

# HUNGRY GHOSTS

BY JEAN TONG



**MTC** MELBOURNE  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

# HUNGRY GHOSTS

BY JEAN TONG

3 — 19 MAY

SOUTHBANK THEATRE, THE LAWLER  
WORLD PREMIERE

— Cast —

Emina Ashman  
Jing-Xuan Chan  
Bernard Sam

— Production —

Director Petra Kalive  
Set Designer Eugyeene Teh  
Costume Designer Sophie Woodward  
Lighting Designer Emma Valente  
Composer & Sound Designer Darius Kedros  
Movement Director Lyndall Grant  
Lighting Secondment Marty Shlansky  
Sound Secondment Rory Tyzack  
Directing Secondments Karla Livingston-Pardy, Ryan A. Murphy  
Stage Manager Lisette Drew  
Production Photographer Jeff Busby

— About the play —

When you're a young queer Chinese-Malaysian Australian, how do you work out where you belong in the world? Criss-crossing between our unnamed protagonist, the disappearance of flight MH370 and an unsolved mystery, *Hungry Ghosts* offers an unconventional take on the complexities of contemporary life.

*Hungry Ghosts* was commissioned with the support of the Joan & Peter Clemenger Trust. Developed with the support of The Cybec Foundation through MTC's Cybec Electric Playreading Series as part of the 2017 AsiaTOPA Festival, directed by Mark Zhuang Yi and read by Emina Ashman, Jing-Xuan Chan and Gareth Yuen.

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which Southbank Theatre, MTC HQ and Arts Centre Melbourne stand, and we pay our respects to Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors past and present, and to our shared future.





*Jing-Xuan Chan (top), Bernard Sam and Emina Ashman*

## From the playwright

JEAN TONG



*Jing-Xuan Chan*

### **When did you first realise that your three parallel stories in *Hungry Ghosts* could work together in a full-length play?**

I'd been interested in 1MDB and MH370 for a while, but couldn't quite pinpoint what it was about those events that interested me. Then in early 2016, I came across a conspiracy theory about how some individuals involved in 1MDB might have instigated the disappearance of MH370 due to certain passengers' knowledge about the financial scandal. Something clicked then – the nature of grasping at straws during a tragedy, the scale of the financial operations and volume of assets, my physical distance from home and inability to fully contribute to the discussions that were unfolding about the country's socio-politics – it fell into place so suddenly. I noticed that the common thread seemed to be a

sense of loss, or an inability to speak due to either the suppression or lack of knowledge, or the wistful melancholy for something missing. The writing unfolded from there; the beginning of the process was just me making lists about how these three things were like each other, whether in terms of abstract concepts like loss and distance, or more tangible things like coinciding dates and personal experiences of flying with Malaysia Airlines.

### **What interests you about the exploration of identity in your writing?**

I enjoy when identity fluctuates. I think people are increasingly discovering highly specific ways of identifying themselves and figuring out how to talk about the way they experience the world. However, I'm really interested in the outliers of these categories; when and why

do these labels fail, and what other expectations come with those new identities or categories? Language is intoxicatingly powerful, but incredibly slippery: who are we with it, and who are we without it? I hope that my writing opens up some spaces on all of those levels – finding the words to say who we are, but also realising that those words may not (and should not) always be able to dictate who we are.

### **What are the overarching themes in this new play?**

It's about belonging and non-belonging, the terse relationship between desire (wanting something) and greed (wanting everything) and collective group identity (family and nationhood).

## From the director

PETRA KALIVE



Jean Tong is a fiercely intelligent playwright with something to say. *Hungry Ghosts*' complexity is at once exciting and terrifying.

In Chinese Buddhism, 'hungry ghosts' are beings driven by intense emotional needs and only manifest from tragedy or 'evil deeds'. Further back, in very early Chinese and Vietnamese mythology, hungry ghosts are those who have been deceitful, greedy people and their

karma is an insatiable hunger. Jean Tong's hungry ghosts are seekers, but they also exist in and embody corruption, another central tenet of the play.

I hope to create a work that is emotionally affective, a piece of theatre that agitates, and connects with its audience.

