

THE CHILDREN

BY LUCY KIRKWOOD



MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

Welcome



Season 2018 is off to a flying start with two of the best plays to come from the UK in recent years. We have the international smash hit production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* playing to packed houses in the Playhouse across the road, and Southbank Theatre's first production of the year is the Australian premiere of *The Children* – an astonishing new work from British playwright Lucy Kirkwood.

This intricate play tackles questions that concern us all and we hope will have you thinking and talking about its issues long after the curtain comes down. Lucy Kirkwood's writing is nuanced, layered and carefully crafted. Such a play needs a cast and creative team who can respond with the same glorious conviction when bringing it to life.

In the hands of our Associate Director Sarah Goodes, her exceptional design team and three of the country's finest actors – Pamela Rabe, Sarah Peirse and William Zappa – there's no doubt you're in for a special night of theatre.

To our subscribers joining us for another season of thrilling drama, entertainment and adventure, thank you for the continued support and passion you show this Company. And to our new audiences, a warm welcome to you all as we begin Season 2018.

Here's to a wonderful year ahead at Melbourne's home of theatre.

Virginia Lovett
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Brett Sheehy AO
Artistic Director

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 past and present, 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
A MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY & SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRODUCTION

THE CHILDREN

BY LUCY KIRKWOOD

3 FEBRUARY – 10 MARCH, 2018

Southbank Theatre, The Sumner

— About the play —

In an isolated cottage on the English coast, Hazel and Robin, two retired nuclear physicists, are living a quiet existence. Outside the world is in chaos after a devastating Fukushima-like disaster. Then one day Rose, an old friend and colleague, arrives unexpectedly, bringing buried memories of the past and a confronting challenge for the future.

— Cast —

Hazel Pamela Rabe

Rose Sarah Peirse

Robin William Zappa

Voice & Dialect Coach Geraldine Cook-Dafner

Movement Consultant Freya List

Wig Construction Kylie Clarke Wigmaking

Original Wig Styling Lauren A. Proietti

Stage Manager Christine Bennett

Assistant Stage Manager Meg Richardson

Rehearsal Photographer Deryk McAlpin

Production Photographer Jeff Busby

— Creative Team —

Director Sarah Goodes

Set & Costume Designer Elizabeth Gadsby

Lighting Designer Paul Jackson

Composer & Sound Designer Steve Francis

SYDNEY
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For information regarding running time please see a member of the Front of House team. Please note this performance will have no interval.

The Children was developed with the kind support of the Berwin Lee Foundation and first performed at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre, Downstairs, Sloane Square, on Thursday 17 November 2016.

Cover photo: Justin Ridler

In conversation with the director

MTC Associate Director Sarah Goodes takes on Lucy Kirkwood's intimate new drama.



What do you think the playwright of *The Children*, Lucy Kirkwood, is trying to say with this play? The first thing that hit me when I read the script was how such a seemingly small, detailed play could tap into such large themes and ideas like intergenerational responsibility, and how we live our lives in our current times.

The story also has a loose correlation to the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan and the tsunami that happened there. I remember being deeply affected by that and watching quite a few documentaries about the overwhelming impact on the community, on people's personal lives and the collective trauma it created.

Kirkwood's previous play *Chimerica*, was this huge, expansive, globe-trotting thriller. On the other hand, *The Children* is a very personal, intimate chamber piece of three characters in one cabin. Her subject matter is just as ambitious – intergenerational responsibility, the environment – but she's pared the scale

right back. Why do you think that is and what is gained in that? You could argue that she's applying the idea of living with less to her own playwrighting. I think it's interesting that after writing such a global epic like *Chimerica*, she gave herself the challenge of how to explore epic themes in a very small, contained space.

She creates this wonderful tension by giving the characters nowhere to go. She closes the doors, she keeps it all happening in real-time. As a playwright, she's really flexing her muscles to go from the epic to this very detailed playing space. Only an incredibly brave and talented playwright would give herself that challenge. And that's what she is.

