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2025 AUTUMN



BLACK SWAN
STATE THEATRE COMPANY



HONOURING THE PAST, INSPIRING THE FUTURE

NAOMI PIGRAM-MITCHELL'S PASSION PROJECT



**ANNA
SAMSON**
FROM PARADISE TO
OSAGE COUNTY



**DEBORAH
FRANCES-WHITE**
ON THE SHOW THAT'LL HAVE YOU
QUESTIONING EVERYTHING

BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY & BELVOIR ST THEATRE PRESENT

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

BY TRACY LETTS
27 FEBRUARY – 16 MARCH
STATE THEATRE CENTRE



★★★★★
TIMEOUT

★★★★★
LIMELIGHT

★★★★★
STAGENOISE

★★★★★
THE GUARDIAN

★★★★★
SYDNEY MORNING HERALD



BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

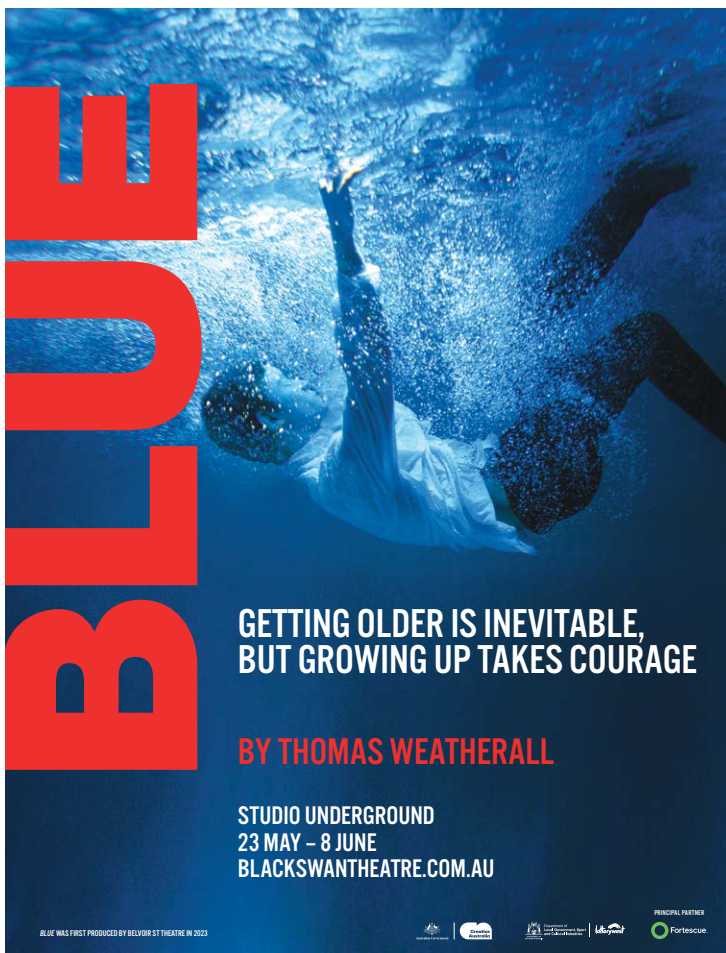
RAISED IN BIG SPIRIT COUNTRY

CREATED BY NAOMI PIGRAM-MITCHELL
MUSICAL DIRECTION BY BART PIGRAM

27 – 29 MARCH
STUDIO UNDERGROUND



THE SOUND OF BROOME, LIVE IN PERTH



GETTING OLDER IS INEVITABLE,
BUT GROWING UP TAKES COURAGE

BY THOMAS WEATHERALL

STUDIO UNDERGROUND
23 MAY – 8 JUNE
BLACKSWANTHEATRE.COM.AU

ALICE WAS FIRST PRODUCED BY BELVOIR ST THEATRE IN 2022



BY DEBORAH FRANCES-WHITE
14 JUNE – 6 JULY STATE THEATRE CENTRE

“A SALTY, VOLATILE CROSS BETWEEN
INDECENT PROPOSAL AND A SATANIC
EDITION OF COME DINE WITH ME.”

SUNDAY TIMES



A BIG YEAR FOR BLACK SWAN



Proud to be
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of Black Swan
State Theatre
Company
of WA

2025 IS SHAPING UP TO BE A HUGE YEAR FOR BLACK SWAN! AS I WRITE THIS, PERTH IS BUZZING WITH FESTIVAL ENERGY, AND WE'RE GEARING UP TO OPEN AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY, OUR CO-PRODUCTION WITH BELVOIR ST THEATRE.

This exquisite production swept the major Sydney Theatre Awards at the end of 2024, and Perth audiences are just as eager to experience it - ticket sales have been phenomenal, and that momentum is carrying across the whole 2025 Season. That boost helps all aspects of our business from planning shows for the future, to demonstrating to our partners in the State and Federal Government that we are creating exceptional theatre. With Kate Champion's artistic vision guiding the Company, we're looking forward to bringing audiences a season filled with bold, powerful storytelling.

We're also celebrating some exciting news... our 2024 hit *Prima Facie*, directed by Kate and starring Sof Forrest, is heading to Sydney, with a season at Carriageworks in July. It's fantastic recognition of the incredible talent

behind the production, and we're thrilled that audiences on the east coast will get to experience it.

There's a real sense of sharing and respect between Australia's State Theatre Companies, and that collaboration extends beyond productions to ideas, policies, and insights - ensuring that collectively, we keep focusing our energy (and dollars) on making the best theatre possible for Australian audiences.

We're also delighted that our principal partner, Fortescue, has extended their support until the end of 2026. Their commitment means we can keep growing our impact - engaging more people across WA's arts industry, supporting regional communities, amplifying First Nations voices, and reaching new audiences.

