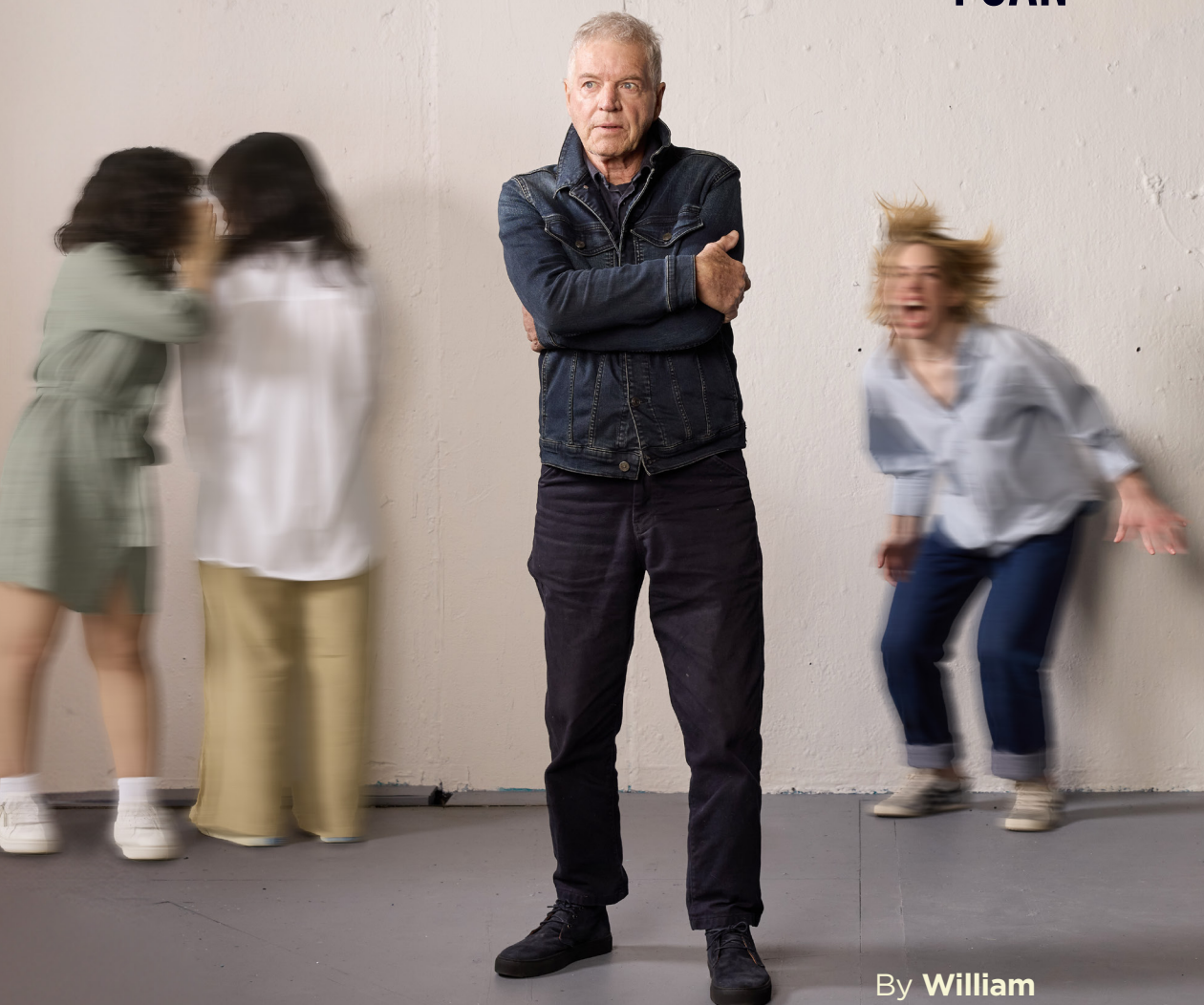




**BELVOIR ST
THEATRE**

**15 NOV -
4 JAN**



By **William
Shakespeare**
Directed by
Eamon Flack

THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF KING LEAR AND HIS THREE DAUGHTERS

THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF KING LEAR AND HIS THREE DAUGHTERS

RUN TIME: 3 hours and 15 min (incl 2 intervals)

WARNING

King Lear includes strobe lighting. There are moments of violence, the use of significant stage blood and scenes that depict injury in a graphic way.

