



FAMILIAL BONDS

BITING

OPULENCE

GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

# GOLDEN BLOOD

## 黄金血液

BY MERLYNN TONG | DIRECTED BY TESSA LEONG

24 JUNE – 30 JULY | SBW STABLES THEATRE

DIRECTOR **TESSA LEONG**

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER **MICHAEL HANKIN**

LIGHTING DESIGNER **FAUSTO BRUSAMOLINO**

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER **RAINBOW CHAN**

PRODUCER **ELOISE SNAPE**

DRAMATURG **JENNIFER MEDWAY** (MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY)

EFFECTS CONSULTANT **EMILY PARSONS-LORD**

STAGE MANAGER **SUSIE HENDERSON**

WITH

**MERLYNN TONG**

**CHARLES WU**

*Golden Blood* was commissioned through Melbourne Theatre Company's NEXT STAGE Writers' Program, supported by MTC's Playwrights Giving Circle.

**GRIFFIN  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**



Griffin acknowledges the generosity of the Seaborn, Broughton & Walford Foundation in allowing it the use of the SBW Stables Theatre rent free, less outgoings, since 1986.

---

# PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

My mother took her own life when I was 14 years old. At her funeral in Singapore, we burned paper effigies of gold bars, gold ingots and hell money. Eight years prior, at my father's funeral, in addition to the gold and money, we also burned him a life-sized effigy of his Mercedes Benz, complete with his car plate. We even burned two paper women (utterly bizarre, especially for a six year old) and an enormous ornate Chinese palace. We were wealthier when my father died, so we had more to offer him. I was worried for my mother. Perhaps she could move into his palace in the afterlife?

I remember the heat from those massive fires; it felt like the flames were twice my height. The persistent embrace of the heat seemed to warn me that it could envelop me at any moment, just as it had consumed my parents the morning prior. The smell of the smoke lives in me now, and when I catch the scent at an Aussie barbeque or incense burning at someone's house, I am momentarily brought back into being that small child against the big fire; I am haunted by worship and offerings, hope and yearning.

As I grow older, I realise that the afterlife, grief and gold, love and money, family, and status, have been constantly conflated in my world. *Golden Blood* is my unravelling of these beliefs that have been infused into my blood. I utilise a pair of siblings recently orphaned as a catalyst for my exploration. These characters are fictional, but inspired

by the many potent characters I had encountered in my teens. One was my favourite babysitter, a cheeky gangster who played Dance Dance Revolution with me and made up fun songs with my name in it, who one day I saw on the front pages of the newspapers—he was one of the biggest scam artists on the island and has since disappeared. Another was a pair of brothers, whose father was to be hanged by the state that day, and armed with a knife, they went on a rampage.

Perhaps I am curious to lift the veil of the glitzy and glamorous Singapore that we so often see on screen. I want to uncover the stories that may be bubbling beneath the skyscrapers and fast cars; the stories of those utterly desperate to ignite themselves into that river of wealth and status, and understand what sacrifices are made along the way.

It has been a mammoth task bringing this web of emotion, sensations, and experiences onto the stage. I sincerely want to thank Griffin Theatre Company and Melbourne Theatre Company for giving my work the opportunity to be received. I also want to thank Tessa, Jenni, Chris, Declan, and everyone else who patiently sifted through my brain and heart with me and assisted in translating them into words on a page.

And finally, to my partner Zac: thank you, for always holding my hand through the fires.

**Merlynn Tong**  
**Playwright**

---

---

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Gold. Ancestor worship. Gangstas. Singapore chilli crab. A toy koala.

Merlynn Tong has found the ingredients for a play that asks us confronting questions about family and the depth of filial bonds, while also cheekily giving them the finger.

Renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei famously, and purposely, dropped a 2000 year-old, million-dollar Han dynasty urn and captured it in photographs. To the resulting outrage he replied, 'Chairman Mao used to tell us that we can only build a new world if we destroy the old one'. He also has a series of photos, *Study in Perspective*: his middle finger raised in the foreground and an icon of significance, like the White House, Tiananmen Square, or the *Mona Lisa*, in the background. For a long time, he has invited questions about what we value, and whether we can create anything new when what came before us is held as sacred.