**'Language is intoxicatingly powerful, but incredibly slippery:  
who are we with it, and who are we without it?'**

JEAN TONG



Bernard Sam, Jing-Xuan Chan and Emina Ashman



## Cast & Creative Team



**EMINA ASHMAN**

Cast

Emina Ashman is a Malaysian-Australian actor, theatre-maker and writer based in Melbourne. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in theatre practice at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2014 and completed her Honours at VCA in 2017. For Melbourne Theatre Company, Emina previously appeared in *Moths* and *Hungry Ghosts* as part of Cybec Electric. Other theatre credits include *Bock Kills Her Father* (She Said Theatre/La Mama); *Tales of a City by the Sea* (La Mama); *Lotus* (Playwrights Australia/Malthouse Theatre - National Play Festival); *Roberto Zucco* (Le Poulet Terrible/La Mama); and *Too Ready Mirror* (Darebin Arts Speakeasy). Stage credits while training at VCA include *The Little Prince*, *Plus Sign Attached*, *Lucky Country* (Melbourne Fringe). Film credits include *Love Automated* written by Melanie Killingsworth. Emina is also a poet and playwright and has had her work featured at Beta Fest: Theatre in Various States of Undress, the VCA Master of Writing for Performance Presentations and most recently, on Melbourne Spoken Word. Emina is a proud member of MEAA.



**JING-XUAN CHAN**

Cast

Jing-Xuan Chan graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2006. During her studies she received the Irene Mitchell Award for outstanding performance, the Orloff Family Charitable Trust Scholarship for outstanding commitment to training, and the Friends of the Victorian College of the Arts New Emerging Talent Award. She has since worked for various theatre companies including Melbourne Theatre Company, Red Stitch, and Malthouse Theatre; she has also performed in productions both locally and overseas including *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *The Three Sisters*, *Criminology*, *Othello*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Green Room Award nominated for Best Ensemble), *Incognito*, and *Wit* (for which she was nominated for a Green Room Award). Her television and film credits include *City Homicide*, *The Family Law*, *Dirt Game*, *Winners and Losers*, and *Happy Country*. Jing-Xuan has also attained her A.T.C.L Associate Diploma in Speech and Drama and aside from acting, enjoys lending her voice to narrating audio books and audio plays.



**BERNARD SAM**

Cast

Born in Melbourne and raised in Malaysia, Bernard Sam holds a degree in Psychology from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and a degree in Theatre Practice from the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). While at the VCA, Bernard performed in *Mother Courage & Her Children* (dir. Chris Kohn); as Creon in *Antigone* (dir. Melanie Beddie); Doctor Chebutykin in *Three Sisters* (dir. Melanie Beddie); and Stevie Sprague in *The Boys* (dir. Alister Smith). Bernard devised and performed in *NEVER for FRISK*, presented as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival 2017. Outside of the VCA, Bernard worked with Malthouse Theatre in researching and developing *Little Emperors* for the 2017 Asia TOPA festival. For the same festival, Bernard also performed with the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company in *Dancing with Death* (Arts Centre Melbourne). Since graduating from the VCA, Bernard participated in the development of *Hungry Ghosts* earlier in 2017 and is thrilled to have joined the cast at Melbourne Theatre Company.



Jing-Xuan Chan, Bernard Sam and Emina Ashman; (right) Emina Ashman

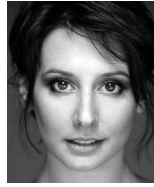
## Cast & Creative Team



**JEAN TONG**

Playwright

Jean Tong is a Melbourne-based writer whose work, tonally best described as 'wry outrage', makes explosive statements using dark humour and vivid imagery. Her previous work includes *Romeo Is Not The Only Fruit* (Melbourne International Comedy Festival at The Coopers Malthouse); *Anti Hero* (Monash Centre for Theatre and Performance); and *Macdeath: a Coda* (Union House Theatre). She has also presented at the Emerging Writers' Festival, and published in Peril Magazine and Meanjin (*Spike*). In 2018, she was selected for Screen Australia's 'Developing the Developer' workshop, and for Film Victoria's TV and Online Concept lab (Plot Twist).