Supported by
Artistic Director's Circle

THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF KING LEAR AND HIS THREE DAUGHTERS

CAST

Ahunim Abebe

Cordelia

Peter Carroll

Fool

Tom Conroy

Edgar

James Fraser

Oswald

Charlotte Friels

Goneril

Colin Friels

King Lear

Raj Labade

Edmund

Brandon McClelland

Kent

Conor Merrigan-Turner

France, Others &
Understudy

Lizzie Schebesta

Stand-in Goneril/
Understudy

Sukhbir (Sunny)

Singh Walia

Albany

Alison Whyte

Countess of
Gloucester

Charles Wu

Cornwall

Jana Zvedeniuk

Regan

Musicians

Harley Coleman

Hilary Geddes

Jess Green

Arjunan Puveendran

CREATIVES

By

William Shakespeare

Directed by

Eamon Flack

Set Designer

Bob Cousins

Costume Designer

James Stibilj

Co-Composer &

Sound Designer

Steve Francis

Co-Composer

Arjunan Puveendran

Lighting Designer

Morgan Moroney

Assistant Director

Margaret Thanos

Fight Director &
Intimacy Coordinator

Nigel Poulton

Additional Movement

Director

Charmene Yap

Vocal Coach

**Laura Farrell &
Patrick Klavins**

Additional music by

Hilary Geddes &

Jess Green

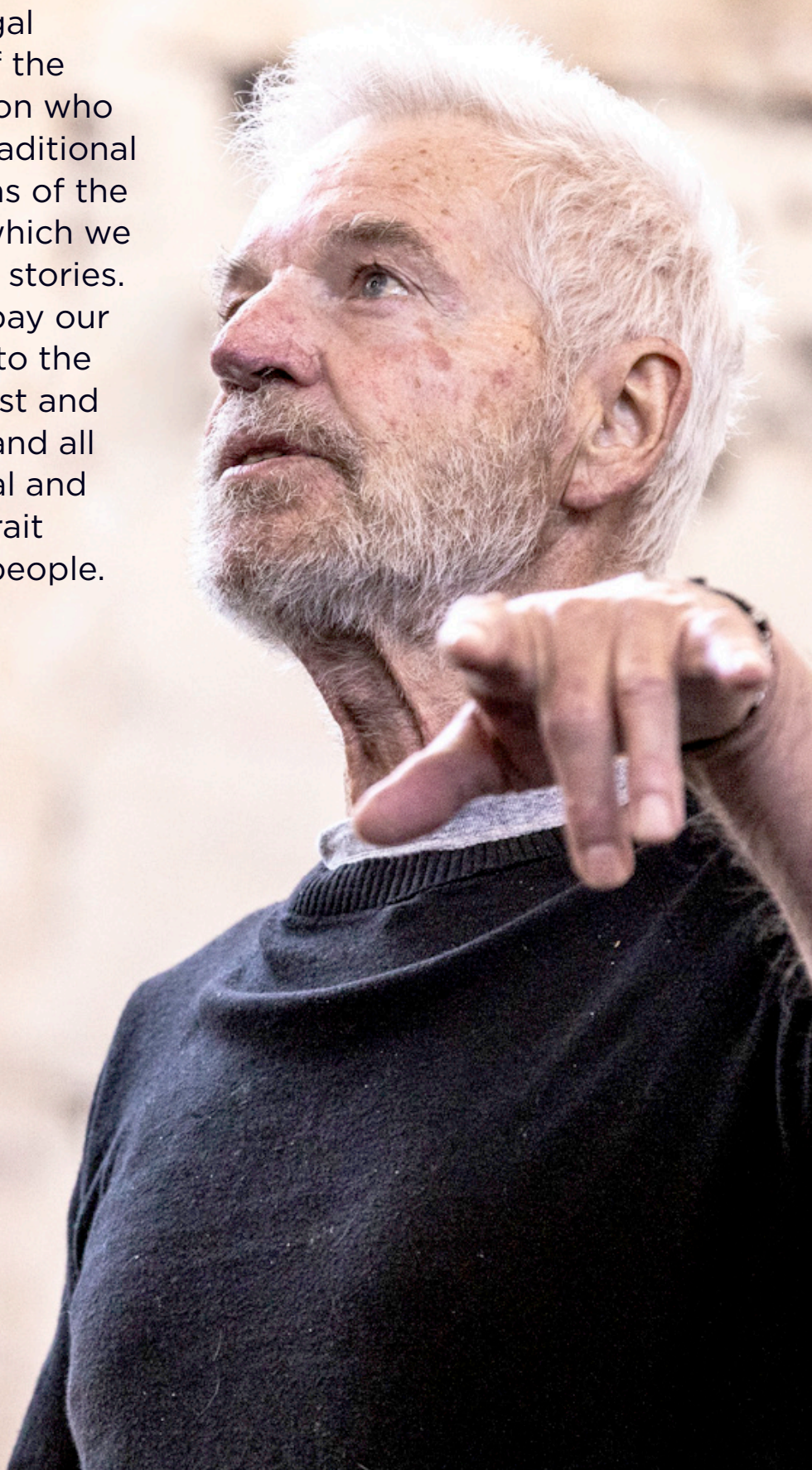
Stage Manager

Luke McGettigan

Assistant Stage Manager

Rebecca Dilley

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
respects to the
Elders past and
present, and all
Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander people.



Cover photography by

Daniel Boud

Rehearsal photography by

Brett Boardman



Eamon Flack

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

EAMON FLACK

King Lear is a play with a multitude of visions and forces at work within it. Here are some that have been on my mind as we've made this production:

• • •

Mathematically the centre of a circle has no dimension; it is zero, nothing; and every other point in the circle, of which there are an infinite number, exists only in relation to that nothing at the centre. The ratio of a circle's circumference to diameter (pi) is a number with infinite decimal places - 3.1415926535 etc forever. All this is contained in a perimeter with no beginning and no end, every infinite point of which is identical to every other. Nothing and everything confined in a perfect perimeter. Terrifying void, and endless possibility, in one bounded space.

This is the world of *King Lear*.

• • •

"The old world is dying, and the new cannot be born. Now is the time of monsters."

Popular paraphrase of a line from Antonio Gramsci's Prison Notebooks

• • •

"Which of you shall we say doth love us most."

King Lear, Act 1.

The play begins with an act of caprice by a powerful ruler; in its aftermath the world trembles, norms and rules begin to unravel, and the natural chaos beneath begins to leach into the minds of the rich and powerful, and everyone in their service...

Which makes this a play for 2025.

• • •

"How now, what news?"

