



**BELVOIR ST
THEATRE**

Lady Day

at Emerson's Bar & Grill

14 SEP - 15 OCT 2023

**LEARNING
RESOURCES**



Belvoir presents

LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL

By **Lanie Robertson**

Musical Arrangements by **Danny Holgate**

Director **Mitchell Butel**

Associate Director **Zahra Newman**

This production of *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* opened at Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre on Tuesday 29 Aug 2023 and opened at Belvoir St Theatre on Saturday 16 September 2023.

Set and Costume Designer **Ailsa Paterson**

Lighting Designer **Govin Ruben**

Musical Director and Additional Arrangements **Kym Purling**

Sound Designer **Andrew Howard**

Voice and Dialogue Coach **Geraldine Cook-Dafner**

Voice and Dialogue Coach **Jennifer Innes**

Stage Manager **Bridget Samuel**

Assistant Stage Manager **Sean Proude**

With

Zahra Newman Billie Holiday

Elenoa Rokobaro Alternate Performer – Billie Holiday

Kym Purling Jimmy Powers

Victor Rounds Double Bass

Calvin Welch Drums

Co-produced with **Melbourne Theatre Company** and **State Theatre Company South Australia**

Principal partner **Ord Minnett**

Piano generously supplied by **Kawai**

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.

Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill was first produced in New York by the Vineyard Theatre.

Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill is produced by special arrangement with The Gersh Agency, 41 Madison Avenue, 29th Floor, New York, NY 10010.

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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 Eamon Flack 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 belvoir.com.au/education

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM



Lanie Robertson
Writer



Danny Holgate
Musical Arrangements



Mitchell Butel
Director



Zahra Newman
Associate Director



Geraldine Cook-Dafner
Voice and Dialogue Coach



Andrew Howard
Sound Designer



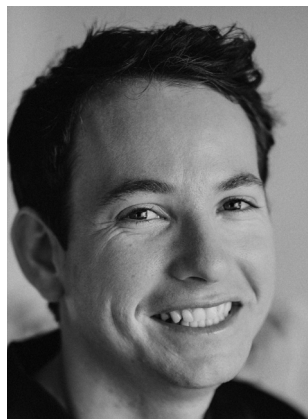
Jennifer Innes
Voice and Dialogue Coach



Zahra Newman
Billie Holiday



Ailsa Paterson
Set and Costume Designer



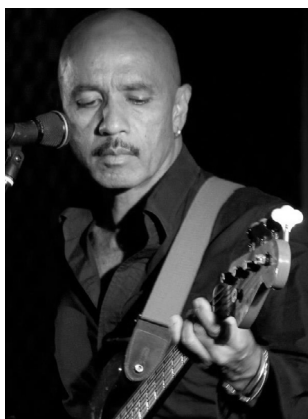
Sean Proude
Assistant Stage Manager



Kym Purling
Musical Director, Additional
Arrangements & Jimmy Powers



Elenoa Rokobaro
Billie Holiday
(Alternate Performer)



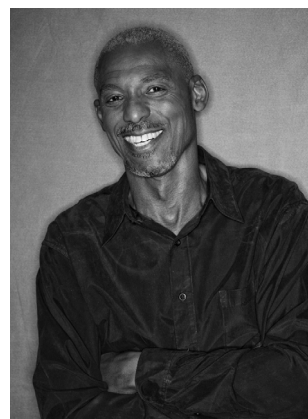
Victor Rounds
Double Bass



Govin Ruben
Lighting Designer



Bridget Samuel
Stage Manager



Calvin Welch
Drums

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

MITCHELL BUTEL

What is it about some performers that captures a generation? And what is it about those who leave legacies long after they're gone?

Is it their look, their sound, the way they open our mind or heart, their craft, their innovation, the meaning or message they impart to us? Maybe it's all of those things.

There is perhaps no singer in the last century with as distinct and recognisable a voice as Billie Holiday. And few singers with as individual and idiosyncratic a musicianship.

