

Company B and Sydney Festival, in association with Melbourne
Theatre Company present

The Sapphires



Ursula Yovich, Deborah Mailman, Lisa Flanagan, Rachael Maza

photo: Jeff Busby

Written by Tony Briggs
Directed by Wesley Enoch

Teacher's Notes

Freehills

EDUCATION PARTNER

Company B

The originality and energy of Company B Belvoir productions arose out of the unique action taken to save the Nimrod Theatre building from demolition in 1984. Rather than lose a performance space in inner city Sydney, more than 600 arts, entertainment and media professionals as well as ardent theatre lovers, formed a syndicate to buy the building. The syndicate included nearly every successful person in Australian show business.

Company B is one of Australia's most prestigious theatre companies. Under the artistic leadership of Neil Armfield, the company performs in major arts centres and festivals both nationally and internationally and from its home, Belvoir St Theatre in Surry Hills, Sydney. Company B engages Australia's most prominent and promising directors, actors and designers to present an annual artistic program that is razor-sharp, popular and stimulating.

During the past few years artists of the calibre of Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett, Jacqueline McKenzie, Noah Taylor, Richard Roxburgh, Max Cullen, Bille Brown, David Wenham, Deborah Mailman and Catherine McClements have performed on the Belvoir St Theatre stage.

Sell-out productions like *Cloudstreet*, *The Judas Kiss*, *The Alchemist*, *The Diary of a Madman*, *Hamlet* and *The Small Poppies* have consolidated Company B's position as one of Australia's most innovative and acclaimed theatre companies.

Up to 3,000 people a week pass through the Belvoir foyer to see a show at one of its two theatres, the Downstairs Theatre which seats up to 80 people and the Upstairs Theatre which seats up to 356 people. Company B also presents an annual season in the Downstairs Theatre called B Sharp.

Belvoir St Theatre Limited is the owner of Belvoir St Theatre. Company B is the resident production company.

For more information visit www.belvoir.com.au

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THE SAPPHIRES

By Tony Briggs
Directed by Wesley Enoch

Joe
Jimmy
Kay
Cynthia
Gail
Robby
Dave
Julie

Aljin Abella
Wayne Blair
Lisa Flanagan
Deborah Mailman
Rachael Maza
Chris Kirby
Christopher Pitman
Ursula Yovich

Drums
Saxophone/Tambourine
Keyboard/Vocals
Guitar/Vocals

Roger Bergodaz
Bob Bertles
Simon Burke
Sim Martin

Musical Director
Set Design
Costume Design
Lighting Design
Choreographer
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Sound Operator
Dresser
Set Builders

Peter Farnan
Richard Roberts
Dale Ferguson
Matt Scott
Tony Bartuccio
Tiffany Noack
Minka Stevens
Jeremy Silver
Jo Beaton
Justine Green & Peter Crome

Acknowledgement: Company B and all those involved in the production of *The Sapphires* would like to acknowledge that the song 'Ngarra Burra Ferra' features in this play as a tribute to its 'keeper' Aunty Geraldine Briggs AO, a senior Elder of the Yorta Yorta people, leader of the Dhulanyagen Clan of Ulupna and Grandmother of Tony Briggs.

Aljin Abella appears in this production courtesy of NIDA.

Songs performed in this production with kind permission of APRA and the copyright holders

*The Company B production of The Sapphires opened at Belvoir St Theatre on
9 January, 2005*

The Script

The following is an extract from an interview with writer Tony Briggs

Interview by Tanya Cawthorne

Q: Tell me about The Sapphires. How did the idea for the play come about? Is it true that it is based on a family story?

A: The Sapphires came about from growing up listening to the stories my mother and aunts told. I have a large extended family. My grandmother, who is still alive and in her mid-90's had a number of children and my mother was the youngest female. The story of The Sapphires actually is a blend of two separate stories I heard when I was growing up. In the late 1960's my mother and her sister, Lois had both been selected to sing as back-up singers for a band that was playing in the Far East during the Vietnam War. They both traveled to Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines to entertain the troops. A couple of years before that, my mother and her two first cousins were singing in a successful soul music cover band, called The Sapphires in Melbourne, a band which was headed up by a Maori musician called Pinky Tepaa – and he was really the driving force that led to my mother and Lois going to Vietnam. It's really funny, because since I started working on the play, I have had people of my mother's age tell me that they remember The Sapphires and when they used to play at The Tiki Village in Melbourne. Basically, what I did was combine a number of stories together to create what ultimately became the script for The Sapphires. The stories I heard were so inspirational, and I wanted to be able to pay homage to all of them, but it made so much sense to put them together.

