

THE ARCHITECT

BY AIDAN FENNESSY



MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

Welcome



The Architect is an example of the profound role theatre plays in helping us make sense of life and the emotional challenges we encounter as human beings.

Night after night in theatres around the world, audiences come together to experience, be moved by, discuss, and contemplate the stories playing out on stage. More often than not, these stories reflect the goings on of the world around us and leave us with greater understanding and perspective.

In this world premiere, Australian work, Aidan Fennessy details the complexity of relationships with empathy and honesty through a story that resonates with us all. In the hands of Director Peter Houghton, it has come to life beautifully.

Australian plays and new commissions are essential to the work we do at MTC and it is incredibly pleasing to see more and more of them on our stages, and to see them met with resounding enthusiasm from our audiences.

Our recently announced 2019 Season features six brilliant Australian plays that range from beloved classics like *Storm Boy* to recent hit shows such as *Black is the New White* and brand new works including the first NEXT STAGE commission to be produced, *Golden Shield*. The full season is now available for subscription so if you haven't yet had a look, head online to mtc.com.au/2019 and get your booking in.

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Artistic Director & CEO

Virginia Lovett
Executive Director & Co-CEO

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.



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



MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

THE ARCHITECT

BY AIDAN FENNESSY

27 SEPTEMBER — 31 OCTOBER 2018

Southbank Theatre, The Sumner

— About the play —

Hiring a temporary carer requires some serious vetting, and when Helen's partner John heads off on a brief overseas trip she concedes to the arrangement by appointing the least likely candidate: a dubious young drifter and jack-of-all-trades. With an incorrigible zest for life, he could be just the medicine she needs – if it wasn't for the monumental secret he's hiding. As their disparate worlds collide and an unexpected bond forms, Helen turns to Lennie to help face her reality.

— Cast —

John Stafford Nicholas Bell
Helen Pyefinch Linda Cropper
Leonard Wadsley Johnny Carr
Jeremy Pyefinch Stephen Phillips

— Creative Team —

Director Peter Houghton
Set & Costume Designer Christina Smith
Lighting Designer Matt Scott

Composer & Sound Designer J David Franzke

Set & Costume Design Secondment

Jeremy Pryles

Fight Choreographer Lyndall Grant

Stage Manager Lisette Drew

Assistant Stage Manager Pippa Wright

Rehearsal Photographer Deryk McAlpin

Production Photographer Jeff Busby

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

The Architect has been commissioned with the generous support of the Joan and Peter Clemenger Trust.

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Cover Photo: Justin Ridler

From the playwright

Aidan Fennessy



While Oscar Wilde suggested that ‘all art is quite useless’, almost a century later the Russian auteur Andrei Tarkovsky countered that ‘all art is a preparation for death’. Both are probably correct and both are strangely compatible.

Can one prepare for something as monumental as ‘non-existence’? And further, what is the point? And yet we do it all the time. Quietly. Privately. Within the confines of our homes. Away from the noise of life. Close to the ones we love.

I suppose this play looks like it leans towards Tarkovsky and yet it is really about the other side of the equation. It’s a work that is about the preparation for life, labouring in the looming shadow of its antithesis. It’s also about climbing the impossible Everest of identity right at the very end of a journey.

The idea for it was informed by my brief friendship with a remarkable woman who was in the process of doing just that. Her name was Gwyneth and she was in the terminal stages of cancer. I got to know ►

*(Above) Aidan Fennessy with Linda Cropper and Nicholas Bell;
(Opposite from top) Johnny Carr; Nicholas Bell, Stephen Phillips and Linda Cropper*





(Clockwise from top) Stephen Phillips and Johnny Carr, with cast and creative team looking on; Stephen Phillips; Nicholas Bell; Linda Cropper and Stephen Phillips

**'Who are we and how are we meant to act? ...
Where is it that we might find the answers to this?
I don't know the answer to this. But I remain curiously
engaged and hope you do too.'**

her by being her house cleaner, every Wednesday for two hours over an eight-month period. She was a heck of a woman. Her poise and grace in the face of her own demise is what inspired this play. But what you'll see here is, of course, not her story. It's an invention to bring those qualities into stark relief.