Your cast includes Sarah Peirse, Pamela Rabe and William Zappa. What kinds of people are they playing? Like any great playwright [Kirkwood's] written a play where she's got three characters that are entirely different instruments. Together, on stage they make great music. ►



Director Sarah Goodes in rehearsal with William Zappa, Pamela Rabe and Sarah Peirse





(Clockwise from top left) William Zappa; Sarah Peirse;
William Zappa, Pamela Rabe and Sarah Peirse

Hazel (Pamela Rabe) and Rose (Sarah Peirse) are both physicists but they are the exact opposite to each other. Hazel is about routine, ritual of daily life, being organised, in control of the body, and therefore the mind while Rose embraces the chaos and unpredictability of life – they're so different that they have this great kind of envy of each other's qualities because they reflect back at each other exactly what they aren't and at the same time they are both extremely territorial. It makes for great conflict.

Robin (William Zappa) has this incredible appetite for life, and for women. He's an incredibly generous person who loves life – a quality that also gets him in trouble.

It's not giving anything away to say there's a love-triangle aspect to *The Children*. What's the set-up? Well, they're in a very small cottage in England, somewhere on the East Coast. It's not a place you would normally live. It's a place where you'd holiday or it might have been a fisherman's cottage. There's been a natural disaster that has damaged a nuclear reactor, so Robin and Hazel have had to move to this cottage because their family home was inside the exclusion zone. Their four children are grown up, living away.

Both Robin and Hazel worked at the nuclear reactor as nuclear scientists with Rose, but they haven't seen Rose for 20 years. The play starts with Rose appearing at their door all of a sudden. Hazel knows that Rose and Robin were involved with each other before she and Robin had their first child. So, there's this palpable tension about why Rose has shown up after all this time.

'She creates this wonderful tension by giving the characters nowhere to go. She closes the doors, she keeps it all happening in real-time.'

How significant is the external environment in this piece? I'm working with Costume and Set Designer Elizabeth Gadsby and one of the things we've been talking about is the importance of the ocean in this work. In interviews with people who experienced the Fukushima tsunami, all of them use this incredible language of the experience of the tsunami being unfathomable, overwhelming and incomprehensible. They can't quite describe the enormity of this thing; the children who are interviewed talk about it being just as they had imagined a monster. In the play, Hazel talks in great detail about the moment of the tsunami coming. In both Japan and in the play, there's a sense of this eerie peeling back of the ocean, and a stillness, before this rush of it coming forward as this unstoppable, primal force. With Elizabeth, I've talked a lot about how we might have the ocean present in the design – the pulse of the ocean. And how that pulse, that breathing of the ocean, comes together with the characters by the end of the play. ■



Hear more from director Sarah Goodes in our MTC Talks podcast series. mtc.com.au/MTCTalks

Changing behaviour

Lucy Kirkwood picks at the seams of our social and environmental consciousness in her bold and heroic new play *The Children*.



(Above) Pamela Rabe, William Zappa and Sarah Peirse; (opposite from top) William Zappa and Sarah Peirse; Sarah Peirse and Pamela Rabe

Several years ago, British playwright Lucy Kirkwood set her mind on writing a play about climate change. How that play would take shape, she wasn't sure, but she knew she wanted her narrative to be emotionally, rather than intellectually, driven.

The Children takes inspiration from the devastating effects of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, in Japan. 'When I heard about the heroism of the retired work-force returning to the plant to help with the clean-up, lots of different and long

gestating ideas started to finally come together for me,' Kirkwood says.

Exploring an environmental disaster wasn't about explaining the facts of humankind's impact on the planet, Kirkwood clarifies. Instead, it was about exploring why, if we knew the facts, we were failing so catastrophically to change our behaviour. 'It's because those changes are enormous and frightening and demand that we give up things we have all come to feel we are entitled to,' she says. ►





Pamela Rabe; (opposite, clockwise from top left) Sarah Peirse; William Zappa; Pamela Rabe with Director Sarah Goodes

‘The idea you can do nothing because the disaster is already too large is an infantilising one.’

Still in her early 30s, Kirkwood has an understanding of generational responsibility beyond her years. ‘Capitalism has instilled a set of desires in us that are very difficult to de-program,’ she says. ‘Hazel’s line, “I don’t know how to want less” is perhaps the most crucial line in the play,’ says Kirkwood. ‘Capitalism depends on growth. Our entire economic system depends on us wanting more and more, on boundless desire – and if we continue to pursue those desires they will destroy us.’