Gloucester, Act 1.

The common refrain of characters in Shakespeare's plays, and of the Elizabethan and Jacobean world of instability and flux.

There's also something very contemporary about it: What now? How has our world been shaken today? What does the latest news mean for us, our families, our place in society, our beliefs, our faith in humanity, in the ends we're working towards?

• • •

"Humanity perforce must prey on itself, like monsters of the deep."

Albany, Act 4.

Life on Earth in Lear's world is grotesque. Same now.

The lengths we will go to, to protect ourselves from this grotesqueness are extreme, perhaps even a little... grotesque: thick cocoons of self-hood, raging acquisitiveness, a global pandemic of fantasies and delusions (in Shakespeare's time driven by the spread of rumour and libels and cheap pamphlets, in ours by big tech), the eruption of those delusions into our politics, elite cowardice and failure of imagination, the violent enforcement of a fictional order of power, psychotic ideologies of nihilism and superiority, the enforced servitude of millions, inflamed group identities, wars over land, the slaughter of scapegoats - and we're back in the grotesque again, round and round.

King Lear is a play which plunges into this vicious circle in search of a way to break it.

• • •

"Truth's a dog must to kennel."

Fool, Act 1.

This is a great play for thinking about the problem of telling the truth. It's a problem because you first have to figure out what the matter at hand is, then what the (best) truth of that matter is (there's probably more than one), then how to (best) express it. That's assuming the people you're talking to want to hear what you're saying. A lot can go wrong and often does.

The matters at hand in this play are power, inheritance, survival; the insignificance and powerlessness of human creatures; the chaos and nothingness of the universe we live in.

In the broken world of the play, the expression of the truth of these things is pushed to its limits: Cordelia tries to say nothing; the Fool speaks elaborately meaningful nonsense; Edgar becomes a madman; Gloucester sees the world anew in seeing nothing; Lear loses his mind; language transforms, erupts, distorts - and sometimes in its battle with chaos it breaks through to find an appropriate form of truth and clarity, even if only for a moment...

• • •

"Men are as the time is."

Edmund, Act 5.

We are infected by the world we live in. Rules, norms, opinions, truths and mistruths, fragments of speech, ideas and ideals all spread in a mutating and never-ending pandemic of thoughts and feelings - what Edmund calls "the plague of custom". When our leaders and our elites turn capricious, erratic, deranged, frightened and frightening, nihilistic, then those same things get licenced in the world. Chaos and impunity erupt all over.

