

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a grey sweater, holds a black Canon video camera with both hands. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a warm, orange-toned wall with a large, dark shadow of her head and shoulders cast behind her. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

# WORKING WITH CHILDREN

BY NICOLA GUNN

**MTCC** MELBOURNE  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

# Welcome



Following her acclaimed *Green Screen* as part of NEON Festival 2014, it is a great pleasure to welcome Nicola Gunn back to MTC and present her latest creation, *Working With Children*.

Nicola is one of Australia's most innovative theatre makers, creating incisive contemporary performance works that are sought after internationally.

She has an unrivalled ability to combine several art forms to enhance the performance narrative and tell complex stories, often exploring moral and ethical situations with her signature subversive humour.

To have the world premiere of *Working With Children* as part of our 2018 Season is a great thrill, as is the news that the work will have its international premiere in Seattle at On The Boards in February 2019.

At MTC we are committed to supporting independent artists in the development, production and showcase of their works and have done so through various successful collaborations in recent years. *Working With Children* is an example of these partnerships, as a work commissioned and produced through our NEON NEXT initiative.

Enjoy this world premiere production.

Brett Sheehy AO  
Artistic Director & CEO

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

MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne.



MTC is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria.



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MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

# WORKING WITH CHILDREN

BY NICOLA GUNN

30 AUGUST — 29 SEPTEMBER 2018

Southbank Theatre, The Lawler

— About the play —

Imagine a woman who works with children. Now imagine a man who works with children. The woman has a secret she is incredibly ashamed of, while the man says and does things in private that he wouldn't want made public ... *Working with Children* uses the moral and ethical ambiguities of working with children to explore the relationship between language and the (sexualised) body, and between naming and authority.

— Creative Team —

**Concept, Text, Direction, Design & Performance** Nicola Gunn

**AV & Spatial Design** Nick Roux

**Music & Sound Design** Kelly Ryall

**Lighting & Spatial Design** Bosco Shaw

**Costume Design & Co-Set Realisation** Eugyeene Teh

**Associate Artist** Sarah Aiken

**Script Dramaturg** Jon Haynes

**Stage Manager** Meg Richardson

**Rehearsals Assistant Stage Manager** Emma Barbaro

**Rehearsal & Production Photographer** Sarah Walker

**Acknowledgements:** For ongoing conversations about this project, I am indebted to Cristian Stefanescu and Claire Acevedo. I would also like to thank Sarah Austin, Clare Bartholomew, Luke George, Emma Hall, Pol Heyvaert, Daniel Sack and Emma Valente for their valued thoughts at points throughout the process. And finally, some of the ideas that informed this work came about during a creative development with Tamara Saulwick. — Nicola Gunn

For information regarding running time, please see a member of the Front of House team.

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An MTC NEON NEXT commission

Cover Photo: Justin Ridler



*Nicola Gunn in rehearsal*



# CHILDREN IN PERFORMANCE

Sarah Austin, a PhD candidate at VCA researching children in contemporary performance, sheds some light on the implications of featuring children in theatre.

The last ten years has seen the rapid rise of contemporary and experimental performance works that feature children on stage as performers and collaborators, and that are created specifically for adult audiences. We have seen children giving haircuts to adults, young girls dancing with grown men, a political party created by children to address children's policy concerns, an army of teenage girls on stage with a male bodybuilder and an ensemble of children echoing the common phrases that their parents use to explain the world to them. These works are critically acclaimed, some are made by Australian artists and all stage ideas of childhood and children that challenge or intervene in the way we are conditioned to perceive childhood.

Childhood is a concept which has been articulated and defined by artists, social commentators and theorists throughout history. The understanding that childhood is not simply a biological reality but a cultural construction was articulated in 1960 by French historian of childhood Philippe

Ariès.<sup>1</sup> More recent childhood scholars point to increasingly conservative and anxiety driven attitudes towards the vulnerability of children<sup>2</sup> and it is possible to argue that these understandings have been used by artists to exploit our collective anxieties and concerns.

The historic involvement of children in the entertainment industry has been consistently surrounded by controversy<sup>3</sup>. While children have been employed variously as skilled performers and 'scenic adornment'<sup>4</sup> in a range of artistic practices over the decades, their function is often as a symbol of innocence or wickedness, or they serve as reminders of our own mortality or as placeholders for possible futures. Childhood itself is a material social practice shot through with the effects of the social, political and environmental context. A child in a performance context intersects with (and therefore sometimes frustrates or alters) representational practices and can destabilise some of the underlying neoliberal and heteronormative logic that underpins their image. For example, the common image of the child as 'a hope for the future' imagines the child as part of a temporality that progresses in a linear fashion; the child is an unfinished being, in a process of becoming and existing in a vacuum outside of history and outside of adulthood.<sup>5</sup>

The practice of creating experimental and contemporary performance brings all these potent symbolic and political representational notions around children to bear, and echoes the more recent paradigm shift in childhood studies that posits ►







*Nick Roux and Bosco Shaw; (above) Meg Richardson, Eugene Teh and Bosco Shaw;  
(opposite) Nick Roux, Meg Richardson and Nicola Gunn*





'Unfortunately I am a completely impractical person, caught up in endless trains of thought. All of us are fantasists, ill-equipped for life, the children as much as myself. It seems to me sometimes that we never get used to being on this earth and life is just one great, ongoing, incomprehensible blunder.'

