

BELVOIR



THE BOOMKAK PANTO

20 NOV — 23 DEC





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CONTENT WARNING

The Boomkak Panto includes strong language and sexual references. Not suitable for ages under 14.

CAST

Deborah Galanos as Parnia
Virginia Gay as Alison
Rob Johnson as Butch/BD
Billy McPherson as Darren
Hamed Sadeghi as Musician
Mary Soudi as Yazmin
Zoe Terakes as Zoe
Toby Truslove as John

TEAM

Writer & Co-Director **Virginia Gay**
Co-Director **Richard Carroll**
Set and Costume Designer **Michael Hankin**
Lighting Designer **Jasmine Rizk**
Assistant Designers **Cris Baldwin & Keerthi Subramanyam**
Composer **Eddie Perfect**
Sound Designer **Kellie-Anne Kimber**
Music Director **Zara Stanton**
Choreographer **Elle Evangelista**
Intimacy Coordinator **Chloë Dallimore**
Scenic Artist **Russell Carey**
Stage Manager **Luke Mcgettigan**
Assistant Stage Manager **Ayah Tayeh**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we share our stories. We also pay our respect to the Elders past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Virginia Gay, Billy McPherson,
Hamed Sadeghi, Rob Johnson,
Toby Truslove, Deborah Galanos,
Zoe Terakes, Mary Soudi

WRITER & CO-DIRECTOR'S NOTE

VIRGINIA GAY

I saw my first panto at the tender age of 38. It starred my nephew, Eddie, at the slightly-more-literally tender age of 11, playing sixth villager from the left. In Essex. At 10 in the morning. He did two more shows that day.

I went to see a second panto 2 weeks later - a bigger budget one, at a fancy West End theatre. I thought it would make more sense. It made, if possible, less sense. Though the significantly bigger budget allowed for significantly more pointless costume changes and elaborate dance pieces. And pyros. So. Many. Pyros.

Bemused as I was by the local English customs, you couldn't say it wasn't a hit. Both theatres were packed to the gills, and the crowds were mad for it.

See, what no one tells you about pantos, unless you grew up watching them, slowly letting the logic mandala of your brain atrophy into non-existence, is that they are *batshit* mental. Unless you grew up knowing that the old creaky jokes and half-hearted slapstick and wildly squished in celebrity cameos were meant to be creaky and half-hearted and squished, unless you grew up knowing that yelling back was not verboten, but allowed - no, celebrated, vital! - you are astonished and mildly terrified by everything that happens.

So. How to make a truly Aussie panto, that taught people the rules of the art form as we went, but also, while sending up the impossible creakiness of the art form, delivered truckloads of heart just when you least expected it? How to make a show that was actually triumphant, and, like everything I desire to make at the moment, leaves you feeling connected, elated, and feeling like you could change the world?? And how to use this ridiculous, sequin-covered hoopla to integrate why we keep telling the old stories, and if we're gonna keep doing it, what responsibility we have to shake 'em up, give 'em to new voices, and turn our hopeful little faces towards the future?

I wrote a fairytale village that actually deserved to be protected. A little microcosm, a dream of what Australia *could* be, if we only pulled our fingers out and gave slightly more of a shit. Seen and heard First Nations elders, welcomed and integral-to-the-community refugee families, a queer AF love story at its heart and a thousand in-jokes specifically designed for Sydney theatre-loving audiences. And to make the music, I went to Australia's Eddie Perfect, who has delivered 3 phenomenal songs which will almost certainly nab him another Tony Nomination if we ever tour to the US.

I wrote this show for Zoe Terakes, who is without a doubt one of the greatest actors of their generation. (A tip, if you ever need to write for A Specific Actor – give the character the same name - it makes it very hard for them to turn the job down.) I needed, in a central character, a charismatic powerhouse, someone who you would root for, someone with exceptional comic timing, someone who could sing gloriously and fight for what's right *and* break your heart with their bravery and vulnerability. Zoe's a phenomenal activist, a dear friend, and absolute tip-top human, and I am eternally grateful to them for not laughing me out the door when I said 'Mate ... have you ever seen a panto? Well, stick with me ...'

I'd also like to thank the whole cast for the many excellent lines and moments they have all contributed which have *immeasurably* improved the script, and which are now enshrined as cannon. I'd like to thank every one of them too for their generosity of spirit and playfulness - and their fearlessness. Not everybody can run so boldly and so kindly at a joke and it was a complete and utter joy to watch them throw caution to the confetti-speckled wind. I'd also like to thank Gillian Cosgriff and Jane Watt for brilliant lines and insight too, and the exceptional cast of our workshop week, which was made possible by the terrific Artists At Work program.

