

HIR



12 AUGUST - 10 SEPTEMBER 2017

LEARNING RESOURCES

BELVOIR



Belvoir presents
HIR

Writer TAYLOR MAC

Director ANTHEA WILLIAMS

This production of *Hir* opened at Belvoir St Theatre on Wednesday 16 August 2017.

Set & Costume Designer **MICHAEL HANKIN**

Composer & Sound Designer **STEVE TOULMIN**

Lighting Designer **SIAN JAMES-HOLLAND**

Associate Artist **LUCKY PRICE**

Voice / Dialect Coach **PAIGE WALKER**

Design Assistant **JEREMY ALLEN**

Production Manager **SALLY WITHNELL**

Technical Manager **AIDEN BRENNAN**

Stage Manager **ISABELLA KERDIJK**

Assistant Stage Manager **KEIREN SMITH**

With

KURT PIMBLETT

GREG STONE

HELEN THOMSON

MICHAEL WHALLEY

***Hir* is supported by the Creative Development Fund.**

Playwrights Horizons Inc., New York City, produced the New York City Premiere of “HIR” Off-Broadway in 2015

HIR was developed and given its world premiere at Magic Theatre, San Francisco, CA. Opening Night was February 4, 2014. Loretta Greco, Producing Artistic Director.

HIR was workshopped as part of the Creativity Fund, a program of New Dramatists.

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which Belvoir St Theatre is built. We also pay respect to the elders past and present.

CONTENTS

About Belvoir	1
Cast and Creative Team	2
An Interview with the Director	3
Writer's Note	5
Rehearsing <i>Hir</i>	7
Production Elements	9
Costume Design	
Set design	
Production Week Photographs	15
Post Show Discussion	17
Podcast	19
Contact Education	20

ABOUT BELVOIR



One building.

Six hundred people.

Thousands of stories.

When the Nimrod Theatre building in Belvoir Street, Surry Hills, was threatened with redevelopment in 1984, more than 600 people – ardent theatre lovers together with arts, entertainment and media professionals – formed a syndicate to buy the building and save this unique performance space in inner city Sydney.

Thirty years later, under Artistic Director Eamon Flack and incoming Executive Director Sue Donnelly, Belvoir engages Australia's most prominent and promising playwrights, directors, actors and designers to realise an annual season of work that is dynamic, challenging and visionary. As well as performing at home, Belvoir regularly takes to the road, touring both nationally and internationally.

Belvoir Education

Our Education Program provides students and teachers with insights into the work of Belvoir and first hand experiences of the theatre-making process.

Belvoir Education offers student workshops, teacher professional development workshops, work experience, VET placements, archival viewings and a wealth of online resources designed to support work in the drama classroom. Our arts access programs assist schools in Regional NSW and Western Sydney to access the company's work.

Explore our education pages at www.belvoir.com.au/education

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM



ANTHEA WILLIAMS
Director



TAYLOR MAC
Writer



JEREMY ALLEN
Design Assistant



MICHAEL HANKIN
Set & Costume
Designer



SIAN JAMES-HOLLAND
Lighting Designer



ISABELLA KERDIJK
Stage Manager



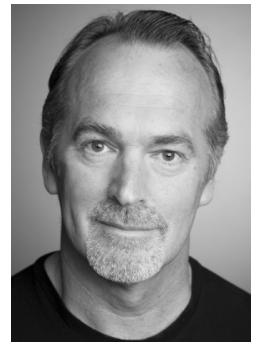
KURT PIMBLETT
Max



LUCKY PRICE
Associate Artist



KEIREN SMITH
Assistant Stage
Manager



GREG STONE
Arnold



HELEN THOMSON
Paige



STEVE TOULMIN
Composer & Sound
Designer



PAIGE WALKER
Voice & Dialect Coach



MICHAEL WHALLEY
Isaac



SCOTT WITT
Movement Director

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ANTHEA WILLIAMS & LUCKY PRICE

An interview with the Director

Associate artist on *Hir*, LUCKY PRICE, sat down with director ANTHEA WILLIAMS to discuss why she wanted to tackle Taylor Mac's hit play.

