



BELVOIR ST
THEATRE

LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI

1 OCT - 6 NOV 2022



LEARNING
RESOURCES

Belvoir presents

LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI

By **Vidya Rajan**

based on the book by **Melina Marchetta**

Directed by **Stephen Nicolazzo**

This production of *Looking For Alibrandi* premiered at the Melvyn Theatre at Malthouse Theatre on Wednesday 13 July 2022, and opened at Belvoir St Theatre on Wednesday 5 October 2022.

Set & Costume Kate Davis **Kate Davis**

Lighting Kate Davis **Katie Sfetkidis**

Composer & Sound Kate Davis **Daniel Nixon**

Choreographer & Musician **Rosa Voto**

Musician **Renato Vacirca**

Vocal Coach **Matt Furlani**

Dialect Coach **Paulo Bongiovanni**

Cultural & Language Consultant **Lucia Mastrantone**

Stage Manager **Amelia Grindrod**

Assistant Stage Manager **Jessica Law**

With

John Marc Desengano as Jacobe Coote

Ashley Lyons as Michael

Chanella Macri as Josephine Alibrandi (Josie)

Lucia Mastrantone as Christina & Sera

Hannah Monson as Ivy & John Barton

Jennifer Vuletic as Nonna, Sister Bernadette & Margaret Throsby

Looking for Alibrandi is co-produced with **Malthouse Theatre**

Principal Partner **Ord Minnett**

Supported by **Copyright Agency Cultural Fund**

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, present and emerging, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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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 and Executive Director Aaron Beach, 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



Vidya Rajan
Writer



Melina Marchetta
Original Author



Stephen Nicolazzo
Director



Kate Davis
Set & Costume Kate Davis



John Marc Desengano
Jacobe Coote



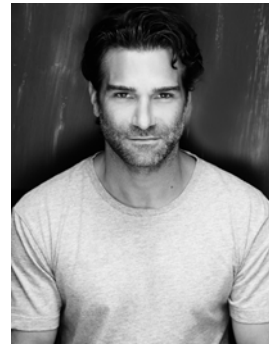
Matt Furlani
Vocal Coach



Amelia Grindrod
Stage Manager



Jessica Law
Assistant Stage Manager



Ashley Lyons
Michael



Chanella Macri
Josephine Alibrandi (Josie)



Lucia Mastrantone
Christina & Sera
Cultural & Language
Consultant



Hannah Monson
Ivy & John Barton



Daniel Nixon
Composer & Sound Kate
Davis



Katie Sfetkidis
Lighting Kate Davis



Renato Vacirca
Musician



Rosa Voto
Choreographer & Musician



Jennifer Vuletic
Nonna, Sister Bernadette &
Margaret Throsby

AUTHOR'S NOTE

MELINA MARCHETTA

I'm writing this on Wangal land, and I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, and pay my respect to their elders, past and present. It's never lost on me that I live on land owned by a people who have been storytellers for more than 40,000 years. I come from a family of storytellers. Aspects of *Looking for Alibrandi* are snippets of stories told to us on childhood journeys to my grandparents' home in the Burdekin up in North Queensland; or at weekly Sunday lunch with the entire Marchetta family in Sydney's inner-west. Stories of racism and of wartime internment, but most of all, stories of community and belonging, which is very much what *Looking for Alibrandi* is about.

This year marks the thirty-year anniversary of the novel, so I feel a great honour in having it adapted by Vidya Rajan and Stephen Nicolazzo. As a writer, I'm passionate about the longevity of my work and the way it's seen by audiences through time. The vision of other creators, especially those who have worn the coat of being 'the other' at some time in their life, excites me. I've never wished for the play you'll be watching to be an exact replica of

the novel I wrote in my parents' home all those decades ago. I want *Alibrandi* to breed and become its own entity through the talents and passion of other creatives such as Vidya and Stephen.

As a teenager, I felt like I didn't have an identity outside my extended family. It meant I questioned my worth a lot more than someone from the dominant culture who was constantly reassured by positive and warm representations of themselves in the media and in the arts.

So, I feel great joy in the knowledge that young people are sitting in the audience and watching this production, seeing aspects of their lives and culture. And their otherness.

It's a truly beautiful thing.



