



BELVOIR ST  
THEATRE

# NAYIKA

## A DANCING GIRL

நாயிகா – ஒரு நாட்டியப் பெண்

Co-Created and  
Co-Directed by  
**Nithya Nagarajan**  
and **Liv Satchell**

**30 Apr - 19 May**



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நாயிகா – ஒரு நாட்டியப் பெண்

**RUN TIME:** 1 hour 20 minutes (no interval)

### CAST

**Vaishnavi Suryaprakash**  
Performer

**Marco Cher-Gibard**  
Musician

**Bhairavi Raman**  
Musician

### CREATIVES

Co-Creator and Co-Director  
**Nithya Nagarajan**  
Co-Creator and Co-Director  
**Liv Satchell**  
Sound Designer and Composer  
**Marco Cher-Gibard**  
Set and Costume Designer  
**Keerthi Subramanyam**  
Lighting Designer  
**Morgan Moroney**  
Dramaturg  
**S. Shakthidharan**  
Production Dramaturg  
**Carissa Licciardello**  
Fight Choreographer  
**Maria Tran**  
Creative Producer  
**Zainab Syed**  
Creative Consultant  
**Christopher Gurusamy**  
Stage Manager  
**Tanya Leach**

### WARNING

Contains adult themes and mentions gendered violence including sexual assault. Includes coarse language, loud music, sudden loud sound, strobe lighting and blackout.



Nithya Nagarajan

## CO-CREATOR AND CO-DIRECTOR'S NOTE

NITHYA NAGARAJAN

In Australia, one woman a week is killed on average by an intimate partner. In South Asia and the diaspora, the prevalence of lifetime intimate partner violence is 35% higher than the global average. The reasons for both conditions are complex and include a combination of socio-economic structures, patriarchal attitudes, and prevalent social norms that define gender roles. In *NAYIKA: A Dancing Girl*, we illuminate the interiority of these female lives: lives that endure, resist and occasionally survive the unthinkable. At the intersection of text, movement and music,

we paint a layered picture of the full-blooded complexity of Brown femininity.

*NAYIKA* traces the journey of a protagonist who re-claims the autonomy of her story: re-assembling herself through language and movement, with the help of her *Sakhi*, a female friend. We have deliberately broken away from the theatrical traditions of a Western play and used the dramaturgical structure of a *Varnam* instead, the *pièce de résistance* of a Bharatanatyam recital, as the blueprint through

which to tell this story. Even though ostensibly a memory play, it's constantly punctured by the entanglement of memory, myth and realism. Evoking exquisite details of place, the designers, musicians and performer map the landscape of Chennai onto the psyche of our heroine's memories.

*NAYIKA* marks the mainstage debut of more than 50% of this intersectional creative team. As a rehearsal room, we were interested in alternate dramaturgies - employing conceptual, structural and formal tactics to tell familiar stories anew. It is imperative that the canon of what constitutes theatre in Australia expands and it is our hope that *NAYIKA* elasticises those edges.

For a work like this to have artistic integrity, the process has to mirror the outcome. It has been an absolute honour to make this work with Liv Satchell, a feminist theatremaker and a dear friend whose craft I respect so deeply. We have remained alive to every offer in the room and met the conversation where it's at as we've encountered this story over the last four years as an ensemble through a lens that is both

culturally specific and universally resonant.

We started working on *NAYIKA* during the harshest lockdowns in our lifetime. This means many women globally were locked down with their perpetrators, often without reprieve, for months on end. Violence against women is a shadow pandemic. There is a lot at stake when survivors speak their truth, and women do this at great danger to themselves. Believe them. I urge us all to try and understand how we are conditioned by culture and how, perhaps, we can in turn condition culture to strive for safer and more equitable worlds. A famous Bharatanatyam dancer, Mavin Khoo, once spoke of the *Varnam* as 'an arc of hope'. In the end, *NAYIKA* is our collective effort toward an arc of hope: one that honours the ordinary extraordinary.



Marco Cher-Gibard, Bhairavi Raman,  
Vaishnavi Suryaprakash



Liv Satchell

# CO-CREATOR AND CO-DIRECTOR'S NOTE

LIV SATCHELL

This project began when I received a book in the mail. It was Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of The Writer as a Young Wife*, which is a fictionalised account of intimate partner violence and the narrator's fight to escape it. My dear friend Nithya wanted to know if I'd consider reading it with a possible solo dance-theatre work adaptation in mind, a springboard for mapping the globally endemic failure to guarantee women's safety and autonomy. I had just made it home from a residency with Odin Teatret in rural Denmark, landing in Melbourne's first lockdown with 40 minutes to spare before the mandatory fortnight quarantine came into effect. I had time to read.

