

Blessed Union

11 Feb – 11 Mar



Written by **Maeve Marsden**
Directed by **Hannah Goodwin**

In association with
Sydney WorldPride 2023

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**SYDNEY
WORLDPRIDE
2023**



Blessed Union

11 Feb – 11 Mar

CAST

Danielle Cormack Ruth

Maude Davey Judith

Emma Diaz Delilah

Jasper Lee-Lindsay Asher

CREATIVES

Writer **Maeve Marsden**

Director **Hannah Goodwin**

Set & Costume Designer

Isabel Hudson

Composer & Sound Designer

Alyx Dennison

Lighting Designer

Amelia Lever-Davidson

Dramaturg **Dom Mercer**

Movement & Intimacy

Coordinator **Nigel Poulton**

Stage Manager **Luke McGettigan**

Assistant Stage Manager

Mia Kanzaki

RUNNING TIME

2 hours & 10 mins

(incl. 20 min interval)

CONTENT WARNING

Blessed Union uses strong language, haze and includes references to anxiety, depression and sexual acts.

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.



WRITER'S NOTE

MAEVE MARSDEN

I have written and spoken about queers, family and my queer family so many times, I am afraid there aren't any words left. But here we are.

It's tempting, of course, to use this space to tell you exactly what I am trying to say on stage. The compulsion to be seen and understood has motivated me since I was small, vanity perhaps, or maybe the product of growing up in a family marked 'other' from day one. But, the magic of theatre is just how open for interpretation the text is, first by a director, creatives and cast, then by you, its audience. As someone so desperate for clarity, releasing my stranglehold on the narrative is excruciating...but here we are.

I will say this: *Blessed Union* is a play about a family falling apart in an attempt to stay together. It is a play about the end of love, when who you love is politicised. And it's a play about food. A lot of food. My undying gratitude to production and stage management.

If you've read the blurb you'll know this is a play specifically about a lesbian family. I grew up coming to see plays at Belvoir, dropped off by my own lesbian mothers, two women with sensible careers who perhaps hoped for a more predictable professional future for their eldest daughter. But here we are.

To have my first play performed in this place is quite the moment for me. And for that play to be both a celebration and loving critique of my community means more than you could know, unless you too hold an identity that was never rendered as anything but a two-dimensional stereotype on screen and on stage, if it were rendered at all.

I hope audiences will find something of themselves in these characters, however you identify, and I *really* hope you laugh. It took me a long time to realise what a privilege it is to laugh at the worst of ourselves.



Maude Davy, Jasper Lee-Lindsay, Danielle Cormack, Hannah Goodwin, Emma Diaz & Maeve Marsden

When you grow up facing discrimination, you spend a lot of time not giving the other side cannon fodder; having space to be messy and flawed, in public and on stage, feels like freedom to me.

Thank you so much to Eamon and the entire Belvoir team for their investment in this work. I applied for the Early Career Playwright's Lab at the end of 2019, when I was at a personal and professional crossroads. The mentorship and encouragement provided across the year of the Lab were instrumental in the work's growth. Thank you to Jordan Shea, Jean Tong, Antoinette Barbouttis, Gretel Vella, Michael Costi and Sarah Bassiuni for your frank and fabulous feedback. Thanks especially to Louise Gough and Dom Mercer who coordinated the Lab.

Dom, you've championed and believed in this story from that first night, when we ranted wine-drunk about queer storytelling, enthusiastic as only theatre nerds can be. Thank you for being a sounding board, a problem solver, a collaborator and friend for the last three years, equal parts pragmatic, creative and kind.

Hannah Goodwin, thank you so much for taking this silly play so seriously - you looked at the comedic chaos on the page, chaos that another artist would easily have interpreted as farce, and you found the heart and soul in it. You made this family your own, for a time, and the work is endlessly better for your empathy, intelligence, precision and care.

Thank you to my readers Maya Newell, Alecia Simmonds, Declan Greene, Anna Martin, Emily Falconer and Viv McGregor for your incisive feedback and suggestions. I am so damn lucky (blessed, if you will) to know you.

And to Emma, Maude, Jasper and Danielle - you are magic.

I am deeply grateful to my family, especially my mothers - Louise and Teresa - for allowing me to borrow the given circumstances of our lives and then fictionalise (satirise?) them on stage. Thank you for your undying love, support and bravery. My partner has been known to say of me, 'she has the confidence of a child who was excessively loved', and she's not wrong.

Speaking of my partner, this play would not exist without Nikki Stevens. I am a deeply collaborative, extroverted creature who tried to write their first play in 2020, a task that would have absolutely defeated me had I not been locked down in an apartment with Nikki's fierce mind, deep understanding of character, passion for story, and wicked sense of humour. Thank you for the late nights and tracked changes. I love you. What a gift.

I started writing this play when we were trying desperately to conceive our first child, and we finished it in a home bursting with the unrelenting joy, love and mayhem of our 18 month old kid. What a ride it is to care for tiny humans. What a heart-filling, life-changing, beautiful mess.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

HANNAH GOODWIN

Blessed Union is about a family trying to reimagine themselves in the wake of a separation.

I have it on good authority that divorce is one of the toughest things that a person can go through. I have never married or divorced but as a teenager I did watch my parents separate, a process they navigated as gracefully as they possibly could. What I remember most about that time was the feeling of being in a gloopy kind of limbo state. We simply didn't know how to be together as a unit anymore. The rules had all changed. Change like that is uncomfortable,

painful, and at times bizarre, even hilarious. For a while it made us behave in some wild and woolly ways.

