Home, I'm Darling
by LAURA WADE
Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the First Peoples of Country on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand, and we pay our respects to all of Melbourne’s First Peoples, to their ancestors and Elders, and to our shared future.

Our 2020 season invites you to see the world differently as we present a suite of plays that will ignite imaginations, challenge preconceptions and enrich lives. That sentiment could not be more true for this Olivier Award-winning comedy and our season opener – *Home, I’m Darling*.

In this Australian premiere production we meet 1950s archetypes Judy and Johnny, and get a glimpse into their carefully curated lives. But beneath the technicolour surface there’s more to this 1950s dream than meets the eye, and what unravels is a razor-sharp social commentary that will leave you with plenty to contemplate about our modern lives.

MTC Associate Artistic Director Sarah Goodes has assembled a cast of unparalleled comedic talents to bring this play to life and we’re thrilled to have Jane Turner back on our stage alongside Nikki Shiels, Toby Truslove, Peter Paltos, Izabella Yena and Susie Youssef.

As we open a new season and embark on a new decade, we couldn’t be happier to have our passionate audiences by our side. With productions including the five-time Tony Award-winning musical *Fun Home*, a glittering new production of Shakespeare’s warm-hearted comedy *As You Like It*, four NEXT STAGE Originals and the transformative *Sunshine Super Girl* in store, 2020 is a season not to miss. So if you haven’t yet got your subscription in, now is the time to secure your seats before they’re all gone.

Enjoy the show.

**Brett Sheehy AO**  
Artistic Director & CEO

**Virginia Lovett**  
Executive Director & Co-CEO
— About the Play —

Every couple needs a little fantasy to keep their marriage sparkling, and Judy is always looking for little ways to brighten her husband Johnny’s day. Like cocktails, dancing, warm slippers … all the usual jazz. But is their perfect 50s life a perfect lie?

— Cast —

Marcus  Peter Paltos
Judy    Nikki Shiels
Johnny  Toby Truslove
Sylvia  Jane Turner
Alex    Izabella Yena
Fran    Susie Youssef

— Creative Team —

Director  Sarah Goodes
Set & Costume Designer  Renée Mulder
Lighting Designer    Paul Jackson
Composer & Sound Designer  Jethro Woodward
Voice & Dialect Coach  Geraldine Cook-Dafner
Assistant Director    Bessie Holland
Intimacy Coordinator  Michala Banas
Choreographer    Steven Grace
Assistant Choreographer  Tracie Morley
Stage Manager    Christine Bennett
Assistant Stage Manager 1  Meg Richardson
Assistant Stage Manager 2  Lucie Sutherland
Sound Design Secondment  Daniella Esposito
VCA Stage Management Secondment  Max Woods
Production Photography  Jeff Busby
Rehearsal Photography  Pia Johnson

For information regarding running time, please see a member of the Front of House team.
W
e all like to play hide and seek – it just varies from individual to individual what we are hiding from and what we are seeking out.

In *Home, I’m Darling*, protagonist Judy is hiding from the times. And who would blame her? As the world outside swings with pathological intensity between apathy and hysteria, it makes sense to create a safe port in the storm. It’s easy to understand the act of creating and inhabiting a world based on a bygone era filled with shiny hopefulness. The home is a place where Judy and her husband Johnny feel safe, allowed to immerse themselves in their passions and aesthetic pleasures. Rebels against the times, of sorts.

But to keep this world quietly ticking over, a series of choices – financial, social and personal – have to be made. Many of these choices lie on the fault lines of money, gender and the role-play that arises within marriage. The judgement they fear outside the front door is very real. Their fragile desperation to keep the real world at bay gives the play its existential breadth; in the same way all humans create a fragile web of
‘All great, simple images reveal a psychic state. The house, even more than the landscape, is a ‘psychic state,’ and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy.

