

BELVOIR



OPENING NIGHT

26 FEB - 27 MAR



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26 FEBRUARY – 27 MARCH

Based on the original screenplay
by **John Cassavetes**

RUNNING TIME

1 hour 40 minutes

CONTENT WARNING

Opening Night contains scenes of domestic violence and uses strobe lighting and herbal cigarettes.

CAST

Caitlin Burley as Nancy
Jing-Xuan Chan as Kelly
Luke Mullins as Manny
Toni Scanlan as Sarah
Leeanna Walsman as Myrtle
Matthew Zeremes as Marty

UNDERSTUDIES

Charlotte Friels as Kelly and Nancy
Anthony Harkin as Marty and Manny
Fiona Press as Sarah
Anna Samson as Myrtle

CREATIVES

Original Screenplay **John Cassavetes**
Director & Adaptor **Carissa Licciardello**
Set Designer **David Fleischer**
Costume Designer **Mel Page**
Lighting Designer **Nick Schlieper**
Lighting Associate **Jasmine Rizk**
Composer & Sound Designer
Max Lyandvert
Associate Composer **Hamed Sadeghi**
Fight Director **Tim Dashwood**
Assistant Director **Nicole Pingon**
Stage Manager **Luke McGettigan**
Assistant Stage Manager
Holly Fernanda

Supported by **Oranges & Sardines**

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.

Leeanna Walsman
Rehearsal photos by Daniel Boud



Caitlin Burley, Carissa Licciardello & Leeanna Walsman

DIRECTOR & ADAPTOR'S NOTE

CARISSA LICCIARDELLO

Late last year, looking for a project to direct for the company, I gathered some thoughts on a blank sheet of paper, hoping to spark an idea. I wrote down the titles of books, films, plays that had piqued my interest, alongside a series of ideas and themes I'd long been fascinated by - plays-within-plays; theatre magic; theatre that deconstructs itself, appearing to operate in one way but soon revealing itself to be an entirely different beast; the split self, the double, the doppelganger; the idea of gender, and womanhood, as performance; the trope of the aging actress as vain or insane; the long list of female characters whose suffering or unravelling is part of the spectacle of the work; *A Streetcar Named Desire*; *Persona*; and a film I'd seen once, years ago - *Opening Night*.

All of the most interesting ideas on the page connected back to this last title - and suddenly all the theatrical, thematic and symbolic potency of *Opening Night* became clear to me. The film remains a distinctive work of art that examines what it is to age, to grapple with life and death, love and marriage; but looking at the work through fresh eyes, it seemed to also offer a remarkable vessel for what it is to be a woman in a world that has very particular expectations about how you are supposed to be and behave. A world that grants you a brief illusion of power through youth and beauty, before gradually fading you into invisibility; a world that gaslights you, telling you how things are supposed to be even as that grates against your own experience of the world.

It is this split of realities that Myrtle, the lead actress featured in *Opening Night*, has to navigate. There's her outer world - the world of the play she's rehearsing, the world of actor, director, writer, designer - the world of culture - a world that appears to be real, but is actually constructed; and her inner world - the world as she experiences it - a world of the surreal, the metaphysical, the symbolic - a world that perhaps offers more substance.

It was the theatrical potential of these two worlds, and their ability to explore what it is to move through the world as a woman, that was the major drawcard and way in for me as an adaptor/director. And in the intimate, exposed, no-bullshit Belvoir stage, it became clear that there was a way to stage this work that didn't need cameras or screens or close-ups projected onstage - conventions one might be tempted to use in adapting a work like this - but where the play-within-a-film became a play-within-a-play. The potential for confusion between the play on the one hand, and play-within on the other, would be something we could actually exploit to take us further inside Myrtle's experience - to slip between realities.

I never returned to the film; instead I began to work from the screenplay, the blueprint for Cassavetes' film, from which we created a blueprint for our own act of theatre-making.

