



BELVOIR ST
THEATRE

COUNTING AND CRACKING

எண்ணிக்கை, இல்லையேல் கையோங்கு
ஒலன் னொலன்னை நமீ ஒலன் னர்னை

31 May - 23 Jun 2024

NATIONAL TOUR

28 Jun - 21 Jul 2024

CARRIAGEWORKS

**LEARNING RESOURCES
PART A: PRE-SHOW**

CONTENTS

PART A: PRE-SHOW

PROGRAM

About Belvoir	4
Writer's Note	6
Director's Note	8

TEXT

Timeline	12
About the play	14
Locations	15
Characters	16
Pre-show	17
At the show	18
Theatrical Exploration questions	19
Script to stage	20
Contact Education	

PART B: POST SHOW

will include:

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA

Return to belvoir.com.au/counting-and-cracking-2024/#schools closer to the tour.

Belvoir presents

COUNTING AND CRACKING

By **S.SHAKTHIDHARAN WITH EAMON FLACK**

Directed by **EAMON FLACK WITH S.SHAKTHIDHARAN**

Counting and Cracking was first produced by Belvoir and Co-Curious at Sydney Town Hall, as part of Sydney Festival, on 15 January 2019.

Costume and Cultural Advisor **Anandavalli**

Set and Costume Designer **Dale Ferguson**

Lighting Designer **Damien Cooper**

Sound Design and Composer **Stefan Gregory**

Touring Producer **Simone Parrott**

Production Manager **Barry Searle**

With cast of 16 including:

Rodney Afif

Prakash Belawadi

Antonythasan Jesuthasan

Nadie Kammallaweera

Ahi Karunaharan

Abbie-Lee Lewis

Gandhi MacIntyre

Shiv Palekar

Sukhbir Singh Walia

Nipuni ShaRahda

Kaivu Suvarna

Rajan Velu

Sukania Venugopal

Musicians

Kranthi Kiran Mudigonda

Janakan Raj

Venkatesh Sritharan

Co-produced with **Kurinji**

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.



BELVOIR

ST THEATRE

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



Production image by Brett Boardman

WRITER'S NOTE

S.SHAKTHIDHARAN WITH EAMON FLACK

PROGRAM

Ten years ago I was hungry. Hungry to learn about my mother's homeland. To know my history. So I started on a journey that had no clear end.

I read everything there was to read on the subject. I had conversations with so many gracious and intelligent Sri Lankans from all around the world. I was reeling from the overload, but slowly, very slowly, a story was being born. It was a story about parents and children. About coming together and breaking apart and coming together again - in our families, our governments, our countries.

And this story became something bigger than my own hunger. It became something that had a power. The power to help my mother reconcile with her homeland. To connect people across deep divides. The power to collapse time and join continents.

The story became less about fitting my community into a simple narrative, and more about presenting a group of people in all their glorious complexity. It became less about discovering "the truth" of what happened in Sri Lanka, or what brought us to Australia, and more about understanding the stage as a sacred space where many truths can gather at once.

The stories we choose to believe in underlie all our actions, thoughts and feelings. In *Counting and Cracking* I hope to provide audiences with a new story to believe in: about Australia, about Sri Lanka. It's a story in which migrants are not asked to discard parts of themselves to fit in, but instead are asked to present their full selves, to expand our idea of what this country can be. It's a story of how the politics of division can win the battle, but never the war, around how power is gained in this world. It's a story in which love may not triumph over adversity,

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



L to R: Vaishnavi Suryaprakash, Ahi Karunaharan, Rarriwuy Hick, Nipuni Sharada, Prakash Belawadi

but through sheer persistence and resilience can eventually overcome it. And finally it's a story about reconciliation: between parents and children, between neighbours and enemies, between your new home and your old home, between society and its institutions.

It's been quite the ride for Co-Curious and Belvoir, as both companies have utilised their different sets of expertise to make this wildly ambitious dream a reality. Neither company could have done it on its own. Much like the story of *Counting and Cracking*, the process of making this work proves that real power can be gained when different groups come together to create something new.

Before you watch the play consider:

How do you think migrants to Australia in the past have been asked to discard parts of themselves to fit in? Why do you think this is the case? How might '...a story in which migrants are not asked to discard parts of themselves to fit in, but instead are asked to present their full selves, to expand our idea of what this country can be' translate into a narrative? What theatrical devices could you use to explore this theme? For example, character, place and time. How?



