

**EXTRACT**

# **THE MAGNIFICENT GIRL**

**ELIZABETH TYSON-DONELEY**

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Written by Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley

Devised by Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley and B.J. Cole (with some sections of the play being transcribed from the spoken word of B.J. Cole)

## **FOREWARD**

*The Magnificent Girl* is made up of interwoven threads of personal narrative, centering on the lives of two women, Beth and Jay. It explores the physical, sexual and emotional landscape of girlhood, adolescence, mothering and womanhood, and the impact experience can have on the imagination, body and personal identity.

Beth centers her exploration of identity around the female body, breaking down its parts, documenting its changes, reclaiming it as whole, and redefining its purpose. Jay attempts to locate her spirituality from amidst the banal trappings of suburbia and the pressures of motherhood. For both women, the subconscious mind is drawn down, untangled, and the female self entirely reimaged.

*The Magnificent Girl* captures the Queensland of old, an expansive, elemental existence of huge backyards, wooden houses, mango trees and big blue skies, and within that time and context, a unique female perspective. The play's tendency towards lyricism lends itself to the flowing, episodic nature of the performance, incorporating music, movement and storytelling. Playful, percussive sounds made from kitchen utensils and bits of junk are contrasted with beautifully crafted compositions to create a lively and breathtaking atmosphere.

*The Magnificent Girl* speaks with authenticity of women's inner lives, representing a sense of place without stereotypes and traditional myth making. It creates the opportunity to generate a new myth, one of untamed, spirited girlhood, adolescent tenderness and honest, insightful womanhood, all within a Queensland landscape of expansive, imaginative freedom and physicality. *The Magnificent Girl* is a potent reminder of childhood days, family outings and teenage years. It's a soothing balm of honest reflection, a voice given to internal lives, a reclaiming of physical worth, and importantly, a restoration of the spirit to transcend.

**Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley**

## **ELIZABETH TYSON-DONELEY**

Elizabeth Tyson-Donoley is a Brisbane-based writer, artist and creative practitioner in theatre and film production. She was born in Launceston, Tasmania in 1972 and has drawn inspiration from a childhood spent in various parts of Australia, in Mortlake in Victoria, Adelaide, Darwin, Hay and Sydney in New South Wales, Brisbane, Hervey Bay and Maryborough in Queensland.

She completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Queensland in English and Drama in 1995, and performed in plays and comedy revues at the Cement Box Theatre with the University Drama Society (UDS). In 1993 she formed Kicking the Kettle Women's Theatre Company with Leah Mercer and Leith Sinclair nee Whatmore, alongside musicians Alison Bolger, Rachel Cooke, Kelly Jeffs and Nicole Thibault from the band CLAG and composer Gary Wilson. She co-wrote, co-directed, co-designed and performed in the plays *Kicking the Kettle*, *Dinah is Dreaming*, *Kissing Eve* and the *Unisafe Project*.

In 1995 Elizabeth Tyson-Donoley collaborated with B.J. Cole, Gary Wilson and Kelly Jeffs to form Red Boots Dancing Theatre Company. *Running Away With The Dog* was performed at Metro Arts Theatre as a work in progress. This work later developed into the script for *The Magnificent Girl*, performed in 1996 at the RSL Hall, Rosalie by Elizabeth Tyson-Donoley and B.J. Cole, accompanied by musicians Gary Wilson and Kelly Jeffs.

In 1997 Elizabeth Tyson-Donoley wrote, directed and performed in the one-woman shows *In A Corner Bed*, opening for women's physical theatre company Glued at the Princess Theatre, and *The Seven Year Chaos*, for Shock of the New Festival at La Boite Theatre.

Elizabeth Tyson-Donoley completed a Bachelor of Film and Television Production at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University in 2003, and worked as a production designer for various independent short and feature film projects in and around Brisbane. In 2010 her short play *Dessert Pears* was produced by Short and Sweet Theatre Festival in Brisbane and Sydney. She currently lives in Brisbane and works as an administrator at Griffith University.