Psychologists generally, and Francoise Minkowska in particular, together with those whom she has succeeded interesting in the subject, have studied the drawing of houses made by children, and even used them for testing. Indeed, the house-test has the advantage of welcoming spontaneity, for many children draw a house spontaneously while dreaming over their paper and pencil. To quote Anne Balif: ‘Asking a child to draw his house is asking him to reveal the deepest dream shelter he has found for his happiness. If he is happy, he will succeed in drawing a snug, protected house which is well built on deeply-rooted foundations.’ It will have the right shape, and nearly always there will be some indication of its inner strength. In certain drawings, quite obviously, to quote Mme. Balif, ‘it is warm indoors, and there is a fire burning, such a big fire, in fact, that it can be seen coming out of the chimney.’ When the house is happy, soft smoke rises in gay rings above the roof.

If the child is unhappy, however, the house bears traces of his distress ...

one becomes a psychologist of houses.’

— Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space
stories and illusions to keep us safe from the brutality of real life.

When I first read this play I was struck by how it homed in on both feminism and the pressures of finance on a marriage. It also made me ask the question: why does feminism move in 'waves'? And to reflect on how each generation responds to what has gone before it, how mothers and daughters react to each other’s life choices. Why, instead of the baton getting handed on, is it often thrown back in the face of the previous feminist generation? Why do daughters so often define themselves in such direct opposition to their mothers?

Designer Renée Mulder and I talked a lot about the influence of Ibsen’s A Doll’s House on Home, I’m Darling. Playwright Laura Wade has very cleverly taken some of the key structures of Ibsen’s work and embedded them in her play. It is a doll’s house of her own creation that Judy has willingly locked herself inside. Of course, in our times choice is freedom – but can you really be free when you are financially dependent on another person?

Renée is one of the most talented set and costume designers working in Australia today and together with Lighting Designer Paul Jackson and Composer & Sound Designer Jethro Woodward they make a dream team to bring to life Judy’s perfect home.

Assembling this extraordinary cast for this play was no simple task but one worth every effort and now I simply couldn’t imagine a better cast. Being able to lure the Australian icon Jane Turner back from Paris, Nikki Shiels and Susie Youssef from Sydney, as well as Toby Truslove, Peter Paltos and Izabella Yena and placing them together within this world has been a dream come true.

Read more about Home, I’m Darling at mtc.com.au/backstage
In *Home, I’m Darling*, mother-daughter characters Sylvia and Judy have a fundamental disagreement about what constitutes feminism. For Judy, it’s about choice, but for Sylvia it’s more complex. Like many parents, she’s baffled by her daughter’s choices; in particular, by her lifestyle: Judy is a stay-at-home wife.

Sylvia cannot comprehend her daughter’s adherence to the ideology known as the Cult of True Womanhood, or the Cult of Domesticity – a value system popularised in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, which cemented men’s work outside the house, and paid; and women’s work inside, unpaid. The four pillars or ‘virtues’ of the ideology were piety, purity, submission and domesticity. The ideology reached its zenith during the 1850s, and again during the 1950s, but despite many challenges to its dominance since then it’s a battle that’s still being fought in 2020.
With *Home, I’m Darling*, Laura Wade comments on 21st century issues – in particular those around gender and feminism – by looking at them through the prism of the 1950s, and specifically through the lens of the Cult of Domesticity.

When men were sent off to both World Wars, women left their homes and took up the jobs their husbands and brothers left behind, picking up the slack on factory floors and in office buildings alike. Then, during the economic boom post-World War II, women returned home, literally. They gave up their wartime careers to become full-time wives, mothers and homemakers once more.

Soon mod-cons like washing machines and dishwashers were sold to them as liberation from their never-ending cycles of housework, but socially the standards of domesticity only increased to unattainably high standards, while the introduction of coloured television – and with it, a tsunami of advertising – saw commercials that encouraged women to participate in an unsustainable arrangement of consumerism.

The 1960s brought with them the second wave of feminism (the first having occurred after women obtained the right to vote at the start of the century), inspired by Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique*, which criticised the patriarchy for reducing

‘Most generations have an element of being horribly ungrateful children. Judy acknowledges the gains feminists of her mother’s generation have made, but doesn’t really want to move forward.’
Despite all the gains of feminism, not much has fundamentally changed at home. There is still an enormous imbalance between women and men when it comes to domestic labour: according to the 2016 survey from Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA), women in heterosexual couples were spending almost twice as many hours a week on domestic duties compared with their male partners.