Billie said: "If I'm going to sing like someone else, then I don't need to sing at all... You can't copy anybody and end with anything. If you copy, it means you're working without any real feeling."

And yet, her sound, her style, her process coalesced into a way of singing that has influenced many who have followed her.

To quote Frank Sinatra in 1958, a year before Holiday died and when this show is set: "With few exceptions, every major pop singer in the US during

her generation has been touched in some way by her genius. It is Billie Holiday who was, and still remains, the greatest single musical influence on me. Lady Day is unquestionably the most important influence on American popular singing in the last twenty years."

She was prolific as a live performer and as a recording artist. She was provocative – her signature song Strange Fruit was a flashpoint cri de Coeur for the civil rights movement. And she was a worker – someone who was most at home on stage, collaborating with other musicians.

How lucky we are to have found other performers who are also so at home on stage to bring Billie's tale to life once more, led by Zahra Newman and Elenoa Rokobaro (at certain performances) – two phenomenally talented singing actors whose connection to Billie's spirit and sound is uncanny. Our luck continues in having one of the finest jazz pianists on the planet today, Kym Purling, musically directing the show and leading our other wonderful musicians, Calvin Welch and Victor Rounds and in having a terrific creative team and crew to help realise our vision.



Mitchell Butel and Zahra Newman (rehearsal image by Sia Duff)

We are delighted to be co-producing this show with our friends at State Theatre Company South Australia and Melbourne Theatre Company and thrilled that audiences across the nation will get to experience the intimacy and impact of Lanie Robertson's artful deep dive into Billie's life and music over a late night performance at (the now gone but once popular) Emerson's Bar & Grill, in South Philadelphia.

The private and public challenges and battles of Billie Holiday's life have perhaps sometimes overshadowed the genius and uniqueness of her talent. As she noted in her autobiography "Lady Sings the Blues", it was a life of great love, pleasure and success but also one underscored by deep pain, poverty, prejudice and injustice. We hope this show shines a light on the fact that although her power as a musical storyteller may been impacted, even sharpened by those experiences, her skill, humanity and artistry are the true legacies of her life.

As biographer Stuart Nicholson writes: The polarities of art and life collided with such violence during the 44 years of singer Billie Holiday's life they became bonded into one immutable whole. Together they give force to the Billie Holiday legend, a legend that has grown with increasing definition since her death in 1959. Although a sense of sadness and waste provide the backdrop for her troubled yet colourful life, that life is ultimately redeemed by the joy, the passion and, in her final years, the pathos of her music. That she was able to achieve so much with the burdens she had to carry must surely be her ultimate triumph. Yet the essential truth about Billie Holiday is that she was a great artist, not because of her hedonistic and much publicised lifestyle, but in spite of it.

We hope you enjoy the moonlight our Billie is about to shine on you.



Mitchell Butel (rehearsal image by Sia Duff)

SONGLIST

PROGRAM

Crazy She Calls Me

Written by Russell/Sigman
Published by Campbell Connelly (Australia)
Pty Ltd
By kind permission Wise Music Group

Somebody's on My Mind

Written by Herzog/Holliday
Published by Campbell Connelly (Australia)
Pty Ltd
By kind permission Wise Music Group

I Wonder Where Our Love has

Gone

Written by Woodrow Johnson
Published by Campbell Connelly (Australia)
Pty Ltd
By kind permission Wise Music Group

Deep Song

Written by: Cory/Cross
Universal Music Corp.
Administered by : Universal Music
Publishing Pty Ltd

Don't Explain

Written by: Herzog Jr /Holiday
Songs Of Universal, Inc
Administered by: Universal Music Publishing
Pty Ltd

Gimme A Pigfoot And Bottle Of

Beer

Written by: Wilson
Universal Music Corp.
Administered by: Universal Music Publishing
Pty Ltd