LUCKY: Can you please for the record state your name?

ANTHEA: Anthea Jade Williams.

LUCKY: I always wanted to start a taped interview like that.

ANTHEA: It was really good.

LUCKY: What's a straight cis female like you doing with a gender queer absurdist realist play like this?

ANTHEA: Well, first of all, I love the play. I thought it was hilarious and wonderful when I read it. There is a tricky thing in terms of who is allowed to tell stories. I never would have directed this play if we hadn't had a lot of trans artists to work with. So once I started working with you Lucky, I knew we had to keep working together because I trust you and I think you trust me. You'll tell me if I'm doing something stupid! [Laughs]. That's what theatre is about – collaboration. I also never would have directed this play if we hadn't found a young, gender queer performer to play Max. That was so important. Anyone who is working with representation has to open up and work with people who aren't themselves.

But I've also experienced being in a minority. I'm a woman with a disability so I felt like a lot of the things in the play I could

relate to. It's not just a play about gender; it's a play about people in transition. That's not just gender transition; it's about society in transition. It's a play about a dysfunctional nation through the prism of a dysfunctional family. That relates to everyone. It's beautiful, funny and hopeful, but also honest about the problems we encounter as a society.

LUCKY: Why do you think Taylor Mac uses comedy to explore those ideas?

ANTHEA: It's disarming. Families are inherently funny and a lot of people find their family hilarious and annoying in near equal measure. I certainly do. But also, once you laugh with someone, you acknowledge their humanity, and you open up to them. That's really important.

LUCKY: "Hir" is a gender neutral third person singular object pronoun. Why do you think Taylor chose this as the title of the play?

ANTHEA: The play is about place. You pronounce "hir" like "here". Taylor plays with words a lot. Isaac is called "I" – assumed centrality of the straight white son; Max – maximum; Paige – the turning of a page, the pages of history; Arnold – Benedict Arnold, the great American traitor. With the title judy [Taylor Mac's preferred gender pronoun] is playing with the idea that the play is about a person and gender, but also about place. It's about urban blight, America and small towns that are difficult to be at home in if you're in any way "other".

Homes and communities that are problematic. But leaving these communities doesn't deal with those communities' issues.

LUCKY: Why is a story about transition important to an Australian audience in 2017?

ANTHEA: Our whole society is in transition – economically, environmentally, in relation to the rights of women, racial and gender equality. We are trying to figure out how to relate to each other and how to be. We're all in transition and our dilemma is the same dilemma as the characters in the play.

We have to figure out what we want to move on from and how to do that, and what we want to take with us from the past; how we're going to accommodate everyone, or who cannot be accommodated. When progressives think about change it's tempting to believe it's going to be good for everyone, but is that always the case?

What do we want our society to be in the future? And what are we willing to sacrifice to make that happen? Or what are we not willing to sacrifice? I don't think we're willing to sacrifice our humanity. That, ultimately becomes the question of the play.

LUCKY: Taylor Mac says in judy's manifesto for theatre, 'I believe, in the theatre, something surprising should happen every ten seconds'. What about *Hir* might surprise an audience?

ANTHEA: A lot of the issues that could be assumed to cause conflict are not the centres of conflict in the play. Similarly the joy and hope comes from surprising places. It's easy to make assumptions about each of these characters too, but they defy them, which is delightful.

How are you finding working on the show? What has surprised you in the process?

LUCKY: Although this is a play that explores issues of gender, it's also not about that at all. Although one of the central characters is trans, what I've loved about working on this play is watching the transition of all of the characters.

ANTHEA: Do you have any problems with the play?

LUCKY: Someone asked me about the de-masculinisation of Arnold and [suggested] that was problematic because it perhaps made fun of trans women and was transphobic. I don't actually

believe that is the truth of what Taylor has written in the play.

ANTHEA: Agreed, Arnold has gone through a massive change and some of it hasn't been voluntary. He's had a stroke, he's lost his job, and there's a lot of stuff going on in the house that he would never have chosen to happen. But I think a lot of the change has been liberating, and there's nothing in the script to suggest that he doesn't like wearing a dress, that he doesn't like wearing makeup. Has he found a new freedom? Does he embrace Max? We're left to ponder that.