## **PRODUCTION HISTORY**

### *Running Away With The Dog – A Work In Progress*

The Magnificent Girl was first performed as a work in progress under the working title Running Away With The Dog. It was produced by Red Boots Dancing Theatre Company and performed at Metro Arts Theatre in Brisbane on 8th June 1995 and ran for two weeks.

Red Boots Dancing Theatre Company consisted of the following cast:

|           |                         |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| BETH      | Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley |
| JAY       | B.J. Cole               |
| MUSICIANS | Gary Wilson             |
|           | Kelly Jeffs             |

Musical score composed by Gary Wilson

Music performed live by Kelly Jeffs and Gary Wilson

Devised and Directed by Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley and B.J. Cole

Script Editing by Matthew Hornsey

Set Design by Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley, Toni Tyson-Doneley and Geoff Corbett

Lighting Design by Amy Barrett

Lights supplied by Kooemba Jdarra

Poster Design by Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley

Produced by Metro Arts and Red Boots Dancing Theatre Company

B.J. Cole was pregnant throughout rehearsals and for the duration of the run. The program featured a dedication to B.J.'s unborn baby - 'the silent and wiggly presence in all our rehearsals.' The play was produced independently, with the support of Metro Arts, friends, family, community organizations, and volunteer stage crew and front of house staff.

The show ran for two hours and included a fairytale told in sequential parts called The Adventures of Princess Pea. The fairytale was later separated out from the main body of the text and performed as a stand-alone piece. The script for The Magnificent Girl emerged from the largely autobiographical writing central to the theme of the play.

The set design was constructed out of junk and salvage materials sourced from the Mt. Nebo rubbish dump. The inspiration was that of a rustic, rambling Queenslander, with space

underneath the house and a huge backyard, scattered with old car parts, timber and tools. Large sheets of corrugated iron, painted a rusty red, lined the stage area, with bales of straw on stage and throughout the theatre. A stainless steel kitchen sink sat on top of a wooden cart with a bucket under the drain, and dried corncobs with their husks splayed out lined the walls. A clothesline that was percussive when pulled stretched across the rear of the stage. The musicians sat underneath it in their open shed, 'stars' twinkling above them.

In the final scene, Roof Tops, the theatre took on the magical atmosphere of a rooftop on a summer's night. The music played by Gary Wood and Kelly Jeffs combined with the storytelling created a breathtaking, hypnotic effect.

### *The Magnificent Girl*

The Magnificent Girl was first performed by Red Boots Dancing Theatre Company at the RSL Hall, Nash Street, in the Brisbane suburb of Rosalie, on 19th October 1996 and ran on selected dates up until the second week in November.

Red Boots Dancing Theatre Company consisted of the following cast:

|           |                            |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| BETH      | Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley    |
| JAY       | B.J. Cole                  |
| MUSICIANS | Gary Wilson<br>Kelly Jeffs |

Musical score composed by Gary Wilson

Music performed live by Kelly Jeffs and Gary Wilson

Devised and Directed by Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley and B.J. Cole

Set Design by Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley

Poster Design by Elizabeth Tyson-Doneley

Produced by Red Boots Dancing Theatre Company

The venue provided a stage and seating area, with a small bar and foyer, but no lighting. The stage was lit with fluorescent lights only and the audience area darkened. The Magnificent Girl was performed, and following an interval, The Adventures of Princess Pea, exhausting the two performers and extending the duration of the overall program. The set consisted of a rambling, junkyard design made less effective by the absence of proper stage lighting. It was a difficult run without adequate funding or production support, but it proved to be beneficial

in advancing the play's script development. An integral part of the rehearsal process was the generous support of B.J. Cole, a NIDA graduate, whose expertise in acting and voice lifted the quality of the show's performances.

The production was infused by a community feel, strengthened by the local venue in which the performance took place, and by a fundraising night dedicated to Queensland lighting designer Frances Macken, who had recently passed away after a long battle with cancer. Money raised at the performance on 20<sup>th</sup> October was donated to Queensland Theatre Company's Friends of Frances Fund to assist in the welfare of her four surviving children.