Rehearsal image, by Tamarah Scott

WRITER'S NOTE

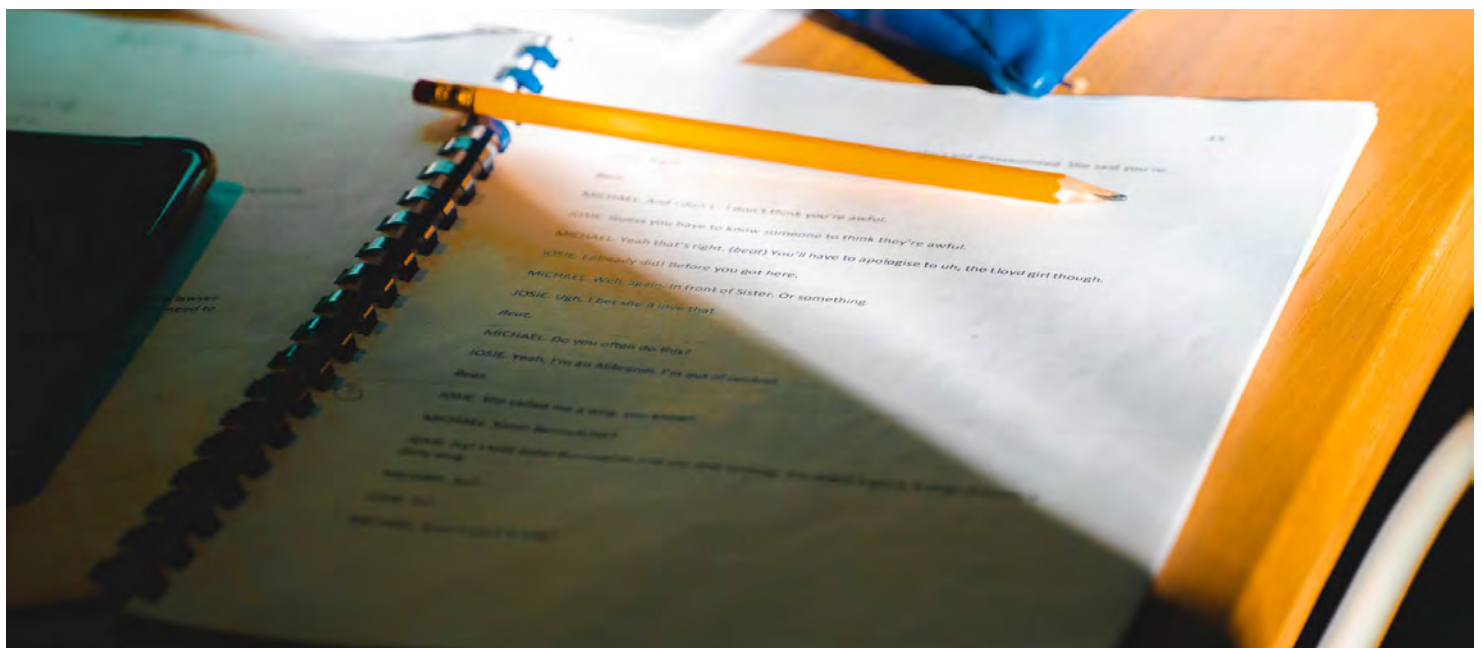
VIDYA RAJAN

I wasn't in Australia in the 90s, and so missed the huge *Alibandi* moment at that time, and actually only read the novel a few years ago, when I chanced upon it at a bookstore. I could not put it down though, and finished it in a night, immediately electrified, and swept away by a real sense of recognition. I guess this isn't surprising—I was a young woman from a migrant background too, a first-generation South Asian Tamil one in my case, who like Josie had also grown up in modest suburbs and chafed against the excesses of culture while dreaming of a grander future.

In adapting the book over the last couple of years, this initial sense of resonance is something I revisited. It felt worthy of investigation, that this novel still felt fresh to someone like me, whose family went through a much later and completely different wave of migration to this country. For many newer settler migrants, Southern European migrants might seem initially part of the fabric of 'Australia', but this was not always so, and there is much we can gain in finding solidarity and exchange across our stories. In my writing, I drew on echoes of similarity: rhythms of silence and speech, the intergenerational strength of women, feelings of alienation, internalised inferiority regarding the 'Anglo establishment', and

the pressures of self-actualising while honouring the sacrifice of those who came before you.