It's an interesting assumption that it's a terrible thing to put a man in a dress. Is it really that terrible?

LUCKY: It says more to me about Paige's relationship with femininity than it does about Arnold's or about a de-masculinisation. Paige has been subject to abuse and ridicule her whole life because of her femininity.

ANTHEA: She's scared of the masculine. That's clear.

LUCKY: What have you found personally challenging?

ANTHEA: It's pretty joyous with this cast and creative team, but at the moment we're working the line between the heart of the piece and the jokes and finding where to pitch it. With this play more than other comedies I've directed it's tricky to know where the laughs are going to be without an audience. I think that's going to be different every night.

LUCKY: Taylor talks a lot about that in Judy's manifesto – how theatre should be different every single night and how the audience will dictate how it works. So that's a wonderful and perfect problem to be having with this play.

ANTHEA: You're quite right. Thanks for saying that Lucky.



Anthea Williams (second from right) with Kurt Pimblett, Greg Stone and Helen Thomson

WRITER'S NOTE: TAYLOR MAC

I'm a lover and maker of the alternative, underground, and radical movements, and basically every work I've made is somehow rooted in a subculture. *Hir*, however, is a new kind of play for me as it's dealing with the mainstream; rather, the remnants of the former body politic and the rise of a new progressive body politic.

I grew up in Stockton, California at a time when it held the honour of having the highest murder rate (per capita) in America, the third highest illiteracy rate, and rows and rows of cheap urban blight tract houses were being built atop former farmland. Despite its century-old history of being one of the worst places in America to live, people kept moving in. That's not to say they wanted to be there. If the daily disparagement I'd hear about Stockton from almost every inhabitant I knew is an accurate indication, nobody wanted to live there. People who professed they liked it would sometimes say, with zero irony, that moving to Stockton was a great idea because if you drove for three hours, in any direction, you'd end up in a place you'd like to be. The problem of economic hardship, or institutionalised prejudices, or complacency, or fear of the unknown, or a lack of education about (or access to) alternatives, or, or, or... whatever the reasons, meant nobody ever – or rarely – drove those three hours.

Stockton, to my family and many others, was a “for now” place; it was where poor or lower-middle-class families could afford their first houses. We called them starter homes and braved the bad statistics in hopes we could join the upwardly mobile and eventually move on to bigger and better things. Unfortunately, as the matriarch Paige describes in *Hir*, these homes often became “a starter home we've been in for thirty years”. Essentially my hometown was one of those places where the American dream got stuck in an American reality.

I started plotting my escape the second I developed a feminine walk and became conscious that I wasn't like the other boys. My story is not unusual. Most of the working-class queers I know have similar ones. We're always comparing tales about our oppressive upbringings and priding ourselves with our blue ribbons for worst hometown statistics. We continually talk about how lucky we are that our queerness and our need to survive and find community gave us the extra bit of drive that was needed to get out of those homophobic and transphobic environments. We queers, for the most part, fled to the bigger cities, or radical enclaves, where we try not to look back, lest we turn into a pillar of fast food condiments.

In my time since I left home (25 years), it's been thrilling to notice how many of those queer refugees, along with the straight radicals (and even progressives), are exploding the oppressive traditions, dictates, laws, and culture we've inherited and are creating a new world order in our new homes. Sure it's taking time, it should have happened long ago, and isn't even close to actually being what it needs to be (in terms of dealing with inequality, climate change, and economic disparity), but it's happening. There is tangible progress. There are also tangible casualties that are a direct result of this new world order we're helping to create.

I keep reading articles and seeing news reports about how a whole generation of straight white conservatives is being sacrificed to the Fox News gods, how the boys are being left behind in schools, and as I travel around the country performing, I see how many returning soldiers aren't able to integrate back into society. I equate Stockton, and all the Stocktons, with Arnold and Isaac in the play: the former is an abuser patriarch turned stroke victim and the latter, a prodigal son who is now an extremely damaged war veteran. They're two people who tried to run their environments using the traditions they'd been given, failed violently, and can't be allowed to be in charge any longer. But two people who are in the world regardless. Paige, the matriarch of the family, and Max, the youngest sibling (who is transgender and has begun to use the third-sex pronoun “hir” in place of her or him), believe they're on the verge of freeing themselves. They've fought back and are reaping the benefits. It's glorious. The problem they come up against in the play is: what to do with the collateral damage?

