

BELVOIR



STOP GIRL



**20 MARCH -
25 APRIL**

By **Sally Sara** Directed by **Anne-Louise Sarkis**

Principal Partner
ORD MINNETT

Stop Girl is the proud recipient of the **Blake Beckett Trust Award**
Supported by **The Group**



STOP GIRL

20 MAR – 25 APR

RUNNING TIME: 1 HOUR 40 MINUTES (NO INTERVAL)

TEAM

Writer **SALLY SARA**
Director **ANNE-LOUISE SARKS**
Set Designer **ROBERT COUSINS**
Costume Designer **MEL PAGE**
Lighting Designer **PAUL JACKSON**
Composer & Sound Designer **STEFAN GREGORY**
Associate Composer **HAMED SADEGHI**
Stage Manager **LUKE MCGETTIGAN**
Assistant Stage Manager **CECILIA NELSON**
Movement Director **NIGEL POULTON**
Video Deviser & Cinematographer **JACK SALTMIRAS**
Video Content Creator & Systems **SUSIE HENDERSON**

CAST

Psychologist **DEBORAH GALANOS**
Suzie **SHERIDAN HARBRIDGE**
Bec **AMBER MCMAHON**
Atal **MANSOOR NOOR**
Marg **TONI SCANLAN**
AV actors **HILAL TAWAKAL,**
AQSA TAWAKAL, AISHA TAWAKAL,
NAJIULLAH

For more information including cast and creative biographies, visit the website

Photography Daniel Boud, Brett Boardman

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 our respect to the Elders past, present and emerging, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Sheridan Harbridge



SYNOPSIS

“Rule number one, honour the dead.

Rule number two, don’t make the situation worse.”

The blasting effect of tragedy in a foreign country ripples its way through life in suburban Sydney.

Suzie is a reporter transitioning home to Sydney from a war-torn Afghanistan. Atal is an Afghan engineer seeking asylum in Sydney after his work with foreigners in his own country has left his family and his life under threat.

Walkley Award winning foreign correspondent Sally Sara makes her playwriting debut at Belvoir St Theatre with *Stop Girl*. Sally questions what it means to have freedom, the darkness of trauma and how sometimes ordinariness is the hardest thing of all.

***Stop Girl* includes references to trauma, violence, mental illness and contains some strong language.**

If *Stop Girl* raises any concerns for you following the performance, Lifeline offers a 24 hour counselling service and can be reached at 13 11 14. Additional information can be found on their website, lifeline.org.au. Other services which may be of assistance include mental health advocacy organisation, Beyond Blue (beyondblue.org.au, 1300 224 636), and youth mental health foundation, Headspace (headspace.org.au). You may also consider speaking to a trusted source or engaging your local GP.



Mansoor Noor

WRITER'S NOTE

SALLY SARA

My love of theatre began as an eight-year-old, sitting in the darkness at the Festival Theatre in Adelaide. It was that magical moment, when the lights went down just before the start of the show. That moment seemed full of so much excitement and possibility. I thought to myself, 'One day, I want to write the story that comes next.'

Going to the theatre was a 350-kilometre round trip from the small town where I grew up on Yorke Peninsula in South Australia. I never took it for granted.

I wanted to travel further still. As a country kid, I had a restlessness and a deep sense of curiosity. I wanted to see what was in the next town and the next and the next. I wanted to see countries and cities I had coloured-in, in my school books. So, journalism and travel beckoned. But the dream of writing for theatre never left me. I always thought that one day I would know when I had a story worth telling.

Journalism took me from Bourke to Baghdad and beyond. I loved it. The more assignments, the more flights, the more countries and experiences, the better.

But after returning home from Afghanistan, it was clear that years of covering war and disaster had come at a price.

In November 2012, I broke down.

At first it felt like a story I could tell no one. I felt so ashamed and frightened. I could not put the experience into words, let alone share it. It was intensely personal. There was almost a grief that came from finding out that I was not as brave as I thought I was.

Eventually I started to speak of some of what happened. Carefully.

But it felt impossible to tell the whole story.

I knew it was time. The dream of writing for the theatre had never left me.

So, in 2015, I decided to spend a year trying to teach myself to write for the stage. I watched, listened and read everything I could. I emailed playwrights and met up with those who were kind enough to give some time.

I wrote the first draft of the play in 2016 and it was selected for development by Playwriting Australia in 2017.

Stop Girl is semi-autobiographical. The script is a mixture of imagination, my experiences, and interviews with the real life people who were the inspiration for the characters in the play. Theatre is a medium that can deliver narrative with simple truth and vivid symbolism.

I hope the play gives the audience an inside view of journalism, trauma and war. The central dramatic question of the story is, 'How to find peace after pain?' It's a question with currency beyond the battleground and the home front.

I'm grateful to Belvoir for bringing *Stop Girl* to the stage and to my family, friends and colleagues for their generosity and support. It's a dream come true.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

ANNE-LOUISE SARCS

At one level this is a story of the domestic. A woman returns to Sydney. She does her job; she goes to the bank; she visits the beach with her friend.

But while she is going about these everyday, ordinary tasks, she is also engaged in an epic struggle. That struggle is with pain and trauma, and so it takes place within her. But the nature of trauma is that it takes us elsewhere too: she is in Sydney, and she is also in Afghanistan. She is going about her life, and she is reliving horrific events. She is in the present, and in the past.

The examination of trauma upon returning from a war goes all the way back to Greek theatre. And so it is perhaps unsurprising that as we searched for a way to capture

the two very different scales on which this story takes place, I often found myself thinking about Greek theatre.

We have become incredibly skilled, in our contemporary society, at separation. Many of us allow ourselves to believe that the horrors of Afghanistan, of any of the conflicts playing out overseas and the human collateral, have little to do with us. But Sally Sara knows something that the Greeks knew: our own lives cannot be so easily separated from the pain and bloodshed that is unfolding elsewhere. Similarly, the epic dramas of our existences cannot be easily separated from the ordinary. The epic lives within the ordinary, just as the ordinary lives within the epic.

This new play asks immensely difficult questions about what it is to be human. What role should other people's pain play in our lives? How much can we ever understand it? Is there a limit to the amount of pain we are able to take in? The Greeks knew that questions this large needed not only to be asked, but to be shared – that they were bigger than any human could carry alone. They brought them to life onstage and wrestled with them together as a community. They understood that our lives cannot be separated from the lives of others.

For these reasons, I am so grateful that Sally chose to tell this story through the theatre.



Mansoor Noor



Sheridan Harbridge, Amber McMahon



Toni Scanlan, Sheridan Harbridge



Toni Scanlan, Deborah Galanos