With demand for 2025 shows at an all-time high, now's the time to get involved. If you're not already a Black Swan Friend, join us! You'll get discounted tickets and priority booking - and with seats going fast, it's the best way to make sure you don't miss out.

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CEO

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DETECTIVE INSPECTOR TO DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY DRAMA

ANNA SAMSON ON LEADING A HIT TV SERIES AND BEING CAST IN AN 'ACTOR'S DREAM GIG'



ANNA SAMSON CAN'T RECALL A TIME WHEN SHE DIDN'T DREAM OF BEING ON STAGE. THE BRITISH-BORN AUSTRALIAN ACTRESS SPENT PART OF HER CHILDHOOD IN LONDON, AND IT WAS THERE SHE SAYS A CERTAIN WEST END PRODUCTION SPARKED A LIFELONG PASSION FOR PERFORMANCE.

"Story goes, that I saw *Oliver!* at the London Palladium - the production with the incomparable Ron Moody as Fagin - and I've never been the same since," Samson tells us.

After graduating from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2010, the Helpmann-nominated actress began to make a name for herself, securing recurring roles in television series like *Winners & Losers*, *Hunters*, *Jack Irish*, and *Dead Lucky*, the latter of which saw her as part of the main cast.

Audiences might also recognise her as Mia Anderson, Summer Bay resident on the beloved *Home & Away*, or more recently, as DI Mackenzie Clarke in ABC's *Return to Paradise* - the Australian spin-off of the hit UK series *Death in Paradise*.

Given the massive success of the original series, there was an existing dedicated fanbase heading into the premiere of *Return to Paradise*, and building excitement regarding one particular aspect: Mackenzie Clarke, played by Samson, marked the first female lead in the franchise.

Reflecting on her work with the series, Samson says, "The shoot itself - the making of the show - was the greatest thing. Joining this huge and wildly successful franchise

could have been overwhelming and I suppose it was at times, but that external pressure isn't allowed on set."

She continues, "I was really proud to be cast, it's a specific and unique thing - that central detective role - it has to do a lot, walk fine lines, be unique but hold a protagonist function, be both likeable and unlikeable, all while keeping the show's inherent spirit of fun. The actors in the original series do a remarkable job and I'm still amazed I've joined their ranks."

While *Return to Paradise*'s first season was airing late last year, Samson was busy starring in the Black Swan and Belvoir St Theatre co-production of *August: Osage County* in Sydney. When asked about the unique challenges of theatre versus television, Samson noted how, despite the differences between 'set life' and 'theatre life', both mediums were essentially just about storytelling.

"They are both intense workplaces, they are both great fun. Both are trying to tell a human story."

They do, however, require different skillsets.

Samson noted, "Theatre feels much more of an actors' arena, where your performance isn't subject to an editor, and you have weeks of rehearsals to shape the production. The immediacy of the audience is the biggest difference, the biggest gift. Humans are your other 'scene partner', whereas in screen it's the camera. You simply can't be as 'small' in the theatre. The camera picks up thought, whereas theatre demands you make physical and vocal choices to convey those thoughts, needs, wants, desires to the audience."



Image by John Platt



This philosophy has been put into practice in Samson's many stage credits including *Master and Margarita* as Margarita (Belvoir), *Consent* as Kitty (Outhouse Theatre Co), *Skylight* as Kyra, and *Birdland*, the latter two with Melbourne Theatre Company. It took on even greater significance when she joined the cast of *August: Osage County*, a play she describes as an actor's dream.

"It's one of the best-known pieces of theatre and one of our most monumental modern plays."

"It's a beast. *August: Osage County*, and the team Eamon had started to assemble when I was approached, well, it's a bit of an actor's dream gig."

August: Osage County is Tracy Letts' Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning play about the chaotic and dysfunctional Weston family. Following the disappearance of her husband, family matriarch, Violet, spirals into addiction. Her three daughters dutifully return to their childhood home with their spouses, children and unfinished business trailing behind. Samson is playing the youngest of the three daughters, Karen, who she describes as the "forgotten and overlooked child".

"Her survival mechanisms are so powerful, this insatiable positivity, this addiction to self-betterment, this destructive toxic forgiveness, this mentality shaped by patriarchy, this obsession to be fulfilled by things outside herself. And at the end of the day...a little girl who

still yearns for familial love. She is a hideous malaise of republican sensibilities, capitalism, and abuse in various forms. I love Karen, I'm extremely fond of her, she's a deeply damaged creature whose optimism, had it been given the correct course, could have been a beautiful force."

Samson stars alongside Hayley McElhinney (*Dirty Birds, Oil*) and Amy Mathews (*Toast*) as Karen's older sisters, Barbara and Ivy, while their mother is played by television and theatre legend, Pamela Rabe. They are joined by Caroline Brazier, Bee Cruse, Geoff Kelso, Bert LaBonté, Will O'Mahony, Ben Mortley, Rohan Nichol, Greg Stone and Esther Williams, rounding out the 13-strong ensemble.

"There is no end to what being in a show like this gives me. It's important theatre, it's meaty, it's joyful, it's wonderfully well written, it's working alongside some of the best artists Australia has."

We cannot wait to welcome Anna and the exceptional cast of *August: Osage County* to the Heath Ledger Theatre, when the show hits the theatre in late February as part of Perth Festival.

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY
IS PLAYING AT THE HEATH LEDGER THEATRE
FROM 27 FEBRUARY TO 16 MARCH.



FROM SCRIPT TO STAGE TO THE STATE THEATRE

REIMAGINING AND RELOCATING THE SET OF *AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY*

THE OPENING PAGES OF *AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY* PAINT A VIVID PICTURE OF A SPRAWLING THREE-STOREY COUNTRY HOUSE THAT'S UNDERGONE EXTENSIONS, RENOVATIONS, AND REPAIRS OVER THE YEARS.