Advice for anybody looking to co-direct for the first time – co-direct with one of your best friends, who you love and trust with your whole heart, who makes working feel easy and ridiculous, and who's skill with a schedule far outways your own. As we were making *Calamity* together, Richard Carroll would say, all the time 'I mean, this is basically a panto' and I would nod sagely, not knowing what he was talking about. Well, look at us now, Richard! We put on a show! Right here in the old barn!

Huge thanks to Alice, Leon and Gidget who gave me space and calm to write in the middle of an apocalypse, and, as always, to the GFWR – the most supportive and loving life-long team a kid could dream of.

Also, a big thanks to CJ which brought me to SB which lead me to Stuart Town (the original Ironbark – where the bloke with the beard was from!), a glorious handful of houses, with a railway station, and a phenomenal pub with famous potato scallops, and Eugowra, a place known for its murals and its awesome milk bar. (And Molong, Duneedoo, Gulgong – thanks Glynis – the list goes

on!) I couldn't have made this show without having fallen in love with these Little Aussie Towns™. Not to sound too much like a bloody pollie, but now that we're out and in the world again, rent a van and go visit them. You won't regret it.

Love Jinny. x





Richard Carroll

CO-DIRECTOR'S NOTE

RICHARD CARROLL

Hello! How have you been? Haven't seen you in a while. What's been happening? Oh, mainly struggling to keep your head above water as you navigate through a terrifying post-apocalyptic plaguescape? Honestly, same.

But - theatre is back! Again! For now. At least, if you're reading this while sitting in an actual seat in the actual theatre, waiting for the show to begin - how exciting to know that the show will actually - almost certainly - be happening tonight. Now please pull your mask up over your nose, and thank you so much for buying a ticket and helping to get Belvoir back into fighting-fit financial health!

Working and playing with Virginia Gay when we made our production of *Calamity Jane* - which played at Belvoir in 2018 - was one of the highlights of my directorial career. The sense of anarchic irreverence, radical curiosity, and iconoclasm that we both feed off in a rehearsal room was so intoxicating and ultimately fruitful that I was champing at the bit to work with her

again. So when she told me that she'd spent the 2020 lockdown writing not only a new adaptation of *Cyrano De Bergerac* for Melbourne Theatre Company (now on-sale for 2022), but also a brand-new Australian work for Belvoir, I was thrilled and also extremely astonished. I myself had a not-unproductive lockdown period - I created several new kilos, showered nearly every week, and completed almost seven seasons of *The Golden Girls*.

I was, then, thrilled to have an opportunity to take some of the credit when Jinny and Eamon Flack asked me to jump on board this show as co-director - no doubt keen to balance the chaotic energy of the script with some of my trademark subtlety and understatement. It's not really my fault - I grew up in the UK, where pantomime is an annual tradition. My earliest theatrical memories are of local pantomimes, which taught audiences that love will find a way, that dramaturgy is less important than frenzied enthusiasm, and that Kylie Minogue songs can

have a place in a Robin Hood story, if you only want it enough (talk about radical inclusivity). Later, I saw higher-end pantomimes, including the National Theatre's *Peter Pan*, where I pestered my mother to buy me a plastic rapier in the foyer, despite being far too old for such a thing - such is the majestic power of merchandising (check out the fabulous wares on-sale at the bar, and did I mention we're here to get Belvoir back into *fighting-fit financial health*?!)

This mad, delightful panto-inside-a-play-inside-a-panto (Panto-ception, if you will) brings together a cast of people I've loved working with before (Virginia Gay), people I've been trying to work with for ages (Zoe Terakes, Deb Galanos), people I'm excited to work with for the first time (Toby Truslove, Billy McPherson, Mary Soudi), and people I swore I'd never work with again, but discovered I don't contractually have the power to veto (Rob Johnson). Throw in the incredible musicianship of Hamed Sadeghi, and the outrageous talents of our magnificent creative, design, production, and stage management

teams, and we discovered that it's true what they say - it takes a village to make a village.