I hope this work lets the audience have a deeply felt experience of this vital moment of migratory history. In turn, it's also a way to connect with and perhaps even to look anew at what, if anything, has changed now, and which stories get to be considered classic parts of this country's trajectory.



Rehearsal image, by Tamarah Scott

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

STEPHEN NICOLAZZO

PROGRAM

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I walked up to Rita, a local Coburg nonna, as she was boiling tomatoes in her custom-made gallon drum and asked, whereabouts in Italy are you from? She responded with 'The part you no like'. I said, 'Are you Calabrese?' and she laughed hysterically. 'YES!' We shared this heritage, both our fathers' sides came from the same part of Italy. As she continued to stir and show an entire community group over the course of six hours what her passata day looked like, I kept chatting to her, wanting to know more. We learned that we were both half-Calabrese and half-Neapolitan, and that we both liked bossing people around. She called me the 'Napolitano' and I, like so many of the other participants, took heed to her hilarious demands and helped her make the passata.

The ritual of passata making was not a tradition in my family, but experiencing

it as an adult brought tears to my eyes. I thought about my family history, how much I love the way Italians labour over food and speak with abandon. How they are always on the precipice of laughter or tears. It conjured memories of the women in my family, my Nonna Lina, Nonna Clara, Great Nonna Rosa, and mia Madre, Angelina. Strong, loving, defiant, and difficult humans who had influenced me with stories and idiosyncratic gestures and vocal ticks, who made me the passionate dramatic creature I am today. I thought of my father, playing Italian standards on his guitar and singing in a wedding band at Italian reception centres every weekend. Of listening to his band rehearse woggy classics and pop songs, not understanding the lyrics but always wanting to dance.

The act of observing another family's tradition of passata making somehow



Stephen Nicolazzo

brought me emotionally closer to my own. This event, organised by a local community centre in Coburg distilled so much of what I wanted to bring to *Looking for Alibrandi* on stage—an emotional representation of family rituals, history, music, and storytelling. To share. It opened my heart up in a way I hadn't let myself do for a very long time, and that felt, as Josie so often says, 'emancipating'.

Looking for Alibrandi had always compelled me because it spoke so directly to the joy I experienced as a young kid growing up in the north-western suburbs of Thomastown, Lalor, and Reservoir, sitting in my Nonni's second kitchen in the garage eating pasta and having my first sip of wine. It also spoke to the conflict that occurred as I

grew older. I was scared to embrace my identity for fear of not being able to access an Anglo-centric world, I was embarrassed by custom, by smelling of salami or garlic, and growing hair on my chest just that little bit earlier than others. I was afraid to be a wog. Just like Josie. Always trying to assimilate to a culture other than my own. I would try out a British accent, strive for excellence in my studies to escape being a concreter, and shut out the traditions that had brought me such love as a young person. I wanted to escape the curse of being a wog. Josie was the first character I had ever read or seen on screen that understood what it was like. Her story made me proud to be a wog and I will thank Melina Marchetta for creating her every single day.



Chanella Macri, Lucia Mastrantone

HISTORY & CONTEXT

EXTRACTS FROM MALHOUSE THEATRE

PROMPT PACK

By Lyall Brooks

THE SOURCE TEXT: MELINA MARCHETTA

Melina Marchetta was born into a family of Australian immigrants, like the character Josie in *Looking for Alibrandi*; the story of Marchetta's grandmother immigrating to Australia from Italy in the 1930s loosely inspired the novel. Unsure of her academic abilities, Marchetta left school at age 15, but later earned a teaching degree. She taught at a Catholic boys' school in Sydney for 10 years. *Looking for Alibrandi*, her first novel, was published in 1992 and became an instant hit, selling out its first print run in only two months. It earned a number of prestigious awards, both in Australia and worldwide, and Marchetta went on to also write the screenplay for the award-winning 2000 film adaptation.