This note first appeared in Playwrights Horizons' subscriber bulletin for its New York premiere of Hir in 2015.



Kurt Pimblett, Greg Stone & Michael Whalley



Helen Thomson

REHEARSING HIR



Helen Thomson & Greg Stone

Describe what you see in the picture above.

What do you think the relationship between these two characters could be?

Who has the higher status in this moment? Why?



Kurt Pimblett & Michael Whalley

Describe what you see in the picture above.

What do you think the relationship between these two characters could be?

How does the actors' body language convey this relationship?



Helen Thomson, Greg Stone, Michael Whalley & Kurt Pimblett
 Describe what you see in the picture above.
 Where is this scene located?
 What do you think is happening in this moment?



Kurt Pimblett
 Describe what you see in the picture above.
 Look carefully at the magnets on the rehearsal fridge
 Why might these magnets feature as part of the set?

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

The elements of production are the technical and visual elements used to manipulate the elements of drama in order to effectively tell a play's story.

In these notes we are going to look at *Hir*

Costume design references

Set model box

COSTUME DESIGN: REFERENCES & RENDERINGS



Costume Rendering by Michael Hankin (2017)



Michael Whalley as Isaac



Costume Rendering by Michael Hankin (2017)



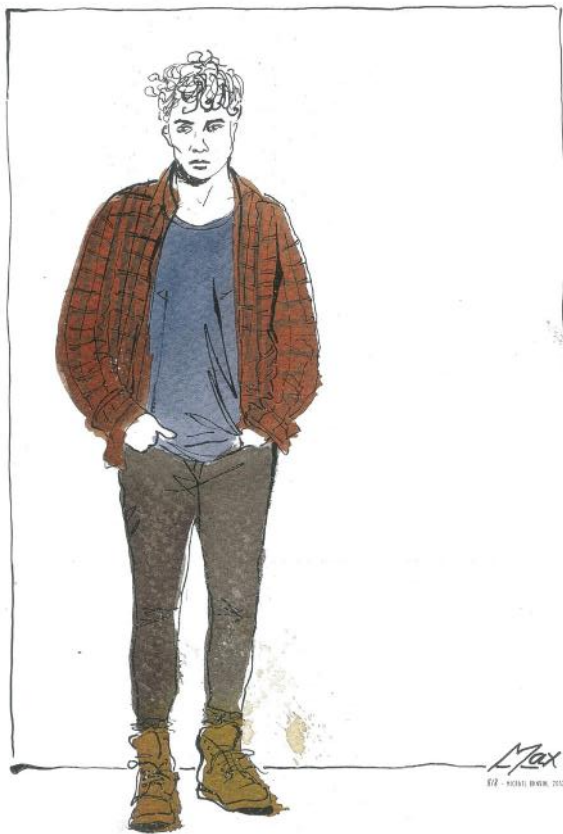
Helen Thomson as Paige



Costume Rendering by Michael Hankin (2017)