How do we put a stop to what came before us so that we may move on?

We often find our place in the world in relation to our family. We inherit their names. We carry them with us as part of our own identity. For many Chinese, this relation extends beyond those in our immediate living family and is connected to previous generations. Family connections can be deep and complex. So often we love them, so often we hate them, so often we are annoyed by them. Despite thinking our family could be the worst on the planet—dysfunctional, infuriating, chaotic—many of us will defend them if someone else comes on the attack. It is not just blood that ties us. It's a shared understanding about

who we are—separate from names, genes, a shared household. We defend our own and we will stand up for them against others, even if it's not in our rational interests.

And maybe that's what defines family.

But what happens when rifts appear that cannot be mended? What if you realise it would be better for everyone if you went it alone? Yes, your family may haunt you forever, but nevertheless, a choice to stay apart presents itself.

*Golden Blood* invites us into the world of two siblings: a Singaporean-Chinese brother and sister who are deeply aware of their obligations to ancestors and the family name, but who are completely adrift from any sense of a traditional family.

*Golden Blood* pulls hard at the ties we have to those who came before us: it threatens to untie us. It questions what a bloodline means and what it means to be filial, deferential, and respectful. It tugs at our suspicions of those we purport to love the most and questions why. I am thrilled to invite you into the world of Merlynn Tong's creation to experience the chaos of what freedom can look like for these two orphans.

Merlynn has been infinitely generous with sharing so many stories with me of her life, her family, and her childhood in Singapore. From loss, so much humour, warmth, and generosity flows. I am so grateful for her trust. I am inspired by her honour for the sacred as well as her desire to tear it apart.

**Tessa Leong**  
Director

---

---

# BIOGRAPHIES



## MERLYNN TONG

WRITER/GIRL

Merlynn Tong is a playwright and an actor. She is currently a resident writer of La Boite Theatre Company and was the 2020 resident writer of Melbourne Theatre Company. Her theatre credits as playwright include: for Black Swan State Theatre Company: *The Big Mac*; for Critical Stages/Paines Plough Theatre Company: *Come to Where I Am*; for Playwriting Australia: *Dear Australia: SKIN*; for Force Majeure: *Consent*; for Playlab: *Blue Bones* (which Merlynn also performed in, and for which she won six Matilda Awards including the Lord Mayor's Award for Best New Australian Work, Best Mainstage Production and Best Female Actor in a Leading Role); for Queensland Theatre: *Good Grief*; for Queensland Theatre/Mercury Theatre (UK): *Antigone*; for Wax Lyrical: *Ma Ma Ma Mad*. Merlynn's theatre credits as a performer include: for Bleached Arts: *Hotelling*; for Brisbane Festival: *Bitch: Origin of the Female Species*, *The Theory of Everything*; for Brown's Mart Theatre: *New Babylon*; for Elbow Room: *Enlightenment*; for Elbow Room/Flowstate: *What I'm Here For*; for Judith Wright Centre: *Hot Brown Honey*; for La Boite Theatre Company: *The Mathematics of Longing*, *Straight White Men*; for Playlab: *Blue Bones*; for Punchdrunk/Imaginary Theatre: *The Lost Lending Library*; for Queensland Theatre (The Scene Project): *The Shot*; for Shock Therapy Productions: *Viral*; for Sydney Theatre Company/National Theatre of Parramatta: *White Pearl*; for Taiwan, Taoyuan International Children's Festival: *The Wizards from Oz*. Merlynn's television credits include: for ABC: *Harrow*, *Reef Break*; for the BBC/Sundance Films: *Top of the Lake: China Girl*. Merlynn is also the prize recipient of Screen Queensland's Stage to Screen pitch, *The First 10 Pages 2.0*.