Q: So what sort of stories did your mother and aunt tell you?

A: Mum was actually really blasé about her story. I think the way they see it is that they just loved doing what they did for the fun of it. I don't think they ever saw their goal as becoming world class performers. *The Sapphires*, as a band sort of just naturally fizzled out after a few years because the band members started to settle down, get married and have children. Mum did say though, that the trip with her sister to Vietnam was so quick it almost seemed a blur. She did recall a few hair-raising moments though – like the time they were in a military helicopter flying from a gig and they were being shot at constantly.

Q: Tell me about your writing process. How did you go about capturing the amazing stories of your family within the framework of the play?

A: I've always been fascinated with history. When I discovered that my own mother was part of such an amazing part of it, I was just so drawn in and felt utterly compelled to write it all down. Being a first time playwright, I was amazed at how incredibly quickly it all happened, but I felt really driven, it was just something I had to do. As daunting as it seemed, I just had to be brave about it and believe in myself. When it came to actually gathering material for

the play, I spoke to my mum, my aunties and other relatives as well as doing some research on the period. I already had some writing experience, having written some film scripts and I've been working on a documentary project which has required me to write some dialogue for some re-enactment scenes. So, by the time I came to write *The Sapphires*, I had managed to gain a little bit of experience. Also, being an actor, I have a very good instinct for how dialogue needs to sound, so that also helped me.

Q: How long did the project take all together?

A: About one and a half to two years. But that wasn't working on it full time. I've had to juggle my acting in between that.

Q: Were you ever worried about how your mum and aunt would react to your portrayal of them in your play?

A: No, not really. People need to know that the stories my mother and aunt told me really only served as the catalyst for the inspiration of the play. There's definitely a lot of artistic license in *The Sapphires*! It's more that I have used the essence of their personalities and their stories to create my play, rather than take their stories and directly transfer them into the script. I don't think they have anything to worry about!

Q: Indigenous performers seem to be finally making significant strides in having their stories heard within mainstream Australian culture. How do you feel about this, and is this something you relate to?

A: At times, I still feel like I am put in a box a little. It's one thing to be known as a writer – it's another thing to be known as an "indigenous writer". I think there is a danger of creating an elitist sub-culture, but saying that, I feel it is also important to be part of something that enables work like mine to be seen by a mainstream audience. *The Sapphires* was never intended to be a political piece. I just felt it was a really strong story, with really amazing characters – and that is the important thing, not the fact that they are aboriginal.

I think the reason people are finally embracing indigenous art though is because we are finally getting a voice. Whatever is happening though, I'd like to feel that it is a positive thing.

Q: What projects are you working on now?

A: I am continuing my work on a documentary concept called "Wala Baby", which means "Water Baby" in English. The idea behind it is to show the diversity of the aboriginal community itself – something that's generally not understood by the broader community. The documentary will travel around the coastline of Australia and I'm really excited about it and look I'm forward to embarking on the journey ahead.

The Year – 1968

Some of the key events of the 1968 (source: www.nostalgiacentral.com)

JANUARY

- 04 - Number of US troops in Vietnam reaches 486,000
- 04 - The search for Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt's body at Portsea in Victoria is called off
- 10 - John Grey Gorton takes over as Australian Prime Minister
- 17 - The Seekers are named Australians of the Year
- 30 - The Viet Cong's Tet Offensive begins, surprising US forces in South Vietnam
- 31 - Viet Cong Tet offensive hits at heart of Saigon

FEBRUARY

- 01 - South Vietnamese National Police Chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes a Viet Cong officer with a single pistol shot to the head in a street in Saigon. The photograph of the execution by Eddie Adams won a Pulitzer Prize and became a memorable image of the Vietnam War
- 24 - US forces recapture the Vietnamese port of Hue. General Westmoreland is calling for 206,000 reinforcements