It's a detailed and complex setting that would be a challenge for any set designer. But an even greater challenge? Reimagining that entire house to fit into a small, 300-seat theatre with space for only one storey - and then making it adaptable enough to tour across the country and fit a completely different 550-seat theatre with a radically different stage configuration.

This was the task Set and Costume Designer Bob Cousins faced when he joined the creative team for *August: Osage County*. Before the production made its way to the west coast, we caught up with Bob to talk about the challenge of designing a set that bends the rules of the script and can be transported cross-country.

The shift from the typical three-storey Weston house to a smaller, one-storey version was essential to fit Bevoir's theatre space. Aside from necessity, how do you think using a one-storey set positively enhanced the production?

I hope in the end, this production is more nimble, more able to surprise. One of the most compelling aspects of theatre is its capacity to stretch and dissolve time and space. With the audience willing this on, the best theatre can be thrilling. Less illustration and more room for imagination is an invitation for this sort of complicity from actors and audiences alike.

What considerations had to be made in the original design phase in order for this set to transport effectively from Sydney to Perth?

Though we thought a lot about how any idea might work in the two distinct spaces, it was always with an understanding that we were in effect making two different productions, even if the architecture of the set is mostly the same. At the moment, we can't even say how different - the Perth production will necessarily evolve and find itself as Eamon and the actors discover and respond to the new space, new cast members and the new audience. In this sense every production is made different every night.

What are the biggest challenges about moving the production to the other side of the country and into a theatre with different dimensions and audience perspectives?

Theatre only ever really happens in the space between the stage and the audience; we are all theatre makers. Taking a design from Bevoir's non-conventional corner space, with its low ceiling and intimate seating, into a more traditional proscenium arch venue like the Heath Ledger Theatre must alter the fundamental relationship between the theatre makers - writers, actors, directors and designers - and the audience, and therefore the nature of the production itself. But I have a great confidence in the strength of this writing, cast and production to find a new and compelling relationship to the Perth audience.



HONOURING THE PAST, INSPIRING THE FUTURE



IN 1990, JIMMY CHI AND KUCKLES' *BRAN NUE DAE* PREMIERED AT THE OCTAGON THEATRE. WIDELY REGARDED AS AUSTRALIA'S FIRST INDIGENOUS MUSICAL, IT WAS DIRECTED BY ANDREW ROSS - WHO CO-FOUNDED BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY THE FOLLOWING YEAR.

Among the audience was a young Naomi Pigram-Mitchell, daughter of musical legend Stephen Pigram - a key member of seven-piece band The Pigram Brothers.

"I was only 12, and seeing that on stage, so far from home, was incredible.

To watch an audience celebrate something that belonged to me, to my people - it's life-changing. You can't put a price on that."

That impact shaped Naomi's entire career. An acclaimed singer, songwriter, and performing artist from Broome, she began performing professionally at 17 on Black Swan's national tour of *Corrugation Road*, also directed by Andrew Ross.

Almost 30 years later, Naomi is back in Perth, preparing to present her own production, *Raised in Big Spirit Country* - a musical celebration of the 'Broome sound' and the people who brought it to national prominence. The show is created by Naomi, with musical direction from her brother Bart Pigram.

"When I say the Broome sound or the Kimberley sound, it's a really multicultural mix of music," Naomi explains. She refers to the diverse cultural backgrounds that have shaped Broome, especially those of Asian descent, who settled there during the pearling boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



"With them came their food, their music, their way of life, and it's definitely heard in that sound of Broome music."

What began as Naomi's personal story has grown into a generational narrative.

"It's a Generation X perspective. Growing up in the 80s and 90s, local music was a huge influence, from *Bran Nue Dae* to the music festival Stompen Ground, which brought major Aboriginal artists to Broome.

"At 14, I stood in a massive crowd watching my dad on stage with Yothu Yindi and Warumpi Band and all these huge Aboriginal musicians. There was this injection of pride and identity."

Naomi refers to the artists and cultural leaders who helped shape that era as the 'artistic giants,' the very people *Raised in Big Spirit Country* aims to celebrate for their profound influence on an entire generation.

"I don't think they realise how much their music shaped my generation."

In August 2024, *Raised in Big Spirit Country* had its pilot season as part of *A Taste of Broome* in the Kimberley. Pigram-Mitchell recalls how nerve-wracking it was to present the story of her generation for the first time, particularly in a community where it is culturally expected to "wait in line" until you're an Elder before speaking.

She knew she couldn't wait. "I thought that, given the nature of how we grow up there, that generation are not

going to be celebrated. They're not going to celebrate themselves, and the generation before them are dying off.

So, it's our obligation to celebrate the influence that they have on us."

The one-night-only concert received overwhelming praise, particularly from the First Nations community in Broome. Now, the show is back, bigger and better than before, ready for Perth audiences this March.

So, what exactly is *Raised in Big Spirit Country*? Naomi describes it as "a concert of songs" but with a theatrical element to it. It features original songs she wrote with her brother Bart, alongside classic tracks that Naomi and her family grew up with.

"The majority of the music comes from a band called The Kuckles, which is the band of *Bran Nue Dae* music, and Scrap Metal, which is a band that was formed in the 80s by my dad and his brothers and a couple of other band members prior to Pigram Brothers. Unless you have a tape or a CD that you bought back then or have been given by somebody else, this music isn't heard anymore...So there's some good old local classics that people will be surprised to hear again."

This production marks the beginning of Naomi's full-time role at Black Swan as Indigenous Engagement and Program Manager.



"I have a long history with Black Swan in that my first encounter with the stage and my first professional national tour both started with them."

Naomi is particularly excited about making the reconnection between Black Swan and her community up north.

"I think that there's a lot to be said for what Black Swan Theatre did back in the day - Andrew Ross and the Company itself - what it did for bringing Kimberley stories to the stage, and I'm excited to rebuild that connection."