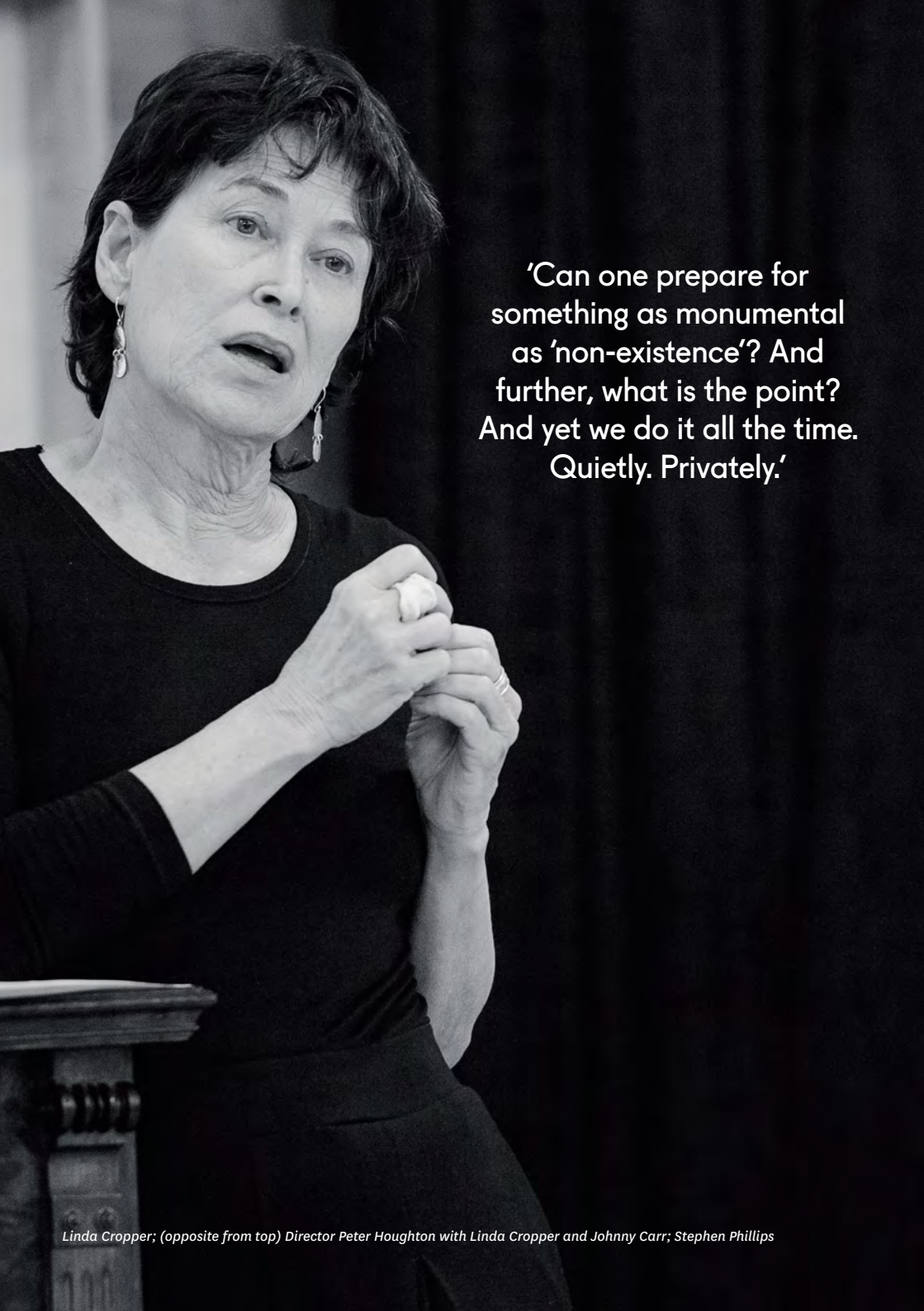
On Wednesdays, we would chat. Her house was always impeccably clean, though she would insist it was perpetually 'in a state'. I told her I was writing a play about her and she was delighted. She had a reverential respect for words and narratives. In fact, I suspect, she, like me, only made sense of the world through the stories we tell and are told. Especially those we construct to explain our choices. I informed her that I had to imbue her character with a few rough edges and psychic fault lines otherwise it might make for a dull night in the theatre. After all you can only stare at perfection for so long. She unfurled a snaking grin at that thought. She passed away peacefully in her home surrounded by her loved ones. I was lucky enough to be granted a brief audience with her before her departure. I don't remember much of what