— WG Sebald from *Rings of Saturn*



children as socially and biologically unfinished bodies<sup>6</sup> towards children as agents who are shaped by but also have the capability to shape society.<sup>7</sup> Performance studies scholar Isis Germano argues that the current interest in child performers by theatre and dance practitioners provides a fertile ground to examine childhood's complex relation to the production of normalcy and strangeness regarding the human itself.<sup>8</sup>

The proliferation of performance work in Australia featuring children on stage also occurs in the context of a specific social moment surrounding the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse, which means almost daily unthinkable horrific, historical crimes against children are confirmed and broadcast and

enter the public consciousness. As this unfolds, institutions have responded with policies and legislation designed to increase protection and safeguard children from possible and perceived harm. The Victorian government introduced the Child Safe Standards, which became legislation in 2016, which effect all organisations and individuals working with children. As institutions become more risk-averse it is possible to see the vulnerability paradigm that circles around ideas of children and childhood at play. Whilst these standards exist to protect children, it is important to ask what this might mean for children rights and whether it will diminish the capacity of children to act as agents of culture and to be heard and taken seriously on matters that effect them. ■



### SARAH AUSTIN

Sarah Austin is a PhD candidate at the Victorian College of the Arts researching children in contemporary performance. She is a Research Associate at the School of Culture and Communication (University of Melbourne) on an ARC funded project investigating Disability Arts Practice in Australia and an award-winning artist making performance work with, by and for children and young people. This is an extract from Sarah's paper that won the 2018 Veronica Kelly Prize at the Australasian Drama Studies Conference in June.

### Endnotes

- 1 Ariès, Philippe (1962) *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick, New York: Vintage
- 2 Budd, Natasha (2004) *Staging Childhoods: Experiments in authentic theatre making practice with children*, QUT (Thesis)
- 3 Budd 2004: 21
- 4 Davis, Tracy C. 1986: "The employment of children in the Victorian theatre", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2 (06): 177-135
- 5 Halbertsam, Judith (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham: Duke University Press; Edelman, Lee (2005) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press
- 6 Shilling Chris (1993) *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage Publications, London
- 7 James, Alison and Prout, James (eds) (2015), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood; contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, Routledge, London and New York
- 8 Germano, Isis (2018) 'So Cute, So Creepy: Children Undoing the human in Het Hamiltoncomplex', *Performance Research*, 2018, 23 1, p44-p51,



(Below) Nicola Gunn; (opposite from top) Nicola Gunn with Meg Richardson; Kelly Ryall



‘There is hardly an action we perform in our youth that we don’t later long to annul. But what we ought to regret is not the actions of the past, but the fact that we no longer possess the spontaneity that made us perform them. Adolescence is the only period in which we learn anything.’

— Marcel Proust from *Within a Budding Grove*

# Creative Team



## NICOLA GUNN

Concept, Text, Direction,  
Design & Performance

Nicola Gunn is an award-winning writer, director, performer and designer, who combines text, choreography and visual art to make contemporary performance in response to a self-generated impulse to tell a story or explore a form. Her work has toured across Europe, North America, New Zealand and throughout Australia. Most recently she created *Mermermer* with choreographer Jo Lloyd for Chunky Move; *Piece for Person* and *Ghetto Blaster* for Performing Lines/Mobile States; *A Social Service* for Malthouse Theatre; *Green Screen* for MTC's NEON Festival; *The Interpreters for Field Theory* at Alliance Française; and *In Spite of Myself* for Arts Centre Melbourne/Melbourne Festival. She has performed in the works of Ridiculusmus and Tamara Saulwick; dramaturged dance works by Luke George and Jo Lloyd; and written for Jessica Wilson and Ian Pidd. Nicola is the recipient of an Australia Council for the Arts Creative Australia Fellowship and a Churchill Fellowship. She holds a Masters of Art (Art in Public Space) from RMIT.