‘The idea you can do nothing because the disaster is already too large is an

infantilising one,’ Kirkwood says. It is also one of the many reasons for her play’s title.

Kirkwood describes the notion of behavioural change as a sort of death. At its core, *The Children* is about crucial compromise and the ultimate sacrifice. Hazel asks, ‘How can anybody consciously moving towards death ... by their own design, possibly be happy?’

MTC Associate Director and *The Children* Director, Sarah Goodes, believes the play is about ritual, and the routines we cling to in the face of disaster. ‘It rumbles with these much bigger questions of ... “How do we live?” “How do we live with less?”’

Set entirely inside the walls of an East Coast seaside cottage, the land beneath Hazel’s house is eroding and the living room rests on a slight tilt.

‘The exact geographical location of *The Children* is unclear. ‘I am wary of telling you [the location],’ Kirkwood says. ‘Because one of the things I enjoyed about the UK production was that everyone was convinced they knew where it was, and most of them were wrong. But that sense of ownership meant that they had emotionally connected with the setting. I wouldn’t want to rob anyone of such a lovely misconception.’ ■



Hear more from playwright Lucy Kirkwood in our MTC Talks podcast series. mtc.com.au/MTCTalks





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Lucy Kirkwood

Playwright



In 2009, Lucy Kirkwood's play *it felt empty when the heart went at first but it is alright now* was produced by Clean Break Theatre Co. at the Arcola Theatre, London. The play was nominated for an Evening Standard Award for Best Newcomer and made Lucy joint winner of the John Whiting Award 2010. *NSFW* premiered at the Royal Court, starring Janie Dee and Julian Barrett, in 2012. *Chimerica*, premiered at the Almeida Theatre in 2013 and subsequently transferred to the West End, earning the Best New Play at the 2014 Olivier and Evening Standard Awards, as well as the Critics Circle Award and the Susan Smith Blackburn Award. Recent work includes

The Children, which premiered at the Royal Court, in 2016, and *Mosquitoes*, presented by special arrangement with Manhattan Theatre Club, opened at the National Theatre in 2017. Lucy also writes for television. She has written for *Skins* (Company Pictures), created and wrote *The Smoke* (Kudos/Sky 1), and is currently writing a mini-series of her play *Chimerica* for Playground Productions. She also wrote and directed the short film *The Briny* and is developing projects with Clio Barnard and Lenny Abrahamson. ■

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IMAGE: *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, presented by Acting Company 2017 and Production students.
PHOTO BY: Jeff Busby.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Cast & Creative Team



PAMELA RABE

Hazel

Pamela Rabe is one of Australia's most highly regarded and awarded actors. She is returning to the Melbourne Theatre Company stage for the first time since *The Cherry Orchard* in 2013. She has appeared in over 40 productions for MTC dating back to her first role in 1983 - *The Winter's Tale*. Notable recent theatre performances include *My Fair Lady* (GFO); *Ghosts*, *The Glass Menagerie* (Belvoir); *Testament of Mary* (Malthouse Theatre); *Grey Gardens* (The Production Company); *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *The War of the Roses*, *The Season at Sarsaparilla* amongst many others for Sydney Theatre Company. Her directing credits include *Jumpy* (MTC/STC); *Soloman and Marion* (MTC); *Elling* (MTC); *In the Next Room* (or *The Vibrator Play*) (MTC/STC), *Porn.Cake* (Malthouse Theatre); *The Serpent's Teeth: Citizens* (STC). Screen credits include feature films *The Well* (1997), *Paradise Road* (1996), *Così* (1996) and *Sirens* (1994), and the TV series *Wentworth*, *The Secret Life of Us* and the upcoming *F**king Adelaide*.



