



GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

# WHITEFELLA YELLA TREE

BY DYLAN VAN DEN BERG

12 AUGUST – 17 SEPTEMBER | SBW STABLES THEATRE

CO-DIRECTORS **DECLAN GREENE, AMY SOLE**  
DESIGNER **MASON BROWNE**  
LIGHTING DESIGNER **KELSEY LEE**  
COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER **STEVE TOULMIN**  
DRAMATURG **ANDREA JAMES**  
STAGE MANAGER **ISABELLA KERDIJK**

WITH  
**CALLAN PURCELL**  
**GUY SIMON**

**GRIFFIN  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**

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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.

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# PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

First love: voices breaking, words coming out in all the wrong ways, a mess of limbs and too-wet kisses, earnest declarations. Imagine two boys falling for the first time—the giddiness, the joy—in a context without shame. And then imagine that love threatened by invaders wanting to colonise their Country, their bodies, their love. That's the world of *Whitefella Yella Tree*.

It's often hard to pinpoint when the idea for a play comes to you. Usually, for me (mainly because I'm incredibly lazy), it percolates for a while before I have a sense that there might be something there. With *Whitefella Yella Tree*, that was not the case. The earliest notions of this work bubbled up angrily when I read a Tweet almost a decade ago. Anthony Mundine said that artistic depictions of queer Aboriginal folks are out of sync with 'our culture'—*forbidden*, in fact—and that the Ancestors would be none too happy. I was fairly young at the time, had more than my fair share of internalised homophobia and was still figuring myself out in all sorts of ways. Since then, Mundine has gone on to say things which an older me can, on one level, take with the single grain of salt they deserve, but they still trigger memories of that disorienting encounter with the idea that queer identity was at

odds with culture. The idea that non-First Nations people might cling onto Mundine's comments as though they carry some weight because he is an Aboriginal man also goaded me; a feeling that these ideas could gain traction in a world that already erases Blak queerness.

So, after years of procrastination (the one 'sport' in which I could be an Olympic contender), I started reading and asking around, gathering up stories, and was able to confirm what I already knew deep down in my gut—that our mobs, our cultures, were not heteronormative. Queerness existed. It was embraced and it was celebrated. In fact, homophobia, in the sense that we know it today, is a poison that invaded this country.

So, I've written this play in the hope that you might reflect on the rich and real detail of lives that were disrupted when those ships hit the shore. The queer love stories that never got to be written.

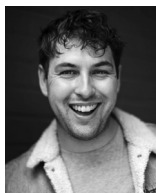
**Dylan Van Den Berg**  
**Playwright**



Photography: Dayvis Heyne

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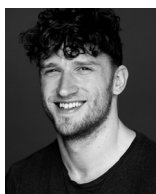
# BIOGRAPHIES



## DYLAN VAN DEN BERG

### WRITER

Dylan is a Palawa writer/dramaturg for stage and screen. He is currently in residence at Sydney Theatre Company through the Emerging Writers Group and was a 2021 Griffin Studio Artist. His play *Milk* premiered at The Street Theatre (ACT) in 2021, receiving the Nick Enright Prize for Playwriting at the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the Victorian Premier's Award for Drama. In 2020, his gothic revenge drama *way back when* won both the Griffin Award and the Rodney Seaborn Playwrights Award and was developed through Darlinghurst Theatre Company's 'Next in Line' program. Dylan is currently under commission at The Street Theatre (ACT) and the National Theatre of Paramatta. Other recent and upcoming work includes for ArtsAct: *Apprehended*; for Belco Arts: *Ngadjung*; for Fringe at the Edge of the World: *The Camel*; for NIDA: *All That Glitters is Not Mould*; for The Street Theatre: *Blue: a misery play*; for Short+Sweet: *Why am I a Fish?*; and an adaptation of Barbara Baynton's *The Chosen Vessel*. His short plays and other writing have appeared in *Island Magazine* (2020), *BITE Magazine* (2021), and an upcoming anthology published in the USA by the Centre for Sustainable Practice in the Arts (2022). On screen, Dylan writes regularly for *Playschool*, and is writing on another yet-to-be-released ABC children's TV series. Dylan studied drama at the Australian National University and the State University of New York.