we talked about. I don't think it made a lot of sense. For my part it was a tumbling collection of poorly calibrated clichés. All I remember is that her beautiful, illicit smile was still there at the end.

It struck me late in the writing of this play that all the characters are consumed by the process of trying to find their appropriate role in the stark spotlight of mortality. How are we meant to be? Anyone with an experience of death here knows this. And in a broad sense, this is simply a concertinaed version of life itself. Who are we and how are we meant to act? And where is it that we might find the answers to this? I don't know the answer to this. But I remain curiously engaged and hope you do too. As did Gwyneth, to the very end.

And I hope this play does her justice. I hope this play opens a door into a place where you can make sense of the fleeting world. I thank you for your attention and I thank the cast, crew, director and designers for their great talent and careful work.

Aidan Fennessy



'Can one prepare for
something as monumental
as 'non-existence'? And
further, what is the point?
And yet we do it all the time.
Quietly. Privately.'



From the director

Peter Houghton



We can sometimes leave a theatre barely remembering the intricacies of a plot or even the order of events, and yet feel moved beyond words by a rising sense that what we are seeing – despite all the obvious mechanics of a stage and a room full of people watching it – is expressing a truth we know to be accurate and relevant to our own lives.

And moreover we know that it is a universal truth, and that everyone else in the room knows it too. These rare moments of unification, of common understanding, are in my view, the hallmarks of great writing for stage, and Aidan's play is littered with them.

The other common feature of great plays is great characters and this play has four of them. We're told when we first start working in the theatre that a character needs to want something and needs to fight for it to the end of the line. And that there need to be obstacles to overcome and antagonists who want the opposite.

This, we are told, will create drama. All true of course, and all present here in *The Architect*. But the logical conclusion to draw from this summary is that drama only involves fighting for something and achieving it ... against the odds. That formula will sound familiar of course;

(Opposite) Director Peter Houghton with Linda Cropper and Nicholas Bell;

(below) Stage Manager Lisette Drew, Stephen Phillips, Johnny Carr, Director Peter Houghton, Linda Cropper and Nicholas Bell



it's the blueprint for almost every film we've ever seen. But often in the great dramas of the stage, the characters fight against the odds and lose ... or win in ways that look like losses, or lose so others can win. Hamlet dies, Willy Loman never makes it home, Olive will never enjoy a Summer of the Eighteenth Doll.

These plays endure because they confirm our core understanding that life goes on, but also that life changes and sometimes, life ends. They may seem hopeless at times or convey a cynicism or defeatism that weighs on the soul. But they satisfy because they touch on our primal fears and like all

great art, remind us that we are not alone in feeling frightened.

I don't want pain. I don't want to leave this world and I don't want to leave the people I love. The truth is, all of those things will happen to me and the truth of that will hurt.

So how do we construct lives with meaning if the architecture of our existence – the beginning and the end... and much of the middle – is out of our hands? Is it arrogant to claim the role of 'Architect' and attempt to design our lives in ways that in the past were left to Gods? Is it folly to even try? Or is part of the nobility of our species ►

(From top) Stephen Phillips with Linda Cropper; Director Peter Houghton with Linda Cropper, Nicholas Bell and Stephen Phillips; Stephen Phillips; Stephen Phillips and Johnny Carr (Opposite) Johnny Carr with Nicholas Bell

the attempt to write the story of our lives in endlessly inventive ways that both mark importance and pass on meaning from one generation to the next?


