

BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

# Dirty Birds

WRITTEN BY & STARRING

**HAYLEY McELHINNEY &  
MANDY McELHINNEY**

SHOWING

**18 NOVEMBER -  
10 DECEMBER**

WHERE

**HEATH LEDGER  
THEATRE**



PRINCIPAL PARTNER





## BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ACKNOWLEDGES THE WHADJUK PEOPLE OF THE NYOONGAR NATION AS THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND ON WHICH WE WORK AND LIVE.

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TELLING STORIES ON THIS COUNTRY FOR MANY THOUSANDS OF YEARS, AND WE ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR INCREDIBLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL LANDSCAPE WE RESIDE IN. IN ADDITION, WE ACKNOWLEDGE AND RECOGNISE ALL FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE WORK AND WHOSE LANDS WE TRAVEL TO IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA. WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO ALL ELDERS PAST AND PRESENT, AND THEIR ANCESTORS THAT WALKED THIS COUNTRY BEFORE THEM, AS WE STAND UNITED TOWARDS A SHARED FUTURE.

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### **Total running time:**

1 hour 10 minutes (no interval)

### **Content warnings:**

This show contains mature themes and coarse language, use of strobe and haze effects.

### **Hero Images**

Frances Andrijich

### **Rehearsal Photography**

Daniel J Grant

### **Design**

Troy Barbitta





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# Synopsis

**AUSTRALIA'S BELOVED MCELHINNEY SISTERS SHARE THE STAGE FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME, TAKING ON STARRING ROLES IN THEIR DEBUT PLAY, *DIRTY BIRDS*, THAT BLURS THE LINE BETWEEN TRUTH AND FICTION, JOURNEYING THROUGH THE PAST, PRESENT, REAL AND ABSURD.**

This brand-new Australian work brims with humour, beauty and sadness. Intensely relatable, *Dirty Birds* explores the journey of characters who have been disappointed by life itself, constantly living in effort to be anyone but themselves, to satisfy everyone but themselves. Forced to leave their humble

abode they are faced with an ultimatum from nature. But there's a problem - they can't seem to get it together to do what needs to be done. What ensues is an elaborate search through memories, familiar rituals and endless cups of tea, to find something that will shake them from their predicament before it's too late.

From the brilliant creative minds of Mandy McElhinney (*Wakefield, The Glass Menagerie*) and Hayley McElhinney (*Mystery Road: Origin, Oil*) *Dirty Birds* is the extraordinary culmination of twenty years of dreaming and introspection. Deeply rooted in the sisters' own Irish heritage, this remarkable production delves into the human struggle to survive in a society that's constantly changing the goal posts on how to live.



Childhood photo supplied by Hayley and Mandy McElhinney.





# A note from the writers **HAYLEY McELHINNEY & MANDY McELHINNEY**



**FOR OVER 20 YEARS WE'VE WANTED TO WORK ON STAGE TOGETHER. MOST OF THAT TIME WAS SPENT WAITING ON OTHERS TO GIVE US PERMISSION, AS WELL AS TRYING TO FIND THE RIGHT PLAY THAT WOULD SUIT US BOTH.**

Then Covid happened and, like many artists, having that pause from performance meant that our creativity had to find an outlet. So, we began to meet (yes, over Zoom), to figure out what it was we wanted to make.

Pretty quickly we stopped looking for the perfect play when we realised we had one of our own that needed to be written. Like birds building a nest, we started very slowly, writing scenes and speeches that would hopefully come together to create a play. Sometimes we would

introduce a clever idea that we thought would make us sound smart or look good and the nest would fall apart, so it was a process of staying true to the play at the same time as waiting for it to reveal itself.

In 2021, we reached out to our friend and producer Colm O'Callaghan for advice on where to take our play next and he introduced us to Kate Champion who, much to our delight, jumped on board. To put it simply, Kate's brilliant and we are the luckiest ducks to get to work with her. Kate's experience with devised work, as well as text-based work, was the perfect combination and how we wanted to approach the creation of the show. When Kate became Artistic Director of Black Swan in 2023, all of a sudden, *Dirty Birds* had a flight path set to the place of our birth on Whadjuck Noongar Boodja. Although not autobiographical, our play is strongly influenced by our upbringing in the coastal town of Leeman and then in the suburb of Kelmscott. So, it feels right that our premiere should be in Boorloo.