Another key focus for Naomi is supporting aspiring artists from the Kimberley region, helping to guide them through the early stages of their careers as they make their way to Perth.

"Opportunities are very scarce for regional artists, and it really helps to have somebody that you know based in the city. I want to create 'bush tracks' to help Kimberley talent living in the city, and to also present opportunities for the ones that are still up there."

Through *Raised in Big Spirit Country* and her new role at Black Swan, Naomi Pigram-Mitchell not only honours the artists who came before her but champions the voices of the future generations of Indigenous artists. With a deep-rooted commitment to her community, Naomi is paving the way for a vibrant and inclusive future in the arts, where the voices and stories of the Kimberley are heard far and wide.



RAISED IN BIG SPIRIT COUNTRY
IS PLAYING AT THE STUDIO UNDERGROUND
FROM 27 TO 29 MARCH.

Raised in Big Spirit Country is made possible through the support of our Impact Partner, Minderoo Foundation





DIVING INTO THE DEEP BLUE

IN CONVERSATION WITH THOMAS WEATHERALL

THOMAS WEATHERALL IS QUICKLY BECOMING ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S BRIGHTEST YOUNG STARS. CURRENTLY STARRING AS MALAKAI MITCHELL - THE TEEN HEARTTHROB AND LOVE INTEREST IN NETFLIX'S SMASH HIT *HEARTBREAK HIGH* - WEATHERALL CATAPULTED TO NATIONAL FAME, EARNING BOTH AN AACTA AND A LOGIE AWARD ALONG THE WAY.

His journey in the arts began in the world of dance, with Weatherall initially setting his sights on a professional career in the industry. However, everything took a turn when he landed a role in the ABC series *Deadlock* during his first year out of high school. Reflecting on the unexpected shift, Weatherall says, "It was all entirely unplanned. I was never the most technical dancer, and looking back, I think what I enjoyed the most was the way in which you could communicate or express something through movement - the same way you can through writing and acting."

Following his role in *Deadlock*, Weatherall went on to appear in television shows such as *All My Friends Are Racist*, *RFDS*, and *Troppo*, before Netflix came knocking with a role in the reboot of the 1994 series *Heartbreak High*.

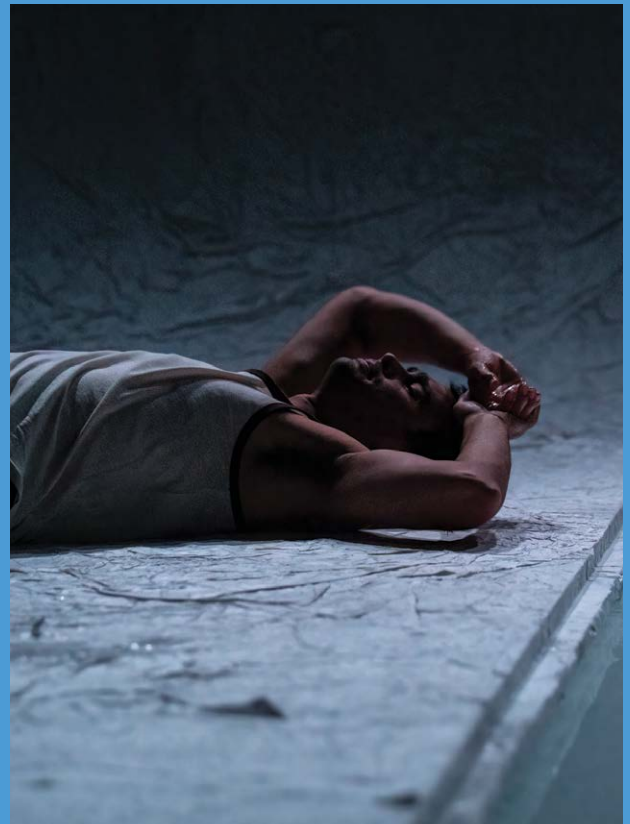
"I owe everything to that show really," says Weatherall. "It's changed my life in both a professional and personal context in such an extreme way."

The show has been praised for its racial, gender, and neurodivergent representation, tackling important cultural and social issues, and has garnered extensive critical acclaim - including an International Emmy Award.

"Only when I'm away from the project do I really see just how profound that show has been - and I say that as only a very small part of it. We have a really wonderful, invested and vocal viewership, so getting to hear just how impactful that show has been continues to shock me."

Following the first season, Weatherall was gearing up for another milestone project in his career: the debut of his one-man play *Blue*, which he wrote and starred in. *Blue* premiered at Belvoir St. Theatre in 2023. It follows the story of Mark, a young man in his early 20s, and is told in a way that Weatherall describes as an almost "stream-of-consciousness confession" between Mark and the audience.

The audience meets Mark at a time in his life when he is navigating the challenges of growing up, grappling with grief, love, and his own mental well-being.



"I've always felt fairly ill-equipped to discuss such things in my own life, whereas in a script, or in character, it feels easier and more liberating. It was really a way to therapise myself. I think a lot of people can relate to that sensation. What is hard to discuss or handle in 'real life' they often explore through music, art, film, etc."

What began in 2019 as an exercise in self-expression through writing was never intended to be shared publicly. As time went on, *Blue* started to take form.

"I was out of home, studying at drama school and feeling a bit aimless. The four years of writing that followed was the first time I really in earnest tried to confront my mental health, my identity and some of the bigger questions/fears I was quite happy to ignore."

He continues, "There wasn't any pressure, I could simply write this as an exercise, and if I didn't want to share it, I wouldn't."

Now, *Blue* is heading to Perth in Black Swan's brand-new production, with Owen Hasluck cast in the role of Mark, under the direction of Ian Wilkes. Hasluck will be only the third person to perform the role, following Callan Purcell at Adelaide Festival last year and Weatherall in all other iterations of the production.