This preoccupation certainly forms much of the core business of our stages and has done so for millennia. Aidan continues this tradition by asking the big questions in *The Architect*. He wisely eschews easy answers, instead leaving us with a metaphorical pen in our own hands, perhaps inviting us to keep writing our own stories and to keep searching for the true meaning of our existence.

If all this seems dire, it's also good to remember that I usually direct comedy and Aidan is one of the funniest people I know! And our cast are some of the finest actors in this country. There is no desire here to wallow in the mud, but rather to bring characters we can love to situations we find difficult to handle. I know you'll enjoy *The Architect*, you'll be challenged by it, entertained by it, warmed by it and hopefully stimulated by it. Thanks for coming.



Go online to see the full gallery of production and rehearsal images.
mtc.com.au/backstage





'I don't want pain. I don't want to
leave this world and I don't want
to leave the people
I love. The truth is, all of those
things will happen to me and the
truth of that will hurt.'



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A black and white photograph of a person in a graduation cap and gown, with their face partially obscured by torn white paper. The background is a vibrant pink with a repeating white geometric pattern. The title 'IDA' is overlaid in a large, stylized font.

IDA

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Creative Team



NICHOLAS BELL

John Stafford

Nicholas Bell's Melbourne Theatre Company credits include *North by Northwest*, *Madagascar*, *Richard III*, *The Hypocrite*, *Enlightenment*, *Festen*, *Dumbshow* and *Memory of Water*. Other theatre includes *War Horse*; *The Great* (Sydney Theatre Company); *The Wintering* (Red Stitch); *Richard III*, *Loves Labours Lost*, *Red Noses*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V* (Royal Shakespeare Company); as well as repertory seasons at Basingstoke, Oxford, Chesterfield and York in the UK. Television: *A Place to Call Home*, *Wanted*, *The Ex PM*, *True Story with Hamish & Andy*, *Underbelly Files: Chopper*, *Mad as Hell*, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, *Time of Our Lives*, *Winners & Losers*, *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, *Power Games*, *Childhood's End*, *Parer's War*, *The Games*, *Newstopia*, *Stingers* and *Satisfaction* to name a few. Film: *Don't be Afraid of the Dark*, *I Love you Too*, *Noise*, *Caterpillar Wish*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Opal Dreams*, *Bad Eggs*, *The Great Raid*, *Take Away*, *Ned Kelly*, *The Dish*, *Mission Impossible II*, *The Craic*, *Dark City*, *Shine* and *Hotel Sorrento*. Awards include Best Actor at the New York City International Film Festival 2011 for *Afterglow*.



LINDA CROPPER

Helen Pyefinch

After graduating from NIDA Linda Cropper made her professional debut playing Sally Bowles for the HVTC, and since then has continued working extensively in theatre, film and television. Her work with the Melbourne Theatre Company includes *Ghosts* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as *Poor Boy*, a co-production with Sydney Theatre Company. Other productions include *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like it*, *Hamlet* (Bell Shakespeare); *Elektra Orestes*, *Nora*, *Painted Woman* (Belvoir); *The Dresser* (Comedy Theatre, Melbourne); *Amadeus*, *An Ideal Husband*, *Arcadia*, *A Month In The Country*, *Top Girls*, *Chinchilla*, *Madras House*, *The Mortal Falcon*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Loot*, *As You Desire* and *Secret Rapture* (STC); *Agatha Christie's The Mousetrap* (Louise Withers and Associates); *And No More Shall We Part*, *Through the Wire* (Griffin Theatre); *The Marriage of Figaro* (Royal Queensland Theatre Company); and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Darlinghurst Theatre). Her work in television includes *Offspring* (Series 1-7), *Pine Gap*, *The Leftovers*, *The Pacific*, *Rake*, *Old School*, *Redfern Now*, *Satisfaction*, *Ring of Scorpio*, *Eden's Lost*, *Palace of Dreams*, *Children of the Dragon*, *My Husband My Killer* and *Wildside*.