**PETRA KALIVE**

Director

Petra Kalive has extensive experience as a director and dramaturg of new works for the stage. For Melbourne Theatre Company she directed *Melbourne Talam*, *Beached* (winner of the 2010 Patrick White Award), the Cybec Electric reading of *In the Kingdom of Cha* and was Assistant Director on *Constellations*. Her acclaimed adaptation of Peter Goldsworthy's novel *Three Dog Night* toured nationally in 2009. She was dramaturg at Red Stitch from 2009 – 2012, Assistant Dramaturg at Malthouse Theatre in 2010, and Assistant Director on *Macbeth* (Sydney Theatre Company). Petra has directed for Arena Theatre Company, Complete Works Theatre Company, St Martins Youth Arts Centre, La Trobe and Monash University performing arts programs. She is currently Artistic Director of Union House Theatre at Melbourne University. Her most recent work as a director includes *Redemption* by Anthony Crowley (La Mama), *Macbeth and Macdeath: a Coda* (Union House Theatre) and the much-acclaimed *Taxithi* which played two sell-out seasons at fortyfivedownstairs.

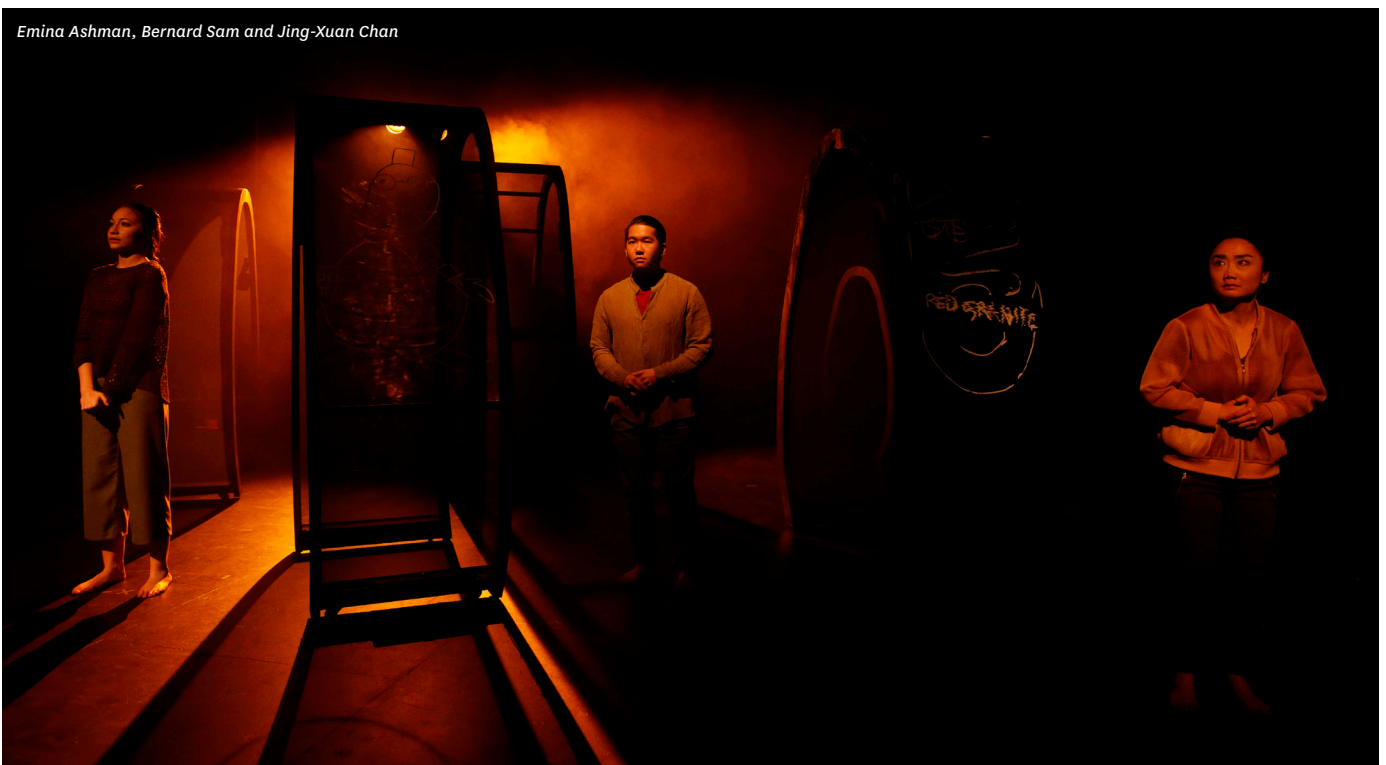


**EUGYEENE TEH**

Set Designer

Eugyeene Teh is a designer across multiple artforms. Recent design credits include *Abigail's Party*, *Endgame* and *Straight White Men* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Blaque Showgirls*, *Meme Girls*, *A Social Service* and *Approximate Translation* (Malthouse Theatre). As a co-artistic director of Little Ones Theatre, his many designs include *The Happy Prince*, *Merciless Gods* (with Griffin Theatre Company); *Dracula*, *Dangerous Liaisons* (with MTC NEON); *Salome* (with Malthouse Helium); *Psycho Beach Party* and *The House of Yes*. For MKA, his designs include *The Trouble with Harry*, *The Unspoken Word is 'Joe'* (Griffin