DON'T ASK WHAT THE BIRD LOOK LIKE

BY HANNAH BELANSZKY
DIRECTED BY ROXANNE MCDONALD WITH LEE LEWIS



Queensland Theatre acknowledges the Jagera and Turrbal people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, and their unique relationship with the lands, seas and waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.









As Queensland Theatre's newly appointed Executive Director, it's an absolute privilege to welcome you to this extraordinary show, which admittedly has been a little longer in the making than we expected.

don't ask what the bird look like was originally slated for our 2022 program, but the relentless rain clouds that hovered over Brisbane for weeks early that year had other ideas. When the resulting floodwaters surged through Queensland Theatre's headquarters, the difficult decision was made to curtail the season, and this play was — reluctantly — temporarily shelved.

But in this ever-changing industry, we don't look at it as a setback — we look at it as extra creative development time. The version of don't ask what the bird look like you are about to see has been honed to perfection.

Emerging playwright Hannah Belanszky is a powerful new First Nations voice in the world of Australian theatre. Based in Brisbane, she is of the Yuwaalaraay people, from northwestern New South Wales, and the story she tells in this play is one of land, family and reconnecting with Hannah Belanszky is a powerful new First Nations voice in the world of Australian theatre.

Criena Gehrke
Executive Director

country, as city girl Joan (Matilda Brown) travels out to a tiny river town in the back blocks in search of answers about her family history.

Hannah's play, with a twist of humour, philosophy and gothic Australiana, nabbed her a finalist spot in the 2018-19 Queensland Premier's Drama Award, which led to Queensland Theatre commissioning don't ask what the bird look like. We are committed to telling and sharing First Nations stories, and Hannah's play is directed by our Artistic Elder Roxanne McDonald, alongside Artistic Director Lee Lewis, with a powerhouse First Nations cast, as Shakira Clanton and Michael Tuahine take the stage alongside Matilda Brown.

It remains for me to thank our production partner Ergon Energy Network and Energex, as part of Energy Queensland for its support, and of course thank you all for coming out to see a live show, supporting your state theatre company, and re-energising our industry after a challenging time.

Enjoy the show,

- Criena

DON'T ASK WHAT THE BIRD LOOK LIKE

BY HANNAH BELANSZKY
DIRECTED BY ROXANNE MCDONALD WITH LEE LEWIS

Joan needs her father. She hasn't seen him since he left her and her Mum when she was just a little girl. She wants answers, she wants history, she wants to know more about who she is.

Travelling into country as remote as it is strange to this city girl, Joan finds Mick. He doesn't speak much, and bears little resemblance to the man who taught her to play Scrabble all those years ago. But amid the flies, the heat, the dust and the stillness of this small river town lurk many ghosts and mysteries. Over cups of tea and Scrabble in Mick's weather-beaten old house, Joan is about to discover some family secrets that have been hidden below the surface for decades.

With a light touch of humour and a philosophical undercurrent, this play is an intimate work from an exciting new First Nations voice, directed by Queensland Theatre's Artistic Elder Roxanne McDonald with Lee Lewis.

A gently funny, almost gothic tale about land, family and reconnection.

CREATIVES

Writer Hannah Belanszky
Co-Director Roxanne McDonald
Co-Director Lee Lewis
Set & Costume Designer Chloe Greaves
Lighting Designer David Walters
Composer & Sound Designer THE SWEATS
Dramaturg (Rehearsal) Alexander Bayliss
Dramaturg (Development) Isaac Drandic
Voice Coach Gabrielle Rogers

Stage Manager Angela Roff **Assistant Stage Manager** Tia-Hanee Cleary

CAST

Joan Matilda Brown
Pattie Shakira Clanton
Mick Michael Tuahine

LOCATION

Bille Brown Theatre Queensland Theatre 78 Montague Road South Brisbane

DURATION

100 minutes, with no interval.

WARNINGS

This production contains smoke, moments of extremely dark lighting states and themes of loss.

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

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636 13YARN 13 92 76 Lifeline 13 11 14 Headspace headspace.org.au

PRODUCTION PARTNER







Hannah Belanszky Writer

I wrote this play to find my voice as a young woman, writer and Yuwaalaraay person. I wrote it for my family, black and white. And I wrote it for you, sitting in the theatre, reading this now.

