

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

April 6, 2020

Winner of Queensland Premier's Drama Award to be revealed in April

Theatres may be closed for now, but talented artists forge on with new works

Images of finalists here - <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/8bso4d4jx94wmwl/AACGCLYaO9H8bhkoYBUVdOzMa?dl=0>

The winner of the prestigious **Queensland Premier's Drama Award (QPDA)** 2020–21 will be announced in the coming weeks with three talented Queenslanders **Anna Loren**, **Maddie Nixon** and **Steve Pirie** in the running to have their original play performed on the mainstage during Queensland Theatre's 2021 Season.

The three playwrights were chosen in November 2019 from a record-breaking field of 221 entries from every state and territory in Australia and their works have been undergoing creative developments over the past few months.

Following closed readings of the plays on April 9, the winner will be announced later in April.

Queensland Theatre Artistic Director, Lee Lewis, said that whilst the April 9 play readings were no longer open to the public, the significance of the award should not be downplayed. She also emphasised the variety and quality of all three finalists.

"The three plays vary in tone and style, but each is linked to the playwright's own experiences which gives them an authenticity and honesty that audiences will respond to," said Lewis.

"Anna's Loren's play *Comfort* is a semi-autobiographical work responding to whispers her grandmother may have been a 'Comfort Woman' in 1940s Japan-occupied Burma. Maddie Nixon's work *Binnavale* is a heart-warming comedy about a family living in Australia's smallest town (population 4) and Steve Pirie's piece *Return to the Dirt* touches on his time working in a local funeral home in Toowoomba and the life-changing lessons he learnt."

The QPDA was launched in 2002, and through it, Queensland Theatre has developed 31 new Australian plays, employed over 220 actors, writers and directors, and fostered audiences of more than 34,500 to engage with new theatre works.

The Queensland Premier's Drama Award is an initiative of Queensland Theatre with the support of the Queensland Government. Queensland Theatre is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. Queensland Theatre is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

About the finalists and their plays

Anna Loren (Sunshine Coast)

Anna Loren is an actor and theatre maker. She is one of eight emerging playwrights, chosen to participate in Playlab's Incubator Program in 2019, and was recently supported by the Regional Arts Development Fund to attend a residency in Finland, under the mentorship of theatre professional, Dr Margi Brown Ash. Anna has taught for The Actors Workshop and NIDA Open (Brisbane), as well as The Rose Bruford Youth Theatre, NCS The Challenge and the Drama Club (London). [Full biography on request]

Her entry *Comfort*:

Comfort: a state of physical ease and freedom from pain or constraint. Sitting between British-Indian colonial rule and Japanese occupation, Burma is a country torn apart by war. *COMFORT* is a semi-autobiographical work responding to the whispers that her grandmother may have been a 'Comfort Woman' in 1940s Japan-Occupied Burma. Moving between past and present, personal and political, *GRANDDAUGHTER* wades through official military records, rumour and euphemism as she gently unpicks the threads in search of her *GRANDMOTHER*'s truth.

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Maddie Nixon (originally Sunshine Coast but now Brisbane-based)

Maddie Nixon is a Brisbane based writer, director and youth arts practitioner. Maddie is the Youth and Participation Producer at La Boite Theatre Company. Credits include, as playwright: *The Parable People* (Alpha Processing – Playlab), *Cooladdi* (HWY Festival – La Boite Theatre Company, 18-26-Year-Old Playwright Program – Queensland Theatre and Fresh Ink – ATYP), *Food Fight* (Fresh Ink – ATYP). [Full biography on request]

Her entry, *Binnavale*:

The Big Pineapple, The Big Banana, The Big Merino. Australian tourists love big things. But what about the small things? Binnavale is the smallest town in Australia. For now. Once a bustling hub in the orange desert of central Queensland, Binnavale is entirely isolated and solely occupied by one family, the Murphys. Mum, Dad, Levi and Sam, run the town's crown jewel and only remaining business, The Bin Hotel. Business at The Bin isn't exactly booming, but it's going well enough, and the Murphys honestly believe that that they are the gate keepers of the greatest place on Earth. That is until the young hotshot Federal MP Mr Pryce, proposes the Postcode Hybridisation Scheme, a bill which if passed will conjoin a series of small population postcodes in remote and regional Australia. If the Murphys lose their postcode, they lose their smallest town status, and they lose their business. *Binnavale* is a comedy about family, grief and growing up.

Steve Pirie (originally from Toowoomba but now Brisbane-based)

Steve Pirie is a writer, theatre maker and youth arts worker based in Brisbane. A graduate of the University of Southern Queensland, he is also the co-Artistic Director of Mixtape Theatre Collective, a regional independent theatre company based in Toowoomba, Queensland. His first play, *Escape from the Breakup Forest*, has since been published by Playlab following statewide seasons, and in 2014, Steve's work *3 O'Clock, Flagpole* was selected for development as part of the Lab Rats initiative. In 2017, he was an independent artist with Queensland Theatre where he developed his work, *Return to the Dirt* as part of his residency. [Full biography on request]

His entry, *Return to the Dirt*:

In 2014, Steve Pirie returned to his hometown in regional Queensland with no job, money or goals. After a series of dead ends he finally found work in a local funeral home where he spent the next year living and working among the dead, the dying and the families left behind. Join Steve, your tour guide, as he takes you through the realms of the dead and behind the closed doors of the Australian funeral industry in this powerful meditation on what it means to die in the 21st century, to lose the ones we love and what a twenty-something learned about what awaits us at the end.

For further information, imagery, interviews or more, please email kath@kathrose.com