Just over four years later, what we are sharing with you has travelled further than any of us could have ever imagined. Importantly, we have moved away from Kandasamy's text to focus directly on survivor testimony, fictionalising a set of real events that straddle Chennai and Sydney.

We have deliberately chosen not to disclose the identity behind this testimony because this story is happening everywhere, all the time, and the specificity of this one account stands in for every single woman who survives (and makes some small gesture towards the unspeakable loss of those who do not). We want to paint a picture in the most vivid colours available to us of what is at stake when we compress even one single life – its past and future, its incredible pain and joy – into a headline or statistic. We want to return the body to this story of violence and resistance. We want to be kept on the hook.

It has been the honour of my lifetime to make this work with this exceptional team. What you see before you on stage tonight is the fullest and most generous expression of their humanity and artistry. Deep and abiding thanks to Belvoir for inviting us to tell this story, to you for joining us, and to Nithya for putting a book in the mail.



Marco Cher-Gibard

# A REFLECTION ON NAYIKA

SHANTI RAMAN

Shanti Raman (Professor, Senior Clinical Adviser - Child and Family Health and Community Elder)

Exploring the searing issue of intimate partner or gender-based violence, especially involving an ethno-cultural group, is challenging at the best of times. The figures are grim, here in Australia, one woman a week is killed on average by an intimate partner. In South Asia and the diaspora, the prevalence of intimate partner violence is significantly higher. But art- and the performing arts in particular- as they occur in a shared space- with or without explicit messages, create community. And therefore, provides a safe space to explore this issue in a culturally congruent manner. As Brecht famously said, "art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer to shape it." NAYIKA: A Dancing Girl- does just that, by exploring and giving shape to the issue of intimate partner violence, then allowing the protagonist to triumphantly transcend the pain and suffering and emerge victorious. A new Nayika (heroine) is born.

Using text, movement and music beautifully interwoven, NAYIKA traces the journey of a

protagonist who re-claims the autonomy of her story. The story of a young South Asian woman, who arriving in Chennai as a teenager to pursue her passion for Bharatanatyam- is also discovering the flowering of her sexuality and realising her artistic potential. The details of the budding romance that then progresses into a harrowing pattern of coercive control and male violence is vividly recreated, using the artistic and (to a South Asian audience) familiar metaphors of Bharatanatyam and Natyashashtra.

But NAYIKA: A Dancing Girl is much more than just an exploration of a social evil. It is not a sermon. It is ART! Terrific performances by the dancer/actor Helpmann Award-winning Vaishnavi Suryaprakash, and live music by Bhairavi Raman (violin) and Marco Cher-Gibard (soundscape, various). Created and directed by Nithya Nagarajan and Liv Satchell, this exquisite performance celebrates the full-blooded complexity and beauty of Brown femininity. We need more of our stories-today's stories, to be told in this way.

Go and experience it!



Nithya Nagarajan, Live Satchell, Vaishnavi Suryaparakash

# A NOTE FROM THE CO-DIRECTORS

**NITHYA NAGARAJAN & LIV SATCHELL**

In the time that we have spent making *Nayika: A Dancing Girl*, our world has undergone profound change. Living in this radically shifting landscape, we have been dismayed to witness our work become only more relevant with each passing day.

Violence is being perpetrated on so many different and simultaneous scales right now - locally, regionally, nationally, globally - and we are being driven to choose which ones we care about. Part of this is self-preservation - we can only hold so much profound loss. Part of this is conditioned by who we are and where we live, which stories are prioritised by our politicians and which are left untold by our media.

In all these stories, women and children are disproportionately the victims, and there is a direct connection between male violence, domination and control.

The way we are talking about this violence, the way we are legislating against it, the way we are listening to those who manage to survive it - none of our current systems are functioning to stop the onslaught.

We need to imagine new futures if we are ever going to stem the tide. We need to listen to survivors. We need to believe them. We need to hold space for people to speak truth to power, how and when they are able.

*Nayika* is our clarion call for this ordinary utopia - we hope that by sitting together and witnessing one woman reclaiming self-sovereignty, we will reflect on how we can each enact it in our own lives.

We write in solidarity and toward liberation.

# RESOURCES

Thank you for joining us for the performance of **Nayika - A Dancing Girl**. We appreciate that some patrons may need some support or information after the performance. Please see below for English and Tamil resources.

According to the Federal government Status of Women in 2024 Report Card, **one in five women** in Australia have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.