I'm writing you this note sitting in the passenger seat of Mum's minibus. We're driving some of the creative team from this production out to visit my family's country in Goodooga— a town located just under the Queensland border in Northwest NSW. Johnny Cash is blasting, of course, and Grandma is singing along with co-director Aunty Roxy in the seats behind me. The trip is a crossover of two of my worlds— family and theatre. Not unlike the writing of this play.

My mum, grandma and greatgrandmother were born out here, but I grew up in Brisbane and didn't form a real relationship with this place until my early adult years. I felt a need bursting out of me to know where I come from, to understand the people who raised me, to make sense of my own place in the world. My enthusiasm meant I wanted all the answers, all at once, now. I soon learnt it's not so simple.

A journey towards healing and connection can't be done in isolation, but people and places have complex histories that can be hard to navigate, especially when you feel like an outsider. At times this left me, and still leaves me, feeling lost.

don't ask what the bird look like isn't autobiographical, but through a story of a father and daughter I was able to process experiences that have shaped me both personally and culturally — inevitably bringing me closer to family, land, and a stronger sense of self.

I want to thank Lee Lewis, Aunty Roxanne McDonald, Isaac Drandic, Alex Bayliss, Kylie Bracknell, Shari Irwin, Queensland Theatre and Playlab Theatre for supporting me and this work from the very beginning. To the incredible cast and creative team — thank you for believing in this play and for bringing the story to life so beautifully. And to my Mumma, Wendy Rix — thank you for everything!

I wrote this play to find my voice as a young woman, writer and Yuwaalaraay person. I wrote it for my family, black and white. And I wrote it for you, sitting in the theatre, reading this now. don't ask what the bird look like is about the unspoken, the space between us. It's reaching for what we all yearn for: connection. I don't know what brought you to the theatre today, but thank you for being here, for sharing this small moment in time with me.

Lots of love.

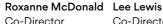
- Hannah













Co-Director

Now more than ever this play needs to be seen.

Roxanne McDonald:

When I first saw this play read it was a finalist in the 2018-19 Queensland Premier's Drama Award, I thought hey this sounds like my country, you're talking about my mob. The regional country town brought back memories of my childhood growing up in Roma, living on the fringes near the creek and going fishing. My hope is audiences will also fall in love and relate to these characters and may see parts of themselves in it.

This is my directorial debut with Queensland Theatre, and I am very excited and honoured to be working on this new play with Artistic Director Lee Lewis, I'm learning so much. It is with great respect to Hannah for trusting me to co-direct her incredibly layered and nuanced stage play. As a First Nations artist, I believe telling stories can strengthen our community and generate a greater understanding of us mob and the issues that are our everyday reality. Now more than ever this play needs to be seen, we are potentially on the precipice of great change in this country which could have profound implications on the nations' psyche, cultural identity, heart and soul. I am extremely proud of our deadly cast and creatives who are completely invested in this new

work and are taking deep care of this story. The vibe, openness, support and guidance in the rehearsal room has been phenomenal. Working with emerging talent has always been something I'm passionate about, whether I'm acting with our young ones or directing, I hope I can pass some of my knowledge and wisdom onto them.

Lee Lewis:

Sharing the experience of directing Hannah's play with Roxanne McDonald has been wonderful. The community of the rehearsal room inspired by Hannah's beautiful writing has been joyous. Like Roxanne, I first saw this play as a finalist in the Queensland Premier's Drama Award and have loved it ever since. Yes, it has taken a long time to come to the stage, but Hannah's patience and persistence has seen the play evolve over that time into a deeply satisfying family story. It has been a real privilege to be part of the team that finally gets to bring this play to the Queensland Theatre stage.

We think you're going to feel a raft of emotions and connect on so many levels and we can't wait for you to enjoy the world premiere of don't ask what the bird look like.

Love.