It's a moving and highly relatable piece of theatre - with audiences finding connection with Mark and his story, regardless of their age, gender, or background. Of the protagonist, Weatherall explains that he's not a worldly, all-knowing entity, but rather a representation of one individual, handling some big issues in their life. It's his hope that Perth audiences are able to connect with that, or see a bit of themselves in Mark, in the same way that previous audiences have.

"It's been truly the highlight of my career, getting to talk to people after these shows, and hearing how the work connected to them."

"I still have emails saved from people who felt the show highlighted their experiences or spoke to them. It's deeply personal work, and while not autobiographical, a lot of the mental health stuff is rooted deep within me. Getting to talk to people about that, young men, their parents, people who have experienced loss because of such issues, has really changed my life."

He continues, "Similarly, I've loved talking to audiences post-show who disagree with Mark, or wish he had done something different, and almost asking why he didn't. Those sorts of discourses are the ultimate compliment, because it means the work made the audience think, and open themselves up to a conversation that can be continued into their own personal circles."

Reflecting on his time performing the role, Weatherall says the balancing act of being both the writer and the sole cast member was difficult.

"I wish it wasn't, but it was. I think I've gotten better at the juggling act, but at 22, with such a personal story, it's hard to separate yourself. But once you're in the thick of tech and the season itself, Writer-Tom just disappears. Some



of the team used to joke that Writer-Tom and Actor-Tom weren't talking to each other - and that's honestly how it felt."

Now 24 years old, Actor-Tom has recently been filming the third and final season of *Heartbreak High*, while Writer-Tom says he's looking forward to what's next.

"Dom Mercer, who was instrumental in getting this work up at Belvoir, deduced my writing the best anyone ever has; I write what I'm terrified of. So, there are a few more grand, all-consuming fears and ideas that have been percolating ever since the first performance of *Blue*. I've got a bit of downtime, and a few exciting projects nearing release, so I'm keen to see where it all leads. Hopefully a lot more writing, and perhaps some directing one day."

With such an impressive start in the industry from both the performance and creative perspectives, we asked Weatherall if he had any advice for others looking to make a start in the arts - whether they're an actor, writer, or just trying to find their creative path.

"Watch everything, not just the things you like. Read! Get a library card so you can do it on the cheap. And go for walks. Walks always help!"

"There's no right or wrong way to start in this career, the best thing to do is just start."

"When I decided to write *Blue*, I was 19. I called my brilliant agent and asked her for advice. She told me to "just start writing". And it really is that simple. I began writing *Blue* that day and didn't look back. Start small."

From something that started small, to a fully-fledged play performed to packed theatres across the country, soon to be in Perth. We're so glad Thomas Weatherall decided to "just start writing".

**BLUE IS PLAYING AT
STUDIO UNDERGROUND FROM
23 MAY TO 8 JUNE.**



GET TO KNOW



OWEN HASLUCK, WHO WILL BE MAKING HIS DEBUT WITH THE COMPANY AS MARK IN THOMAS WEATHERALL'S ONE-MAN SHOW

What excites you most about performing in *Blue*?

There are so many things to be excited about! I'm excited to tackle such a beautiful piece of work that confronts so many topics that I myself, and I'm sure many others, find hard to articulate. I'm excited to meet the team and get working on it, I'm excited to be in the room. I'm excited to see what I can bring to the play. I'm excited to perform on my home country. I am just excited!

What were your highlights at NIDA?

I enjoyed my entire three years there, but the highlight is, and always will be, the absolutely amazing and fantastically brilliant friends I have made through the journey. I'm so proud to know them all and to have shared a beautiful three years with them.

Who was your top artist in your 2024 Spotify wrapped?

To anyone who knows me personally this is no surprise, but my top artist was The Weeknd. But closely behind was Childish Gambino who dropped a brilliant album last year that I love. These two do music in a way that I love, where the artistry is just as important as the music, they make music they want to do, and I love that!

What have you been watching lately?

I've been on a bit of a horror/thriller kick lately. Lots of different styles telling some very, very impactful stories that need to be told. The one that stuck with me the most is

Longlegs; it's not for everyone but I loved how it asked me to suspend my disbelief, and when the movie finished it stuck with me.

Where is your favourite place on earth?

My favourite place on earth is when my mum goes out to photograph the night sky, to go with her out in the middle of nowhere in WA and do nothing. It's such a beautiful and wonderful thing to appreciate the beauty of life with the person who has given you so many opportunities to live an amazing life, so I take every chance I can.

Who are your three ideal dinner party guests?

I feel like it's got to be a fun dinner right, so I'd want people who I think would just absolutely be a blast to have dinner with. Firstly, Steve Irwin. I don't think I need to explain why; the man's a national treasure and I love him still. Secondly, Jim Carrey. That man is my childhood, and I'd love to meet him and pick his brain a little. Finally, Robin Williams. An amazing man and a wonderful soul with so much to give and I would've loved to have the opportunity to meet him. But in an ideal world I think these three would be a blast. The conversation would be rich, but also hilarious, and who knows, maybe Steve would've pulled a snake or something out of nowhere.

Do you have an interesting pastime?

I wouldn't say it's the most interesting pastime, but I play soccer, I was big on it growing up and I still play! I'm a huge soccer fan so whenever I get the chance to play, I take it.

Who are performers you admire?

Honestly, I admire every performer. What we do is unique and amazing, but it's also tough and challenging and I admire every single person I've watched or performed with, that has gotten up and put themselves out there in front of an audience.

But if I were to say I admire one single person, it is Jim Carrey. He was my childhood, and it's not even just the comedy, even in movies such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* he gave a performance that stuck with me. I wouldn't be the artist I am today without his effect on me.

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Celebrate life.