It's very rare for us to feel completely at home in our own skin. People who supposedly have it all together fascinate us, and on many occasions, we have pretended to be these people. We wanted to explore the idea that it's impossible to fully engage with life if you're pretending to be someone you're not. Mary and Martha do everything in their power to be anything but themselves and, like children who play dress ups, they do it with commitment and little rules. But there is no escaping yourself is there? And sometimes stepping into your own skin and befriending yourself with all your flaws, mistakes, triumphs and limitations, is the most generous gift you can give yourself and each other, and it's in this spirit we share our play with you. We hope you enjoy it.



# A note from the director **KATE CHAMPION**

**'IT'S SO BRIGHT OUT THERE. BRIGHT LIGHTS AND BRIGHT TEETH AND BIG VOICES AND SMALL CONVERSATIONS.'**

Writing a new play is a challenge for even the most experienced of writers.

Inhabiting a character in an existing play is a massive undertaking for any actor.

Doing both at the same time, for the first time, could be seen as either madness or the pinnacle of creative endeavours. It's very much the latter, with a tiny pinch of the former, that has led Mandy and Hayley McElhinney towards the creation of *Dirty Birds*.

This brand-new play is a rare act and an uncommon accomplishment. It is something which has been beckoning them for decades and which can only occur when certain stars align as they have, with the premiere of their imaginative powers taking place in

collaboration with their hometown theatre company - Black Swan.

Growing up in Leeman, Western Australia, to an Irish father and an English mother, Mandy and Hayley have brought their mass of vivid childhood influences and adult recollections to the invention of this new work. Questions around belonging and acceptance of place, body and spirit swirl amongst their priceless dry humour and poetic absurdity.

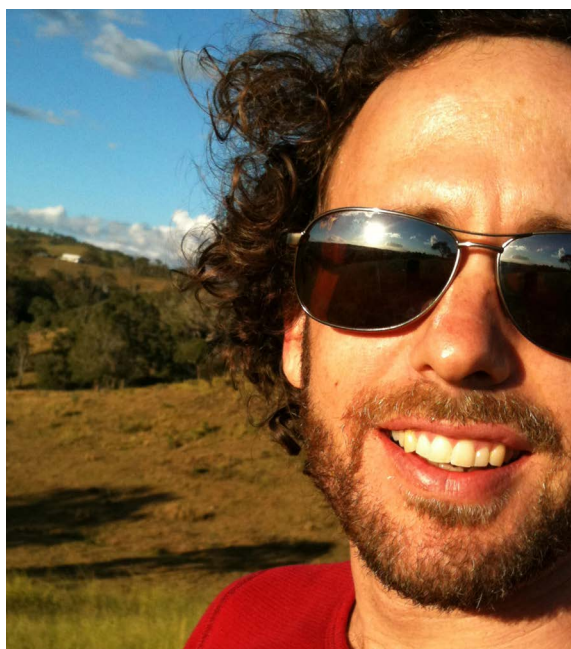
Ultimately their story is calling out the deep and inherited patterns of behaviour in all of us. Our accumulated, unsustainable ways of existence which can only be remedied if we embrace the necessity to change.

It's been a career highlight for me working with Mandy and Hayley and the incredible creative team and crew of *Dirty Birds*, with particular thanks to Colm O'Callaghan for bringing us together.





# A note from the Set & Costume Designer **BRUCE MCKINVEN**



## **AS A DESIGNER, YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR RESPONDING TO THE IDEA OF THE WORK VISUALLY.**

This is the same for a devised process as much as when you are working on an established script. A devised process places an emphasis on being open to finding things in the rehearsal room that inform the structure of the work. It is an open forum for all the creative artists on the team. I find this is when collaboration can work at its best. This extended period of focus allows the writers/makers, directors, designers and

performers to find common ground; to shape the work around discussions of ideas, and shared experiences.

This has been precisely the case for *Dirty Birds*. So, to Black Swan, thank you for investing an extended development time into a new work. And to Hayley and Mandy, thanks for having us on the ride.

Design wise, this is a psychological world of the characters' making, where they have exiled themselves in a world of make believe, in a game or ritual where childhood bickering remains a part of their intrinsic language. There is a flimsiness to this world, that nods to the cubby houses of our early years - which were so real to us - but simultaneously highlights the fragile and ephemeral nature of some of those walls we build around us. It also touches on images of refugee camps and the idea of the displaced, whether by choice or not.