God Bless The Child

Written by Herzog /Holiday
Publisher Warner/Chappell
Administered by APRA

Strange Fruit

Written by A Lewis
Publisher Warner/Chappell
Administered by APRA

What A Little Moonlight Can Do

Written by Harry Woods
Publisher Warner/Chappell
Administered by APRA

Foolin' Myself

Written by Lawrence/Tinturin
Administered by BMG

When A Woman Loves A Man

Written by Hanighen/Jenkins/Mercer
Administered by BMG

Tain't Nobody's Business If I Do

Written by Everett Robbins and Porter
Grainer
© Clarence Williams Music Publ Co Inc
Licenced by EMI Music Publishing Australia
Pty Ltd

Easy Living

Written by Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger
© Famous Music Lic /Sony/ATV Harmony
Licensed by Sony Music Publishing
(Australia) Pty Ltd

Baby Doll

Written by Smith/Wedman
Publisher Kobalt Music
© Published by MPL Music Publishing
Administered by Kobalt Music Publishing
Australia Pty Ltd

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA

Listen to the Billie Holiday songs
featured in the production

LISTEN NOW





Billie Holiday, Downbeat, New York, N.Y., ca. Feb. 1947 (William P. Gottlieb 04251)

HISTORY

WHO IS BILLIE HOLIDAY?

Billie Holiday, born April 7, 1915 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was a superstar of her day. She first rose to prominence in the 1930's with a unique style that reinvented the conventions of modern singing and performance. More than 80 years after making her first recording Billie's legacy continues to embody what is elegant and cool in contemporary music. Holiday's complicated life and her genre-defining autobiography "Lady Sings the Blues" made her a cultural icon. The evocative, soulful voice which she boldly put forth as a force for good, turned any song she sang into her own. Today, Billie Holiday is remembered for her musical masterpieces, her songwriting skills, creativity and courageous views on inequality and justice.

From Billie Holiday Official Site
Estate of Billie Holiday

[READ MORE](#)



Billie Holiday, Downbeat, New York, N.Y., ca. Feb. 1947 (William P. Gottlieb 04251)

TIMELINE

WHO IS BILLIE HOLIDAY?

1915	Billie Holiday is born Eleanora Fagan on April 7
1933	Holiday cuts her first records at the age of 18
1935	Billie signs with Brunswick Records after producer John Hammond hears her singing in a Harlem nightclub
1937	Receives the nickname Lady Day from sax player Lester Young
1938	Billie becomes the first Black woman to work with a White orchestra
1939	Billie debuts <i>Strange Fruit</i> - a protest song about racism in America - at Café Society, New York's first integrated nightclub
1941	Billie co-writes and records <i>God Bless The Child</i>
1948	Billie performs at Carnegie Hall to a sold out crowd
1956	Releases her autobiography <i>Lady Sings The Blues</i>

THE PLAY STARTS HERE

1959	Billie performs one of her final performances at jazz club Emerson's in South Philadelphia in March
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THE PLAY ENDS HERE

1959	Holiday completes her final album, Billie Holiday, retitled <i>Last Recordings</i> , with MGM
1959	Billie dies of cirrhosis at age 44 on July 17
1976/78	<i>God Bless The Child</i> and <i>Strange Fruit</i> are inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame
1987	Billie Holiday is posthumously awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award
1999	Time Magazine declares <i>Strange Fruit</i> the Song of the Century



SEE THE FULL TIMELINE

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY

MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING

LISTEN to Billie Holiday's 'Strange Fruit' (1959)

Strange Fruit

Written by A Lewis
Publisher Warner/Chappell
Administered by APRA



LISTEN ON SPOTIFY

LISTEN ON YOUTUBE

billieholiday.com/signaturesong/strange-fruit

This song is one of the most chilling and iconic songs produced by the late singer. Listen to the song, without context. You may want to follow along with the lyrics below.

LYRICS

Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop

After listening to Strange Fruit consider the following questions:

1. How does this song make you feel?
2. What images are conjured for you?
3. What is the most striking line?
4. Is this song similar to anything you listen to?