Theatre Company); *Triangle* and *sex.violence.blood.gore*. Other recent credits include Melbourne Festival's *Lady Eats Apple* (Back to Back); *Book of Exodus Part II* (Fraught Outfit); *Exil* and *The Howling Girls* (Sydney Chamber Opera); *In Between Two* for Sydney and Melbourne Festivals, *The Moors* (Red Stitch); and *Coloured Aliens* (La Mama). Eugyeene received a Green Room Award with seven previous nominations. He is also a recipient of the Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship.

*Emina Ashman, Bernard Sam and Jing-Xuan Chan*



## Cast & Creative Team



**SOPHIE WOODWARD**  
Costume Designer

Sophie Woodward is MTC's Wardrobe Co-ordinator and after *Hungry Ghosts* is working as Dale Ferguson's Design Associate on *An Ideal Husband*. She graduated with a Bachelor of Production (Design) from VCA in 2010 winning the Beleura John Tallis Design Award in her final year. Since then she has designed *Rules for Living*, *You got Older*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Honey Bees*, *The Village Bike*, *Wet House*, *Love Love Love*, *4,000 Miles* and *Day One*, *A Hotel*, *Evening* (Red Stitch); *The One* (PoppySeed Festival/FortyFive Downstairs); *The Pyjama Girl* and *Letters from the Border* (Hothouse Theatre); *A Long Day's Dying*, *Conspiracy*, *Patient 12* and *The Savages of Wirramai* (La Mama); *Between the Clouds* (ATYP/HotHouse Theatre); *Extinction* (Red Stitch/GPAC); *Love Song* (Melbourne Fringe); and *Glorious*, *Educating Rita*, *Shirley Valentine*, *Always Patsy Cline* and *All My Love* (HiT Productions). Sophie also works as a stylist, styling the images for MTC's subscription season brochure for the last three years. One of her music videos was awarded the J Award Australian Music Video of the Year in 2015.