The play is set inside a raging pandemic of curses and lies, news and (often late or incorrect) information, ambitions and drives that all seem to hop invisibly from character to character - a storm of thoughts and feelings that blow on any and all.

Ours is the time of arseholes, egoists, liars, cheats and cowards, of ignorance, stupidity, self-pity, brutality, extreme power, and impunity.

• • •

"These late eclipses of the sun and moon portend no good to us."

Gloucester, Act 1.

It's hard to overstate how contemporary a writer Shakespeare was. An example: Gloucester's line above seems to refer to two eclipses, one lunar, one solar, in September and October 1605 -

around the time the play premiered. Shakespeare was writing of the news of the day, in a play set nearly 2500 years earlier. The precipitous mix of old and new is daring and exhilarating.

Shakespeare probably wrote *King Lear* in 1604/05, soon after the death of Elizabeth I and the ascension to the throne of James I. Like the world of the play, and like our world now, this was the end of one era and the fitful start of another, a time of uncertainty, fear, suspicion, plots, plagues, conspiracies, conspiracy theories, lies and fantasies, threats of war, civil strife, treason and overthrow...

His play is, variously, an adaptation of an anonymous Elizabethan play called *King Leir*; an episode in Raphael Holinshed's 1587 history *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Irelande*; a chapter in Philip Sidney's *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*; an infamous court case of the day in which a daughter sued to take control of her ageing father's estate; and much, much, much, much more.

Shakespeare borrowed and stole widely and freely. *King Lear* is a repository of a multitude of thoughts and forms of words taken from dozens of contemporary sources - an approach to playwriting that would get you sued today (unless you're ChatGPT).

• • •

"Down from the waist they are centaurs, though women all above."

King Lear, Act 4.

Lear's language reveals a profound anxiety about the power and unpredictability he associates with women. His vitriol is not an isolated dramatic flourish but reflects a broader cultural anxiety of the period. Shakespeare was writing for James I, who had come of age amidst the fraught political rivalry between his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I—an environment that left him with a lasting suspicion of female authority. Shakespeare's plays from this era, including *Macbeth*, often grapple with themes of witchcraft, transgressive femininity, and a distinctly misogynistic worldview. The resonance of these anxieties feels utterly (and horrifyingly) contemporary. Across the globe we are witnessing an erosion of women's rights and a reassertion of conservative, traditionalist rhetoric around gender roles.

• • •

"Is man no more than this? Consider him well."

King Lear on Poor Tom, Act 3.

The play is 420 years old now. Shakespeare's sources reach back to the 12th century. The legendary King Leir described in those sources reigned in about 8BC, nearly 3000 years ago. The play has a very deep imaginative memory of a time when the human world and the natural world were closer together, and it contains within it a kind of linguistic archaeology of the millennia of accumulated human activity since - the gradual accretion of hundreds of generations of thought and feeling into "humanity", and humanity's flourishing into the fragile new humanism of Shakespeare's time - at its fullest in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and at its most doubtful in *King Lear*.

How reliable is this "humanity" of ours? How far are we really from 1605, from 8BC, from our wild and desperate origins? More and more it feels like this "humanity" is coming apart...

• • •

"What can man's wisdom in the restoring of bereav'd sense?"

Cordelia, Act 4.

What can be done about demented leadership and the madness of our ruling ideologies?

• • •

"List a brief tale."

Edgar, Act 5.

Humans are animals + language.

Sometimes all we have to tame the chaos, to pull us back from the edge of some wild impulse, is the ability to turn our instincts into words. To speak our way through. To restore our sense. Find wisdom, clarity, truth, beauty, alternative thoughts, shared thoughts, narratives, stories, understandings...

Unfortunately, we can also talk our way into our worst instincts.

• • •

Keywords in *King Lear*:

Nature/natural/unnatural

Love

Nothing

See and sight

Eye and eyes

Tears and weeping

Esperance (hope)

Authority

Fortune

Service

Truth

Heart

Man

Heaven/s

Mad/madness/folly/fool

Beasts of predation: serpents, dogs, flies, rats, vultures, kites, cuckoos, tigers, dragons, wolves...

A whole lexicon of words to do with reproduction: degenerate, sterility, copulation, lechery, womb, milk, teem, adultery, the making, got, to't, bastardizing, top, lusty, conceive...

• • •

How do we make something out of nothing?

How much - and how little - power do we really have?

What did we inherit, and what will we pass on?

How do we tame the chaos?

