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# QUEENSLAND THEATRE

## Finalists announced for Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2020-21

Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk has announced the finalists for the Queensland Premier's Drama Award (QPDA) 2020–21. Artists Anna Loren, Maddie Nixon and Steve Pirie have been selected from the record-breaking field of 221 entries. This marks the largest intake of new dramatic works in the Award's 17-year history, with entries received from every state and territory in Australia.

"I congratulate Anna Loren, Maddie Nixon and Steve Pirie for this incredible achievement. I wish them well as they continue their development journey working with industry experts and look forward to seeing which script will be the next winning play on our Queensland stage," said Ms Palaszczuk.

The three finalists are now in the running for the drama award, where the winner receives a professional production of their entry in Queensland Theatre's 2021 Season.

The previous winner, **David Megarrity** and his play *THE HOLIDAYS* will premiere in Brisbane in July 2020, as part of Queensland Theatre's 50th Anniversary season.

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 QPDA judges – Christine Castley, Deputy Director-General, Department of the Premier and Cabinet; Louise Gough, Head of New Work, Belvoir; Jennifer Medway, Literary Associate, Melbourne Theatre Company; Nadine McDonald-Dowd Executive Producer, Learning and Engagement Program, QPAC; and Sam Strong, Artistic Director, Queensland Theatre – met with the 14 artists who progressed to the shortlist to discuss their projects further. From there, the judges selected the three finalists whose works now undergo creative developments which will culminate in a play-reading in 2020, after which the judges must chose the winner.

The winner of the QPDA will have their project receive a professional world premiere production by Queensland Theatre in 2021.

"Queensland Theatre is the national leader in new stories and new talent and the Queensland Premier's Drama Award is the foundation stone of this ambition. This award helps us to create the next landmark Australian story, to identify the most distinctive new artists, and to provide pathways for their work and careers," said Queensland Theatre Artistic Director, Sam Strong.

"This was an intensely competitive round, with a record number of entries from around Australia, and an incredibly impressive long-list that was a snapshot of a very healthy new writing culture. I'm especially pleased that the three plays that rose to the top were all by Queensland artists, and two of them have a regional setting," he said.

“The plays vary widely in their style, tone and the experience they want to create for an audience. But they are united by a kernel of personal experience that sits at the heart of each of them. This gives all three plays a unique authenticity and power. I’m sure incoming Artistic Director Lee Lewis will enjoy the wealth of talent contained in the shortlist and in Queensland as a whole.”

The Queensland Premier’s Drama Award is an initiative of the Queensland Government, delivered in partnership with Queensland Theatre.

## The 2020–21 finalists:

### **Anna Loren:**

Anna Loren is an actor and theatre maker. She is one of eight emerging playwrights, chosen to participate in Playlab’s 2019, Incubator Program 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 studied at The Actors Workshop (Brisbane), and later at the Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance (London), supported by an international bursary. Also a drama facilitator, 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. It has been cut open, segmented, dissected and blown apart. Battling armies open lasting wounds across the land, leaving scars not only on the earth, but also on the bodies of the women they seek to colonize. *COMFORT* is a semi-autobiographical work that responding to the whispers that my own grandmother may have been a ‘Comfort Woman’ in 1940s Japan-Occupied Burma. In blaring juxtaposition, my memories of her exist in a 1980s Australian childhood. Afternoons spent in a suburban Perth backyard, playing around the hills hoist; holidays sweating in a musty, sand-filled caravan; Expo ’88. But just below the surface, one ever-present unspoken rule journeyed with us; we don’t talk about the past. 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.

### **Maddie Nixon:**

Maddie Nixon is a Brisbane based writer, director and youth arts practitioner. Her artistic practice focuses on the development of new contemporary work, Australian comedy and theatre for young people. 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 Mullers. 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 Mullers honestly believe that that they are the gate holders of the greatest place on Earth. That is until the young hotshot Federal MP Mr Brett 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 Mullers lose their postcode, they lose their smallest town status, and they lose their business.

If the family don't have tourists passing through, The Bin Hotel will be shut down, and they will have to abandon the only place they've ever called home. *Binnavale* is a comedy about family, grief and growing up.

**Steve Pirie:**

Steve Pirie is a writer, theatre maker and youth arts worker currently 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, Flaggpole* 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, which was presented at La Boite's HWY Festival in 2018. [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, what a twenty-something learned about what awaits us at the end, and what a final act of love can do for our healing.

*Return to the Dirt* is a celebration of finding your place in the world, the power of personal redemption and humility at the end of all things. Most importantly, it is a stepping stone to one of the most important conversations you need to have.

## PREVIOUS QPDA WINNERS:

2018-2019	David Megarrity for <i>The Holidays</i>
2016-2017:	Michele Lee for <i>Rice</i>
2014-2015:	Daniel Evans for <i>Oedipus Doesn't Live Here Anymore</i>
2012-2013:	Maxine Mellor for <i>Trollop</i>
2010-2011:	Marcel Dorney for <i>Fractions</i>
2008-2009:	Richard Jordan for <i>25 Down</i>
2006-2007:	David Brown for <i>The Estimator</i>
2004-2005:	Adam Grossetti for <i>Mano Nera</i>
2002-2003:	Sven Swenson for <i>Road to the She-Devil's Salon</i>