- Aunty Rox & Lee







FROM OUR PRODUCTION PARTNER

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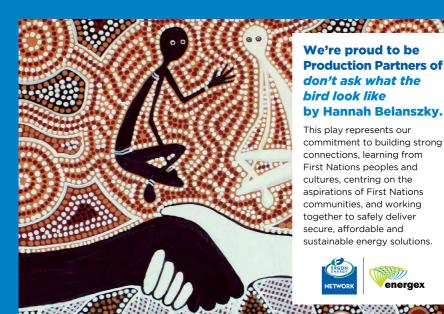
During this time, we have supported unique home-grown Queensland stories. These reflect the community in which we live and work, and champion First Nations artists. Stories include the production of *My Name is Jimi*, a celebration of Torres Strait Island culture, to the phenomenon of *Boy Swallows Universe*, and the joyful story of *The Sunshine Club* in 2022.

This year, we are proud to be Production Partner of *don't ask what the bird look like* and to celebrate First Nations stories and experiences.

- Michael



Michael Dart
Executive General Manager, Customer
Ergon Energy Network and Energex,
as part of Energy Queensland



Creatives

Hannah Belanszky Writer



Hannah Belanszky is a writer, actor and Yuwaalaraay woman. She wrote, directed, and performed in *The Wives of Wolfgang* which won Best Cabaret at the Adelaide Fringe weekly awards and has also been performed at Brisbane

Powerhouse and Fringe World Perth. Hannah has been commissioned by Australian Theatre for Young People, Playlab Theatre, QUT and All Hallows' School. Her play Shadows in a Dress has had readings presented at La Boite Theatre Company, QPAC, Bleach Festival and Clancestry. She was recently Playwright in Residence at Unless Pictures and selected for the Netflix ANZ Writer's Lab. don't ask what the bird look like is her mainstage debut.

Roxanne McDonald Co-Director



Queensland Theatre: Our Town, Mother Courage and her Children, Head Full of Love, The Tragedy of King Richard the Second, Fountains Beyond (with Brisbane Festival), The Skin of our Teeth, The Sunshine Club. Radiance (with Kooemba

Jdarra Indigenous Theatre Company). Other Credits: La Boite Theatre Company: Away, From Darkness, Lysa and the Freeborn Dames, Oodgeroo Bloodline to Country (with Kooemba Jdarra), Romeo & Juliet (with Kooemba Jdarra), The Taming of the Shrew; Creative Regions: It All Beains with Love: Belvoir: Winvanboaa Yurringa. Windmill Baby, Yibiyung, The Man from Mukinupin (with Melbourne Theatre Company), Parramatta Girls; Belloo Creative: Rovers; Sydney Theatre Company: The Battle of Waterloo; Griffin Theatre: The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table (with Bungaburra Productions and Hothouse); The Street Theatre: Milk; Kooemba Jdarra, Indigenous Theatre Company: The Cherry Pickers, Yarnin' Up, A Life of Grace and Piety (with Jute Theatre), Seems Like Yesterday, Goin' To The Island, Luck of the Draw, Njunjul the Sun, Whispers Of This Wik Woman, Bitin' Back (with QPAC): Queensland Museum: You Came To Mv Country & You Didn't Turn Black. Film: Grace, My Country, Welcome To Country, B.Old, Blackbuster, Australia Day. Television: Mabo, Reef Doctors, 8mmm Aboriginal Radio, Grace Beside Me, The End, Harrow, Deadlock, Summer Love, Queen of Oz. Positions: Artistic Elder, Queensland Theatre. Awards: Matilda Award – Special Commendation, Performance Romeo and Juliet, Goin' To The Island, The Sunshine Club.

Roxy is a proud Mandandanji woman from Roma, Queensland.

Lee Lewis Co-Director



Queensland Theatre: Tiny
Beautiful Things, Family Values,
First Casualty, Bernhardt/
Hamlet, Return to the Dirt,
Prima Facie, Our Town,
Mouthpiece, Rice. Other
Credits: Griffin Theatre
Company: Prima Facie, Family