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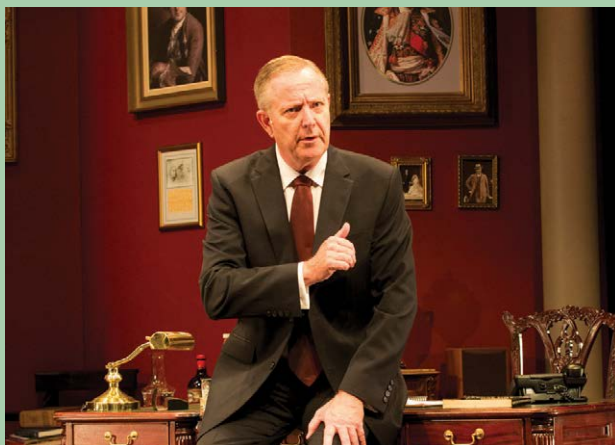


For more on Clayton Utz and the Arts scan above.

THIS IS THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

A DIVINE COMEDY ABOUT ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST ICONIC LEADERS...FROM HIS PERSPECTIVE.

"Leadership isn't about being popular; it's about being right" - Paul Keating



Since its premiere in 2019, *The Gospel According to Paul* has delighted audiences across the country. Written by and starring the incredibly talented Jonathan Biggins, this smash-hit comedy is an homage to one of Australia's most fascinating political figures, Paul Keating. If you're not a political junkie, don't worry - this show is as much about wit, charm, and storytelling as it is about politics.

Jonathan Biggins, a household name in Australian theatre, is known for his biting satire in *The Wharf Revue*. But with *The Gospel According to Paul*, he's taken things to another level. Over 90 minutes, Biggins transforms into Keating with uncanny precision, capturing not just his signature wit and rhetorical flair, but also the man behind the podium.

"The success of the show hinges upon not only Keating's impressive story," Biggins told the Law Society Journal, "but also his theatricality, his ability to throw the switch to vaudeville and dance above his adversaries, throwing bombs with as much panache as he could manage." And that's exactly what Biggins brings to the stage - a Keating who is razor-sharp, unapologetically bold, and always captivating.



What makes this show so special is that it's not just about the politics - it's about the person. From Keating's working-class roots in Bankstown to his love for Mahler and his wit that could eviscerate opponents in seconds, *The Gospel According to Paul* paints a vivid, often surprising portrait of the man who shaped modern Australia.

Critics can't get enough of it either. The *Sydney Morning Herald* called it "Biggins' finest work," while *Limelight Magazine* described it as "hilariously funny, astute, inspiring." And let's not forget the audiences who've been packing theatres since day one - it's a show that has everyone talking.

But it's not all laughs (though there are plenty of those!). The play also nudges us to think about leadership and vision. As Biggins puts it, Keating wasn't afraid to take risks and shake things up. It's a reminder of the kind of leadership that's about ideas, ambition, and, yes, a bit of flair.

"Even though the general public are probably equally divided in their love or dislike of Keating, they all have respect for him (even if grudging)," Biggins explains. "I played the show to sell-out houses at the Glen Street theatre in the heart of [Tony] Abbott's old electorate and I'm pretty sure only about three of them had ever voted for the ALP in their lifetimes."

So regardless of your political knowledge or leanings, you are guaranteed a night of top-notch theatre.

Oh, and has the man himself seen the show? You bet. Keating has seen it a few times, so with that stamp of approval, you'd be mad to miss it.

**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL
IS PLAYING AT THE HEATH LEDGER THEATRE
FROM 23 JULY TO 3 AUGUST.**



DINNER, DRINKS, AND DANGEROUS TRUTHS

DEBORAH FRANCES-WHITE ON *NEVER HAVE I EVER*

DEBORAH FRANCES-WHITE HAS SPENT YEARS MAKING PEOPLE LAUGH WHILE MAKING THEM THINK. WHETHER IT'S THROUGH STAND-UP, SCREENWRITING, OR HER Hugely popular podcast *THE GUILTY FEMINIST*, she knows how to tackle big ideas with sharp wit and a healthy dose of mischief.



Now, she's bringing that same energy to the stage with *Never Have I Ever*, a comedy with bite that we're serving up at the Heath Ledger Theatre in June, directed by our very own Kate Champion.

For Deborah, stepping into playwriting felt like creative freedom.

"You can create a world with so many points of view in a play, and nobody knows which character you, the playwright, agrees with," she explains. "Sometimes you agree with all of them or none of them. You can create whole flawed human beings and get them into all sorts of trouble. It's brilliant! Do other people know about this?!"

As someone used to shaping stories for the stage through stand-up and screenwriting, writing a play allowed her to explore different perspectives in a way she hadn't before. "As a stand-up, you need to have a clear point of view, and it's assumed to be yours, even if it's ironic. I just wrote a non-fiction book called *Six Conversations We're Scared to Have* about the state of the world and the stifling of critical thinking and debate. That book had to be so rigorous and fact-checked. Writing a play is liberation! I recommend it!"

At its heart, *Never Have I Ever* is a comedy. But, like much of Deborah's work, it doesn't shy away from deeper themes.

"I wrote *Never Have I Ever* after listening to many guests and co-hosts on *The Guilty Feminist* sharing their experiences.

It gave me a real understanding of the kinds of conversations the characters in the play delve into," she says. "It's a comedy. It's fun and playful. But ultimately, for me to be really interested (as a writer or viewer!), it needs to say something about the world we live in."

And Deborah knows a thing or two about making an audience laugh while making them think. *The Guilty Feminist* has racked up more than 150 million downloads, mixing humour with real conversations about feminism, privilege, and identity. Does she see *Never Have I Ever* as an extension of that?

"Yes, absolutely," she says. "I don't want to lecture people, so I think you've got to be really entertaining to explore some of the themes in the play without being didactic."

Deborah isn't the first writer to use comedy as a way of delivering sharper truths. She's taken inspiration from some of the greats.

