Courtney Stewart
Mei



Peter Sutherland
Stage Manager



Hsiao-Ling Tang
Pearl

WRITER'S NOTE: MICHELLE LAW

Whenever I see theatre in Australia I like to watch the people in the audience. They sigh, laugh and cry with recognition as the story unfolding on stage touches them, connects them, and validates their existence — something I rarely experience and makes me deeply envious. Who knew that being made to feel unwelcome and invisible in my own country was something that also extended to the art I consumed. I would leave shows feeling very alone.

I want *Single Asian Female* to play a small role in changing that for people like me. People of colour. Women. Migrants. Outliers. The Other. This show is a love letter to them. And I want those in positions of privilege to gain some new insights: namely that we are here, we have been listening, and that now it is our turn to speak. But above all, I want audiences to be entertained. These are difficult issues to dissect, but that doesn't mean we can't have a lot of fun unpacking them along the way.

Single Asian Female is full of the things I love: Doraemon, '90s hits, and social politics. It shines a spotlight on labels; those we assign ourselves and others, and how we struggle against the limitations imposed by those labels in order to lead authentic lives. The Wong family women are real to me because they were inspired by people I know: generous, assertive, resilient women who hold the world on their shoulders. And I have been blessed to meet more of these incredible women in the process of making this show.

Collaborating with director Claire Christian has been a pure joy. From day one she knew instinctively how to realise the characters and world I'd created with attention and care. Working with Claire to assemble a team of extremely gifted cast and creatives who gel together so beautifully, like a real family, has been a surreal experience that fills me with gratitude. (Also disgust, because everyone who's worked on this production is offensively attractive.)

This play would not have been possible without them, nor would it have been possible without Lotus, the series of workshops led by Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP) and Playwriting Australia that fosters Asian Australian playwrights and helped me realise I had a story to tell. *Single Asian Female* also wouldn't exist without the encouragement and support of mentors and cheerleaders like Maxine Mellor, Glyn Roberts and my fellow Lotus Brisbane girls.

Thank you for seeing *Single Asian Female*. Whether you're single, Asian or female, or none of those things, you've made a choice to see work from a new and challenging perspective. It's exciting. It's also exciting that you'll be joining us for karaoke during the show.

It's too late. The doors are already locked.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE: CLAIRE CHRISTIAN

When people ask me about my experience on *Single Asian Female*, I describe the project as a 'unicorn.' A very special, and one-off experience; a cast and creative team who fell desperately in love with each other, and the work, and a beautifully positive response to the story, and these characters. It feels like the greatest joy ever to get the team back together, to throw a bit more glitter (and neon) onto our unicorn and ride it into Belvoir.

There is no denying that Michelle Law and this play are special. It feels special because it's real. The Golden Phoenix could very well be any suburban Chinese restaurant and the Wong women could reflect any migrant Australian experience. It feels special because it's important. It's important that we tell stories that privilege the other, that reflect the actual Australian society we live in. It's important that we see people of colour on posters and giant billboards, on our screens and especially on our stages, because sadly this is not the reality of the arts sector that we work in and all enjoy. I get to say this from a point of safety as a privileged white woman who has never felt othered because of the colour of my skin, my cultural heritage or ancestry. I say it because I can, because I've been afforded opportunities and a platform and if we don't use our voice to talk about the things that are wrong, well, things will never change. And things have to change.

Single Asian Female gives a voice to the voiceless and talks about race and gender in ways that we often don't. In ways that we should; in honest, vulnerable and angry ways that reflect what's really going on. But, most importantly, this play is special because it's about women, it's written by a woman, and it is masterfully performed by women. Funny women. I know right? Who knew that women could be funny.

It has been an absolute JOY to bring this project back to life with this brilliant team. My hope is that you, our audience, have as much fun and feel as many complex feelings as we have these last few weeks.

Welcome to the Golden Phoenix... you can sing along if you like.



REHEARSING SINGLE ASIAN FEMALE



Alex Lee, Hsiao-Ling Tang & Courtney Stewart

Describe what you see in the picture above.

What do you think the relationship between these three characters could be?

What do you think is happening in this moment?



Alex Lee & Patrick Jhanur

Describe what you see in the picture above.

What do you think the relationship between these two characters might be?

How do the actors' body language and facial expressions convey this relationship?



Alex Lee & Courtney Stewart

Describe what you see in the picture above.
Where do you think this scene might be taking place? What clues are there to indicate this?
Who has the higher status in this moment? Why?



Hsiao-Ling Tang

Describe what you see in the picture above.
Where is the focal point in this moment?

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

The elements of production are the technical and visual elements used to manipulate the elements of drama in order to effectively tell a play's story.