**EMMA VALENTE**  
Lighting Designer

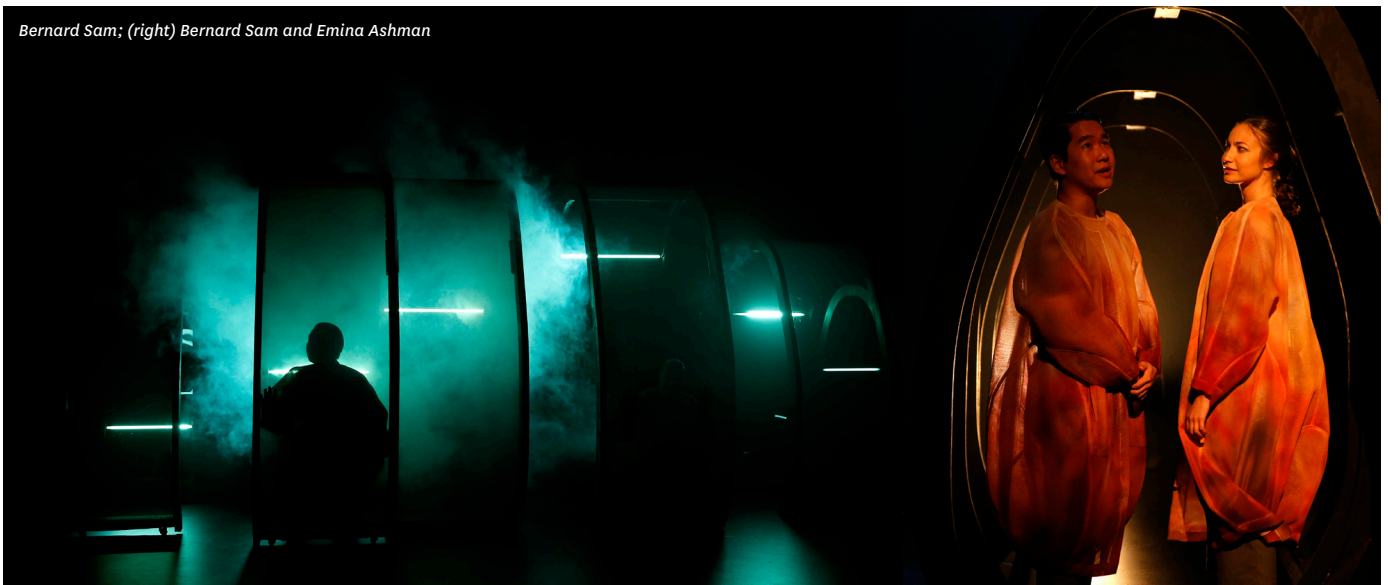
Emma Valente is a freelance director, dramaturg, lighting designer and video designer. She is the Co-Artistic Director of THE RABBLE. For MTC she has previously worked on *Lilith: the Jungle Girl*, *The Golden Dragon*, *Story of O* (NEON), *Twin* (NEON), *Calamity!* (NEON) and as a teaching artist for *In And Out of Worlds* a collaboration between MTC Education and DECV. For THE RABBLE Emma has lit and directed: *Joan*, *Cain and Abel*, *In The Bleak Midwinter*, *Deathly/ Death/ Dead*, *Frankenstein*, *Room of Regret*, *Story of O*, *Special*, *The Bedroom Project*, *Salome* and *Cageling* and is currently working on *Lone*, *Unwoman* and *Ulysses*. Emma's other lighting design credits include *Testament of Mary* and *Manna* (STC); *Little Emperors*, and *Revolt She Said*. *Revolt Again* (Malthouse Theatre); *Wizard of Oz* (Belvoir), *Exodus Part 1* (Fraught Outfit); *Podium Dance* (Arts House); *More Female Parts* (Arts Centre Melbourne); *When the Pictures Came* (Terrapin Puppet Theatre); *Here* (Women's Circus); *Bare Witness* (La Mama); *For a Better World* (Griffin Theatre); and *The Lower Depths* (Ariette Taylor).



**DARIUS KEDROS**  
Composer & Sound Designer

Working across theatre, installation, virtual reality, radio/podcast, and the founder of the Melbourne based immersive sound experience company, Sonic State Design, Darius Kedros has previously composed and designed the sound for *Melbourne Talam* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Big Heart* (Dee & Cornelius/Theatre Works); and the Helpmann nominated *Mother* (If Theatre/Belvoir). He has also made work for the ABC's Radio National, Festival of Live Art, Scienceworks, Federation Square, Melbourne International Film Festival, Melbourne Music Week, The Wheeler Centre, and Asia TOPA. Relocating from the UK in 2013 his northern hemisphere credits include The Rambert Dance Company, Momentum Pictures, BBC, and Virgin Records. Darius has recently been nominated for a Green Room Award for Composition & Sound Design in *Melbourne Talam* (MTC).

Bernard Sam; (right) Bernard Sam and Emina Ashman



MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne.

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MTC is a member of Live Performance Australia and the Australian Major Performing Arts Group.