## DECLAN GREENE

### CO-DIRECTOR

Declan is the Artistic Director of Griffin Theatre Company and works as a playwright, dramaturg and director. As a director, his credits include: for Griffin: *Dogged*, *Green Park*; for Malthouse Theatre: *Wake in Fright*; for Malthouse Theatre and Sydney Theatre Company: *Blackie Blackie Brown*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark*; for ZLMD Shakespeare Company: *Conviction*. As a playwright, his work includes *Eight Gigabytes of Hardcore Pornography*, *The Homosexuals*, or 'Faggots', *Melancholia*, *Moth*, and *Pompeii L.A.* Declan co-founded queer experimental theatre company Sisters Grimm with Ash Flanders in 2006, and has directed and co-created all their productions to date, including: for Griffin Independent and Theatre Works: *Summertime in the Garden of Eden*; for Malthouse Theatre and Sydney Theatre Company: *Calpurnia Descending*; for Melbourne Theatre Company: *Lilith: The Jungle Girl*; and for Sydney Theatre Company: *Little Mercy*. He was previously Resident Artist at Malthouse Theatre.

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## AMY SOLE

### CO-DIRECTOR

Amy Sole is a proud Wiradjuri/Worimi person. Amy is a playwright, director, actor, dramaturg, producer and advocate. They are Creative Associate at Ilbigerri Theatre Company and a recent graduate of MFA (Directing) at NIDA and hold a Master of Theatre (Playwriting) from VCA. Their theatre credits as director include: for Darlinghurst Theatre Company: *Benched*. Their theatre credits as assistant director include: for NIDA: *God's Country*, *Metamorphoses*; for Sydney Opera House: *RENT*. Their credits as writer/director include: for Kings Cross Theatre: *Doing*; for NIDA: *Burning*. Their credits as writer include: for Ilbigerri Theatre Company: *Nan's Place*. Amy regularly directs developments of new works, most recently Phoebe Grainer's *Sugarcane* for the Queensland Premier's Drama Award and Dylan Van Den Berg's *way back when* at Darlinghurst Theatre Company. They are also Creative Director of *Big Blak Bang*, a festival of First Nations storytelling and Artist-in-Residence at Darlinghurst Theatre Company, Co-Founder of Puddle or Pond Theatre Company, and a sitting Co-Chair of the Equity Diversity Committee.

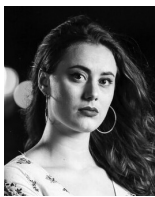


## MASON BROWNE

### DESIGNER

Mason is a descendant of the Darug people and an award-winning creative director, designer and producer working across theatre, film, television, and live events. Mason's theatre credits as designer include: for ATYP: *The Deb*; for Critical Stages: *Nosferatu*; for Hayes Theatre Co: *American Psycho*, for which he won a Sydney Theatre Award for Best Costume Design of an Independent Production, *Cry-Baby*, *Darlinghurst Nights*, *Young Frankenstein*; for Neil Gooding Productions: *Leap*; for New Theatre: *Summer Rain*; for Railway Street Theatre Company: *Sunday In The Park With George*; for Seymour Centre: *The Importance of Being Earnest*; for Tantrum Theatre: *Powerforce Live*, *Riot!*, *Savage Naked Love*; and for The Theatre Division: *Ruthless!*. His television credits include: for Endemol Shine: *Big Brother* and *Ready Steady Cook*. His film credits include: for Sydney Festival: *The Human Voice*. Mason has produced, designed and directed events across Australia and the USA with clients including Audi, Beyond The Valley and Lost Paradise Music Festivals, Darlinghurst Theatre Company, Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Australia, Netflix, Opera Australia, Stereosonic, Sydney Dance Company, Vodka O and Woodford Folk Festival. He is the Co-Founder of Gaytimes, Australia's premier LGBTIQ Music Festival. With an eye for style details, Mason honed his skill as a creative director and stylist on music videos and fashion editorial, including for Abby Dobson, Dappled Cities Fly, Lisa Mitchell, Marcia Hines and Red Riders, as well as the publications Culture, InStyle, Oyster, The Vine, Vogue Brides Australia and Yen. Mason holds a Bachelor of Dramatic Art in Design from NIDA. and is currently undertaking a Master of Fine Arts in Cultural Leadership at NIDA.