From there, I went to lighting designer Nick Schlieper and set designer Dave Fleischer, and we began to design the show at the same time as I was adapting it, each process informing the other - an ideal process for this kind of theatrical work - and the adaptation process continued as we began to work with Mel Page, costume designer, and Max Lyandvert, composer and sound designer, each of us throwing ideas around as we shaped the production. Then our cast joined us and the work continued to take shape, alongside our fight director Tim Dashwood, our excellent Assistant Director Nicole Pingon and our Associate Composer Hamed Sadeghi.

The lead-up to any opening night is always eventful - although I'm not sure if it's ever been as eventful as trying to get a show up during a pandemic. As I write this, we're about to begin Week 4 of rehearsals - but with me directing from Zoom for four days, homebound due to close-contact COVID isolation - our third COVID-related disruption so far.

Despite these challenges, this has been an exciting piece to make. We have had an excellent team working on this show, onstage and off, and the Belvoir production team has really stretched themselves to pull this one off - it's a tricky beast. Thanks too to Alex Stuart and Lauren A. Proietti for your wisdom and work. And a big thank you to my own consiglieri, Elsie.

Here is our *Opening Night*.



Leeanna Walsman & Matthew Zeremes



Leeanna Walsman & Jing-Xuan Chan

LIGHTING DESIGNER'S NOTE

NICK SCHLIEPER

Designing *Opening Night* has been a fascinating process and one replete with challenges. The kind of challenges that are great to get your teeth into – that really stretch your imagination and your expertise.

Adapting a film to the stage is always tricky. Theatre and film both have clear areas of strength and those strengths are very different ones. There's no point shifting something from one form to the other, unless the shift enriches the original. Unless the new form can cast more or better light on some aspect of the story, that the original, because of its form, couldn't do as effectively. Given that the original in this case was a *film* about actors rehearsing a *play*, which we've turned into a *play* about actors rehearsing a *play*, the lens through which the story is viewed becomes

quite different and calls for an equally different set of storytelling techniques.

It goes without saying that you have to find a design language that clearly communicates a number of levels (and versions) of reality. To do this well and then elide elegantly and seamlessly between them is challenging enough at the best of times. But then you also have to find a version of that visual language, that is right for the space in which it's performed and this raises a whole other set of considerations. Solutions that might be great in a proscenium arch theatre, where the stage is viewed and the show experienced through a very clearly defined frame, don't necessarily work in a more open, embracing and proximate space like Belvoir.

“Big theatre” tricks either just don’t work at all, or they’re exposed to be just that – tricks. The nature of the Belvoir space has a way of keeping your theatre-making honest!

So finding solutions that do the necessary work in terms of clearly communicating what can (and sometimes should!) be a confusing and slippery world, but that also feel honest and appropriate to the space became our goal. We constantly went back and tested each potential “solution” against the touchstone of this space. As a result, many an otherwise perfectly feasible idea, found its way onto the reject pile!

We’ve had one big advantage in this process, in that Carissa developed the adaptation in parallel to us developing the design. In this way, one process has informed the other.

The function of light in this context, isn’t essentially different to many another piece of theatre. It’s still there to tell an audience where, when and occasionally why. It still guides the audience’s eye and frequently subliminally suggests how the viewer might feel about a character or a moment in the piece. However, the demands of this play, with its many layers and levels of reality push those functions to a more critical level. The lighting needs to clarify (but occasionally also obfuscate) who’s perspective we’re supposed to think we’re seeing, of any given moment. Whose reality we’re witnessing and how reliable is that particular version of reality? It’s a fascinating puzzle to unpick and find a way through.

After many months of talking about this, I can’t wait to get into the theatre and do it!



Leeanna Walsman, Luke Mullins, Matthew Zeremes, Carissa Licciardello, Jing-Xuan Chan



Caitlin Burley, Carissa Licciardello & Leeanna Walsman



Luke Mullins



Leeanna Walsman & Toni Scanlan



Luke Mullins, Matthew Zeremes, Leeanna Walsman,
Carissa Licciardello & Nicole Pingon



Nicole Pingon



David Fleischer



Leeanna Walsman & Jing-Xuan Chan



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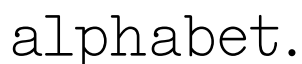
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