"The box" is a recurring motif in the play. At times, it refers to a box of eclectic belongings, or the letterbox outside, or a burial chamber for a bird. At other times, it refers much more figuratively to their situation of displacement. The concept of a box within a box seemed a fitting metaphor of how we compartmentalise our lives and the layers of our history, and to the seeming emptiness of the characters' situation. Ultimately this piece is about a struggle to find one's place in the world, to choose which box we are happy in.









# Cast

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Hayley McElhinney

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Mandy McElhinney

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# Creatives

WRITERS	Hayley McElhinney & Mandy McElhinney
DIRECTOR	Kate Champion
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER	Bruce McKinven
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Paul Jackson
COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER	Rachael Dease
ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER	Matthew Erren
VOICE & DIALECT COACH	Jean Goodwin
STAGE MANAGER	Liam Murray
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	Sophia Morgan





# CAST



## HAYLEY McELHINNEY WRITER & PERFORMER

Hayley is a WAAPA graduate. Television credits include *Mystery Road (Origin)*, *Upright 2*, Penny in *Doctor Doctor* (series 1-5), *Peter Allen: Not the Boy Next Door*, *Rizzoli & Isles*, *My Place*, *Twentyfourseven*, *Always Greener*, *All Saints*, *Blue Heelers*, *Love is a Four Letter Word*, *Backburner*, *Water Rats* and *Good Guys Bad Guys*.

On the big screen, Hayley can be seen in *How to Please a Woman*, *Hearts & Bones*, *Rams*, *Love You Twice*, *The Babadook*, *Redd Inc*, *My Mother Frank* and *City Loop*.

For the Sydney Theatre Company, Hayley performed in *Uncle Vanya*, *The War of the Roses*, *Gallipoli*, *The Serpent's Teeth*, *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Art of War*, *The Season at Sarsaparilla*, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *The Lost Echo*, *Bed and Mother Courage and Her Children*, for which she received the Sydney Theatre Award for Best Supporting Actress in 2006.

Her other stage credits include *Oil*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Proof*, *Buried*, *Darling Oscar*, *Family Running for Mr Whippy* (Black Swan); *You Animal You* (Force Majeure); *Pride and Prejudice* and *Life After George* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *A Moment on the Lips* (Old Fitzroy Theatre); *Noir* and *Don't Stare Too Much* (Darlinghurst Theatre); *Medea* (Steamworks); and *The Danger Age* (Deckchair Theatre).



## MANDY McELHINNEY WRITER & PERFORMER

Mandy is one of Australia's most beloved actresses, having been seen most recently in popular series *Wakefield*. Mandy's numerous other television credits include *The Exhibitionists*, *Love Child*, *Bad Mothers*, *Squinters*, *House of Hancock*, *Hyde & Seek*, *Paper Giants*, *Comedy Inc*, *Bed Of Roses*, and *MDA*. Mandy's feature film credits including *Ned Kelly* and *The Bank*.

Mandy's stage credits include: *The Glass Menagerie* (Black Swan); *Tiny Beautiful Things*, (Queensland Theatre), *The Tempest*, *Appropriate*, *Mosquitos*, *In The Next Room (Or The Vibrator Play)*, *The Beauty Of Queen Lenane*, *Kafka's Metamorphosis*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Great And Don's Party* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Cinderella*, *Forget Me Not* (Belvoir Theatre); *Dreams In White* (Griffin Theatre Co); *When The Rain Stops Falling* (Brink); *Di Viv And Rose*, *The Hypocrite*, *Life After George* and *Pride And Prejudice* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *This Way Up*, *Holy Day*, *Twilight Series*, *Inside 2000* (Playbox).

Mandy received the AACTA Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Television Drama for her role in *Howzat: Kerry Packer's War*.





## KATE CHAMPION DIRECTOR

Kate has decades of experience working in theatre, dance-theatre, opera, musicals, film and circus - in genres ranging from devised original work, new Australian plays, classics, comedy, multi-art form work, interactive and physical theatre. Kate was the founding artistic director of Force Majeure, an influential dance theatre company based in Sydney, premiering five original main stage works for major festivals and touring regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Kate works extensively on large-scale projects, and for major theatre companies as well as in the small-to-medium and independent theatre scene. Kate had a 26-year career as a performer and dancer with companies both nationally and internationally and created two acclaimed solo shows.

Kate has won Helpmann, Australian Dance, Green Room and Mo Awards.