In these notes we are going to look at *Single Asian Female's* Set Design.

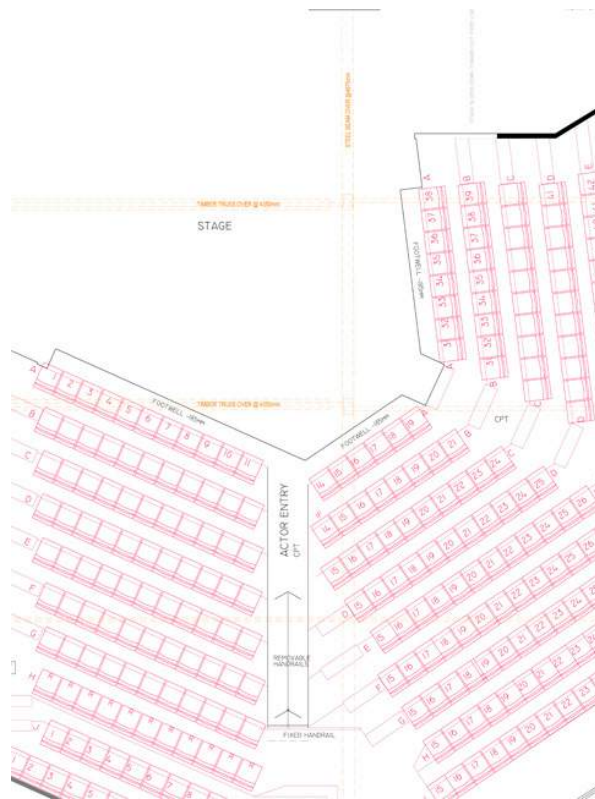
SET DESIGN

"Set in the sunshine coast, the challenge was to transform an ordinary house into one that is home for a Chinese restaurant and portrays the distinctive identities of women two generations apart. To do so, I combined the scenography of three sets into a two-story house: a restaurant in the lower level and two rooms in the upper level. The color scheme and elements used in each room set them apart corresponding to the identity of women the rooms belongs to." Moe Assaad, Set & Costume Designer.

Single Asian Female was first produced in 2017 by La Boite Theatre Company at the Roundhouse Theatre, Brisbane.

La Boite's Roundhouse Theatre is Australia's only purpose-built theatre-in-the-round. It can also be used as a thrust stage with the audience on three sides. In thrust mode it seats 336 people whereas in the round it can seat 400 people. For La Boite's production of *Single Asian Female* the stage was in thrust mode.

Belvoir's Upstairs Theatre is a unique shape and lies somewhere between a thrust stage and in-the-round. It seats approximately 330 audience members.



Belvoir's Upstairs Theatre

Questions to consider about the Set Design

Use the photographs on the following page to compare and contrast the set design in the two different productions.

What are the key differences? Why might these changes have taken place?



Single Asian Female at La Boite (2017)



Single Asian Female at Belvoir (2018)

PRODUCTION WEEK PHOTOGRAPHS

Belvoir's Head of Production Sally Withnell has the responsibility to plan for and oversee Belvoir production weeks in the theatre. Production week is very busy at Belvoir. When one show closes (on a Sunday night) the Production Department begin to 'bump in' Belvoir's next show the following Monday morning. Actors begin working in the theatre from Wednesday for technical and dress rehearsals with their first preview playing to an audience on Saturday night.

Sally took some photographs of the *Single Asian Female* production week to share with us.



POST SHOW DISCUSSION

How did this production's representation of race and gender differ from previous productions you have viewed?



Hsiao-Ling Tang

The play explores the personal relationships between the Wong family women. How does the play use this exploration to draw attention to broader social concerns?



Courtney Stewart & Alex Lee

How was comedy used in the production to lighten moments and provoke thought on serious issues?



Emily Burton & Courtney Stewart

How did the set change or transform throughout the production? How did this support or reinforce the narrative journey of the characters?



Which character did you identify with the most? Why?



Emily Burton, Lucy Heffernan, Hsiao-Ling Tang & Courtney Stewart

How did you feel at the end of the production? Why?



Alex Lee, Courtney Stewart & Hsiao-Ling Tang

SINGLE ASIAN FEMALE

Writer Michelle Law, director Claire Christian, and actors Hsiao-Ling Tang, Alex Lee and Courtney Stewart discuss the making of this smash hit comedy, which shakes up the local theatre scene with fresh stories and perspectives.

Produced by Zoe Ferguson for Belvoir

Listen to the *Single Asian Female* podcast online here:

<https://omny.fm/shows/belvoir/single-asian-female-backstage>

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