HISTORY OF STRANGE FRUIT

“Strange Fruit” is a song performed most famously by Billie Holiday, who first sang and recorded it in 1939. Written by a white, Jewish high school teacher from the Bronx and a member of the Communist Party, Abel Meeropol wrote it as a protest poem, exposing American racism, particularly the lynching of African Americans. Such lynchings had occurred chiefly in the South but also in other regions of the United States. Meeropol set it to music and with his wife and the singer Laura Duncan, performed it as a protest song in New York venues, including at Madison Square Garden.

In 1978 Holiday’s version of the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.[4] It was also included in the list of Songs of the Century, by the Recording Industry of America and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Meeropol had seen Lawrence Beitler’s photograph of the 1930 lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana. He published the poem under the title “Bitter Fruit” in 1937 in *The New York Teacher*, a union magazine. Though he had often asked others (notably Earl Robinson) to set his poems to music, he set “Strange Fruit” to music himself and the piece gained a certain success as a protest song in and around New York.



[READ MORE](#)



Billie Holiday in 1947 playing at Cafe Society, NYC's first integrated nightclub.

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 *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*

Reference images

Set model box

Costume Renderings

DESIGNER

AILSA PATERSON

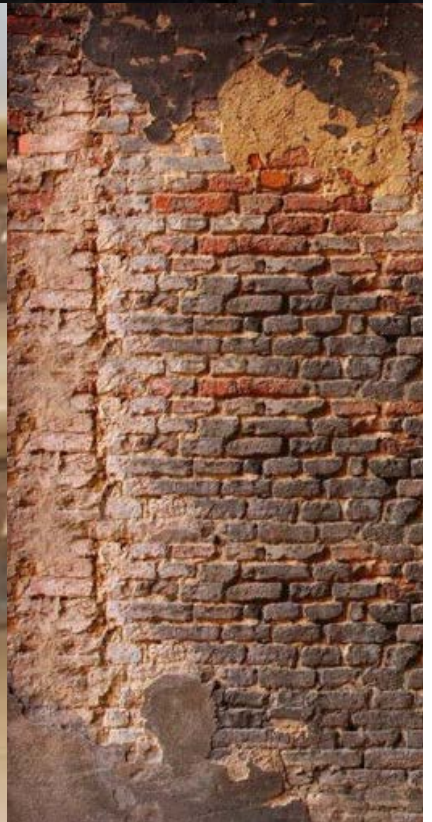
SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER



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.



Reference images collected by Alisa Paterson

MODEL BOX DESIGNS

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

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Top view Set Model Box by Designer Alisa Paterson



Set Model Box, by Alisa Paterson

FINAL DESIGN REALISATION



Initial Design: Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill Model Box - by Alisa Paterson

Questions to consider after seeing this production

1. What are the key differences between the early model box design & the final set design?
2. Why might this change have taken place?
3. How are set pieces used to change the space? What impact does this have?
4. How has the designer used stage space, texture, colour and composition to enhance dramatic meaning?
5. How did the inclusion of cabaret seating on the contribute to the atmosphere and setting?



Final Design: Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill Model Box - by Alisa Paterson