SARAH PEIRSE

Rose

Sarah Peirse's theatre credits include *Switzerland*, *Tribes*, *Poor Boy*, *Enlightenment*, *Molly Sweeney*, *The Heidi Chronicles* (MTC); *The Golden Age*, *Endgame*, *Switzerland*, *Poor Boy*, *Fury*, *Dead Funny* (STC); *Other Desert Cities*, *The Gift* (ATC), *Mark Colvin's Kidney*, *The Business* and *Gethsemane* (Belvoir). Television credits include *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, *The Letdown*, *Offspring*, *Hunters*, *The Shannara Chronicles*, *Old School*, *Rake*, *City Homicide*, *Spirited*, *Murder Rooms*, *Water Rats*, *Fable* and *The Flying Doctors*. Film credits include *Mortal Engines*, *Heavenly Creatures*, *Rain*, *The Navigator*, *The Hobbit Trilogy*, *Unconditional Love*, *The Illustrated Family Doctor*. Sarah has received four Best Actress awards for film roles in New Zealand - *Heavenly Creatures*, *Rain*, *The Navigator* and *A Woman of Good Character*, and theatre awards for *Molly Sweeney* (Green Room Award), *The Golden Age* (Helpmann Award) and *Switzerland* (Sydney Theatre Award).



WILLIAM ZAPPA

Robin

William Zappa has built a solid reputation as an outstanding actor, appearing with our major theatre companies and playing leading roles in *Honor*, *Skylight* and *Rock and Roll* (MTC); *Arms and the Man*, *Loot*, *Honour*, *Travesties*, *Old Times*, *Soul Mates*, *The White Devil* and *A Month in the Country* (STC); *Richard III*, *Death of a Salesman* (State Theatre Company of South Australia); *The Goat or Who is Sylvia* (STCSA/Belvoir); *Corporate Vibes* (QT/STC); *Dance of Death*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Government Inspector* (Bell Shakespeare); *Warning: Explicit Material*, *Seminar*, *Let the Sunshine* (Ensemble Theatre) and *Antigone* (Sport For Jove) among many others. His impressive list of feature film credits includes *Dead Europe*, *Mad Max 2*, *A Heartbeat Away*, *The Phantom*, *Quigley Down Under*, *Men's Group*, and *Crush*. Television work includes *A Place to Call Home*, *Paper Giants: Magazine Wars*, *Devil's Dust*, *Rake*. He has been nominated for and won numerous awards including two for his portrayal of 'Thenardier' in *Les Misérables* and a Sydney Theatre Award for 'Creon' in *Antigone*.

Cast & Creative Team



SARAH GOODES

Director

Melbourne Theatre Company Associate Director Sarah Goodes last directed *Three Little Words* for MTC, following her critically acclaimed direction of *John* and *Switzerland*. Sarah's reputation as a leading director of new Australian and international work has been built on wide-spread praise and multiple award nominations. Formerly Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company, Sarah directed *The Hanging*, *Disgraced*, *Orlando*, *Battle of Waterloo*, *The Effect*, *Vere (Faith)*, *The Splinter*, and *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness*. Her other directing credits include *Elling*, *Black Milk*, *The Sweetest Thing*, and *The Small Things* (B Sharp Belvoir); *The Colour of Panic* (Sydney Opera House); *Vertigo and the Virginia*, *The Schelling Point*, *Hilt*, and *What Happened Was* (Old Fitz Theatre); and *The Unscrupulous Murderer Hasse Karlson Reveals the Gruesome Truth about the Woman Who Froze to Death on a Railway Bridge* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company). In 2015 she was the recipient of the Gloria Payten Travel Scholarship.



ELIZABETH GADSBY

Set & Costume Designer

Elizabeth Gadsby returns to Melbourne Theatre Company as Set & Costumer Designer following her design for *John*. After her season as Resident Designer at Sydney Theatre Company in 2016, Elizabeth works alongside MTC Associate Director Sarah Goodes following their success on *Disgraced* and *The Hanging* (STC). Elizabeth has worked with companies including West Australian Ballet, Griffin Theatre Company, Belvoir, Louisville Ballet Company and Sydney Chamber Opera including her design in *Fly Away Peter*, *An Index of Metals* and *The Rape of Lucrece* (Sydney Chamber Opera). Elizabeth holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting) from National Art School and a Bachelor of Dramatic Arts (Design) from NIDA.