And in spite of increased awareness of – and pushback against – this inequality, the Cult of Domesticity hasn’t vanished; it’s just gone digital. The hashtag #wifey has over 4.9 million posts on Instagram today, while Pinterest’s overwhelmingly female users create picture-perfect dream home boards.

For Wade, the conversation surrounding gendered labour in the household is on-going. With a young family, and a successful career as a writer for stage and screen, it’s no wonder this Olivier Award-winning mother contemplates the division of domestic labour within her own four walls. In the six years Wade spent penning *Home, I’m Darling*, she gave birth to two children; as did the play’s original director, Tamara Harvey, and original lead actor, Katherine Parkinson.

It was a bizarre coincidence, Wade reflects. And perhaps one that subconsciously influenced how the drama unfolds between Judy and her husband Johnny as they divvy up duties. Judy takes measures to live a life almost the opposite of the one embarked on by her mother, who raised Judy in a commune-type environment where vacuuming was considered anti-feminist...
... there are different flavours of feminism. When Judy says she’s a feminist in the play, she believes it.’

Sylvia’s lived experiences and personal memory of post-war England offer a stark comparison to the life her daughter has built for herself. ‘There had to be someone in the play to say, “Firstly this is weird and secondly, it’s pretty disrespectful to the history that’s come before.” It made sense for that person to be Sylvia.’

We’re always rebelling from what’s come before us, Wade believes. ‘Most generations have an element of being horribly ungrateful children. Judy acknowledges the gains feminists of her mother’s generation have made, but doesn’t really want to move forward.’

As Wade explores the nuances of these clashing attitudes to feminism in Home, I’m Darling, she reminds us that ‘it’s important not to judge [Judy]. There are different flavours of feminism. When Judy says she’s a feminist in the play, she believes it.’

Words by Sarah Corridon

Read a extended interview with Laura Wade at mtc.com.au/backstage


(Clockwise from top left) Peter Paltos, Susie Youssef and Nikki Shiels; Jane Turner; Susie Youssef and Nikki Shiels; Nikki Shiels
Laura Wade is an Olivier Award-winning playwright and screenwriter. Her most recent play *Home, I’m Darling* premiered at Theatre Clwyd in 2018 before transferring to the National Theatre where it received rave reviews; in February 2019 it transferred to the West End at the Duke of York’s. *Home, I’m Darling* won the award for Best Comedy at the 2019 Oliviers.

In 2018 Laura adapted Jane Austen’s unfinished novel *The Watsons* for the stage for Chichester Festival Theatre; it will open in the West End at the Harold Pinter Theatre. In 2015 Laura adapted Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet* for the stage. The play premiered at the Lyric Hammersmith before transferring to the Royal Lyceum in Edinburgh.

Laura’s screenplay *The Riot Club*, an adaptation of her 2010 stage play *Posh*, premiered at Toronto International Film Festival 2014. It opened in cinemas in September 2014. *Posh* opened in the West End at the Duke of York’s Theatre on 11 May 2012. The original production opened at the Royal Court Theatre in April 2010 to sell-out audiences.
CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

PETER PALTOS  |  Marcus
Peter Paltos’ previous credits for Melbourne Theatre Company include Gloria, Minnie & Liraz, The Sovereign Wife (MTC NEON/Sisters Grimm) and MKA Double Feature (MTC NEON/MKA). His other theatre credits include The Audition (Outer Urban Projects); Calpurnia Descending (Malthouse Theatre/Sydney Theatre Company); Merciless Gods (Little Ones); The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui (Don’t Look Away), Playlist 2017 (Red Stitch); and Summertime in the Garden of Eden (Sisters Grimm). Peter’s film credits include Holding the Man, Rebootted and the soon-to-be released films The Taverna and Paper Champions. He has also made a number of television appearances, including Sisters (Network Ten) and City Homicide (Seven Network).