MARCH

- 17 - 80,000 demonstrators against the Vietnam War attempt to storm the American embassy in London. 300 arrests are made and 90 policemen are hurt
- 28 - Violence mars a Martin Luther King-led march in support of striking Memphis sanitation workers. Dr King promises to return for another march in April

APRIL

- 01 - Evangelist Billy Graham tours Australia
- 04 - Martin Luther King is assassinated in Memphis
- 05 - Riots in 167 US cities, and on various campuses, follow the slaying of Martin Luther King
- 09 - Publication of the British Race Relations Bill which aims to protect non-whites
- 11 - US President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Bill which makes it illegal to refuse housing on the grounds of race
- 23 - The first decimal coins come into circulation in the UK

MAY

- 05 - 500 are arrested and the Sorbonne is closed as French students riot
- 05 - Three Australian journalists are killed by the Viet Cong in Saigon. A fourth escapes
- 07 - Up to 30,000 students fight with police in the streets of Paris. The rioting students are supported by workers throughout the country who strike and occupy factories
- 13 - US talks begin in Paris about peace in Vietnam
- 28 - Eugene McCarthy beats Robert Kennedy in the Oregon primary
- 28 - Kylie Minogue is born
- 29 - The Australian National Service Act is passed increasing penalties for evasion of military training

JUNE

- 05 - Senator Robert Kennedy is shot in the head in Los Angeles after winning California primary. His killer is a 24 year old Palestinian, Sirhan Sirhan, who claims "I did it for my country". It is the first anniversary of the Arab-Israeli six-day war
- 06 - Robert Kennedy (b. 1925) assassinated in Los Angeles
- 08 - James Earl Ray, Dr Martin Luther King's murderer, arrested in London
- 11 - West Germans need to apply for visas to cross into East Germany
- 12 - de Gaulle bans open-air demonstrations in France
- 14 - Australian journalist Simon Townsend is granted exemption from National Service
- 18 - Warringah Expressway opens in Sydney, Australia
- 23 - Vietnam War officially becomes the longest war in US history. The death toll passes 30,000 by the end of the year

JULY

- 17 - The Beatles' full-length animated movie Yellow Submarine premieres at the London Pavilion
- 02 - 50 Australian students are arrested during an anti-Vietnam demonstration in Martin Place, Sydney
- 04 - 45 people are arrested during a 2,000 strong anti-war demonstration outside the American Consulate in Melbourne, Australia

AUGUST

- 19 - USSR invades Czechoslovakia to restore strict communism. Government leaders are arrested
- 22 - Soviet tanks roll into Prague to crush the "Prague Spring"
- 24 - France explodes its first atom bomb in the South Pacific
- 29 - Police behave like "Gestapo", using truncheons, mace and tear gas on demonstrators marching to oppose the Vietnam war outside the Democratic Party convention in Chicago. National television records police brutally beating demonstrators and others outside the Hilton Hotel

SEPTEMBER

- 06 - Former British colony of Swaziland becomes independent
- 24 - The musical Hair opens in London

OCTOBER

- 04 - Czech leaders accede to Soviet demands to dismantle liberal reforms
- 11 - America launches first manned Apollo mission
- 12 - Olympic Games open in Mexico City
- 18 - John Lennon and Yoko Ono are arrested for possession of marijuana during a raid on Ringo Starr's London apartment
- 27 - The berets, black gloves and clenched-fist salutes of the American "Black Power" athletes severely embarrass the US Olympic Association and lead to some athletes being summarily expelled from the Mexico games
- 28 - Australian postal deliveries reduced from twice to once a day
- 31 - LBJ orders end to Vietnam bombing

NOVEMBER

- 05 - Republican Nixon is narrowly elected 37th US President
- 05 - First black woman elected to US House of Representatives
- 14 - National "Turn In Your Draft Card Day" inspires draft-card burning at college campuses across the USA

DECEMBER

- 20 - First Saturn V rocket launches Apollo 8 into space
- 27 - Apollo 8 splashes down in the Pacific after Frank Borman, James Lovell and William Anders orbited the Moon 10 times in six days

The Referendum

What was the 1967 Referendum in Australia?