## TESSA LEONG

DIRECTOR

Tessa is Griffin's Associate Artistic Director. In 2021, she directed *Wherever She Wanders* by Kendall Feaver in her debut for the company. In her role, Tessa co-runs many artist programs and commissions and has been instrumental in developing Griffin's Equity Action Plan. She is also a founding member of Adelaide-based theatre company *isthisyours?* for which she has directed *Angelique* by Duncan Graham and *David Williamson's The Club (An all-female, 3 actor version)*; and directed/devised *#Youwannatalkaboutit*, *Best We Forget*, and *Make Me Honest Make Me Wedding Cake*. Tessa made *It's Not a Potluck* at Lore Residency in Canada and *Swimming Pool* in Kandos for Cementa festival. She has worked with many companies nationally and internationally as director, dramaturg, researcher and assistant director, including Contemporary Asian Australian Performance, Country Arts SA, Drop Bear Theatre, Force Majeure, Ontroerend Goed, PYT Fairfield, Restless Dance, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Sydney Theatre Company, and Vitalstatistix. She was the Associate Artist at Belvoir in 2017, a Griffin Studio Artist in 2014, as well as a recipient of the Seminaire en Avignon artist program at the renowned Avignon Festival. Since 2018, she has been on the board of directors at PACT: Centre for Emerging and Experimental Art. Tessa has been selected in Australia and internationally for multiple residency and conference programs and worked in advocacy as the Manager, Artist and Sector Development, at Theatre Network Australia. Her next work will be digging for *The Hole* at Rising Festival 2022.

---



## MICHAEL HANKIN

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Michael is a NIDA-trained set and costume designer for theatre, dance, opera and film. Michael's theatre credits include: for Griffin: *Rust and Bone*, *The Ugly One*; for Griffin/Malthouse Theatre: *Ugly Mugs*; for Adelaide Festival/Brink Productions/Edinburgh Festival: *The Aspirations of Daise Morrow*; for Adelaide Festival/Barbican Centre/Brink Productions/Brisbane Festival: *Memorial*; for Bell Shakespeare: *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*; for Belvoir: *Angels in America*, *The Boomkak Panto*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Dark Room*, *Ghosts*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Great Fire*, *Hir* (for which Michael won the Sydney Theatre Award for Best Stage Design), *Ivanov*, *Jasper Jones*, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Mark Colvin's Kidney*, *My Urrwai*, *The Sugar House*, *Twelfth Night*, *Wayside Bride*; for Campbelltown Arts Centre/Sydney Festival: *Ich Nibber Dibber*; for Carriageworks: *Lake Disappointment*; for Chunky Move/Malthouse (including a Netherlands Tour): *247 Days*; for Company B: *Fool for Love*; for Darlinghurst Theatre: *Deathtrap*, *The Hypochondriac*, *Macbeth*, *Miss Julie*, *The Paris Letter*; for Ensemble Theatre: *Great Falls*, *Liberty Equality Fraternity*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; for Force Majeure: *You Animal You*, *Flock*; for Hayes Theatre Co: *Miracle City*; for The Hayloft Project/TRS: *The Boat People*; for Manchester's Home Theatre (UK): *Insane Animals*; for Melbourne Theatre Company: *Three Little Words*; for Melbourne Theatre Company/Sydney Theatre Company: *Jumpy*; for Monkey Baa: *The Peasant Price*; for Sport for Jove: *Of Mice and Men*; for Q Theatre/Seymour Centre: *Truckstop*; for State Theatre Company of South Australia: *Tartuffe*; for Sydney Chamber Opera: *In The Penal Colony*, *The Lighthouse*; for Sydney Festival and New York Music Theatre Festival: *Songs for the Fallen*; for Theatre Royal: *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*; for Vault Festival London/Dublin Fringe: *Admin*. Michael has also previously designed for Ireland's entry to *Eurovision*. His feature film credits include Weapons Design and Coordination for *Three Thousand Years of Longing* and the short films *Julian* and *The Amber Amulet*, both of which were winners of the Crystal Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. His television credits Challenge Designer for Channel 10: *Survivor Australia – Season 6*; and for National Geographic: *Limitless*. Michael has been a recipient of the 2018 Kristian Fredrikson Scholarship for Design in the Performing Arts, the 2015 Mike Walsh Fellowship, and has worked as an Associate Lecturer of Design at NIDA.