JOHNNY CARR

Leonard Wadsley

Johnny Carr graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2008. His theatre credits for Melbourne Theatre Company include *John and What Rhymes with Cars and Girls*. Other theatre credits include *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Dream* (Bell Shakespeare); *Edward II* (Malthouse Theatre), *The Events* (Belvoir/Malthouse Theatre/ STCSA/ Black Swan); *The Boys* (Griffin Theatre Company); *M + M* (Daniel Schlusser Ensemble). Johnny's screen credits include *Eye Contact*, *The Secret Daughter*, *Stories I Want to Tell You in Person*, *Rush*, *City Homicide*, and the web series *The Greatest Love of All*. In 2013 Johnny received the Marten Bequest Travel Scholarship for Acting, where he trained at Ecole Philippe Gaulier. Johnny has been a proud member of Actor's Equity since 2008.

Creative Team



STEPHEN PHILLIPS

Jeremy Pyefinch

A 2002 graduate from the Victorian College of the Arts, Stephen Phillips has appeared at Melbourne Theatre Company in *Boy Gets Girl*, *Take Me Out*, *Metamorphoses*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *The Madwoman of Chailiot*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Realism*. His other stage credits include *They Divided the Sky* for the Daniel Schlusser Ensemble, *The Odyssey* for Malthouse Theatre and *Black Swan* for the Melbourne & Perth International Arts Festival for Bell Shakespeare: *The Tempest* and *As You Like It*, and for Chunky Move: *Lucid* and *Complexity of Belonging*. On television, he has appeared in *Barracuda*, *The Secret River*, *Childhood's End*, *Jack Irish*, *House Husbands*, *The Leftovers*, *Blue Heelers*, *Neighbours*, *Love Letters*, *Australia on Trial*, *Last Man Standing*, *City Homocide*, *Offspring* and was a regular cast member on *Winners and Losers*. Feature film credits include *Disclosure*, *X*, *The Catalyst*, *Turkey Shoot Reloaded* and *The Killer Elite*. Stephen also works extensively as a voiceover artist and audio book narrator.



PETER HOUGHTON

Director

Peter Houghton is an actor, director and playwright. His recent appearances for MTC include *Three Little Words*, *His Girl Friday*, *The Joy of Text*, *The Colours*, *The Female of the Species*, *Birthrights*, *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, *Misalliance*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth*. His directing credits for MTC include *The Odd Couple*, *Boy at the Edge of Everything*, *True Minds*, *Hinterland*, *The Recruit* and *Art and Soul*. His other stage work includes performances in *The Beast* for Ambassador Group; *The Trial* and *Travesties* for STC; *The Eskimo*, *Tartuffe*, *A View Of Concrete* and *Normal Suburban Planetary Meltdown* for Malthouse Theatre; *The Graduate* for Kay and McLean among others. Peter directed *Footprints on Water* for Griffin Theatre, *Noises Off* for Marriners and *Day One A Hotel Evening* for Black Swan. His plays *The Pitch*, *A Commercial Farce*, *The China Incident* and *The Colours* have enjoyed seasons with MTC, Malthouse, QTC, Black Swan and have toured nationally and in the UK. His solo show *The Pitch* played over 500 performances in Australia and UK winning Edinburgh Fringe Awards, Stage UK and Age Pick of the Year. He has received Green Room Awards for Best Actor in *The Pitch* and for 11th Hour Theatre's *Endgame*, Best play for *The Pitch* and Best Director for his body of work.



CHRISTINA SMITH

Set & Costume Designer

Christina Smith's work as Set and Costume Designer has been seen at MTC for the last 18 years, with shows including *Gloria*, *The Odd Couple*, *Elling*, *National Interest*, *The Seed*, *Clybourne Park*, *Rising Water*, *A Behanding in Spokane*, *Boston Marriage*, *The Swimming Club*, *Blackbird*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Clean House*, *Dumb Show*, *Things We Do For Love*, *The Daylight Atheist*, *Honour*, and *Cloud Nine*; as Costume Designer on *Realism*, *Humble Boy*, *Proof*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and *Three Days of Rain*; and as Set Designer on *Hay Fever* and *Boy Gets Girl*. Prior to this she was the assistant to former Resident Designer Tony Tripp. Other companies she has designed for include Seattle Opera, New Zealand Opera, Victorian Opera, Sydney Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre, Black Swan State Theatre Company, Malthouse Theatre, Belvoir, The Production Company, Opera Queensland, SOSA, ACMI, WA Ballet and the Australian Ballet. She regularly lectures in design at VCA, University of Melbourne and NIDA Open, and mentors the Women In Theatre program at MTC.