In a referendum voters are asked to vote YES or NO to a proposed change or amendment to the law or the constitution of a country.

The 1967 Referendum in Australia was a national vote to ask people whether two references in the Australian Constitution should be removed. These references discriminated against Aboriginal people as they allowed for them not be counted as people in a national census and not to have the same rights as other citizens under Commonwealth Law.

The relevant sections of the Constitution read:

'51. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:-

...(xxvi) The people of any race, other than the aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws.

and

127. In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives should not be counted.'

The referendum asked whether the following references should be removed:

- the words '...other than the aboriginal people in any State...' in section 51
- the whole of section 127

What was the result of the referendum?

90.77% of people voted YES. It was the highest ever YES vote ever recorded in a national referendum.

Under the Constitution, Aborigines were now counted in a census and had the same citizen rights as other Australians. The Commonwealth could now legislate for Aboriginal people, whereas before 1967 each State made its own laws for Aboriginal people.

However, many Aboriginal people found little change in the discriminations they faced in daily life.

Useful Links

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/democracy/classroom/new2003/ad_topic4.htm

Some classroom activities around the 1967 referendum

<http://www.abc.net.au/gnt/history/Transcripts/s1147114.htm>

A conversation with Faith Bandler about the 1967 referendum

The Vietnam War

Why did Australia go to war in Vietnam?

The then Prime Minister Robert Menzies was opposed to Communism. He believed the 'domino theory' that if Vietnam fell to the Communism other countries in South East Asia would fall one by one. The Australian public in general feared Communism as well.

In 1965 Menzies announced that Australia was to send combat troops to help the South Vietnamese government with its battle against troops from the Communist North Vietnam.

How were men chosen to go to war?

In 1965 Menzies reintroduced conscription in Australia. This eventually caused a great deal of political and social dissent. A 'birthday ballot' was held – a birth date was announced and all eligible males born of this date were conscripted to go to war in Vietnam.

How many Australians were served in the Vietnam War?

50 000 Australians served in the Vietnam War

508 were killed

2,400 were wounded

How did Australians respond to the war?

At first, the then Prime Minister Robert Menzies was strongly supported.

Australians were afraid of communism and trusted Menzies.

The anti-war movement in Australia started to grow in 1967/68. Many protests – people realised that the war would be difficult to win, they were against conscription and the great loss of Vietnamese civilian life.

When did the Vietnam War end?

The Vietnam War ended in with fall of Saigon in South Vietnam on 30th April 1975.

Australian troops had left Vietnam by 1973.

Find Out More

Useful Links

<http://www.anzacday.org.au/education/activities/activities01.html>

An excellent source of classroom materials

<http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/vietnam/overview.html>

An overview of key events

About the Production

Photo A



Rachael Maza, Ursula Yovich, Lisa Flanagan, Deborah Mailman

photo: Heidrun Löhr

- 1) Describe what you see in the photo above.
- 2) Do you remember what happens in this scene? Who is Gail speaking to?
- 3) Describe the body language of each of the characters in this scene. Who is the focus of this moment? Why?
- 4) In groups of four, form a tableau like the one in the photo above. How can you change the focal point of the tableau? Form four different tableaux so that each person is the focus.
- 5) Improvise a scene in which one of these tableaux is the starting point. Make the characters and situation different from those in The Sapphires. Remember to justify your starting position in the improvisation.

About the Production

Photo B



Aljin Abella, Deborah Mailman and Christopher Pitman

photo: Heidrun Löhner

- 1) Describe what you see in the photo above.
- 2) What time of the day does this scene take place? How do you know?
- 3) Can you remember what happens in this scene in 'The Sapphires'? What happened just before this moment? What happens afterwards?
- 4) Where is the focus in this photo? How is your attention drawn to this point?
- 5) Describe the facial expression and the body language of actor Chris Pitman (he is sitting on the jeep)
- 6) How would you describe the mood of the moment captured by the photo above? What contributes to this mood (consider the lighting, the facial expressions and the body language of the actors)?