• • •



Eamon Flack & Colin Fries



Colin Fries



Raj Labade



Margaret Thanos



James Stibilj



Charlotte Friels



James Fraser





Tom Conroy



Jana Zvedeniuk



Brandon McClelland



Colin Friels & Conor Merrigan-Turner



Alison Whyte & Raj Labade



Ahunim Abebe



Charles Wu



Arjunan Puveendran



Sukhbir (Sunny) Singh Walia



Raj Labade & Tom Conroy.



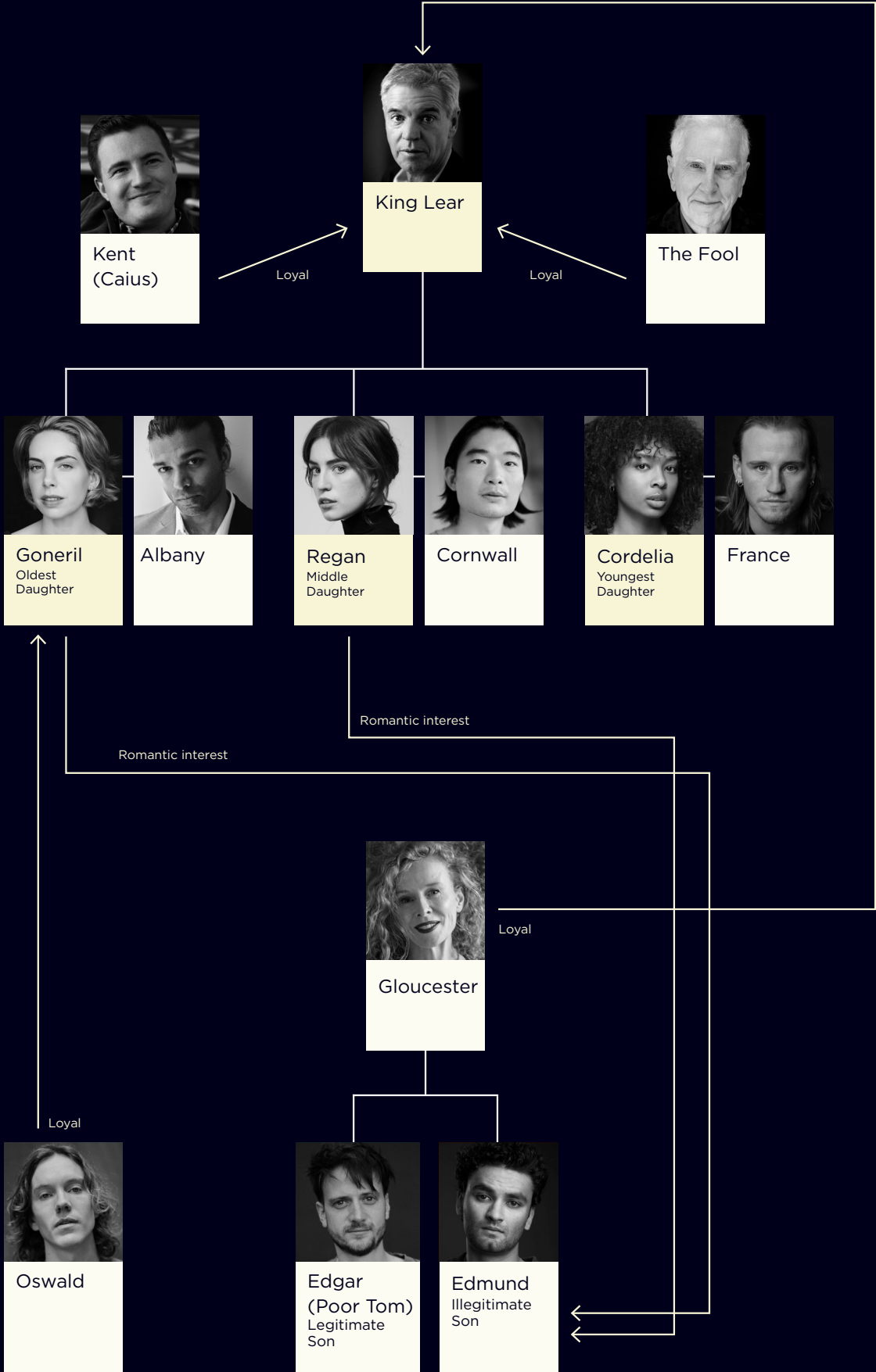
Peter Carroll



Alison Whyte

CHARACTER MAP

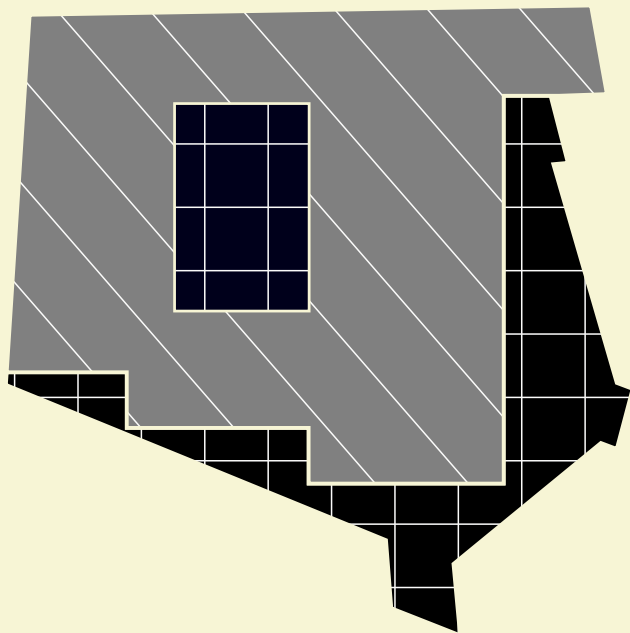
Check out a more detailed breakdown of the Characters of King Lear [HERE](#)



SUSTAINABLE THEATRE MAKING: SET DESIGN

In line with Belvoir's commitment to sustainable theatre making, the set of *The True History of the Life and Death of King Lear and his Three Daughters* has followed the Green Book Baseline standard for sustainable theatre making.

BELVOIR STAGE



What Rostra is?

Rostra are the building blocks used to make a stage higher.



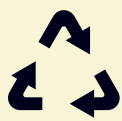
Custom Rostra
100% re-used materials



Wood Floor
100% recycled materials from past productions such as *The Wrong Gods*.
(image below)



TO ACHIEVE BASELINE STANDARD A PRODUCTION TEAM NEEDS TO:



50% materials are re-used & recycled

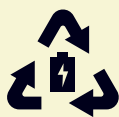


65% of materials are re-used after

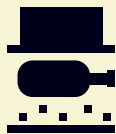


Avoid harmful & Unsustainable materials

OTHER WAYS BELVOIR IS COMMITTED TO SUSTAINABLE THEATRE MAKING:



Battery Recycling



Glass crusher



Bike parking



Costumes from recycled fabric



Worm farm composting



**BELVOIR ST
THEATRE**

2026 SEASON



DEAR SON

Letters of love by First Nations fathers and sons

8 – 25 Jan

AMPLIFIED

Sheridan Harbridge as Chrissy Amplett

29 Jan – 8 Feb

A MIRROR