Interview with S. Shakthidharan
Listen to the playwright talk about *Counting and Cracking*

WATCH NOW

S. Shakthidharan

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

EAMON FLACK WITH S.SHAKTHIDHARAN

PROGRAM

This is an Australian story. It's not only an Australian story, but it is definitely an Australian story. Much of it takes place in Sri Lanka: the story of Australia is the story of many places, many people. Ours is a migrant nation on Aboriginal land. At its best it is a land of refuge and new beginnings. With each successive wave of arrivals, from the earliest times to the English boats, to now, the country has changed, and the national story has changed. *Counting and Cracking* is a new offer to that big unfolding story.

TEXT

It is about many things, but at the heart of it is the fundamental need every one of us has to connect to each other, the world, the past, and the future. Most of our lives are spent making and nurturing these connections. We do this on every scale of life, in small ways and big ways. The small ways are usually age-old, closely-held things – love, family, language, story, belief, food, home, place, the passage of time from one generation to the next.

DESIGN


The big ways are more likely to be newer, more public inventions – the big shared narratives of national identity, political negotiation, economic purpose. *Counting and Cracking* is about the relationship between the big stuff and the small stuff, and what happens when the big stuff tears apart the small stuff. A language shattered, a family torn apart, a place torn down – these things are fragile. They cannot be taken for granted. We inherit them, they are in our keeping. The big stuff must take care of the small stuff. The small stuff is what matters most. We cannot be a nation or a whole person if we cannot keep hold of these connections. And when a person or a group of people have been torn apart then the only thing to do is to begin again – to revive the old connections, or make new ones. Fortunately, new connections are always possible. New stories are always possible. We mix from here and there, from now and the past. Water and water.

PRODUCTION



MEDIA

L to R: Rajan Velu, Vaishnavi Suryaprakash, Jay Emmanuel, Anthony Jesuthasan



This show is the product of new connections. Bringing it together took an almighty effort by a great coalition of people from many walks of life. Belvoir could not have done this without Co-Curious, and Co-Curious could not have done this without Belvoir. We each had to discover what we did and didn't know, and what the other knew that we didn't. Step by step, through days then weeks then years of conversation, we began to see that this show was not just necessary, it was also possible. Then we had to convince a lot of other people that it was necessary and possible. We had to find new partners, new collaborators. Most people were willing - not all, but most. We travelled around Australia. We travelled to London, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur. We spoke to people in Paris, Wellington, Toronto, New York. We travelled all around Sri Lanka, from Colombo to Jaffna to Kayts to Batticaloa. Little by little the coalition of people and organisations grew. Together it has taken our two companies almost six years to bring everything into alignment, and it has only been possible because hundreds of people from all over Australia and around the world have joined in.

Before you watch the play consider:

Director Eamon Flack writes '[*Counting and Cracking*] is about many things, but at the heart of it is the fundamental need every one of us has to connect to each other, the world, the past, and the future.' How might a piece of theatre explore this idea in its production as well as its narrative? Consider space, staging and actor/audience relationship.



Counting and Cracking:
A New Kind of Australian Story

Listen to the director and playwright talk about how the play *Counting and Cracking* was created.

WATCH NOW

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



L to R: Anthony Jesuthasan, Shiv Paleker, Prakash Belawadi, Jay Emmanuel, Monica Kumar



L to R: Shiv Palekar, Prakash Belawadi

TIMELINE

Knowing about the historical context allows you to access the text in a new way.

PROGRAM

1505 Portuguese arrive in Colombo, marking beginning of European interest.

1658 Dutch force out Portuguese and establish control over whole island except central kingdom of Kandy.

1796 Britain begins to take over island.

1815 Kingdom of Kandy conquered. Britain starts bringing in Tamil labourers from southern India to work in tea, coffee and coconut plantations.

TEXT

1833 Whole island united under one British administration.

1931 British grant the right to vote and introduce power sharing with Sinhalese-run cabinet.

1948 Ceylon gains full independence.

1949 Indian Tamil plantation workers disenfranchised and many deprived of citizenship.

DESIGN

1956 Solomon Bandaranaike elected on wave of Sinhalese nationalism. Sinhala made sole official language and other measures introduced to bolster Sinhalese and Buddhist sentiment. More than 100 Tamils killed in widespread violence after parliamentarians protest at new laws.

1958 Anti-Tamil riots leave more than 200 people dead. Thousands of Tamils displaced.

1959 Prime Minister Bandaranaike assassinated by a Buddhist monk. Succeeded by widow, Srimavo, who continues socialist policies.

PRODUCTION

1965 Opposition United National Party wins elections and attempts to reverse socialism.

1970 Srimavo Bandaranaike returns to power and extends nationalisation programme.

1972 Ceylon becomes a republic and changes its name to Sri Lanka. Buddhism is given primary place as the country's religion, further antagonising Tamil minority.