"Oscar Wilde was believed to have said, 'If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, or they'll kill you.' I think that's sage advice."

"I remember reading letters between Wilde and Shaw when I was at university," she recalls. "Shaw complained about the Lord Chamberlain censoring all his plays. Wilde said he hid his radical ideas inside comedies of manners, so the censor would flick through and think, 'No harm here - we've seen ladies and gentlemen being witty in drawing rooms before' and not see the subversive messaging."

Of course, if you want to make your characters say the unsayable, you need to put them in the right environment. Deborah knew that a dinner party - where wine is flowing, social masks start to slip, and things can turn in an instant - was the perfect setting.

"The closed restaurant serves as a hothouse for these four old friends. They loosen up, have too much to drink, play a drinking game that regresses them to their uni days, and then the secrets come out and the gloves come off."

And, naturally, the game 'Never Have I Ever' plays a pivotal role.

"In my experience, the game always causes trouble - which is great for drama (which we don't want in life but do want on stage!)," she laughs. "The game works like this: someone says, (for example) 'Never have I ever... been arrested,' and the other players have to drink if they have been - and then they are interrogated for the story behind the confession. Of course, the more they drink, the more likely they are to drink reflexively - which is a way of accidentally admitting something they wouldn't normally share."

It's the perfect recipe for a night of hilarity... and total disaster.

With such an intimate setting, *Never Have I Ever* makes the audience feel like they're sitting at the table too - watching, judging, and maybe even recognising themselves in the characters.

"I always knew a chamber piece in a theatre would make the audience feel like a complicit voyeur, which is great for drama, because it means there are times when we are looking in

a mirror," Deborah says. "Nothing better for catharsis than laughing at the worst excesses of a character and then realising that character has a lot in common with us."

And audiences have been responding exactly as she hoped. "The number of older women who've walked out with their feminism inflamed, saying quite bold things after watching our rather surprising, explosive ending, has made me very happy. But men have also been very ignited by it - often giving a standing ovation. I'm also excited by the conversations I've overheard in theatre loos in the interval as women debate the central dilemma and whether they'd participate in it in their own lives or whether the characters should go for it or not. Frankly, it feels like a different play now with DEI programmes being shut down across the world, than it did in August 2023 when various #MeToo cases were breaking."

Although she's now based in the UK, bringing *Never Have I Ever* to Perth is a bit of a homecoming.

"I've done the Melbourne Comedy Festival and the Adelaide Fringe Festival as a comedian. I've also toured Australia many times with *The Guilty Feminist* and have family here, so I've kept an umbilical cord back to my home country. So having my play produced both in Melbourne, and here in Perth feels like such a genuine privilege and joy! My inner Aussie child is elated."

Deborah promises a night that's gripping, hilarious, and full of unexpected turns. "The show is very funny and an easy, gripping watch (down to the brilliant director and actors!), but in some ways, it is quite subversive. It has some unexpected twists and turns that really keep audiences guessing. It's about friendship, sex, solidarity, cash, class, infidelity, and identity."

You'll feel like you've had a huge night out with old friends, and it will give you a lot to debate on the way home."

And speaking of nights out, she already has plans for her own *Never Have I Ever* moment when she arrives in Perth. "Never have I ever been to Sneaky Tony's. I hear you need a password to get in on the weekends, and friends of mine have had some outrageous nights there. I'll have to put that right when I'm in town for the play. Might be a good place to go after the show to play a round of *Never Have I Ever*..."

So, are you in? Grab a seat at the table when *Never Have I Ever* arrives at Black Swan in June. Just be warned - you might leave questioning everything you thought you knew about your friends... and yourself.

**NEVER HAVE I EVER
IS PLAYING AT THE HEATH LEDGER THEATRE
FROM 14 JUNE TO 6 JULY**



ACCESSIBLE ARTS FOR ALL

AT BLACK SWAN, WE BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO ENJOY THE MAGIC OF LIVE THEATRE.

We're committed to ensuring our services are accessible to everyone - that's why we've recently introduced a new tool to make our website inclusive for all patrons.

Enter, Recite Me: an accessibility and language toolbar with a range of assistive features, from text-to-speech functionality and screen readers to translation services and customisable styling options. Whether you need to adjust text size, change the background colour, or use a

screen reader, Recite Me has you covered. Just look out for the accessibility symbol on our site to get started!

The best part? This upgrade was made possible by the incredible support we receive through our Friends membership program. It's thanks to our wonderful Friends that we were able to invest in this tool and continue improving the Black Swan experience for everyone.

If you have Access requirements, we encourage you to book tickets through our friendly Ticketing Team who are ready to assist with any needs you may have. If you require wheelchair seating and companion card tickets, you can find them via the "ACCESS" booking button on our site when selecting your seats.

At Black Swan, we believe accessibility should be integral to the experience, which is why all access services are included in the ticket price. It's just one of the many ways we're working to ensure everyone can enjoy the theatre.

SHAPING YOUTH WELLBEING THROUGH ARTS EDUCATION

IN 2024, OUR CREATIVE LEARNING TEAM PROUDLY LAUNCHED A NEW HOLIDAY WORKSHOP PROGRAM IN PORT HEDLAND, GERALDTON, AND ALBANY, WITH ADDITIONAL WORKSHOPS SCHEDULED FOR 2025.

Grounded in The Kids Research Institute's SEW Arts Framework, the program harnesses the arts' transformative power to promote youth social-emotional wellness and strengthen community connections across regional Western Australia.

We are privileged to contribute to groundbreaking research as part of a collaboration between the Kids Research Institute Australia, the University of Western Australia (UWA), Edith Cowan University (ECU), and Healthway. This research evaluates and refines the arts-based health promotion framework, advancing its

potential to enhance social and emotional wellbeing.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Healthway and the Department of Local Government, Sports, and Cultural Industries for their support, as well as our Principal Partner Fortescue, for enabling Black Swan to deliver enriching opportunities for youth and teaching artists alike.