**27 women** have been reported killed so far this year (2024), in Australia with men alleged to have been involved in their deaths.

If you or someone you know needs information or support, these organisations are there to help:

**1800 Respect national helpline** 1800 737 732

**Full Stop Australia** 1800 385 578

**Women's Crisis Line** 1800 811 811

**Men's Referral Service** 1300 766 491

**13 YARN** 13 92 76

**Lifeline (24 hour crisis line)** 131 114

**NSW Domestic Violence Line** 1800 656 463

# குடும்ப வன்முறை

குடும்ப வன்முறை என்பது கணவர்/மனைவி, காதலன்/காதலி அல்லது குடும்ப நபரின் மீது தொடர்ந்து அடக்குமுறை செயல்களில் ஈடுபடும் நடத்தை ஆகும். உடல் ரீதியாகவோ, மன ரீதியாகவோ, தகாத வார்த்தைகள் ரீதியாகவோ, பாலியல் ரீதியாகவோ, பொருளாதார ரீதியாகவோ அல்லது கட்டமைப்பு ரீதியாகவோ குடும்பத்தில் ஒருவர் ஒடுக்கப்படுவதும், அச்சுறுத்தப்படுவதும் குடும்ப வன்முறையில் அடங்கும்.

ஆணாதிக்கம் மிக்க சமூகத்தில் இந்த நடத்தையானது அனுபவத்தினாலோ அல்லது மற்றவரைப் பார்த்தோ ஒருவருக்குள் உருவாகிறதே தவிர மது அல்லது போதை பழக்கங்களுக்கு ஒருவர் அடிமையாவதாலோ, மன நோய் காரணமாகவோ அல்லது கோபத்தைக் கட்டுப்படுத்த முடியாமல் போவதாலோ உருவாகுவது அல்ல. இவை யாவும் குடும்ப வன்முறையில் ஈடுபடுபவர்கள் கூறும் வெறும் காரணங்களே ஆகும். மேலும் குடும்ப வன்முறையில் ஈடுபடுபவர்கள் இந்த காரணங்களை கூறுவதால் உண்மையில் மன நோயினால் அவதிபடும் மக்கள் மீது தவறான கண்ணோட்டம் உருவாக வழிவகுக்கிறது.

வயது, பொருளாதார வகுப்பு, சாதி, பாலினம் அல்லது மதம் என எவ்வித பாரபட்சமுமின்றி அனைத்து மக்களையும் குடும்ப வன்முறை பாதிக்கிறது. குடும்ப வன்முறையானது பொருளாதார ரீதியாக ஒடுக்கப்பட்டோரின் வீடுகளில் மட்டுமே நடைபெறுகிறது என்றோ அல்லது கல்வியறிவு இல்லாத காரணத்தால் மட்டுமே நடைபெறுகிறது என்றோ கூறுவது சரியாக இருக்காது.

அனைத்து பிரிவு மக்களும் குடும்ப வன்முறையை எதிர்கொள்கின்றனர். ஆனால் அவர்கள் அனைவருக்கும் அதில் இருந்து மீண்டு வருவதற்கான வாய்ப்புகளும், வழிகளும், வளங்களும், உதவியும், ஆதரவும் சமமாக இருப்பதில்லை. இந்த சமமின்மையை அரசு அமைப்புகளும், குடிமைச் சமூக அமைப்புகளுமே சரி செய்ய வேண்டும்.

பெண்களும் பால்புதுமையினரும் குடும்ப வன்முறையினால் மற்றவர்களை விட அதிகளவில் பாதிப்புக்குள்ளாகின்றனர். மேலும் அதன் விளைவுகளாக கல்வியிலும், பணியிலும், மன ரீதியாகவும், உடல் ரீதியாகவும் பின்னடைவை சந்திப்பதோடு தங்களை முன்னேற்றி கொள்வதற்கான வாய்ப்புகளையும் வெளி உலகோடுனான தொடர்பையும் இழக்கின்றனர். அதிலும் பால்புதுமையினர் பெருமளவில் குடும்ப வன்முறையால் அதிகம் பாதிப்படையக்கூடிய சமூகமாக உள்ளனர்.

குடும்ப, சமூக மற்றும் நிறுவன கட்டமைப்புகள் தங்கள் அடையாளங்களை ஏற்றுக் கொள்ளாமல் இருப்பதே அவர்கள் மீதான குடும்ப வன்முறைக்கான காரணமாக இருப்பது மட்டுமல்லாமல் அவையே அத்தகைய வன்முறை நடைபெறுவதற்கான தளங்களாகவும் இருக்கின்றன.