TIME: THE HOWARD ERA

A notable change in this stage adaptation of *Looking for Alibrandi* is to set the story in 1996 instead of 1992, which recontextualises the action under the new Prime Ministership of John Howard. The March 1996 Australian Federal Election was the most important Australian election for more than a decade, decisively returning the Liberal-National coalition to office after thirteen years in opposition. Howard swept into power with talk of sovereignty and strong borders, and pledged to create an Australia that was 'comfortable and relaxed' about its past, its present and its future. Race and immigration emerged as a major election issue for the first time in many years. The campaign was full of racially charged rhetoric, notably from the then-emerging political personalities Pauline Hanson, Graeme Campbell and Bob Katter. Hanson was dis-endorsed by the Liberals for her comments about Aboriginal people, but still won a seat as an independent, leading to an increasingly toxic focus on immigration policy in the ensuing years. John Howard himself had become embroiled in the immigration debate in 1987, when he stated that levels of Asian immigration were too high. He subsequently modified his position and prior to the 1996 campaign, publicly apologised to the Asian community for his earlier remarks. The second major issue of the campaign was the discussing of Australia becoming a republic, which Howard—a staunch monarchist—pushed back against. It was the Howard government that soon invented the cruel form of bureaucratic torture that is the Temporary Protection Visa, and began the policy of offshore detention for asylum seekers via prison camps on Christmas Island, Manus Island and Nauru, with Howard's ringing declaration that 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.'





LANGUAGE RACISM & THE TERM ‘WOG’:

The term ‘wog’ is a racial slur. In the UK it refers to a dark-skinned person from North Africa, the Middle East or South Asia, possibly from the term ‘golliwog’. In Australia it was used to refer to people from Southern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

In the 1980s, the term started to be reclaimed by some artists from those communities, including Nick Giannopoulos and Simon Palomares, George Kapiniaris and Mary Coustas, through shows like *Wogs Out of Work*, *Acropolis Now*, and *Wog Boy*. This came hand-in-hand with a lot of racial caricaturing, and there’s a tension in some of these stereotypes in having both positive and negative impacts for those communities.

PASSATA

Throughout the production, the Passata Day ritual of tomato sauce making is present. It’s an ongoing visual element that underpins the action, bringing a constant sensory element of the tradition that links Josie, Christina and Katia to their Italian roots—and to each other. Passata Day is an annual Italian tradition that’s celebrated around Australia, often in January when tomatoes are at their ripest. It involves families coming together, chopping and boiling tomatoes, and then bottling the mixture for cooking throughout the year. Melina Marchetta’s original novel of *Looking for Alibrandi* is said to have introduced the iconic Passata Day tradition to many non-Italian Australians. The use of tomatoes for sauces and preserves did not emerge until the late 1800s. When they were brought to Europe in the 16th century, tomatoes were considered poisonous, and the tomato plant was grown exclusively for ornamental purposes. It took about two centuries for the initial distrust to fade and for tomatoes to be considered edible, by which time the tomato plant had adapted to the climate of Southern Europe. San Marzano is considered the best type of tomato for making sauce, because it’s pulpy, compact, sweet, not very watery, with few seeds, and the right amount of acid. Every region and every family has its own recipe for passata—perhaps adding a basil leaf, or sometimes a touch of salt or olive oil to the bottle. Some families boil and purée the tomatoes first before bottling the mixture, others first peel and quarter the tomatoes, then push them through a machine to make a purée—the messiest job!—before being poured into bottles, sealed, and then boiled in a vat of water for one or two hours. The bottles used are usually recycled and may have been in rotation for decades.

**From: *Looking For Alibrandi* Prompt Pack, VCE Theatre Studies
- Part A (2022), created by Lyall Brooks, Malthouse Education
Coordinator**

Read more from Malthouse Theatre Prompt Pack A
Including discussion and activities about THEMES:
Identity, Religion, Family, The Immigrant Experience,
Socioeconomic Status and Peer Pressure.

[READ MORE](#)

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

PROGRAM

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 *Looking For Alibrandi*

Costume reference images

Set model box

TEXT

DESIGNER

KATE DAVIS

"When Stephen and I started talking about the design, the main symbol of the show felt like it was the tomato—and the aesthetic comes from that idea. We really wanted to bring in this idea of tomatoes and of live processes of making food, so that you would feel—either at the Merlyn [Melbourne partner theatre] or the Upstairs at Belvoir space—a sense of community. We're creating passata live onstage, so we wanted to see the tomato from in its whole form, being cut, being smooshed, being pureed, being bottled and then being eaten—and the smell of the tomato will be filling the theatre. We're also giving a nod to the Belvoir building being, quite literally, an old passata factory!"