NIKKI SHIELS  |  Judy
Nikki Shiels has previously worked with Melbourne Theatre Company in The Cherry Orchard, True Minds, Top Girls and Don Parties On. Other theatre credits include Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, A Cheery Soul and Three Sisters (Sydney Theatre Company); The Sugar House, The Rover and Twelfth Night (Belvoir); Picnic at Hanging Rock, Night on Bold Mountain, The Dragon and Elizabeth – Almost by Chance A Woman (Malthouse Theatre); The Last Wife (Ensemble Theatre); The Unspoken Word is ‘Joe’ (Griffin Theatre Company/La Mama); The Dream (Bell Shakespeare); Joan (The Rabble); They Divided The Sky, M + M, The Dollhouse, Peer Gynt (Daniel Schlusser Ensemble); Madeleine (Black Sequin Productions/Arts House); Romeo and Juliet (ZLMD Shakespeare Company) and The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant (Theatre Works/Dirty Pretty Theatre). Screen credits include Bloom, House Husbands, Childhood’s End, Rush IV and The Eye of the Storm. Nikki won Best Female Actor in an Independent Production in the 2018 Sydney Theatre Awards for They Divided the Sky (25A Belvoir).

TOBY TRUSLOVE  |  Johnny
Toby Truslove has been a favourite on the Australian stage and screen for over 15 years. Toby’s theatre credits include The Last Man Standing, The Speechmaker, The Cherry Orchard (Melbourne Theatre Company); 33 Variations (Cameron Lukey); Bliss (Malthouse Theatre/ Belvoir); Private Lives, Strange Interlude (Belvoir); Children of the Sun (Sydney Theatre Company); and Troilus and Cressida (Bell Shakespeare). Select television credits include Bad Mothers, Miss Fisher’s Modern Murder Mysteries, True Story with Hamish and Andy (season 2), The Wrong Kind of Black, Get KrackIn and ABC’s Utopia (seasons 1–4). Other lead roles include Bleak, Outland, The Strange Calls, Randying, Scumbus, Tractor Monkeys, The Slideshow and Laid, for which Toby received the Monte-Carlo TV Festival’s Golden Nymph Award nomination for Outstanding Actor. Film credits include Koko: A Red Dog Story, I Love You Too, Squid, How to Make a Monster and Smoking Will Kill You.

JANE TURNER  |  Sylvia
Jane Turner is best known as co-creator of the multi-award-winning comedy series Kath & Kim. Jane is delighted to be returning to work with Melbourne Theatre Company; her previous MTC appearances include Jumpy, Man the Balloon and Blabbermouth. Jane’s other theatre credits include David Williamson’s Rupert; the West End season of Holding the Man; a tour of Ben Elton’s Popcorn; Big Hair in America; Away; and The Rocky Horror Show for Paul Dainty. Jane’s television credits include Rake, Parlement (Cineteve, France), Who Do You Think You Are, Big Girl’s Blouse, Full Frontal, Fast Forward, D Generation and several seasons of Kath & Kim as well as the telemovie Da Kath & Kim Code. Jane has also appeared in a number of films, including Kath & Kimberella, Guru Wayne, Above the Dust Level and Thank God He Met Lizzie. Jane has received three Logie Awards, two AFI Awards and a nomination for a British Comedy Award.
CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

IZABELLA YENA | Alex
Izabella Yena appeared in Melbourne Theatre Company’s The Violent Outburst that Drew Me to You – part of the 2019 Education Program – and creative developments for The House of Bernarda Alba and 2020’s SLAP. BANG. KISS. A 2016 VCA graduate, Izabella’s previous theatre credits include Lifetime Guarantee (Theatre Works); a Helpmann Award-winning national tour of Hello, Goodbye & Happy Birthday (Performing Lines); Fierce (Theatre Works); Atomic creative development (Malthouse Theatre); 2.20am (Anvil Production); and a stage reading of Thigh Gap (La Mama). Izabella plays the role of Shirin Abbas in the upcoming feature film Miss Fisher and the Crypt of Tears, directed by Tony Tilse. She was a 2017/18 Malthouse Theatre Vanguard Cohort and Ambassador; a 2016 VCA Patricia Kennedy Award winner; a 2016 Melbourne Fringe Best Performance nominee; and a recipient of the 2015 Pratt Bursaries Scholarship.