Questions for Discussion

- 1) How do the opening sequences of the play establish the sisters' lives – what mood do these scenes set?
- 2) Why doesn't Julie reveal the true reason she left home? Why do you think she hides the fact she has been crying from her sister Gail?
- 3) Why do you think the sisters are so hard on Julie when she first comes to live with them?
- 4) What does it reveal about Australian society at the time that Dave can't pronounce Cummeragunga ?
- 5) How do the sisters react to Julie's appearance at the club?
- 6) What do you think convinces the girls to take up Dave's offer of a tour of Vietnam? Do you think they are fully aware of the situation in Vietnam?
- 7) How is the relationship between Gail and Dave established during their first conversation? What is Gail's attitude towards Dave?
- 8) When does the reality of Vietnam hit the girls?
- 9) Why do you think Cynthia tells Julie not to tell Gail that she's pregnant?
- 10) How would you describe the relationship between Gail and Dave once they arrive in Vietnam?
- 11) Why are the girls told they have to sleep on the stage after their first gig ? What is their response when they find out?
- 12) Explain in your own words what Dave and Gail mean after Gail announces the group won't be singing.

DAVE: Ya can't do this! You've signed a contract.

KAY: Food. Airfares. Accommodation. Good one Dave.

CYN: Dave, you've just robbed these men of a great moon shaking.

CYN exits

DAVE: Yeah go on, walk away. That's exactly what every one said you'd do!

GAIL glowers at DAVE. She takes a threatening step towards DAVE.

GAIL: That'd be right. You make the rules, you're the one in control, all the decisions are yours, and when you screw up we're the ones who look like useless black fellas.

She exits.

DAVE: (calling after her) I'll sort it out. It'll be organized I promise! I'll organize things now. I'll have it all ready. I won't let you down.

13) Why is Cynthia so surprised to see Jimmy in Vietnam? Why is she not so happy to see him? What do we find out about their past together?

14) How does Kay meet Robby, the American soldier ?

15) How does the following exchange show Kay's naivety.

ROBBY: ...You don't wanna be stranded in this place. The Viet Cong are everywhere in these parts.

KAY: So that's why there's so many black soldiers in this camp.

16) Do you remember how the scene between Kay and Robby ends? Why is it funny when Kay begins to leave ? How effective was it to have Robby hanging upside down on stage?

17) How is the tension created on stage when Julie loses her way at the camp ? How is the tension broken?

18) How does Act One end? What is the effect on the ending?

19) How does Joe trick Dave? Do you sympathise with the character of Joe ? Why or why not?

20) How does Dave show his interest in Gail? How does she respond?

21) What are Gail's issues with Dave? Of what does she accuse him?

22) Think about the scene between Julie and Kay in which Julie discovers Kay was once pregnant. How does the dialogue in this scene build up the tension between the characters?

KAY: Having a baby is what makes us deadly Jules.

JULIE: I'm scared.

KAY: Don't be scared. I'll help you take care of it.

JULIE: I can't do it.

KAY: Don't be stupid.

JULIE: (snappily) I CAN'T!!!

KAY: It's hard to understand things clearly when you're pregnant, that's normal.

JULIE: Shaaare, and you're such an expert.

KAY: You don't understand.

JULIE: Don't tell me I don't understand!

KAY: I've got a little more experience than you.

JULIE: I'm the one who's pregnant not you!

KAY: I know that.

JULIE: You haven't got a clue how I feel!

KAY: You feel scared.

JULIE: You don't know.

KAY: I know how you feel blast ya!

JULIE: How would you bloody know?

KAY: Experience.

JULIE: Experience!?

KAY: You're not the only one who's been pregnant!

23) Why do you think Kay encourages Julie to keep her baby?

24) How does the girls' mood change during Act Two ? Why aren't they having fun? How is their frustration conveyed in the scene in the Officer's Club dressing room?

25) How does the mood change after the girls speak to their mother on the phone? How do things change between Gail and Dave?

26) What is the effect of the girls singing Ngarra Burra Ferra (particularly compared to the style of the other songs) ?

27) Why does Joe want to travel with the girls and Dave ? Where does he want to go?

28) How does Jimmy enter the stage for his last scene ? What is the effect of his entrance?