COSTUME DESIGN

BILLIE HOLIDAY

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

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MEDIA



Costume Rendering by Alisa Paterson

BILLIE HOLIDAY



Elenoa Rokobaro, Costume design by Alisa Paterson

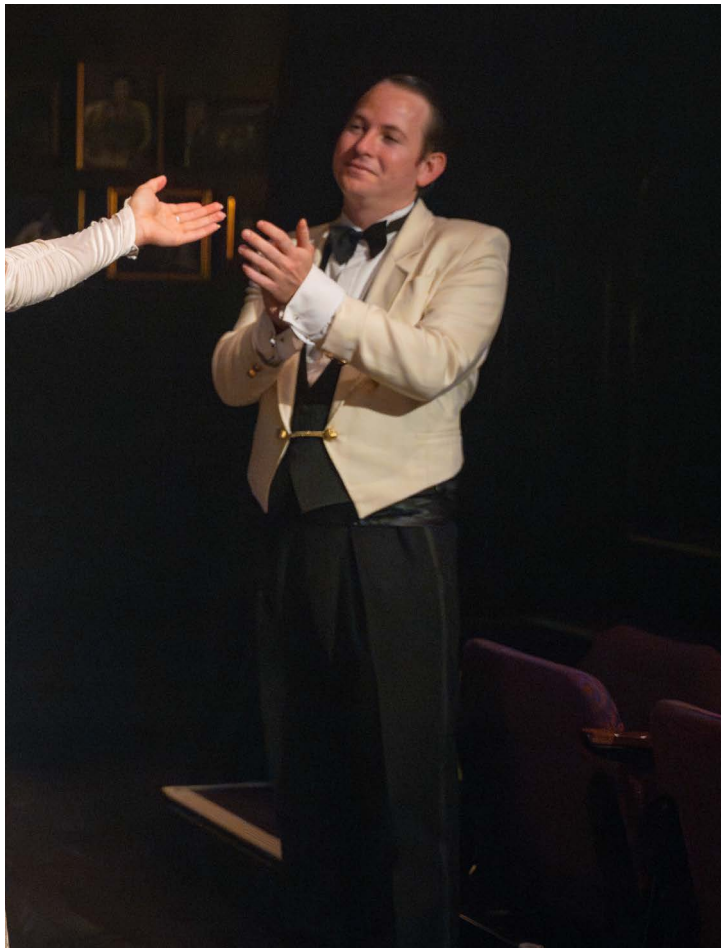


Zahra Newman, Costume design by Alisa Paterson

Emerson**Jimmy Powers****Double Bassist****Drummer**

Costume Renderings by Alisa Paterson

Emerson



Sean Proude as Emerson

Jimmy Powers



Kym Purling as Jimmy Powers

Double Bassist



Victor Rounds on Double Bass

Drummer



Calvin Welch on Drums

REHEARSING LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



Mitchell Butel, Zahra Newman

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



Kym Purling, Elenoa Rokobaro

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



Elenoa Rokobaro

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



Elenoa Rokobaro, Kym Purling

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

POST SHOW DISCUSSION

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



Elenoa Rokobaro

How does the play explore themes of class, racism and injustice?



Kym Purling, Elenoa Rokobaro

How would you describe the relationships between the characters in this play?



Elenoa Rokobaro

How does the play use monologue storytelling to explore history and memory?



Elenoa Rokobaro, Kym Purling

How is music and song used in the play to add to the emotional arc of the show?

What moment in the play had the most impact on you and why?



Elenoa Rokobaro

WATCH & LISTEN



Interview with Mitchell Butel

Watch director Mitchell Butel talk about how the show came about.

[WATCH NOW](#)



The Playlist

Listen to the Billie Holiday songs featured in the production

[LISTEN NOW](#)



Social Media | *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*

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

'I was terrified': Why stepping into Billie Holiday's shoes is such a big ask

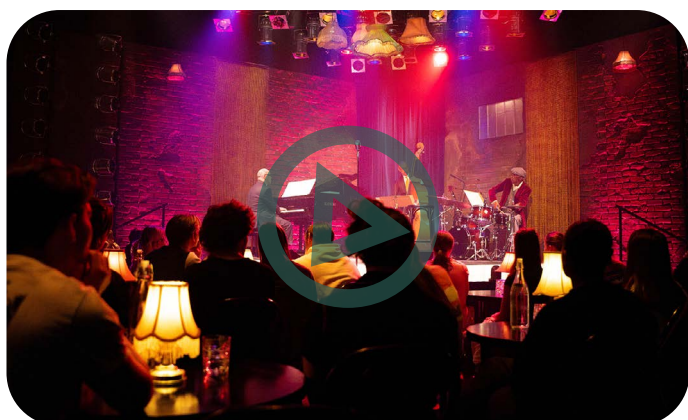
- John Shand, Sydney Morning Herald, 13 Sep 2023

[READ MORE](#)

"★★★★Undoubtedly one of the must-see pieces of theatre this season"

- Australian Book Review

[READ THE REVIEW](#)



Audience Reviews

Hear what audiences are saying about the show

[WATCH NOW](#)

CONTACT EDUCATION

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