Values, First Love is the Revolution, Is There Something Wrong With That Lady?, The Almighty Sometimes, Kill Climate Deniers, Eight Gigabytes of Hardcore Pornography, The Homosexuals or 'Faggots', Rice, Masquerade, Gloria, The Bleeding Tree, Emerald City, A Rabbit for Kim Jong-il, The Serpent's Table, Replay, Silent Disco, Smurf In Wanderland, The Bull, The Moon and the Coronet of Stars. The Call. A Hoax. The Nightwatchman. The Literati, The Misanthrope (with Bell Shakespeare); Sydney Theatre Company: Mary Stuart, Honour, Love-Lies-Bleeding, ZEBRA!; Melbourne Theatre Company: Gloria, Hayfever, Rupert; Belvoir: That Face, This Heaven, Half and Half, A Number, 7 Blowjobs, Ladybird; Bell Shakespeare: The School for Wives, Twelfth Night;





Australian Theatre for Young People:

Battlegrounds, Citizenship; Darwin Festival:
Highway of Lost Hearts; WAAPA: As You Like It;
NIDA: After Dinner, Big Love, The Winter's Tale;
The Hayes Theatre Company: Darlinghurst Nights.
Positions: Artistic Director, Queensland Theatre;
Artistic Director and CEO, Griffin Theatre
Company; Richard Wherrett Fellow, Sydney
Theatre Company. Awards: Helpmann Awards —
Best Play, Best Director The Bleeding Tree; Green
Room Awards — Best Ensemble, Best Production,
Best Director The Bleeding Tree.

Chloe Greaves Set and Costume Designer



Queensland Theatre: As Costume Designer: Barbara and the Camp Dogs. Other Credits: La Boite Theatre Company: Naked and Screaming, The Last Five Years, An Ideal Husband, Caesar; Belvoir St Theatre: Cursed:

Myths Made Here: Cinderella; The Good Room: That's What She Said; Chunky Move: Rule of Thirds, LUCID; Fraught Outfit: The Bacchae (with Melbourne Festival and Dark Mofo); Malthouse Theatre: Blak Cabaret, They Saw a Thylacine; Melbourne Theatre Company: The Waiting Room; Red Stitch Theatre: The River, Incognito, Fury, Oil; Victorian Opera: The Magic Pudding. Positions: Member, Australian Production Design Guild.
Awards: Green Room Award — Independent Theatre Body of Work; Matilda Award Nomination — Best Costume Design That's What She Said, Best Set Design Naked & Screaming, That's What She Said.

David Walters Lighting Designer



Queensland Theatre: Bernhardt/Hamlet, Emerald City, Nearer The Gods, The Wider Earth, Motherland, Quartet, Ladies in Black, Brisbane, Boston Marriage, Gloria, Macbeth, Australia Day, Venus in Fur. End of the

Rainbow, Romeo & Juliet, Pygmalion, Grimm Tales, The August Moon, Rabbit Hole, The Glass Menagerie, The Memory of Water, A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, Molly Sweeney, Chilling and Killing, My Annabel Lee, The Skin of Our Teeth, Vertigo and the Virginia, Long Day's Journey into Night, Amy's View, Master Class, After the Ball, Summer Rain, Arcadia, The Hope of the World, Money and Friends, Gilgamesh, The Shaugraun, Broken Glass, Shadow and Splendour, The Marriage of Figaro, The Game of Love and Chance, On The Whippingside, The Crucible, Essington Lewis: I Am Work, Mrs Klein, The Cherry Orchard, Seven Little Australians, Season's Greetings, The Merry Wives of Windsor, A Month In The Country, Top Silk, Moby Dick, The Taming Of The Shrew, Ghosts, Major Barbara, The Barrets of Wimpole Street, Snoopy, Chorus of Disapproval, Briefs, God's Best Country, Hard Times, The Bloke, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, Night And Day, The Recruiting Officer, A Month Of Sundays, A Spring Song, The Man from Mukinupin, A Different Drummer, Fuente Ovejuna, Salonika, The Venetian Twins. Other Credits: Melbourne Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre



Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Bell Shakespeare Company, PlayLab Theatre, QUT, QPAC, Jute, Handspan, Playbox, La Boite Theatre Company, Rock'n'Roll Circus, Nimrod, Company B, Dead Puppet Society, Expressions Dance Company, Queensland Ballet, Australian Ballet, Opera Queensland, Opera Australia, Topology, Camerata, Boxties, Zen Zen Zo; In Iceland: National Theatre, National Opera, Reykjavik City Theatre. Positions: Adjunct Associate Professor, Drama, Queensland University of Technology. Awards: Matilda Awards/Commendations in 1988, 1990, 1992, 1993, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2018; ABF Lifetime Achievement Award.