The Magnificent Girl gave rise to a great theatre yarn. On the performance of 26<sup>th</sup> October an electrical storm hit the suburb of Rosalie as the play was being performed. Rain belted against the corrugated iron roof of the RSL Hall, a challenge for the voices of both performers. A clattering of windows and doors being closed could also be heard in the hall. In Scene Twelve - Bliss, the character of Jay recounts the story of her body splitting wide open and 'the sky, the stars, the moon, the trees, the ocean, the sun, the rain, the thunder, the plants, the mountains, the whole universe was just sucked into my body, filling my entire being.' As though on queue, the real storm that was occurring outside intensified with flashes of lightning, loud rumbling, cracking thunder, and heavy pouring rain, shocking and exhilarating both the audience and performers.

## **CHARACTERS**

BETH – A woman in her early to mid twenties

JAY – A woman in her early to mid thirties, a mother of young children

## **SETTING**

The action takes place in the present, interspersed with scenes that reflect on times past, with an emphasis on memories of childhood and adolescence. The play is in one act, set in Queensland, Australia. The present day sequences are set in Brisbane. The scenes involving memories draw on the Queensland country town experience, in particular Maryborough. A scene recalling early childhood refers to an experience in Darwin. In Act One, the action takes place in Beth's bedroom, Jay's kitchen and a shared, imaginative space, where memories, reflections, and new possibilities are brought to life.

## **MUSIC**

There is an area on stage for the musicians. Live original music played with any combination of percussion instruments, toy instruments, guitar, keyboard, bits of junk, drums, brass, glass jars, strings and woodwind, provides a soundscape for each scene. The music is a subtle undertone to the spoken word, and a soundtrack to the more physical scenes.

## **MOVEMENT**

Movement is important in the play, with some entirely physical scenes. This provides an opportunity for actors to explore movement, but also for actors/dancers to approach these scenes as choreographed dance sequences.

## **PRODUCTION HINTS**

For The Dough Stomping Dance, the dough can be ordered from a professional baker for each night of the production.

The set design can incorporate moveable parts that make percussive sound when activated.

## **ACT ONE**

### **SCENE ONE – Naked Body (Self)**

*BETH is in her bedroom.*

**BETH:** I stare at my naked body for hours, searching the patterns of my skin. My red, mud pie muscles. My ghost gum bones. My soft hairs that grow quietly in the shade. My adventurous hairs. My crazy, wire hairs. I look at my fatty spots and my fine spots. I watch where the racetrack of my body curves around, stretches out and stops short. I look at all the different colours in my eyes and wonder how they've ever been classified on my driver's license. I look at my freckles, my scars, my red blotches and dark circles. I look at the clever folds, coverings and contraptions of my genital organs. I trace my fluorescent green vein with my finger and then become lost in the secret sensitivities of my hands. I look at my body closely, examining all the things that make my body mine, and not simply female.

*(The following can be adapted to suit the actor's own body. Are your nipples apricots or plums? Are your teeth straight like a white picket fence? What does your belly look like? Your feet?)*

This breast is smaller than this one. This ear is different to this one. My shoulder blades, nearly slicing the skin that covers them. My small, apricot nipples. My crooked teeth, like a row of run down terrace houses.

I study my physical features for hours, poking and stroking them, learning them off by heart.

### **SCENE TWO – Bicycles**

*JAY and BETH are centre stage. Bicycles music starts.*

**JAY:** When I was a girl, and my body was small and uncertain, I learnt how to ride a bicycle, first with training wheels, and then without, sitting on the glittery seat, pedalling and steering, rainbow streamers flying from the handlebars. It was exhilarating, the fresh air, the freedom. I could go anywhere I wanted to. I was a girl with my own bike.

**BETH:** Bicycles, endless streams of bicycles, uniting the young and eccentric.

**JAY:** BMX, three gears, ten gears, a thousand gears...

**BETH:** Silver Streak

**JAY:** Red Star

**BETH:** Blue Bandit

**JAY:** Hitting your front bum against the boy's bar when you ride your brother's bike.

**BETH:** Stacking it. Grazed knees. Palms of the hands, red and burning. Grease from the bike chain in a dash across the leg.