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## KELSEY LEE

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Kelsey is a designer in lighting, set and costume. She has designed for theatre, film and events. Her theatre credits as a lighting designer include: for Griffin Lookout: *A is for Apple*; for Bell Shakespeare: *The Comedy of Errors*; for Belvoir: *A Room of One's Own*; for Belvoir 25A: *Extinction of the Learned Response*, *Kasama Kita*, *Skyduck*; for Darlinghurst Theatre Company: *I'm With Her*; for Ensemble Theatre: *A Letter for Molly*, *Killing Katie*; *Confessions Of A Bookclub*, *Outdated*, *Unqualified 2: Still Unqualified*; for Green Door/KXT: *Good Dog*, *If We Got Some More Cocaine I Could Show You How I Love You*; for Outhouse/KXT: *Trevor*; for National Theatre of Parramatta/Sydney Festival: *Queen Fatima*; for Red Line Productions at the Old Fitz: *Fierce*, *The Humans*; and as Associate Lighting Designer: for Belvoir: *At What Cost?*. Her credits as set, costume and lighting designer include: for Griffin Lookout: *Jali*; Australian Chamber Orchestra: *There's A Sea In My Bedroom*, *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*; for Belvoir 25A: *Destroy, She Said*; for NIDA: *LULU: A Modern Sex Tragedy*. Kelsey designed the set for Hayes Theatre Co's *Catch Me If You Can* and was co-designer for Griffin's *Shabbat Dinner*.



## STEVE TOULMIN

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Steve's credits as composer/sound designer include: for Griffin: *Beached*, *The Bleeding Tree*, *Dogged*, *Feather in the Web*, *Gloria*, *Kill Climate Deniers*; for Griffin/La Boite: *A Hoax*; for Griffin/Malthouse Theatre: *The Homosexuals*, or *'Faggots'*; for Bell Shakespeare: *Othello*, *Richard III*; for Belvoir: *20 Questions*, *Barbara and the Camp Dogs*, *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, *Blue Wizard*, *Hir*, *Is This Thing On?*, *Ivanov*, *Jasper Jones*, *La Traviata*, *The Rover*, *Scorched*, *The Seed*; for Ensemble Theatre: *Circle Mirror Transformation*, *Great Falls*, *Liberty Equality Fraternity*; for La Boite: *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Tender Napalm*; for Queensland Theatre: *Switzerland*, *That Face*; for Strut & Fret: *Blanc De Blanc*, *Blanc de Blanc Encore*, *Fun House*, *Life*; for Sydney Festival: *44 Sex Acts in One Week*, *All the Sex I've Ever Had*, *Maureen*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Black Is The New White*, *A Flea In Her Ear*, *Little Mercy*; for Sydney Theatre Company/La Boite: *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness*. Steve has also designed for events like Papua New Guinea's 40<sup>th</sup> Year of Independence Celebrations and EKKA Arena Spectacular (2013-2015).