## FAUSTO BRUSAMOLINO

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Fausto Brusamolino is a lighting and visual artist currently living on Darug land. Fausto devises lighting and generative visuals for live performances and films, creates his own lighting art installations, and provides visual design consultation to other artists' artworks and exhibitions. Fausto has lit productions in traditional venues like theatres, studios and galleries, alongside less conventional locations like multi-level car parks, rooftops, large scale outdoor installations and abandoned locations. As a freelancer and creative business owner, Fausto has designed shows and worked for: Adelaide Festival, Australian Ballet, Biennale of Sydney, The Cad Factory, City Recital Hall, Lewis Major, Museum of Contemporary Art, New Zealand International Arts Festival, Opera Australia, Post, Roslyn Oades,

---

---

Sydney Festival, Sydney Opera House, Teatro Stabile di Torino (Italy), Victoria Hunt, Urban Theatre Projects, Teatro Stabile di Torino and many more. Fausto recently designed the site-specific lighting for *The Nightline*, an immersive work that crafts together installation, performance, and a powerful sound piece, set inside the sculpture workshop at the National Arts School. Fausto received the 2018 Green Room Award for Best Visual Design for *Tangiwai*, which he designed the lighting for and developed the software/hardware to manipulate water effects in real time—exploring and generating a wide range of unique visual and sensorial palettes.



## **RAINBOW CHAN**

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Rainbow Chan is a vocalist, producer and multi-disciplinary artist who has built a reputation as one of the most innovative musicians in Australia. Rainbow Chan's highly anticipated EP *Stanley* was released on UK label, Eastern Margins, in November 2021. Her sophomore record *Pillar* (Independent, 2019) was the feature album on community radio stations nationwide and was nominated for the Australian Music Prize. Her debut record *Spacings* (Silo Arts & Records, 2016) was nominated for FBI SMAC Record of the Year and AIR Best Dance/Electronica Album, with its single *Nest* being FBI Radio's most played song that year. Lifted from the EP *Fabrica* (Healthy Tapes, 2017), her single *Let Me* won the FBI SMAC Award for Best Song. She has performed at renowned venues and festivals including Art Gallery of New South Wales, Gallery of Modern Art, Iceland Airwaves, Melbourne Music Week, MONA FOMA, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Sydney Opera House, Tai Kwun (Hong Kong), and Vivid. On screen and on the airwaves, she has composed music for the ABC's documentary *The Glass Bedroom*, a live score for Art Gallery of NSW's *Starbust: Chinese Film Season*, the theme song for 7am's *Everybody Knows* podcast, and an original soundtrack for short film *Butter* directed by Anita Lee. Her multi-arts installations have been exhibited with Firstdraft Gallery, Liquid Architecture, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, and I-Project Space, Beijing. In 2020, Rainbow Chan was part of Artspace's one year studio program and was selected as the Performance Space x West Kowloon Exchange resident artist. *Songs from a Walled Village*, her documentary for ABC Radio National, was a finalist in the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union Awards 2021. Rainbow Chan is a finalist in the 2021/22 NSW Visual Arts Emerging Fellowship (Artspace/Create NSW/NAS). Rainbow Chan is signed to Gaga Music Publishing.