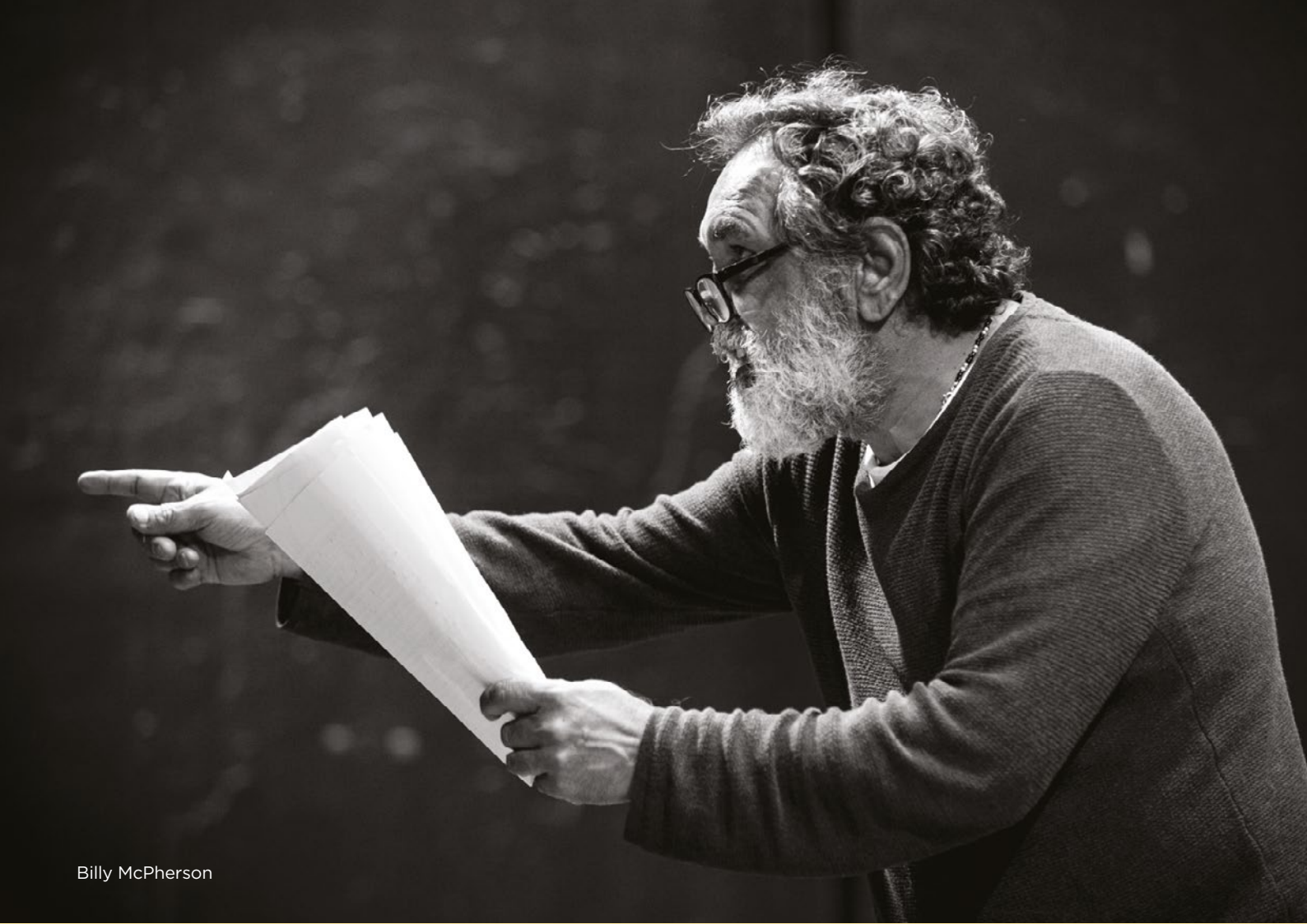
Because I didn't go to NIDA, it's taken most of my career so far to discover what kind of theatre I'm drawn to make. Looking back at the works I've been attracted to and created - varied though they are - I see two things running through them proudly and unashamedly, like a streaker at a funeral. Joy and vulnerability. This show has both in spades, and I hope you're willing to take us by the ruthlessly-sanitised hand, and be joyous and vulnerable yourselves - because if there's one thing I've learned, and one thing this wonderful new Australian work shows us, it's that without vulnerability there is no true joy.

This show is a love letter to the art of storytelling, and I believe it's our greatest honour that we live and work on Aboriginal land - home to the oldest storytelling culture in the world. I am, and always will be, honoured to tell stories on this land.

Richard Carroll

Virginia Gay, Billy McPherson,
Hamed Sadeghi, Rob Johnson,
Toby Truslove, Deborah Galanos,
Zoe Terakes, Mary Soudi





Billy McPherson



Mary Soudi



Mary Soudi and Rob Johnson



Rob Johnson



Zoe Terakes



Toby Truslove



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2022

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Toby Truslove, Zoe Terakes, Mary Soudi