ஆஸ்திரேலியாவில் செயல்படும் சில முக்கிய ஆதரவு அமைப்புகள்:

- ‘இந்தியன் (சப்கான்டினென்ட்) க்ரைசிஸ் அண்ட் சப்போர்ட் ஏஜென்சி’ (Indian (Subcontinent) Crisis and Support Agency) என்ற அமைப்பானது கலாச்சார ரீதியாகவும் மொழி ரீதியாகவும் மாறுபட்டு இருக்கும் சமூகத்தினரின் (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community - CALD) சிக்கலான தேவைகளை அங்கீகரிக்கும் செயல்களில் ஈடுபடுகின்றது. அவர்களின் சேவைகளானது கலாச்சார கட்டமைப்புகளுக்கு உட்படும் வகையில் உதவி கோருபவரின் தேவைகளுக்கு ஏற்றவாறும் சூழ்நிலைகளுக்கு ஏற்றவாறும் தக்க குறிக்கோள்களுடன் இருக்கின்றன.
- அவர் வாட்ச்’ (Our Watch) என்பது குடும்ப வன்முறைக்கு வழிவகுக்கும் கலாச்சார, நடத்தை மற்றும் அதிகார ஏற்றத்தாழ்வுகளில் மாற்றத்தை ஏற்படுத்த முற்படும் ஓர் ஆதரவு திரட்டும் அமைப்பாகும். குடும்ப வன்முறை சார்ந்த பிரச்சனைகள் பற்றியும் அவற்றால் ஏற்படும் விளைவுகள் பற்றியும் மேலும் விவரங்கள் தரக் கூடிய விரிவான ஆய்வுக் கட்டுரைகள் பலவும் இவ்வமைப்பிடம் உள்ளன.
- ‘பெண்கள் பாதுகாப்பிற்கான தேசிய ஆராய்ச்சி அமைப்பு’ (National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety) ஆஸ்திரேலியாவின் இலாப நோக்கமற்ற தன்னார்வ தேசிய ஆராய்ச்சி அமைப்பாகும்.
- ‘லவ்: தி குட், தி பேட் அண்ட் தி அக்லி’ (Love: the good, the bad and the ugly) என்பது ஆரோக்கியமான உறவுமுறைகளுக்கான ஆலோசனைகளையும், உதவிக் குறிப்புகளையும், கதைகளையும் தரும் ஓர் இணையத்தளம் ஆகும்.
- ‘டொமெஸ்டிக் வயலன்ஸ் ரிசோர்ஸ் சென்டர் விக்டோரியா’ (Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria) விக்டோரியாவில் இருக்கும் மாநில அளவிலான நிபுணத்துவம் வாய்ந்த குடும்ப வன்முறையை தடுக்கும் முயற்சிகளிலும் அதில் பாதிக்கப்படுபவர்களுக்கான ஆதரவு வழங்கும் செயல்களிலும் ஈடுபடும் அமைப்பாகும்.



Vaishnavi Suryaprakash



Bhairavi Raman





Tanya Leach



Keerthi Subramanyam



Nithya Nagarajan, Vaishnavi Suryaprakash



Liv Satchell, Vaishavi Suryaprakash



Nithya Nagarajan, Marcho Cher-Gibard



Vaishnavi Suryaprakash



**BELVOIR ST  
THEATRE**

# 2024 SEASON

## TIDDAS

12 – 28 Jan

The comedy smash of the Brisbane Festival, for a three-week Sydney season.

## TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

1 Feb – 3 Mar

A tiny, beautiful, and life-affirming play based on the book by Cheryl Strayed.

## HOLDING THE MAN

9 Mar – 14 Apr

The love story which defined a generation, and a classic of the Australian stage, in a brand new production.

## LOSE TO WIN

25 Apr – 19 May

An extraordinary journey from South Sudan to the Belvoir stage.

## NAYIKA A DANCING GIRL

30 Apr – 19 May

A virtuosic solo performance mixing storytelling, live music, and Bharatanatyam dance.

## NEVER CLOSER

25 May – 16 Jun

An astonishing debut play in a production direct from our Downstairs Theatre.

## COUNTING AND CRACKING

28 Jun – 21 Jul

The internationally-acclaimed epic returns to Sydney, this time at Carriageworks.

## THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

17 Aug – 22 Sep

The hit adaptation of the hit book in a brand new, very Belvoir production.

## WELL-BEHAVED WOMEN

28 Sep – 3 Nov

A musical feast celebrating the women who refused to behave.

## AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

9 Nov – 15 Dec

One of the monumental plays of the 21st century, up close and personal.



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