## NICK ROUX

AV & Spatial Design

Nick Roux is an artist working in sound, video and computer programming. He has previously worked with Nicola Gunn as sound designer for *A Social Service* (Malthouse Theatre), and *Person of Interest* (Theatre Works for FOLA). As video designer, he has created work with All the Queens Men (*Fun Run*), Chamber Made (*Diaspora*), MONA FOMA (*Faux Mo*) and Cinedans Dance Film Festival (*The Palindromist*). Together with Frieder Weiss he created real-time motion graphics for Global Creatures (*King Kong the Musical*), Mercedes Benz (*A-Class Launch*) and Take That (2015 Live Tour). He has collaborated on dance works with Luke George as sound/video/system creator (*24 Hours, Not About Face, Erotic Dance, Public Action, Group Action*) and composed sound for Aphids (*Gameshow*), Gabrielle Nankivell (*Thorn*) and All The Queens Men (*Congress*). For New Music ensemble, Speak Percussion he has designed and built bespoke instruments (*Bell Curve, Polar Force, Fluorophone*) and programmed custom software for Antony Hamilton Projects (*They Want New Language*), Rosalind Hall (*Body of People*) and Matthias Schack-Arnott (*Field Sever Points*).



## KELLY RYALL

Music & Sound Design

Kelly Ryall is an award-winning composer, musician and sound designer for theatre, dance and film. Kelly's recent work with Melbourne Theatre Company includes composition and sound design for *Di and Viv* and *Rose, Hay Fever, Three Little Words, Double Indemnity, Rupert, Peddling, The Crucible, On the Production of Monsters, Return to Earth, Dead Man's Cell Phone, God of Carnage*, and *Savage River*. His other stage credits include *Title and Deed, Kill the Messenger, Cinderella, Nora, and Hedda Gabler* (Belvoir); *Romeo and Juliet, As You Like It, Phedre, Henry IV, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, The School for Wives, and Tartuffe* (Bell Shakespeare); *Boys Will be Boys* (Sydney Theatre Company); *The House on the Lake, Emerald City, The Boys* (Sydney Festival); *And No More Shall We Part, The Floating World, Dreams in White*, (Griffin Theatre Company); *Brothers Wreck* (State Theatre Company of South Australia), *Edward II, The Shadow King, Dance of Death, The Trial* (Malthouse Theatre); *Scenes from a Marriage* (Queensland Theatre); *You Animal, You* (Force Majeure); *Animal* (Theatre Works); *The Bacchae* (Fraught Offit, Melbourne Festival, Dark Mofo).

# Creative Team



## BOSCO SHAW

Lighting & Spatial Design

Bosco Shaw works primarily as a lighting and set designer. His interest is in work that involves bodies and movement, how light feeds and influences the performing space and collaborations that propose alternate light sources and means. He works with Paul Lim and Tom Wright as ADDITIVE, a collaborative lighting design company. Design projects include *Meeting* (Antony Hamilton); *Stampede the Stampede* (Tim Darbyshire); *Attractor* (Dance North); *It Cannot Be Stopped* (Chunky Move); *A Drone Opera* (Matthew Sleeth); *Double Blind* (Stephanie Lake); *Erotic Dance* (Luke George); *Permission to Speak* and *Between 8 and 9* (Chamber Made opera); *XO State* (Asia TOPA); *Between Tiny Cities* (Nick Power); *Nightdance* (Mel Lane); *Bangsokol* (Cambodian Living Arts); *Requiem for Cambodia*; *Faux Mo* (MONA FOMA) and *Night Mass* (Dark Mofo).



## EUGYEENE TEH

Costume Design &  
Co-Set Realisation

Eugyeene Teh is a designer across multiple artforms. Recent design credits include *Abigail's Party*, *Hungry Ghosts*, *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 Trilogy*, *Merciless Gods* (with Griffin Theatre Company); *Dracula*, *Dangerous Liaisons* (with MTC NEON Festival); *Salomé* (with Malthouse Helium); *Psycho Beach Party* and *The House of Yes*. As resident designer 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 won a Green Room Award for *The Happy Prince* and has received seven previous nominations. He is a recipient of the Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship.



## JON HAYNES

Script Dramaturg

Jon Haynes co-founded Ridiculusmus in 1992. Since then he has collaborated with Co-Artistic Director David Woods to devise and perform in all Ridiculusmus' shows, including *Tough time, nice time*, *Ideas Men*, *Say Nothing*, *Yes Yes Yes*, *The Exhibitionists*, *The Third Policeman*, *Three Men in a Boat*, *At Swim Two-Birds*, *Paranoid Household*, *Total Football*, *How to be Funny*, *The World Mouse Plague*, *The Eradication of Schizophrenia in Western Lapland*, *Give Me Your Love and Die! Die! Die! Old People Die!* With Ridiculusmus, Haynes has won awards from Time Out, Total Theatre (including a Significant Contribution award in 2014) and The Herald Angel. He has presented a substantial body of work in London at The Barbican Centre and Battersea Arts Centre, and developed work with the Royal Court and National Theatre, alongside 24 years of UK and international touring. He has been a guest lecturer at the Universities of Wolverhampton, Kent, Queen Mary College, London and many others, and given numerous talks and demonstrations at festivals and symposiums.



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