MEDIA

1976 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formed as tensions increase in Tamil-dominated areas of north and east.

1977 Separatist Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) party wins all seats in Tamil areas. Anti-Tamil riots leave more than 100 dead.

1983	13 soldiers killed in LTTE ambush, sparking anti-Tamil riots leading to the deaths of several hundred Tamils. Start of what Tigers call "First Eelam War".
1985	First attempt at peace talks between government and LTTE fails.
1987	Government forces push LTTE back into northern city of Jaffna. Government signs accords creating new councils for Tamil areas in north and east and reaches agreement with India on deployment of Indian peace-keeping force.
1990	Indian troops leave after getting bogged down in fighting in north. Violence between Sri Lankan army and separatists escalates. "Second Eelam War" begins. Thousands of Muslims are expelled from northern areas by the LTTE.
1991	LTTE implicated in assassination of Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi in southern India.
1993	President Premadasa killed in LTTE bomb attack.
1994	President Chandrika Kumaratunga comes to power pledging to end war. Peace talks opened with LTTE.
1995	"Third Eelam War" begins when rebels sink naval craft.
1995 - 2001	War rages across north and east. Tigers bomb Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist site. President Kumaratunga is wounded in a bomb attack. Suicide attack on the international airport destroys half the Sri Lankan Airlines fleet.
2002 Feb	Government and Tamil Tiger rebels sign a Norwegian-mediated ceasefire. De-commissioning of weapons begins; the road linking the Jaffna peninsula with the rest of Sri Lanka reopens after 12 years; passenger flights to Jaffna resume. Government lifts ban on Tamil Tigers. Rebels drop demand for separate state.
2003	Tigers pull out of talks. Ceasefire holds.
2003 May	Country's worst-ever floods leave more than 200 people dead and drive some 4,000 people from their homes.
2004 Mar	Renegade Tamil Tiger commander, known as Karuna, leads split in rebel movement and goes underground with his supporters. Tiger offensive regains control of the east.
2004 Dec	More than 30,000 people are killed when a tsunami, massive waves generated by an undersea earthquake, devastate coastal communities.

THE PLAY ENDS

2005 Jun	Row over deal reached with Tamil Tiger rebels to share nearly \$3bn in tsunami aid among Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims.
2005 Aug	State of emergency after foreign minister is killed by a suspected Tiger assassin.
2005 Nov	Mahinda Rajapaksa, prime minister at the time, wins presidential elections. Most Tamils in areas controlled by the Tamil Tigers do not vote.

ABOUT THE PLAY

The play follows the journey of one Sri Lankan-Australian family over four generations from 1956 to 2004.

The action of the play takes place in various locations in Sydney, Australia and Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Changes in time and place are represented by different performers playing different characters at different ages as well as costume, props and physical signposts.

Counting and Cracking is in three Acts, with two intervals. Each Act has been described as having its own 'theatrical identity and form'.

The play is performed in English, Tamil, and Sinhalese, with live translation into English.



Counting and Cracking Podcast
The Journey to the Stage

[LISTEN NOW](#)



The Sri Lankan-Australian experience in *Counting and Cracking* | The Mix

The playwright behind the bold new Australian work *Counting and Cracking* talks about discovering the complex history that led to his family fleeing Sri Lanka.

[WATCH NOW](#)

LANGUAGE

The refrain "Two languages equal one country" recurs throughout the performance.

Reflect on the moments that are chosen to be translated and those that are wholly expressed in two languages.