A smart new play from London about art and power

21 Feb – 15 Mar

DRIVE YOUR PLOW OVER THE BONES OF THE DEAD

Pamela Rabe and Eamon Flack take on the Nobel Prize-winner's
whodunnit **28 Mar – 3 May**

THE BIRDS

Paula Arundell goes wild in a new take on Daphne du Maurier's classic

16 May – 17 Jun

THE JUNGLE AND THE SEA

S. Shakthidharan and Eamon Flack's acclaimed play returns

11 Jul – 2 Aug

RUNT

Neil Armfield directs Craig Silvey's great Australian underdog story

22 Aug – 20 Sep

A ROOM WITH A VIEW

E. M. Forster's classic tale of living boldly, together

3 Oct – 1 Nov

THE COCONUT CHILDREN

Vivian Pham's breakout novel comes to the stage

21 Nov – 20 DEC

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We are deeply grateful to our community for supporting us through the good times and the bad. From game-changing gifts to topping up your ticket purchase price, your faith in us has made all the difference. Thank you.

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Led by Belvoir Artistic Director Eamon Flack, the Artistic Director’s Circle supports an iconic Belvoir show each year; in recent years’ productions include *Into the Woods* in 2023, *August: Osage County* in 2024 and *King Lear* in 2025.

Being a member of the Artistic Director’s Circle is a rewarding opportunity to take an active role in Belvoir’s development. Artistic Director’s Circle members are invited to a specially curated series of events; including Opening Nights throughout the season, special in-season events, insider access to our rehearsals, and our Annual Artistic Director’s Dinner.

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Andrew Cameron AM & Cathy Cameron	Stuart & Kate O’Brien	Rosie Williams & John Grill AO
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