THE SWEATS Composer & Sound Designer



Queensland Theatre: Our Town, The Memory Of Water, Children Of The Black Skirt, Far Away, The Cherry Orchard, The Real Inspector Hound/Black Comedy, The Orphanage Project, A Conversation, The Fortunes Of Richard Mahony

(with Malthouse Theatre), Cooking With Elvis, Bag O'Marbles. Other Credits: La Boite: The Motion Of Light In Water, Cock, Kingswood Kids; Sydney Theatre Company: The Harp in the South (Part 1& 2), Going Down (with Malthouse), Three Sisters, Chimerica, Death and the Maiden (with MTC), Love and Information (with Malthouse): Belvoir: Random, The Drover's Wife, Mortido, Miss Julie, The Dark Room; Melbourne Theatre Company: Lilith, Egg (with Terrapin Puppet Theatre), Miss Julie, The Distance, Buyer And Cellar, The Effect, Cock (with Missy Higgins), Yellow Moon, Constellations, Helicopter, Random; Malthouse Theatre: Meme Girls, The Good Person Of Szechuan (with The National Theatre Of China): La Mama: Tall Man. Status Update, Crossed: Real TV: Hoods, The Suitcase, War Crimes. Film: The True History Of Billie The Kid, Wild, Drowning, And Everything Nice, Transient, Booth. Television: Saved. Training: Cert IV Music Industry (Technical Production), RMIT; Cert IV Small Business Management, RMIT; Postgraduate Diploma of Education, UQ; Bachelor of Arts (Music/English), UQ. Awards: Sydney Theatre Award Nomination — Best Score Harp In The South (Part I & II); Sydney Theatre Award — Best Sound Design Chimerica, Best Score/Sound Design The Drover's Wife, Best Score/Sound Design Love and Information; Green Room Award Nomination — Best Sound Design/Composition Miss Julie; Green Room Award — Best Sound Design/Composition Yellow Moon.

Angela Roff Stage Manager



Queensland Theatre: Debut.
Other Credits: Brisbane
Powerhouse: Brisbane Comedy
Festival 2022, 2023;
Queensland Performing Arts
Centre: Various Performances;
The Mama's Boys Collective:
Brothers Book Club; Big Fork

Theatre: Brisbane Improv Festival; Skindeep Collective: Skindeep; Brisbane Arts Theatre: The BFG, You've Got Hate Mail. As Assistant Stage Manager: THAT Production Company: Kill Climate Deniers.

Tia-Hanee Cleary Assistant Stage Manager



Queensland Theatre: Tiny
Beautiful Things, As You Like It,
The Almighty Sometimes.
Other Credits: As Lighting
Operator: Brisbane
Powerhouse: A Girl's Guide to
World War, All Fired Up, Diary
of a Madman, Speed: The

Movie The Play, Diehard: The Movie The Play, Titanic: The Movie The Play; Room to Play: The Eisteddfod. As Deputy Head of Props: Opera Australia: The Phantom of the Opera (2022/2023). As Props Assistant: GWB Entertainment: An American in Paris (Brisbane). As Assistant Stage Manager: Opera Queensland: Sonas of Love and War. The Marriage of Figaro. Opera Under the Stars, Don Giovanni, A Flowering Tree, Peter Grimes: Troop Production: The Lonesome West. As Venue Technician: Brisbane Festival: Cassie Workman, Giantess. Orpheus, Eurydice. As Visual Graphic and Presentation Designer: Matilda Awards (2018 & 2019). Training: Bachelor of Fine Arts (Technical Production), Queensland University of Technology.

Cast

Matilda Brown Joan



Queensland Theatre: Burning House (Script Development). Other Credits: Blak Social/ Brisbane Festival: Queen's City; Hit Productions: The Sapphires (National Tour); National Theatre of Paramatta: Stolen; Moogahlin Theatre Company:

Winyanboga Yurringa (Victorian Tour); Merrigong Theatre Company: The Siren Project, The Sirens' Return, Going Home development; Queensland University of Technology (QUT): The Cherry Orchard, Romeo and Juliet, The Man Who Came to Dinner, The Coast of Utopia, Voyage, The Hot L Baltimore. Training: Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting), Queensland University of Technology.