SUSIE YOUSSEF | Fran
Susie Youssef is a comedian, actor, writer and improviser. She has written, performed and produced comedy for stage, radio and television in Australia and around the world. She is making her Melbourne Theatre Company debut in Home, I’m Darling. Other theatre credits include The Smallest Hour (Griffin Theatre Company); Accidental Death of an Anarchist (Sydney Theatre Company); and The Boat People (The Hayloft Project). Her film credits include The Flip Side (Corner Table Productions) and Scare BnB (Me+You Productions UK). Her television credits include Rosehaven, Get Krackin, Whose Line Is It Anyway? Australia (Guesswork Television); Squinters and No Activity (Jungle Entertainment). Susie is a co-host on The Sunday Project (7PM Company), and also appears on Have You Been Paying Attention? (Working Dog) and Hughesy, We Have a Problem (Screentime).

SARAH GOODES | Director
Sarah Goodes is Associate Artistic Director of Melbourne Theatre Company. She is a Helpmann Award-winning theatre director recognised for bringing over 14 new Australian works to the mainstage. For Melbourne Theatre Company, Sarah’s work includes Così (with Sydney Theatre Company), Golden Shield, Arbus & West, Astraman, A Doll’s House: Part 2, The Children (with Sydney Theatre Company), Three Little Words and John. As Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company, Sarah directed The Hanging, Disgraced, Orlando, Switzerland, Battle of Waterloo, The Effect, Vere (Faith), The Splinter and Edward Gant’s Amazing Feats of Loneliness. Sarah’s other directing credits include The Sugar House (Belvoir), The Sweetest Thing, The Small Things, Elling and Black Milk (B Sharp Belvoir); The Colour of Panic (Sydney Opera House); Vertigo and the Virginia, The Schelling Point, Hilt and What Happened Was … (Old Fitz Theatre). In 2018, Sarah won a Helpmann Award for Best Direction of a Play for her work on The Children, which also won Helpmann Awards for Best Play and Best Female Actor.

RENÉE MULDER | Set & Costume Designer
Renée Mulder’s recent work includes: as Set & Costume Designer, Arbus & West (Melbourne Theatre Company); The Beauty Queen of Leenane, Bangin’ Denmark, The Torrents, Black is the New White, Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark, Orlando, Battle of Waterloo, The Effect, Perplex, The Long Way Home, Dance Better at Parties, Mrs Warren’s Profession, Marriage Blanc, In a Heart Beat, The Splinter, Actor on a Box: The Luck Child (Sydney Theatre Company); Nearer the Gods, An Octoroon, Rice, Sacre Bleu!, Fat Pig (Queensland Theatre); Prima Facie, The Bleeding Tree, The Boys, A Hoax (Griffin Theatre Company); As You Like It, Ruben Guthrie, I Love You, Bro (La Boite); Romeo and Juliet (Bell Shakespeare). As Costume Designer, Harp in the South, St Joan, Top Girls, Chimerica, Endgame, Children of the Sun, Vere (Faith) (Sydney Theatre Company). As Set Designer, Edward Gant’s Amazing Feats of Loneliness (Sydney Theatre Company). Renée was Sydney Theatre Company Resident Designer from 2012–14. She is a graduate of NIDA and Queensland College of Art. Renée won a Sydney Theatre Award for Best Costume Design for Top Girls and a Matilda Award for Best Design for Edward Gant’s Amazing Feats of Loneliness.
CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