The full breadth of human behaviour is enormous. We are capable of nearly anything when dropped into the right set of circumstances. It is why I think that realism can be as mad, as absurd, as symbolic, as scalable, and as strange as many of the heightened forms. That's possible because human beings are that weird.

For this family the stakes of their separation are impossibly high. Their love and their union were politicised. Not six years ago these women and others like them weren't even allowed to marry, forget divorce. That's just one (some would say, small) example of the kinds of rights, institutions, structures, symbols that they had to fight to inhabit. How do you extricate yourself from something you fought so hard to access? That you adopted, adapted, and lovingly made into something that housed you and your family?

Ultimately the play is about how hard it is to change. That is, how hard it is to change personally and how hard it is to make the change

that you want to see in the world. It asks if it is possible to change something slowly, patiently from the inside or if you have to burn it down and start again. Reform? Or revolution!

No matter what route you take, with the pursuit of change comes failure. That's progress. Some of us are allowed to fail and others are not. I've been thinking about who has that freedom, the freedom to fail. That's acceptance, not having to be perfect all the time. In a way doing this show here at Belvoir feels like it could be something genuinely progressive, for here in front of you is a literal stage built for purpose so this family can be a complex, glorious, human MESS.



Jasper Lee-Lindsay, Emma Diaz,
Maude Davey & Danielle Cormack



Danielle Cormack



Jasper Lee-Lindsay



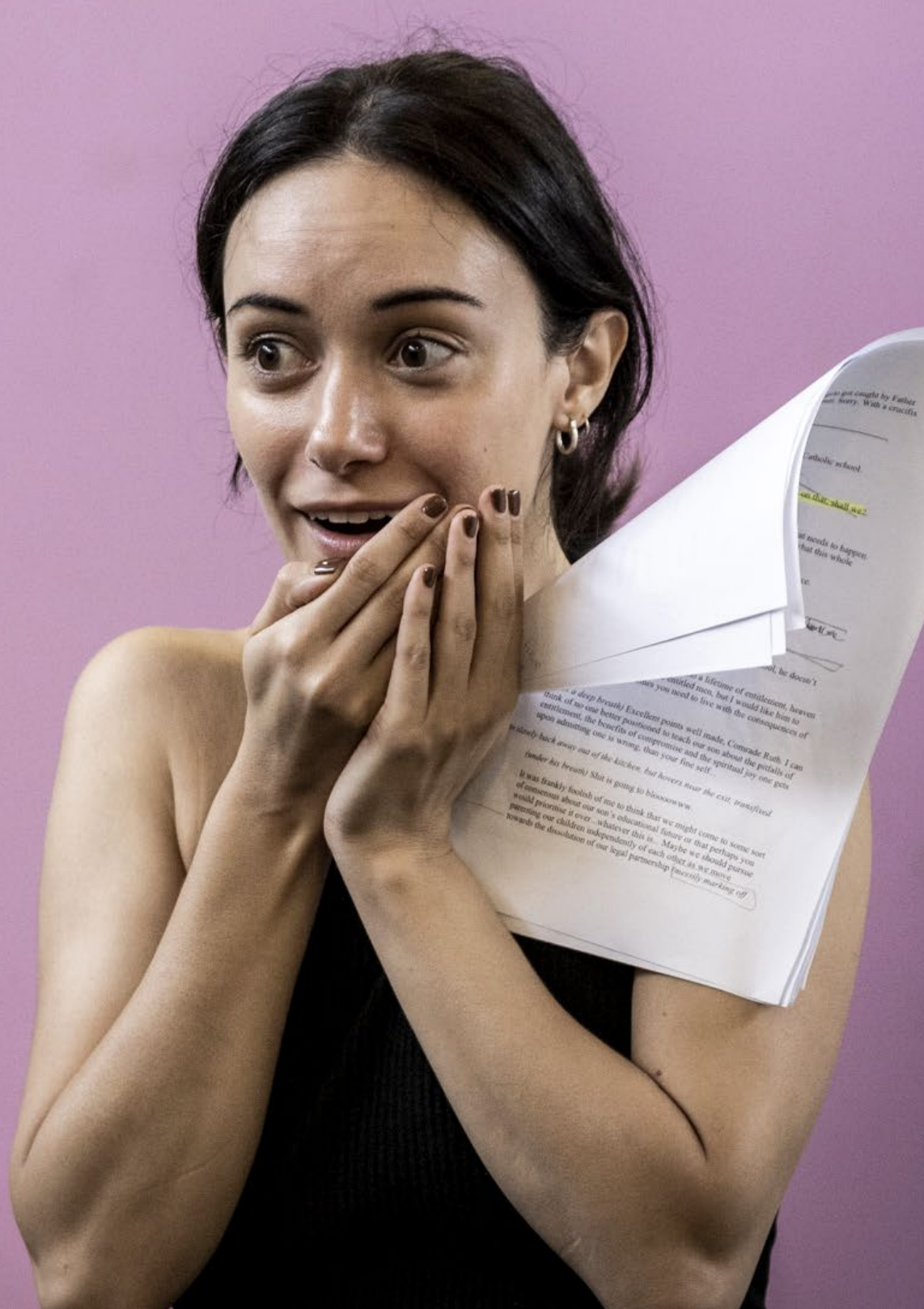
Maude Davey, Danielle Cormack, Jasper Lee-Lindsay, Emma Diaz & Hannah Goodwin

Emma Diaz, Hannah Goodwin, Jasper Lee-Lindsay



Maude Davey, Jasper Lee-Lindsay





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