## **ELOISE SNAPE**

PRODUCER

Eloise is an actor, playwright, producer and voiceover artist who studied a Bachelor of Media in Writing at Macquarie University and an Advanced Diploma of Performing Arts from Actors Centre Australia. Eloise's plays have been shortlisted for the Patrick White Playwrights Award 2021, the Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2022-23 and the Rodney Seaborn Playwrights Award 2021. As an actor, Eloise's theatre credits include: for Griffin Independent: *Sunset Strip*; for Bell Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, *The Players*; for Critical Stages: *4000 Miles* (for which she was nominated for Best Actress in an Independent Production at the Sydney Theatre Awards), *Sunset Strip*; for Outhouse Theatre: *Trevor*; for Redline Productions at the Old Fitz: *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant*, *The House of Ramon Iglesia*, *The Humans*;

---

---

and for Sport for Jove: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Eloise's television credits include: for Foxtel: *Mr Inbetween*; and for Stan: *The Other Guy*. As a producer, Eloise established MopHead Productions, whose first show *4000 Miles* was nominated for numerous Sydney Theatre Awards and toured nationally. MopHead also produced the Australian premiere of Tony award—winning play *The Humans*, directed by Anthea Williams. Eloise has also produced in a solo capacity for Redline Productions at the Old Fitz and Ensemble Theatre.



### **JENNIFER MEDWAY**

DRAMATURG

Jennifer Medway is the Acting Literary Manager of Melbourne Theatre Company and has been a professional dramaturg for over a decade. From 2017—2021 she was the Literary Associate of MTC and prior to that she has been Resident Dramaturg at Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP) from 2014—2017, Associate Artist—Dramaturgy at Belvoir, Literary Assistant at Belvoir, a Studio Artist at Griffin, Co-Artistic Director of Crack Theatre Festival, Script Assessor and Dramaturg for Playwriting Australia (now Australian Plays Transform), alongside her freelance dramaturgy practice. Jennifer has worked with artists from their first forays into creative practice right up to some of Australia's most experienced professional artists across a variety of art forms. She was on the judging panel for the NSW Premier's Literary Award's Book of the Year prize and the Nick Enright Playwriting Prize from 2018—2020, the Queensland Premier's Drama Award in 2020, as well as the UK's Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting in 2020. Jennifer is also a guest lecturer at the Victorian College of the Arts within their Masters of Directing, Playwriting and Dramaturgy programs.



### **EMILY PARSONS-LORD**

EFFECTS CONSULTANT

Emily Parsons-Lord is a visual artist working across installation and performance. Their practice is concerned with air and explosions, the materials of the climate crisis. Based in Sydney, their recent work includes recreating the air from past eras in Earth's evolution, recreating starlight in coloured smoke, recontextualising film effect explosions, multichannel video, and experimenting with pheromones, aerogel, and blasting. Parsons-Lord was recently awarded the main prize in the 2020 Churchie Emerging Art Award and has exhibited both nationally and internationally. They have presented work most recently at Kunsthaus Vienna (2022), as well as at the Bristol Biennial—*In Other Worlds* (2016), Central St Martin's (UK)—*A BROKEN LINK* (2017), Firstdraft, the John Fries Award (2018), Liveworks (2017), NSW Visual Arts Fellowship (2017/2022), Primavera (2016), TEDxSydney, Stuttgart Film Winter Festival for Expanded Media, and Vitalstatistix, amongst others.

---



## CHARLES WU

BOY

Charles Wu is an actor, musician, composer, and NIDA graduate. His theatre credits include: for Belvoir: *An Enemy of the People*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Jasper Jones*, *Miss Peony*, *The Overcoat*, *Samson*; for Melbourne Theatre Company: *Torch the Place*, for which he won the 2021 Green Room Award for Outstanding Performance; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Chimerica*, *The Lifespan of a Fact*, *Mosquitoes*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *Three Sisters*. His film credits include: *Australia Day*, *Liberty Street*. His television credits include: for ABC: *Harrow*, *The Letdown*, *Summer Love*; for Channel 9: *Doctor Doctor*, *Here Come the Habibs*; for Foxtel: *Secret City*. Charles is the lead singer, songwriter and guitarist for Sydney band Earthquake Magnificent, who released their debut album *Dull Hill* in 2017. He is co-founder of the production company Corinthian Food Store Collective. Their 2020 film *Liberty Street*, for which he served as actor and composer, premiered at Flickerfest 2021, GBiennale21, St Kilda Film Festival, and Melbourne International Film Festival. He lives and works on Gadigal land.

---