- Kate Davis

DESIGN

From: *Looking For Alibrandi* Prompt Pack, VCE Theatre Studies - Part B (2022), created by Lyall Brooks, Malthouse Education Coordinator

Read more from Malthouse Theatre Prompt Pack B
Including interviews and notes from the Cast & Creative Team

[READ MORE](#)

PRODUCTION

Questions to consider after seeing this production

1. How many different locations were represented in the production?
2. How are set pieces and the curtain used to change the space? What impact does this have?
3. How has the designer, Kate Davis, used stage space, texture, colour and composition to enhance dramatic meaning?

MEDIA



SET DESIGN

REFERENCE IMAGES

Reference images are used by designers to communicate aesthetic concepts with the director or to the cast. These might communicate a moment in the play, or an overall texture or style.



Aesthetic



Reference images collected by Kate Davis

MODEL BOX DESIGNS



Initial Design: Looking For Alibrandi Model Box - by Kate Davis



Final Design: Looking For Alibrandi Model Box - by Kate Davis

COSTUME DESIGN

JOSEPHINE 'JOSIE' ALIBRANDI

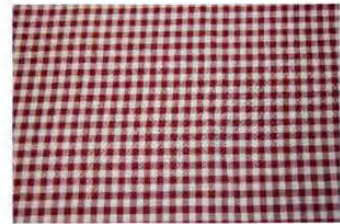
PROGRAM

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DESIGN

PRODUCTION

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'90s girl



Josie



Reference images, character lookbook, by Kate Davis

JOSEPHINE 'JOSIE' ALIBRANDI



Chanella Macri as Josephine Alibrandi (Josie), Costume design by Kate Davis

NONNA



Nonna



NONNA



Jennifer Vuletic as Nonna,

CHRISTINA



Christina

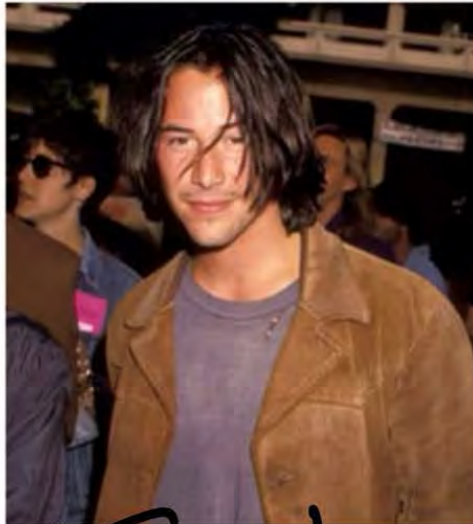
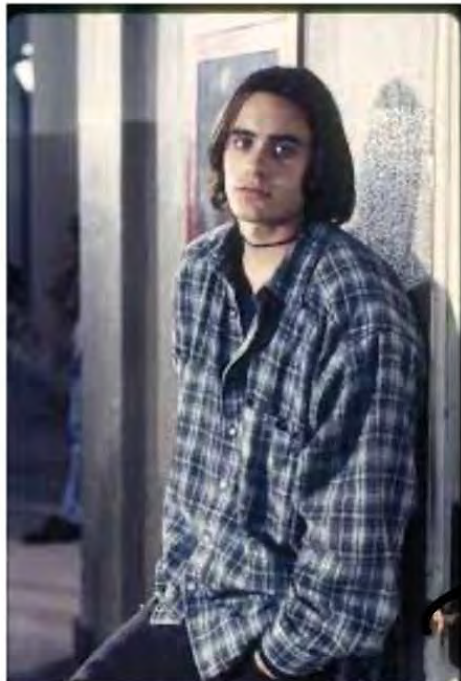