PAUL JACKSON

Lighting Designer

Paul Jackson's recent lighting designs with Melbourne Theatre Company include *Hay Fever*, *Di and Viv and Rose*, *Three Little Words*, *Endgame*, *Miss Julie*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Ghost Writer*, *Ghosts*, *Frozen*, *The Speechmaker*, *Enlightenment*, *Madagascar* and *Private Lives*. He has worked as a lighting designer for the Australian Ballet, Royal New Zealand Ballet, West Australian Ballet, Victorian Opera, West Australian Opera, Sydney Theatre Company, Bell Shakespeare, Playbox, Malthouse Theatre, Belvoir, Ballet Lab, Lucy Guerin Inc, World of Wearable Art New Zealand, La Mama, Chamber Made Opera, and many others. His work has featured in festivals in Asia, Europe and the United Kingdom, and he has lectured in design at the University of Melbourne, RMIT University and Victorian College of the Arts. Paul has received a Helpmann Award (2012), five Green Room Awards, a Sydney Theatre Award and two APDG awards. He is a Churchill Fellow, an Australia Council Fellow, and was an Associate Artist at Malthouse Theatre from 2007 to 2013.

Cast & Creative Team



STEVE FRANCIS

Composer & Sound Designer

For Melbourne Theatre Company Steve Francis has worked on *The Father*, *The Weir*, *The Sublime and Other Desert Cities*. Other theatre credits include *Talk*, *The Hanging*, *Disgraced*, *Arcadia*, *Orlando*, *Battle of Waterloo*, *After Dinner*, *Switzerland*, *Mojo*, *Travelling North*, *Machinal*, *Vere (Faith)*, *The Secret River*, *Sex with Strangers*, *The Splinter*, *Bloodland*, *Blood Wedding*, *Rabbit*, *The Pig Iron People*, *Gallipoli*, *Embers*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Griffin Theatre); *Angels in America*, *Babyteeth*, *Ruben Guthrie*, *Baghdad Wedding*, *Keating!*, *Parramatta Girls*, *Capricornia*, *Box the Pony*, *Gulpilil* and *Page 8* (Belvoir); *Henry V* and *Hamlet* (Bell Shakespeare). He composed the music for the Bangarra Dance Theatre productions *Bennelong*, *Our Lore*, *Belong*, *True Stories*, *Skin*, *Corroboree*, *Walkabout*, *Bush*, and *Boomerang*. His Awards include Helpmann Awards for Best Original Score 2012 and 2003, a Helpmann for Best New Australian Work in 2003, and Sydney Theatre Awards in 2011 and 2014.



GERALDINE COOK-DAFNER

Voice and Dialect Coach

Geraldine Cook-Dafner previously worked for Melbourne Theatre Company on *Hay Fever*, *Di and Viv* and *Rose*, *Melbourne Talam*, *John*, *The Odd Couple*, *Straight White Men*, *The Distance*, *Birdland*, *The Waiting Room*, *Top Girls*, *The Heretic*, *The Swimming Club*, *The 39 Steps*, *The History Boys*, *All My Sons*, *The Clean House*, *Boy Gets Girl*, *Take Me Out*, and *The Glass Menagerie*. Geraldine also works for independent theatre companies, Red Stitch and Hit Productions. She trained at Middlesex University, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and she is an Honorary Senior Fellow in the theatre department at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne. Geraldine also works as a voice consultant in film, ABC Radio, SBS Radio, and for local corporate and government bodies. Geraldine was previously Head of Voice, Head of School of Performing Arts and an Associate Dean at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne.

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In 1980, Sydney Theatre Company's first Artistic Director, Richard Wherrett, defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun." Years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Roslyn Packer Theatre Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim. Renowned artists John Crowley, Tamás Ascher, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Liv Ullmann, Steven Soderbergh and Isabelle Huppert have all worked with STC in recent years and STC has presented productions by the National Theatre of Great Britain, Abbey Theatre and Steppenwolf Theatre Company.



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Hannie Rayson (with Manhattan Theatre Club)

NEON NEXT

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NEXT STAGE
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Dan Giovannoni
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