## BRUCE MCKINVEN SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Bruce is the Senior Production Designer for *Dark Mofo* Festival in Hobart designing most of the festival's major events including *Winter Feast* and *Nightmass*.

He is also Artistic Associate for Brisbane Powerhouse, designing a series of new outdoor event spaces for the performance venue and contributing to the upcoming inaugural *Melt Open* Festival as a key creative.

Bruce has a 30-year career designing for theatre, arts festivals, dance and events across Australia, working with some of the nation's leading practitioners and companies, including Company B Belvoir, Bell Shakespeare, Adelaide Festival, Brisbane Festival, Perth Festival, Queensland Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre Company, La Boite, Expressions Dance Company, Dance North, Queensland Ballet, Force Majeure, Australian Dance Theatre and Singapore Dance Theatre.

For Black Swan State Theatre Company he has designed *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The White Divers of Broome* (Set Designer), *Next to Normal*, *Clinton The Musical*, *Switzerland*, *Let The Right One In* and *Summer of the 17<sup>th</sup> Doll*.

Bruce has previously worked with Kate Champion designing *The Age I'm In* (Costume Designer) for Force Majeure, and *Tenebrae Part 1* and *Tenebrae Part 2* for The Song Company.



## CAST



### PAUL JACKSON LIGHTING DESIGNER

Paul Jackson APDG is a multi-award-winning lighting and set designer, dramaturg and theatre maker who works across Australia and internationally. Paul's practice encompasses theatre, opera, dance, music theatre, concerts, and live events. For Black Swan State Theatre Company: *Cyrano* (with Melbourne Theatre Company), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (with Malthouse), *The Odyssey* (with Malthouse), *Cloudstreet* (with Malthouse). Selected other lighting design credits include: for MTC, *Sunday*, *Cyrano*, *Escaped Alone/What If Only*; for Sydney Theatre Company, *Do Not Go Gentle*, *Lifespan Of A Fact*, *Death Of A Salesman*, *Beauty Queen of Leenane*; for Malthouse, *Solaris*, *Melancholia*, *Monsters*, *Blasted*.

Paul has designed lighting for The Australian Ballet, Royal New Zealand Ballet, Berlin Staatsballett, West Australian Ballet, Victorian Opera, West Australian Opera, Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, TML, The Production Company, Bell Shakespeare, Playbox, Malthouse, Belvoir, Queensland Theatre, Circa, Opera Australia, Australian Art Orchestra, and many others.

Paul has won a Helpmann Award, two Sydney Theatre Awards, seven Green Room Awards, a Critics' Award for Theatre in Scotland, and five Australian Production Design Guild Awards. In addition, he has also received a further four Helpmann Award nominations, thirty-two Green Room Award nominations, five APDG nominations and four Sydney Theatre nominations. He is a Churchill Fellow and an Australia Council Fellow. Paul is accredited with the Australian Production Design Guild.



### RACHAEL DEASE COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Rachael Dease is an award-winning composer and sound designer encompassing art music, dance and theatre scoring, installation and songwriting. Her compositions often explore memory, ritual and human connection. Awards include the Martin Sims Award and Melbourne Fringe Music Award for her critically acclaimed song cycle *City of Shadows*, PAWA for Best Music for *Let The Right One In* and *The Bleeding Tree*, and the 2021 WAM Award for Best Experimental Artist. Work for theatre and dance includes the Helpmann Award-nominated *It's Dark Outside* (The Last Great Hunt) and *Sunset* (Strut Dance/Maxine Doyle). Residencies include PICA, The Arctic Circle and Malthouse Theatre. In 2020, Dease released *Hymns for End Times* which was performed with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra for Perth Festival 2021. In 2022, Rachael collaborated with Maxine Doyle and Es Devlin on *Here Not Here* for Gothenburg Opera Dance Company and continued this collaboration in 2023 with *Salamander* for Brisbane Festival.





## MATTHEW ERREN

### ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER

Matthew Erren (He/Him) is an emerging Perth/Boorloo based Lighting Designer, graduating from the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts majoring in Lighting Design (2019). Matthew has spent his professional career designing for Theatre, Dance and Exhibitions.

This year, Matthew has designed *Ignorance was Bliss* (Enneagon Movement), *Catch 22* (Amelia Sagrabb Projects), *Hell is Other People* (Monkey Brain Theatre Company), *The Effect* (Fremantle Theatre Company), and *Everything Flickers* (Stop Drop + Roll Theatre).