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## ANDREA JAMES

### DRAMATURG

Andrea is a Yorta Yorta/Gunaikurnai theatremaker and a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts. She was Artistic Director of Melbourne Workers Theatre from 2001–2008, where she is best known for her play *Yanagai! Yanagai!*. Andrea was the Aboriginal Arts Development Officer at Blacktown Arts Centre from 2010–2012 and Aboriginal Producer at Carriageworks from 2012–2016. She was recipient of British Council's Accelerate Program for Aboriginal Art Leaders in 2013 and was awarded the Create NSW Aboriginal Arts Fellowship in 2018. Andrea wrote and directed *Winyanboga Yurringa* at Carriageworks and Geelong Performing Arts Centre in 2016 that was also re-produced at Belvoir in 2019. Andrea's play *Sunshine Super Girl*, about Wiradjuri tennis star Evonne Goolagong-Cawley, premiered in Griffin in 2020, enjoyed a season at the 2021 Sydney Festival, and will embark on an extensive national tour in 2022. Her play *Dogged* written with collaborator Catherine Ryan premiered at Griffin in 2021. As Griffin's Associate Artist in 2022 she directed *Ghosting the Party* by Melissa Bubnic. Andrea is a recent recipient of the Mona Brand Award, Australia's most prestigious prize for women stage and screen writers.



## ISABELLA KERDIJS

### STAGE MANAGER

Isabella graduated from the production course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art in 2008. Her previous credits as a stage manager include: for Griffin: *And No More Shall We Part*, *Green Park*, *Replay*, *The Smallest Hour*, *Ugly Mugs*, *Wicked Sisters*, *This Year's Ashes*; for Belvoir: *The Dog/The Cat*, *The Drover's Wife*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Every Brilliant Thing*, *Fangirls*, *Girl Asleep*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Hir*, *Jasper Jones*, *Kill the Messenger*, *Mother*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *My Name is Jimi*, *Stories I Want to Tell You In Person* (National Tour), *The Sugar House*, *Thyestes* (European Tours), *Winyanboga Yurringa*; for Circus Oz: *Cranked Up*; for Darlinghurst Theatre Company: *Fourplay*, *Ride*, *Silent Night*; for Ensemble Theatre: *Rainman*, *The Ruby Sunrise*; for Legs on the Wall: *Bubble*; for LWAA: *The Mousetrap* (Australia/New Zealand Tours); for Spiegelworld: *Empire*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Blithe Spirit*. Isabella was a production coordinator for Opera Australia on Sydney Harbour: *Carmen* and production manager/stage manager for A-List Entertainment: *Puppetry of the Penis*. She has also worked on various festivals, including The Garden of Unearthly Delights, Sydney Festival and the Woodford Folk Festival.

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## CALLAN PURCELL

TY

Callan is a Wiradjuri man who grew up on Awabakal Country.

Callan's theatre credits include: for Little Eggs Collective: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; for Michael Cassel Group: *Hamilton*; for Opera Australia: *Bran Nue Dae* (National Tour); for Sydney Opera House: *Hair*. Callan is founder of the Rad Kid Mob, a movement for

bla(c)k and Indigenous young people and people of colour to see live performance and be empowered to tell their own stories. In 2018, he graduated the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama where he received Honours in Acting and Collaborative and Devised Theatre.



## GUY SIMON

NEDDY

Guy Simon is a proud Biripi/ Worimi man, who grew up in La Perouse and graduated from NIDA in 2010. His theatre credits include:

for Griffin: *First Love is the Revolution*; for Bakehouse Theatre:

*Junction*; for Belvoir: *Jasper Jones*, *My Brilliant Career*; for Browns

Mart Theatre: *I AM MAN*; for Cameron Lukey Presents: *Strangers*

*In Between*; for IPAN Productions: *Lucky*; for Malthouse Theatre: *Blaque Showgirls*,

*Cloudstreet*, *The Return*; for Melbourne Theatre Company: *Jasper Jones*, for which

he received the Helpmann Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role in a Play; for

Melbourne Theatre Company's NEON Festival: *The Myth Project: Twin*; for Moogahlin

Performing Arts: *My Memory, This Fella*; for Queensland Theatre Company: *Black*

*Diggers*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Grand Horizons*, *Playing Beatie Bow*, *The Battle*

*of Waterloo* and *The Harp in the South*. Guy's film credits include *Around the Block*

and *Undertow*. Guy's TV credits include: for ABC: *Redfern Now*, *Wakefield*; for Brindle

Films: *Occupation: Native*; for Network 10: *The Secrets She Keeps*, *The Wrong Girl*;

and for Noble Savage Pictures: *A Chance Affair*.

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