Helen Thomson as Paige



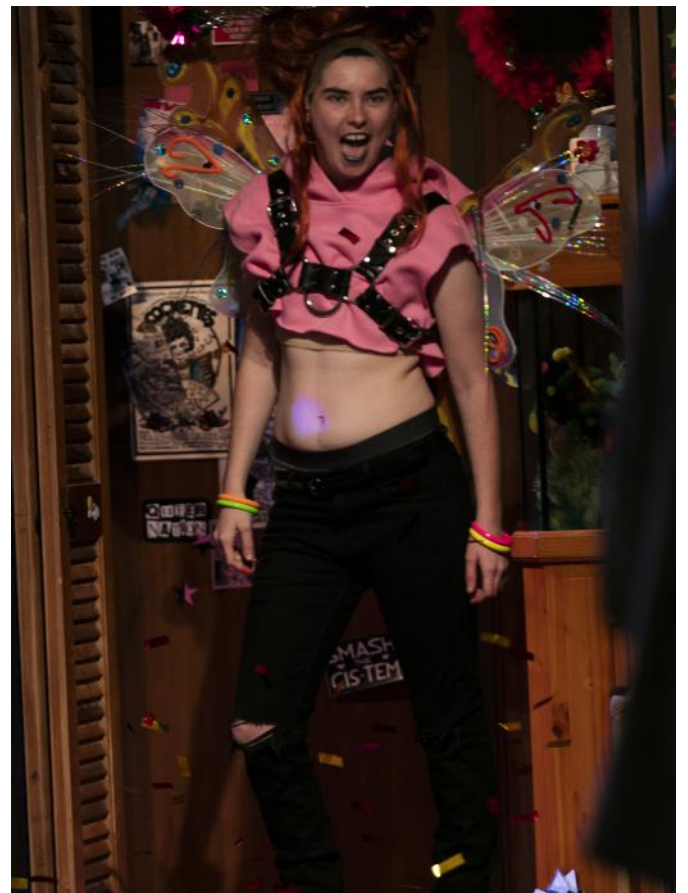
Costume Rendering by Michael Hankin (2017)



Kurt Pimblett as Max



Costume Rendering by Michael Hankin (2017)



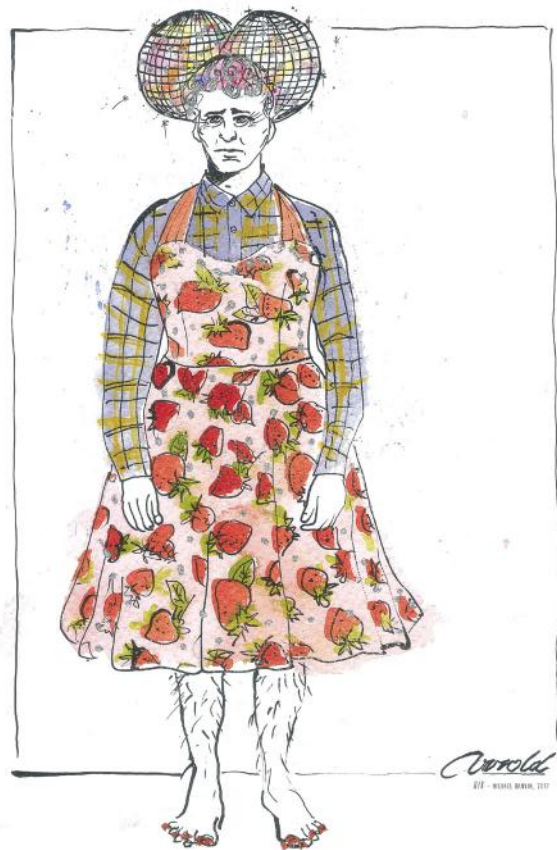
Kurt Pimblett as Max



Costume Rendering by Michael Hankin (2017)