PAUL JACKSON | Lighting Designer
Paul Jackson’s lighting designs with Melbourne Theatre Company include Arbus & West, The Children, Gloria, Hay Fever, Di and Viv and Rose, Three Little Words, Endgame, Miss Julie, Dead Man’s Cell Phone, Double Indemnity, The Ghost Writer, Ghosts, Frozen, The Speechmaker, Enlightenment, Madagascar and Private Lives; and for Sydney Theatre Company, The Beauty Queen of Leenane and Mary Stuart. Other companies he has designed for include The Australian Ballet, Royal New Zealand Ballet, Staatsballett Berlin, West Australian Ballet, Victorian Opera, West Australian Opera, Bell Shakespeare, Malthouse, Belvoir, Chamber Made Opera and many others. He has lectured in design at the University of Melbourne, RMIT University and Victorian College of the Arts. Paul has won a Helpmann Award, a Sydney Theatre Award, seven Green Room Awards, and three Australian Production Design Guild Awards for Best Lighting Design. Paul was Artistic Associate at Malthouse Theatre from 2007–2013. In 2017, he received an Australia Council of the Arts Fellowship. Paul is accredited with the Australian Production Design Guild.

JETHRO WOODWARD | Composer & Sound Designer
Jethro Woodward is a Melbourne-based composer, musical director, arranger, musician and sound designer recognised for his film, theatre and dance scores. He has worked with some of Australia’s leading companies including Melbourne Theatre Company, Belvoir, Malthouse Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Opera Victoria, Chamber Made Opera, Back to Back, Chunky Move, Lucy Guerin, Australian Dance Theatre, Aphids, Stuck Pigs Squealing, Rawcus and more. Recent works include Astroman (Melbourne Theatre Company); Apocalypse Meow, Solaris (Malthouse Theatre); Lazarus (Production Company); Distant Matter (Staatsballett Berlin); Common Ground (Chunky Move/Dance Massive); Rumplestiltskin (Windmill/Southbank Centre London). Jethro regularly tours his work internationally and has won Green Room Awards for Song for a Weary Throat (Rawcus); For the Ones Who Walk Away (St Martins Youth Theatre); The Bloody Chamber (Malthouse Theatre); Moth and Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd (Malthouse Theatre/Arena Theatre) and Irony is Not Enough (Fragment 3). In 2018 Jethro was the recipient of the GRA Technical Achievement Award.

GERALDINE COOK-DAFNER | Voice & Dialect Coach
Geraldine Cook-Dafner previously worked for Melbourne Theatre Company on Golden Shield, Wild, The Children, Hay Fever, Di and Viv and Rose, Melbourne Talam, John, The Odd Couple, Straight White Men, The Distance, Birdland, The Waiting Room, Top Girls, The Heretic, The Swimming Club, The 39 Steps, The History Boys, All My Sons, The Clean House, Boy Gets Girl, Take Me Out and The Glass Menagerie. She trained at Middlesex University, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has a doctorate from the University of Melbourne. Geraldine also works for independent theatre companies Red Stitch and Hit Productions and as a voice consultant in film, ABC Radio, SBS Radio and for local corporate and government bodies, NGOs and charities. Geraldine is an Honorary Senior Fellow in the theatre department at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne where previously she held positions as Head of Voice, Head of School of Performing Arts and Associate Dean.

BESSIE HOLLAND | Assistant Director
Bessie Holland’s theatre credits as an actor include Così (Melbourne Theatre Company/Sydney Theatre Company), The House of Bernarda Alba (Melbourne Theatre Company); The Sovereign Wife (Melbourne Theatre Company/Sisters Grimm); Accidental Death of an Anarchist (Sydney Theatre Company); Blaque Showgirls (Malthouse Theatre); Summertime in the Garden of Eden (Griffin Theatre Company/Sisters Grimm); The Lower Depths (Ariette Taylor, fortyfivedownstairs). Her short-film credits include True History of Billie the Kid, directed by Leticia Cáceres. Bessie’s other screen credits include Get Krackin’, directed by Hayden Guppy, and Beautiful Lie, directed by Peter Salmon (ABC); Wentworth (FOXTEL, Fremantle Media) seasons 2–6; and the soon-to-be-released film The Dry, directed by Robert Connolly.
As part of the Little Group, Port Phillip Ferries wishes the cast and crew a successful season.
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— A View from the Bridge

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