29) How does Jimmy convince Cynthia that he has changed? Do you find the way she forgives him credible? Why or why not?

30) What is the purpose of the scene between Julie and Joe in the truck at night ? How is Joe's view of the world different from that of Julie?

JULIE: You're lucky you're gonna see your family. I miss mine too.

JOE: Do you have husband and children?

Julie is a little taken aback by the question.

JULIE: You're a little sticky beak aren't you? I don't want to get married.

Joe is shocked and has pity on Julie.

JOE: Ohhh, this is very bad news. I am sorry for you. Very, very sorry. This is very bad luck to Vietnamese people.

JULIE: Lucky I'm not Vietnamese then.

JOE: Bad luck for woman not to be married with children.

JULIE: I don't want to have children.

JOE: Children very important for family.

31) What is the effect of having the characters shot at the end of this scene?

32) How do you think this experience changes Julie?

33) Why does Dave decide to cancel the last gig ? How do the girls react? How does Gail's reaction change when she discovers Julie is pregnant ? Why do you think she says "Well this changes everything."?

34) Explain in your own words what Gail means when she says:

The soldiers here can't pack up and go when they want (*indicating Joe*) Neither can this fella. We can't take what we're doing for granted. The black fellas stuck here can relate to us because we're black fellas. We're singing their blasted music for heaven's sake.

35) Describe in your own words what happens when Dave takes Joe to his family's home. Why aren't Joe's family there?

36) What has Dave just realised in the following moment:

DAVE: Joe, come back! It's too dangerous.

Dave steps forward.

Dave takes another step. He looks down at his feet.

DAVE: Oh shit.

37) How did you react when Dave is killed? What is the effect of having Gail read the letter Dave wrote to her after he has been killed?

38) Why do you think this is not the last scene of the play ? How does the play end ? What is the effect of this ending?

39) Draw or describe the set as you remember it. How do the actors use the space to represent different locations ?

40) Describe or draw one of the costumes from the show. What sorts of colours were used ? What was the predominant colour on stage ? Why might this colour have been chosen?

Further Activities

- 1) Have any celebrities and/or entertainers travelled to Iraq to entertain troops serving there currently? Find out what you can. What sort of material and/or songs have been performed? How different is this from what The Sapphires performed in Vietnam?
- 2) Are there similarities between the events of 1968 and 2005?
- 3) Consider the journey each of each of the following characters over the course of the play. How do they change? Consider their view of the world and of others at the beginning of the play compared to their view at the end ? What key events in the narrative contribute to their change?

GAIL – DAVE – JULIE – CYNTHIA - KAY

- 4) Write a letter from the point of view of one of the sisters back to their mother after the first disastrous incident (Dave telling them they have to sleep on the stage) Think how each of them saw the events. Each of them would see it differently. On which detail would each different sister focus?
- 5) Write a journal entry for Cynthia made on the day she first sees Jimmy in Vietnam. Perhaps she describes the events of the day and then the moment she sees Jimmy. Take into account how angry she is with him and touch on the events that happened back in Australia that made her so angry.
- 6) Write a eulogy that Gail gives at a memorial service for Dave back home. Perhaps she describes her initial frustration with Dave and how she eventually fell in love with him. She might tell some stories from their time in Vietnam.



Wayne Blair, Deborah Mailman

photo: Heidrun Löhner

What the Critics Say

- 1) Read the following review of *The Sapphires*, published in the Sydney Morning Herald on Tuesday 11th January, 2005.

URL: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2005/01/09/1105205980903.html>

- 2) Bryce Hallet writes 'So much is known about the political and cultural ferment of the '60s, be it the anti-war protests, sexual liberation or the stealth of the Menzies government.' Is that true for high school students today? How much do you know about the events and culture of the 1960s?
- 3) Hallett describes the story of *The Sapphires* as 'political in patches' but 'focused on the personal'. Do you agree or disagree? What makes a play political?
- 4) Explain in your own words what Hallett means when he writes, 'The play's deadpan humour and grit is established in the first scene in St Kilda's Tiki Club...'
- 5) Write your own review of *The Sapphires*.



Deborah Mailman, Rachael Maza, Lisa Flanagan and Ursula Yovich

photo: Heidrun Löhner