Creative Team



MATT SCOTT

Lighting Designer

Matt Scott has lit more than fifty MTC productions, including *An Ideal Husband*, *Born Yesterday*, *The Odd Couple*, *Jasper Jones*, *Skylight*, *The Last Man Standing*, *The Weir*, *Jumpy*, *The Mountaintop*, *Elling*, *His Girl Friday*, *Red*, *The Seed*, *Tribes*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Clybourne Park*, *Next to Normal*, *A Behanding in Spokane*, *Life Without Me*, *Boston Marriage*, *The Ugly One*, *The Grenade*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Blackbird*, *The Birthday Party*, *August: Osage County* and *Realism*. His most recent other work includes *The Pearlfishers* for State Opera of South Australia; *Oklahoma!* and *Brigadoon* for The Production Company; *Madame Butterfly* for Seattle Opera; *The Rover* and *Jasper Jones* for Belvoir; *Once in Royal David's City* for Queensland Theatre/Black Swan State Theatre Company and *The Marriage of Figaro* for Opera Australia. Matt has received and been nominated for numerous awards, including a 2016 Green Room Award for *The Pearlfishers* (Opera Australia), a 2005 Helpmann Award for his lighting on *Urinetown* (MTC) and a 2003 Helpmann Award for *The Blue Room* (MTC).



J DAVID FRANZKE

Composer & Sound Designer

David Franzke's credits for sound design and composition include. for MTC *The Odd Couple*, *The Beast*, *Australia Day*, *The Joy of Text*, *The Grenade*, *August: Osage County*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *Birthrights*, *The Recruit*; for STC, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2009) (nominated for best sound design, Sydney Theatre Awards, 2009) *Ranters Theatre*, *Come away with me to the end of the world* (2016) *Song*, *Intimacy and Holiday*. Other theatre credits include: *Melancholia*, *Away* (2017 Green Room Award for Composition and Sound Design) *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (2016 Green Room Award for Sound Design) *Pompeii L.A.* (Malthouse Theatre); for BalletLab, *Aviary* (2011) (nominated for best sound/Composition, Green Room Awards (2016), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (2011); *Venus and Adonis* (nominated for Best Sound Design, Helpmann Awards, 2008); *The Odyssey* (nominated for Best Sound Design, Helpmann Awards, 2006); *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (Melbourne Festival, 2009); and Anna Tregloan's *Skin Flick*, for which he received a 2000 Green Room Award for Outstanding Contribution to Design and Technology in Theatre.



AIDAN FENNESSY

Playwright

Aidan Fennessy is a writer and director. His work has been produced extensively both here and overseas. His writing credits include *What Rhymes With Cars and Girls* (Melbourne Theatre Company) *National Interest* (MTC and Black Swan State Theatre Company) *The Way Things Work* (Red Stitch Actor's Theatre and Tamarama Rock Surfers) *The House on The Lake* (Black Swan State Theatre Company, Griffin Theatre Company, and productions in Rome, Athens and Madrid) *The Trade* (Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Tasmanian Theatre Company) *Chilling and Killing My Annabel Lee* (Playbox/Chameleon, Queensland Theatre Company). He was nominated at the 2016 Helpmann Awards for Best New Work. He won the 2012 Victorian Premier People's Choice Award and the 2010 Griffin Award. Aidan was co-founder of Chameleon Theatre, a member of the HotHouse Theatre Directorite, Artistic Director of The Storeroom Theatre Workshop and Associate Director of Melbourne Theatre Company.

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