**JAY:** Dinky rides, sitting on the handlebars. The cool kids riding with no hands.

**BETH:** The little kids pretending to fly, their arms stretched out like wings.

**JAY:** The graduates of this humble learning have left their Black Beauties, their space machines, their aeroplanes and mighty inventions, all of them coated in sparkly paint, for a taller, sleeker bicycle, with thin tyres and a sensible seat.

**BETH:** Heavy school bag squashed under the silver paper rack. Seat wet with three o'clock sweat.

**JAY:** Clusters of friends breaking out of single file. Bells tinkling, speed racing along the bike track, voices like red ribbons flying over their heads.

**BETH:** The modest arrangement of the skirt tucked tightly under the bum, to allow the lifting of the legs without the flashing of the undies.

**JAY:** Teenagers riding side by side, hiding their blushing smiles in the oncoming wind. They travel slowly, extending the time that they spend together, so that each moment can be wistfully recollected in the middle of a dreamy night.

**BETH:** Indicate with a bare arm, signet ring on the middle finger, hair flicking back in ponytail wisps that lick the cobalt blue sky.

**JAY:** The fear of magpie attacks in the hot summer months of the nesting season.

**BETH:** The pain in the throat, the frozen cheeks and fingers, when riding against a winter gale.

**JAY:** Every road, path and intersection congested with peddling legs, bodies leaning forward with muscular exertion.

**BETH:** Everyone on a bicycle wants the same thing. Home. The bag dropping, a cold drink, bare feet and the television.

**JAY:** All things of fun and importance, the places seen, the friends visited..

**BETH:** ...the private escapes, the daring adventures, all of it made possible by the loyal workings of a girl's bicycle.

### **SCENE THREE - Imagination**

*JAY is in her kitchen.*

**JAY:** I suppose you could say that I'm an everyday sort of person, an average person who does average things. But that's just on the surface. When I'm washing the dishes, pulling clumps of hair out of the bathroom plug hole, getting dressed, and waiting for the toast to pop up, I'm thinking about so much. I'm feeling so much. I've travelled the world in my head. I've experienced things, spoken to different people and tasted different things. I know the meaning of life. Life is about occupying yourself well. It's about compassion, creativity, love, imagination and magic. I'm not saying I'm the only person in the world who knows the meaning of life. I'm sure everybody knows. But when you've got bills to pay, and the baby to feed, and the house to clean, and your job to go to, and whatever addiction you have to kick, it's easy to forget why you're here. I just can't ever seem to keep in touch with that grounded part of myself, the part of me that's in a state of rapturous wonder with the whole universe.

*BETH is in her bedroom.*

**BETH:** When I was a little girl, we lived in Darwin, and my days were spent outdoors. My parents gave us a big, orange trampoline for Christmas, and my sister and I played on it every

day. One of us would sit on the corner bar, dangling our legs through the hole and chewing on Hubba Bubba, while the other one bounced, doing tricks and belly flops.

We had a swing set too. I used to sit on the swing for hours, daydreaming and thinking, feeling my life beginning. I'd swing as high as I could, making my hair fly back and the wind rush inside my ears. It felt like I was flying. My eyes and my cheeks would be full of the sky. I'd stay on the swing for so long that when I let go of the chains, my hands would be brown with rust and so stiff that it hurt to open them.

In the backyard, we had a swimming pool shaped like a kidney. I loved swimming, floating on my back in the water, watching the chicken hawks circling above me. I'd swim in the storms of the wet season, rain pouring down into the pool. I'd swim at night, listening to the bats in the banana trees. I'd dive down deep and swim towards the orange light that was built into the concrete wall of the pool, brushing my hand through all the little specks of dust and drowned insect. What I loved most about swimming underwater was the privacy. I could go anywhere in my head and there'd be nobody around to snap me out of it.

#### **SCENE FOUR – Girls Swimming Underwater**

*JAY and BETH are centre stage. Girls Swimming Underwater music starts.*

**JAY:** Girls swimming underwater, their one-piece bathing suits hanging madly onto their twisting, turning, gliding bodies.

**BETH:** Their glossy heads bob below the brightly lit surface, with sailboat lashes resting at half-mast. They have conversations that nobody else can hear.