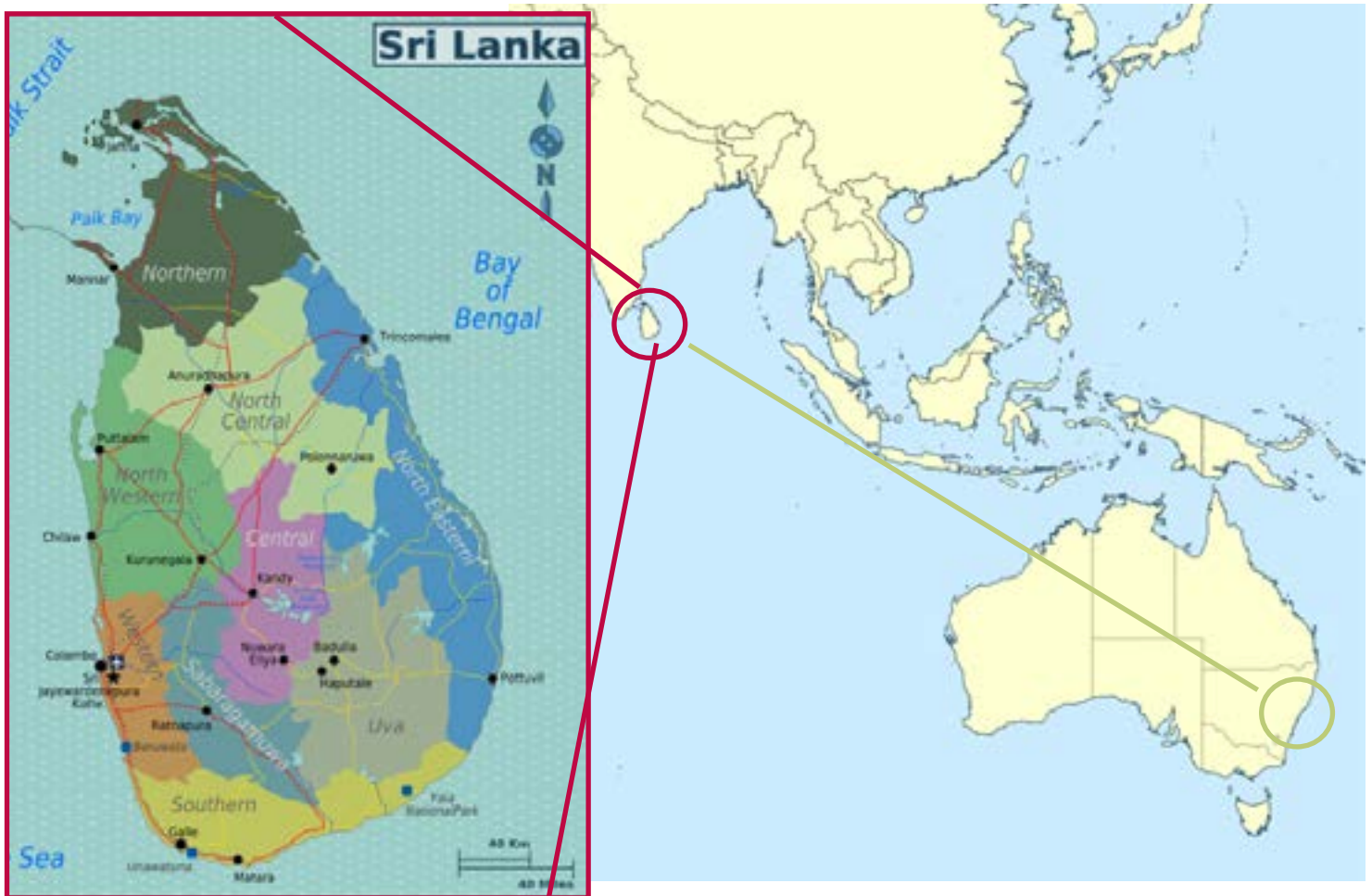
After you watch the play consider:

How is the presentation of scripted dialogue and translations used to bring two cultures together?

Why do you think these moments were selected to be translated?

Why do you think the entire performance was not conveyed in this way? Consider as many reasons for this compositional choice as possible.

LOCATIONS



Map showing the geopolitical situation in Sri Lanka in the early part of the 16th century after the "Spoiling of Vijaya-bahu" in 1521.



Political situation in Sri Lanka, early 17th century.

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



Nadie Kammallaweera

PRE-SHOW

HYPOTHETICALS

Read the theatrical description for *Counting and Cracking*

THEATRICAL DESCRIPTION

On the banks of the Georges River, Radha and her son Siddhartha release the ashes of Radha's mother – their final connection to the past, to Sri Lanka and its struggles. Now they are free to embrace their lives in Australia. But a phone call from Colombo brings the past spinning back to life, and we're plunged into an epic story of love and political strife, of home and exile, of parents and children.

Featuring nineteen performers from six countries, Counting and Cracking follows the journey of a Sri Lankan-Australian family over four generations, from 1956 to 2004.

Consider the following questions:

What do you feel will be the core messages of the performance?
What theatrical elements do you expect to feature throughout the performance? Provide as much detail as possible.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION

Compose three tableaux which may occur in this performance.

Then layer a sound and then some lighting to amplify your hypothetical moment.

Make detailed notes of your scenes and the scenes of your classmates.

Extension: Once you have completed your tableaux present a short response either in a written or viva voce form which describes and justifies your creative and imaginative interpretation.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Compare your hypothetical interpretations with the actual performance.

AT THE SHOW

OBSERVATIONS

PROGRAM

Before the show begins make notes in response to the following prompts

Prompt	Impact and meaning created
What colours do you see?	
What shapes do you see?	
What symbols do you see?	
What lines do you see?	
What set pieces or contextual clues are presented?	