CHRISTINA



Lucia Mastrantone as Christina, Costume design by Kate Davis

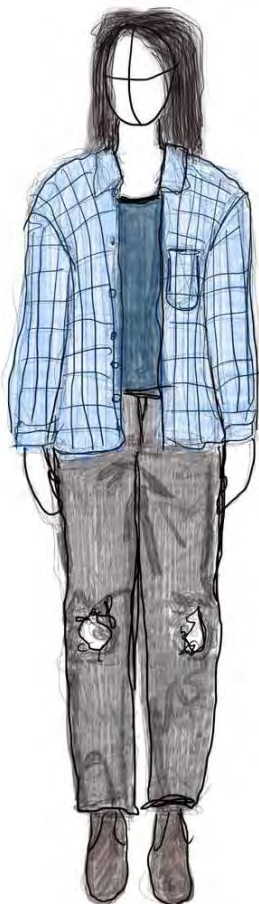
JACOB COOTE



Jacob



JACOB COOTE



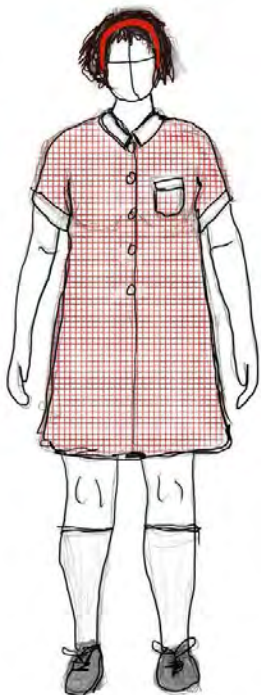
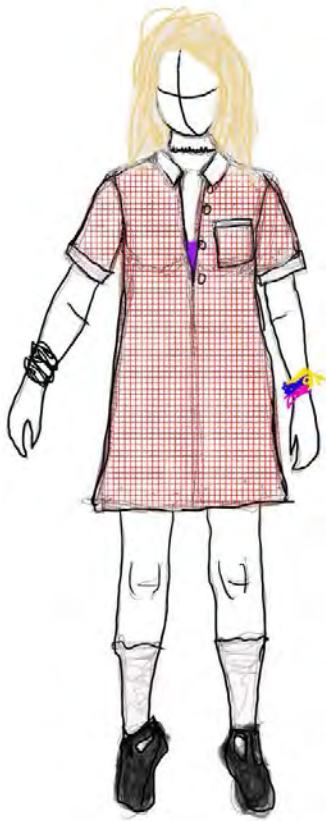
John Marc Desengano as Jacob Coote, Costume design by Kate Davis

IVY & SERA



Reference images, character lookbook, by Kate Davis

IVY & SERA



Lucia Mastrantone as Sera, Hannah Monson as Ivy, Costume design by Kate Davis

MICHAEL ANDRETTI & JOHN BARTON



Michael



John



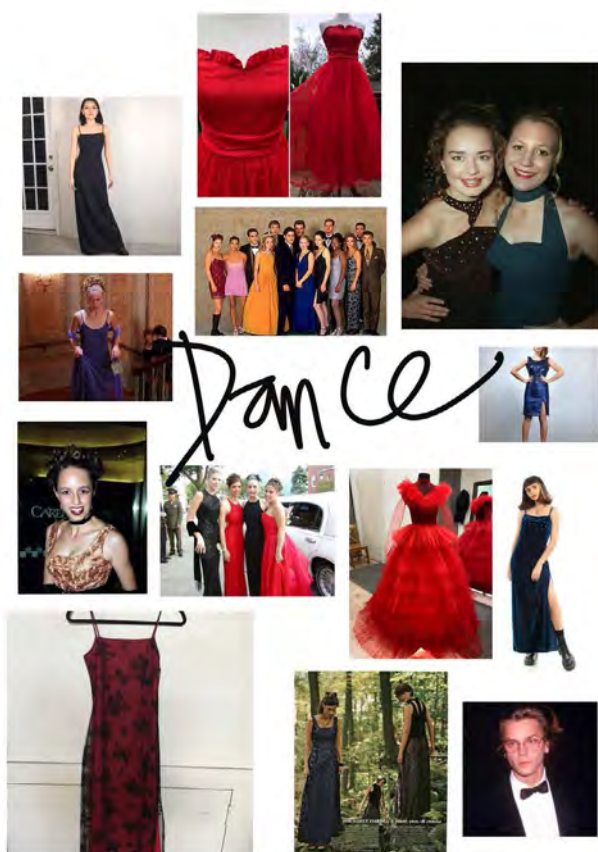
Reference images, character lookbook, by Kate Davis

MICHAEL ANDRETTI & JOHN BARTON



Ashley Lyons as Michael, Hannah Monson as John Barton, Costume design by Kate Davis