Matilda is a proud Aboriginal (Dharawal) woman.



Shakira Clanton Pattie



Queensland Theatre: Barbara and the Camp Dogs (with Belvoir St Theatre). Other Credits: Sydney Theatre Company: Forgotten Dream; Darlinghurst Theatre Company: I'm With Her, Still I Rise; Black Swan Theatre Company: York;

Moogahlin Performing Arts: The Weekend (with Carriageworks). Television: Frayed, Preppers, Eden, Diary of an Uber Driver, Doctor Doctor, Wellmania, Summer Love. Training: NIDA.

Awards: Sydney Theatre Award Nomination — Best Actress The Weekend.

Shakira is a proud Wongatha, Yamatji and Noongar, Gitja yorga (woman) from Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar (Perth), as well as being African American with Native American ancestry on her father's side.

Michael Tuahine Mick



Queensland Theatre: Country Song, Mother Courage and Her Children. Other Credits: Prospero Arts: The Wizard of Oz (with QPAC), Singin' in the Rain (with QPAC); Black Swan Theatre Company: Corrugation Road; Pork Chop Productions:

Last Cab to Darwin, Ruby's Last Dollar; La Boite Theatre Company: Snow White (with Opera Queensland); The Good Room: I Just Came to Say Goodbye (with Brisbane Festival); QPAC: The Arrival. Film: The Demon Disorder, Valentine's Day. Television: The Wheel of Time, Upright, The End, Harrow, Time of our Lives, Redfern Now, Reef Break, Wanted, Sea Patrol, Secrets & Lies, K9, Hot Spell, Farscape. Training: NIDA.











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First Nations Stories

Queensland Theatre has a strong commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to share their stories on our stages and was recently recognised at this year's Queensland Reconciliation Awards for its significant partnership with Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) on Shakespeare's Othello.

We celebrate work that embraces the history, cultural practice and storytelling of our oldest living cultures. From the important national narratives in *Black Diggers* and *At What Cost?* to the rich history and culture in *My Name is Jimi*, and the joyful, reflective musical moments in the *The Sunshine Club*.

There are so many more important stories we want to share with our audiences, and your support will enable us to produce and present engaging new First Nations works and provide real opportunities for employment and training for First Nations artists.

For more information about supporting our First Nations program through a donation or corporate partnership, please contact our Development team on **07 3010 7614** or at **development@queenslandtheatre.com.au**

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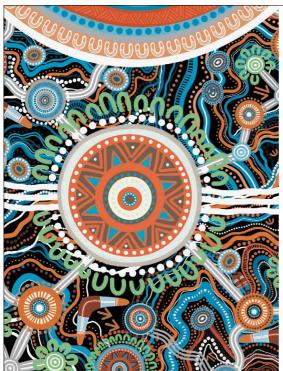
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TECHNICAL COORDINATOR

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SOUND ASSOCIATE

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COSTUME CUTTER

Leigh Buchanan

COSTUME MAINTENANCE Tracey Leino

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DEVELOPMENT

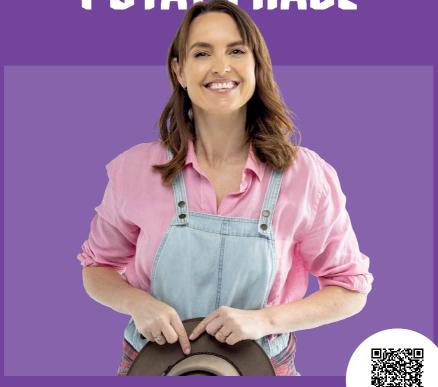
Playlab Theatre, Queensland Premier's Drama Awards (Finalist), Queensland Theatre, Kylie Bracknell.



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7 — 28 OCT BILLE BROWN THEATRE

THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE



BY MELANIE TAIT
DIRECTED BY PRISCILLA JACKMAN