So far, 159 kids have participated over 12 workshops throughout the regions, with incredible feedback...

"My son came home each day absolutely beaming, he made new friends he's continued to stay in contact with and overall loved the experience and is very much looking forward to the next program of workshops."

"My three daughters participated in the week-long workshop and on the third day the eldest hopped in the car and said, 'I'm really glad I did this now Mum as it has lifted my confidence.'"

"My daughter smiled the whole time she loved it."

"My son's connection to a lot of things has multiplied in such a short period - the questions and understanding has been amazing."



Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries



A REVOLUTIONARY ADDITION TO OUR WORKSHOP



WE WERE THRILLED TO WELCOME GUESTS TO OUR PRODUCTION FACILITY IN BASSENDEAN FOR THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF OUR BRAND-NEW CNC ROUTER MACHINE.

The Black Swan Production Facility plays a critical role in supporting our local sector with specialised set building, costume builds, repairs, storage, and equipment hire. The CNC machine (short for computer numerical control) is an advanced piece of equipment that effortlessly sculpts, cuts and shapes materials with high accuracy to the programmed design. This revolutionary addition to our workshop will significantly expand our company's design capabilities and efficiency, creating sets and projects for the WA arts industry.

We'd like to extend a big thank you to Lotterywest, who provided us with a grant of \$95,000 to support equipment purchase and training. This generous grant will provide invaluable support to the local arts industry by creating more pathways for our team to nurture and maintain specialised skills, ensuring these opportunities remain available in WA.

IN THE WORKSHOP

In 2024, we built 12 sets.
It takes a lot of hard work (and materials)
to get the job done.

300
SHEETS OF
PLYWOOD

3000M
OF TIMBER

100KG
OF SCREWS

100M²
OF ALLUSHAPE

47
COSTUMES

400L
OF PAINT



L - R: Audrey Formentin, Lorna Prichard, Ian Booth, Hon. Dave Kelly MLA, Cr Kathryn Hamilton





YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN US

At Black Swan, theatre is about more than just what happens on stage - it's about the community that surrounds it. Our Friends are at the heart of that community, and at our recent Friends Sundowner at Crush, we were reminded just how special that connection is.

A WONDERFUL NIGHT AT CRUSH

Thank you to everyone who joined us for a drink, a chat, and a celebration of our shared love for theatre. It was fantastic to see so many familiar faces, as well as new Friends, come together in such a relaxed and welcoming setting.

These events are a reminder of why we do what we do. Standing in a room full of passionate theatre lovers, talking about the shows we've loved, the ones we're excited for, and the magic that happens when a live performance connects with an audience - it's what makes theatre so unique.

If you weren't able to make it this time, don't worry - there are plenty more opportunities ahead to get together, talk theatre, and enjoy the benefits of being a Black Swan Friend.

THE PERKS OF BEING A FRIEND

Being a Black Swan Friend means more than just supporting great theatre - it also comes with some fantastic perks! As a Friend, you enjoy:

- ✓ **Discounted tickets:** Enjoy exclusive savings on Black Swan productions.
- ✓ **Invitations to special events:** Go behind the scenes, meet the creatives, and connect with fellow theatre lovers.
- ✓ **Early booking access:** Secure the best seats before the general public.
- ✓ **A dedicated Friends e-newsletter:** Stay in the loop with insider updates and special offers.

But that's not all! Friends also receive exclusive discounts from our Friends Partners across hospitality, entertainment, and accommodation.

DON'T FORGET TO USE YOUR EXCLUSIVE FRIENDS PARTNER DISCOUNTS

As a Black Swan Friend, you can enjoy 10% off food and drink at some of Perth's best venues, including:

- ✓ **Bars & Restaurants:** Caballitos, Crush, Freo Social, Mechanics Institute, Otherside Brewhouse, Pirate Life Perth, The Royal, The Standard, TOMA, Varnish on King, Willi's Pizza Bar, and more!
- ✓ **Free Ice Cream Toppings** at Chicho Gelato
- ✓ **Entertainment Discounts:** Discounted tickets at Luna Cinemas, The Blue Room Theatre, Yirra Yaakin, WA Ballet, WA Opera and WA Symphony Orchestra.
- ✓ **Accommodation Deals:** Save on your stay at Adina Hotels (15% off) and Alex Hotel (10% off).

To access your exclusive Friends discount codes, refer to your Friends Welcome Letter and scan the QR code. If you've misplaced the letter, our Ticketing Team will be happy to assist!

JOIN US FOR THE NEXT ONE

If the Sundowner at Crush was anything to go by, our next Friends event is not to be missed! Whether it's a casual social gathering or an exclusive preview event, these moments are about more than just theatre - they're about the people who bring it to life, both on and off the stage.

So, if you haven't joined us yet, consider this your invitation. Be part of the conversation, take advantage of your exclusive perks, and experience theatre in a whole new way.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

To all our Friends - thank you. Your passion, enthusiasm, and generosity make Black Swan what it is. We can't wait to see you at the theatre, at our next event, and in the audience for another incredible season of storytelling.



**PROUD TO BE
PRINCIPAL PARTNER
OF BLACK SWAN
STATE THEATRE
COMPANY**

fortescue.com



ACT 2 TICKETS ON SALE 9 APRIL



BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS A SOFT TREAD PRODUCTION

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO

Paul

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY
JONATHAN BIGGINS

23 JULY – 3 AUGUST
HEATH LEDGER THEATRE

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

BY ANDREW BOVELL

23 AUGUST – 14 SEPTEMBER
HEATH LEDGER THEATRE



Carol

BY ANDREA GIBBS

22 NOVEMBER – 14 DECEMBER
HEATH LEDGER THEATRE