THE DANCE

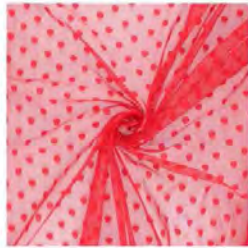
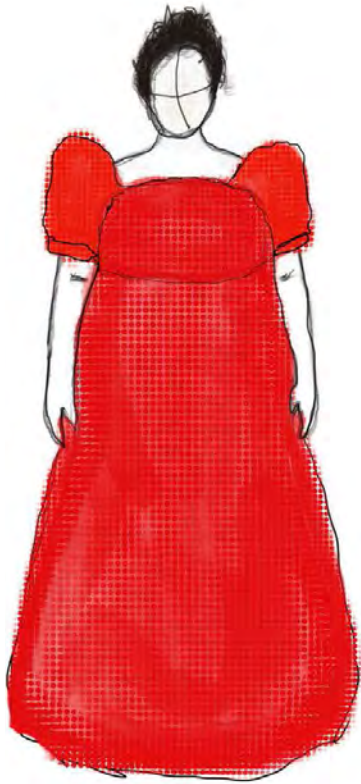


Reference images, character lookbook, by Kate Davis



Reference images, character lookbook, by Kate Davis

THE DANCE



Chanella Macri, Lucia Mastrantone, Hannah Monson John Marc Desengano, Costume design by Kate Davis

REHEARSING LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



John Marc Desengano, Ashley Lyons, Chanella Macri, Lucia Mastrantone, Hannah Monson, Jennifer Vuletic

1. What do you think is happening in this scene? Give reasons for your answer
2. What evidence is there that this is a rehearsal?



John Marc Desengano, Ashley Lyons, Chanella Macri, Lucia Mastrantone, Hannah Monson, Jennifer Vuletic

1. Describe what you see in the photo above
2. What do you think is happening? Give reasons for your answer.



John Marc Desengano, Ashley Lyons, Chanella Macri, Lucia Mastrantone, Hannah Monson, Jennifer Vuletic

1. Describe what you see in the photo above.
2. What do you think is happening in this moment?



John Marc Desengano, Ashley Lyons, Chanella Macri, Lucia Mastrantone, Hannah Monson, Jennifer Vuletic

1. Describe what you see in the picture above.
2. What do you think is happening in this moment?
3. What do you think the relationship is between these characters? Give reasons for your answer

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



Chanella Macri, Lucia Mastrantone,

How does the play explore themes of family, migration and belonging?



Chanella Macri, Hannah Monson

**How would you describe the relationships between the characters in this play?
How does the use of doubling (when one actor plays multiple characters) reveal ideas of the play?**



Hannah Monson, John Marc Desengano

How does the play explore themes of class and privilege?



Jennifer Vuletic, Chanella Macri

What moment in the production had the most impact on you? Why?

Describe how the production uses elements of sound and lighting to tell the story?



Chanella Macri

WATCH & LISTEN



Belvoir Briefing | *Looking For Alibrandi*
Hear from the Artists at the Belvoir Briefing

[WATCH NOW](#)



Prompt Packs | *Looking For Alibrandi*
Check out Malthouse Theatre's **Prompt Pack B** for interviews with Cast and Creatives + much more

[READ MORE](#)



Social Media | *Looking For Alibrandi*

Lots of sneak-peek content, and promotional information can be found on social media.

Take a look at the grid and the stories for more content during the run.



ARTICLES & REVIEWS

Thirty years on, I'm still grappling with what *Looking for Alibrandi* means to me
By Melina Marchetta - Sydney Morning Herald, 28 Sep 2022

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

Finding Alibrandi: Australia's favourite teenage rebel gets a 2022 makeover
By Sonia Harford - The Age, 7 Jul 2022

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)



Reviews | *Looking For Alibrandi*

Find out what critics are saying about the "warm-hearted and rich"* new stage adaptation of *LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI*

[WATCH NOW](#)

CONTACT EDUCATION

PROGRAM

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TEXT

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DESIGN

Belvoir Education would like to thank Lyall Brooks and the team at Malthouse Theatre, Kate Davis, Xu Yang Chua and Jake Severino for their support creating these resources.

PRODUCTION

MEDIA