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

INTERVAL REFLECTIONS

How is the audience transported in the opening moments of the performance?

How does the onstage translation from Tamil to English influence the actor-audience relationship?

Observe the performance space:

- What are the dominant spaces created?
- What perspectives can you look at these from?
- How are you involved or drawn into the space?
- What connections do you have with the space?
- What assumptions, interests or personal circumstances shape the way you see the space?

MEDIA

THEATRICAL EXPLORATION QUESTIONS



SIDDHARTHA

1. Describe Siddhartha's body language and presentation of character during the burial rites compared to his interaction with Lily in the following scene. What does this suggest about how he feels about and interacts with his culture and family?
2. From the opening of the performance, Siddhartha fights against any connection with his culture. How is Siddhartha's developing interest in his culture reflected in his changed movements towards the end of the performance?



RAHDA

3. Describe present day Radha's movement about the space compared to that of her younger self in Colombo. What does this suggest about how she views her place in the world?
4. Radha's voice is also represented differently to delineate between her past and present self, her Sri Lankan self and her self in Australia. Create a venn diagram featuring words, quotes or moments which capture the opposing and intersecting aspects of Radha's character.



APAH

5. Apah is the only character to be played by one actor throughout the performance. What could be some of the reasons for this?
6. Apah changes and develops as the state of his nation becomes more unstable. How does the performer reflect this decline in their choices of movement, expression and voice?

How were the different representations of Thirru and Hasa expressed by different actors on stage?

Which character portrayal was the most engaging for you and why?

SCRIPT TO STAGE

PROGRAM

On the day of the wedding, Radha handcuffs herself to Apah's chair to join him in protest.

YOUNG RAHDA: This is my protest. All of Sri Lanka has been hijacked by politics. Schools, shops, hospitals, houses, now even weddings. People must live! Life must hijack politics!

TEXT

This is a powerful moment for Radha's character, how is this scripted moment emphasised through proxemics, lighting, set and gesture?

Act 2 culminates with the following movement sequence:

MUSIC. EVERYONE RE-ENTERS. THEY MOVE ACROSS THE STAGE AS ONE.

ECSTATIC, SWATHI YELLS A TAMIL BATTLE CRY.

TERRIFIED, MAITHRI YELLS A SINHALA BATTLE CRY.

THE SOLDIERS, THE REFUGEES, SIDDHARTHA, LILY, RADHA AND THIRRU ARE SWEEPED INTO ONE GROUP.

THIRRU IS ON A CROWDED BOAT. THE SWELL OF OCEANS, A STORM. WET AND DESPERATE, THIRRU STEPS FORWARD AND SPEAKS TO US:

THIRRU: *"I claim my rights in the Refugee Convention, signed by Australia in 1951, that I have left my country of origin for reasons of persecution. I call upon the Australian government's spirit of international cooperation to receive my request for asylum and give me an opportunity for resettlement."*

END ACT 2.

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA

How was this scripted moment presented on stage? What was the impact of their stylistic and theatrical choices?

The stage directions convey a powerful combination of movement, sound and voice, what is the impact of this moment as the final tableau for Act 2?

FINAL REFLECTIONS

How did you feel immediately following the performance?

What aspects of the performance spoke to you?

This is the final scripted moment from the play:

*THEY STEP FORWARD.
THEY SCAN THE FACES FOR THIRRU.
WAY UP THE BACK...*

LILY: Amma. Siddhartha.

RADHA LOOKS STRAIGHT ACROSS AT THIRRU.

RADHA: That's your father, Siddhartha.

THIRRU WALKS OVER TO HIS FAMILY. THEY EMBRACE. THE ENTIRE CAST STAND TOGETHER. THEY WALK TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND BOW TO THE AUDIENCE.

CURTAIN.

How does the final tableau capture the message of *Counting and Cracking*?



The movement of actors in and around the space reflects different relationships and simultaneous timelines of experience in Australia and Sri Lanka. Select a moment from the performance where this was the most impactful and describe this in detail.

Entrances and exits are crucial in showing the progression of time. The transitions between Australia and Sri Lanka and the past and present are seamless.

How does the actor's belief and focus contribute to this?

CONTACT EDUCATION

JANE MAY, HEAD OF EDUCATION

02 8396 6222

jane@belvoir.com.au

Belvoir Education would like to thank Jen Coupland, Dale Ferguson, and Xu Yang Chua for their support creating these resources.

PART B: POST SHOW
will include:

DESIGN
PRODUCTION
MEDIA

Return to belvoir.com.au/counting-and-cracking-2024/#schools closer to the tour.

Resources designed by Stevie Bryant for Belvoir (2024)