Greg Stone as Arnold



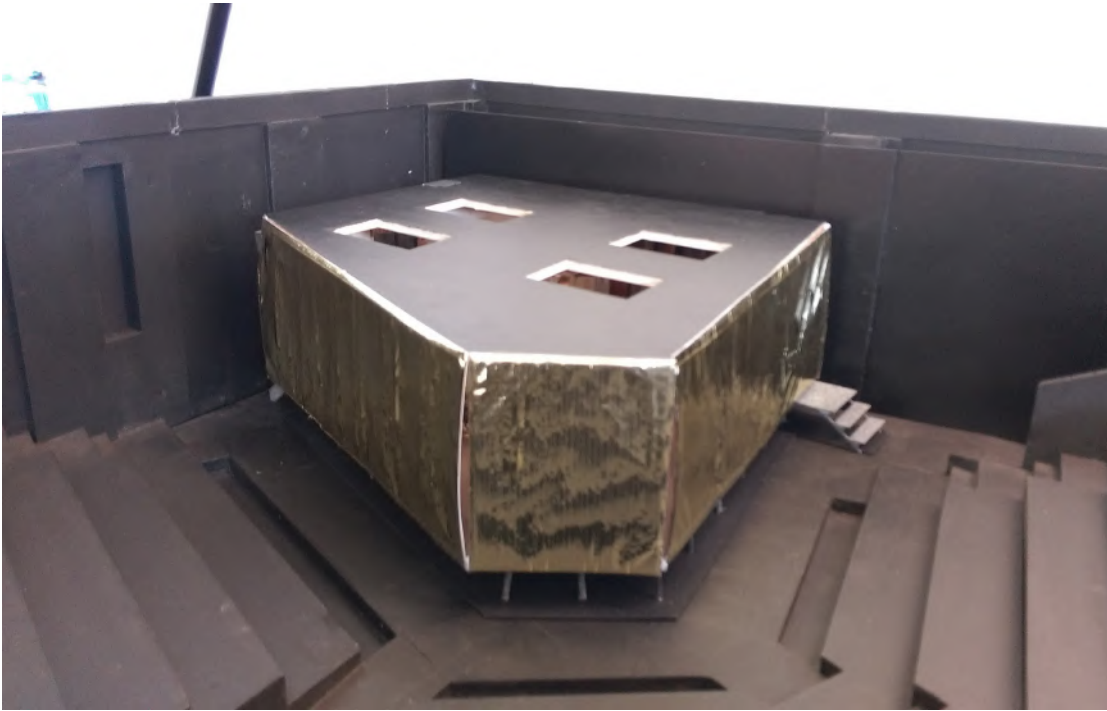
Costume Rendering by Michael Hankin (2017)



Greg Stone as Arnold

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

SET DESIGN



Set Model Box by Michael Hankin (2017)



Set Model Box by Michael Hankin (2017)



Set Model Box by Michael Hankin (2017)

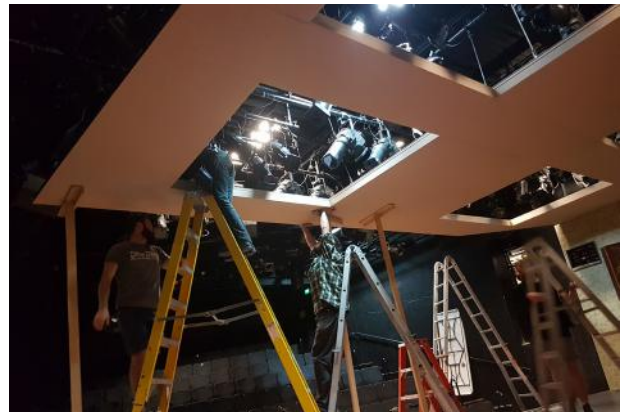
Questions to consider after seeing this production

1. What is the key difference between the early model box design & the final set design?
2. Why might this change have taken place?
3. How many entrance/exit points were used on the set in the production?
4. How has the designer used stage space, texture, colour and composition to enhance dramatic meaning?

PRODUCTION WEEK PHOTOGRAPHS

Belvoir's Head of Production Sally Withnell has the responsibility to plan for and oversee Belvoir production weeks in the theatre. Production week is very busy at Belvoir. When one show closes (on a Sunday night) the Production Department begin to 'bump in' Belvoir's next show the following Monday morning. Actors begin working in the theatre from Wednesday for technical and dress rehearsals with their first preview playing to an audience on Saturday night.

Sally took some photographs of the *Hir* production week to share with us.





POST SHOW DISCUSSION

All four characters go on a significant journey during the course of the play. What has changed for each character from the beginning to the end?



Helen Thomson

Give an example of how the playwright effectively uses humour to confront an audience with human experiences of pain, loss, the controversial or the taboo.



Helen Thomson & Greg Stone

Compare the mood of the opening and closing scenes.



Helen Thomson, Michael Whalley & Greg Stone

What was the dramatic impact of the final scene? How did you feel at the end?



PODCAST



Step behind the scenes with director Anthea Williams and her fabulous cast as they discuss gender, politics and family dysfunction in Taylor Mac's smash hit new play *Hir*.

Produced by Zoe Ferguson for Belvoir

Listen to the *Hir* podcast online here:

<https://omny.fm/shows/belvoir/hir-backstage>

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