Previous Lighting Design credits include *Pursuit* (Enneagon Movement), *Hello, Asteriod* (APK Productions), *Re-Imagined* (Giorgia Schjiff Projects), *Discovering Ancient Egypt* (WA Museum Boola Bardip/Rijksmuseum van Oudheden), *Dinosaurs of Patagonia* (WA Museum Boola Bardip / Museo Paleontológico Egidio Feruglio), *Virtual Realms* (WA Museum Boola Bardip / Barbican Centre), *Walking with Colour* (WA Museum Boola Bardip), *Belong* (WA Museum Boola Bardip), *Wonderland* (WA Museum Boola Bardip / ACME), and many orchestral productions with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra at the Perth Concert Hall.



## JEAN GOODWIN

### VOICE & DIALECT COACH

Jean Goodwin is a Dialect Coach and Lecturer in Voice with 17 years' experience across film, tv and theatre. Jean has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting) and a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) in Theatre Practice (Voice development and dialect acquisition) from the University of Melbourne (VCA).

Recent voice and dialect coaching work includes: *Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (Amazon Prime); *Oil* (Black Swan State Theatre Company of WA); 2018/19 tour *North by Northwest* (Melbourne Theatre Company, Kay & McLean Productions); *Arbus and West* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Storm Boy* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Lovesong* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *The Antipodes* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *INCOGNITO* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre).

Jean has worked as a Lecturer in Voice at the Victorian College of the Arts (University of Melbourne.) Currently, Jean is a Lecturer and Coordinator of Voice in the Bachelor of Arts (Acting) and the Bachelor of Arts (Music Theatre) courses at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA).



## LIAM MURRAY STAGE MANAGER

Liam Murray (he/him) is a Stage Manager who works extensively both nationally and internationally in almost every form of live performance - primarily in theatre, musical theatre and opera. Since graduating from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), Liam has gone on to establish his career as a stage manager through working for a diverse range of companies and scales of production.

For Black Swan, his credits include Stage Manager for *City of Gold* (Black Swan State Theatre Company/Sydney Theatre Company), *Flood* and *Shadowboxing*, and *As You Like It*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Day One*, *A Hotel*, *Evening* and *Death of a Salesman* as Assistant Stage Manager. Other theatre credits as Stage Manager include; *Beneath the Music* (Performing Lines WA/Encounter) *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Henry V*, *Othello* (Pop Up Globe New Zealand) and *The Carnival of the Animals*, *The Little Prince*, *Roald Dahl's The Twits* (Spare Parts Puppet Theatre). His musical theatre credits include; *Fame: The Musical* (HAMA Productions) and *Xanadu*, *High Society* (Hayes Theatre Company). His opera credits include; *The Barber of Seville* (Opera Australia) and *Hansel & Gretel* (Victorian Opera). His dance credits include; *MindCon* (Mitch Harvey Company/Co3 Contemporary Dance) and *Archives of Humanity* (Co3 Contemporary Dance).

As Deputy Stage Manager his opera credits include; *Carmen* (*On Cockatoo Island*) and *Madama Butterfly* (*Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour*) (Opera Australia).



## SOPHIA MORGAN ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Sophia Morgan (she/her) is a graduate from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts with a BA in Stage Management.

In 2023 Sophia worked as the Stage Manager with Black Swan for *The Bleeding Tree*, Co3 for *In House - Killjoy*, and *Architect of the Invisible*, and on the development of *Logue Lake* at PICA. This year Sophia has also worked with Barking Gecko as the Assistant Stage Manager for *The Snow*, and on a variety of concerts for WASO. Sophia also worked with Tennis Australia as Floor Manager, Perth Festival, and Icon AV this year as a technician.

In previous years, Sophia worked with Black Swan on their productions of *Once*, and *York* as the Assistant Stage Manager. She has also worked with The Last Great Hunt as the Stage Manager on *Dick Pics in the Garden of Eden* and *Bite the Hand*. Sophia has also worked on productions at The Blue Room Theatre and worked with Freeze Frame Opera and WA Youth Theatre Company.





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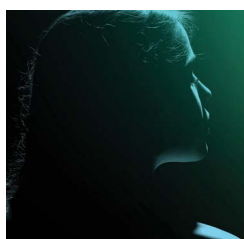


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23 APRIL - 5 MAY



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# 2024



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**the seed**  
BY KATE MULVANY  
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