**JAY:** They tell each other secrets, and see who can hold their breath the longest.

**BETH:** You can see them somersaulting, frontways and backways, stretching out, doing handstands, tiny bubbles on the surface of their skin.

**JAY:** Their black-olive-scarlet-white-lemon-pink-brown bodies never stop moving, as their enormous minds tug and push them in a million directions at once.

**BETH:** Noses peeling, hands and feet wrinkled, they look for shiny objects on the bottom of the pool, that at a single glance become oysters with pearls in the centre, gold coins, magic stones...

**JAY:** ...silver pieces, jewels from a sea queen's crown, tiny people, third eyes, and shells with stardust inside.

**BETH:** Olympic swimming pool, with the racing clock at one end, and the rows of brightly coloured plastic flags, flapping from the tall, steel posts.

**JAY:** Sitting on the lane ropes, diving in, goggles sticking like clusters of tiny suckerfish around the eyes.

**BETH:** An army of microscopic scuba divers, their seaweed hair gets lost in the depths, as they watch the slow and awkward movements of anonymous swimmers.

**JAY:** Listening to the strange, moaning underwater sounds, a chorus of sleepy clams.

**BETH:** Fingers pulling down the backs of bathing suits over round jellyfish bottoms.

**JAY:** With their sunburnt noses atop their smooth sandcastle, sticky icy-pole faces, they call out...

**BETH:** Hey Sharon!

**JAY:** ...they sing..

**BETH and JAY:** (*singing*) 'Feed the world. Let them know it's Christmas time.'

**JAY:** ..they whisper..(*whispering loudly*) Sharon's getting tits!

**BETH:** They call out, not to be rescued by the swimming coaches, stalking the side strips of concrete to catch the naughty runners with big, sun-screened hands. They call out just to be heard, just once. Talking underwater for all this time has left their little lungs tired, their stomachs full of bugs and chlorine.

**JAY:** Hot urine squirts from the babies relaxed too suddenly by their milky surrounds. The smell of plastic floaties and lilos, polystyrene surfboards, kickboards and whistles. Wet towels whipping bare legs in strange and frequent rituals of flirtation. Water bombs. Big kids splashing little kids with nuclear force, making the babies cry and the mothers get ‘Very angry.’

**BETH:** And all through this summer frenzy of odd behaviours and loud disruptions, the fatty, fish girls swim deeper still, whispering, calling out, and relishing in their never-ending journeys of imaginary places.

### **SCENE FIVE – Protection**

**JAY:** I watch my baby daughter swimming in the pool from my mother’s arms to me. I lift her up in the air and cheer for her when she’s made it. When she’s swum that little long way. I wonder what the world has in store for her. It’s like I want to see it all before it happens so that I can selectively protect her from things. Sometimes I send out warnings to the universe. ‘Stay away from her. If you hurt my little girl I will kill you.’ I try not to be too overly protective. There’s just so much to worry about. When I was a girl, I had such unrealistic expectations of what all of this would be like. They were just romantic notions really. They were so ridiculous. I’m amazed at how happy I am with the reality.

**BETH:** I think of all the mothers of mothers of mothers, bustling in their dressing gowns and slippers, inventing the right way of doing things. Practicing the smack, the warning voice, the pointing finger, the sense of ‘Well, you really ought to.’ Women as mothers as household appliances, dressed in white aprons, imitating their newest white goods. Breaking down in secrecy, in the privacy of a sit on the toilet, or in the sewing room, grateful for the white Kleenex that is always kept tucked into the top of the bra for such occasions.

I think of that sound my mother made when she was rolling dough, that sound of nostrils deep in thought, of air being sucked in and blown out, compensating for tightly closed lips. I think of all that heartache and disappointment poured into the production of homemade ice blocks, with a little help from Tupperware. As a small girl, I would hurry from room to room, rescuing my toys from the path of the vacuum cleaner or the Mr. Sheen. I would sit on the island of our couch, and watch my mother sail the rough seas of cleanliness and practicality, not moving an inch, for fear that I would be sprayed with Windex and rinsed in boiling water.



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