

AN MTC NEXTSTAGE ORIGINAL

# TORCH THE PLACE

by BENJAMIN LAW



MTC MELBOURNE  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

# WELCOME



We are thrilled to be premiering Benjamin Law's debut play and even more so that it's the first of four NEXT STAGE Originals appearing in our 2020 Season.

A prolific talent across many disciplines, Benjamin's dramatic writing is defined by an effortless and razor-sharp wit that's underpinned by honesty and reality. The experiences he writes about are fundamentally human and relatable, and his ability to handle light-hearted comedy as skilfully as he does more serious subjects is key to his stature as one of Australia's most exciting literary artists. He is also a master of character and dialogue from his extensive television-writing experience.

Benjamin has brought all this to the table in *Torch the Place* and the result is a poignant, deeply moving and very funny story that gives a beautifully humane insight into a complex mental health issue.

For this world premiere production, we welcome back actors Fiona Choi and Michelle Lim Davidson to our stage and see the MTC debuts of Max Brown, Diana Lin and Charles Wu. At the helm is our former Associate Director Dean Bryant, accompanied by a terrific creative team including three alumnae from our landmark Women in Theatre Program.

*Torch the Place* has been one of the most popular shows of 2020 so far, with the season all but sold out weeks before the first preview. We couldn't be prouder to see such an appetite for Australian writing from our audiences, and with half of this year's program made up of Australian stories there's much to look forward to.

Enjoy the show.

**Brett Sheehy AO**  
Artistic Director & CEO

**Virginia Lovett**  
Executive Director & Co-CEO

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.

MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne.



MTC is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria.



MTC is a member of Live Performance Australia and the Australian Major Performing Arts Group.



MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

# TORCH<sub>THE</sub> PLACE

by BENJAMIN LAW

8 FEBRUARY—21 MARCH 2020  
Arts Centre Melbourne, Fairfax Studio

— About the Play —

Teresa's mum finds it impossible to let anything go – from grudges to household objects. She thinks of her home as a museum of irreplaceable treasures. But she's not really a curator; she's a hoarder. When her kids return home to celebrate her 60th birthday, she's over the moon. But this isn't a reunion. It's an intervention.

— Cast —

**Paul** Max Brown  
**Teresa** Fiona Choi  
**Natalie** Michelle Lim Davidson  
**Mum** Diana Lin  
**Toby** Charles Wu

— Creative Team —

**Director** Dean Bryant  
**Associate Director** Margot Morales Tanjutco  
**Set Designer** Isabel Hudson  
**Costume Designer** Kat Chan  
**Lighting Designer** Amelia Lever-Davidson  
**Composer & Sound Designer** Clemence Williams  
**Intimacy Coordinator** Michala Banas  
**Cantonese Language Coach** Jing-Xuan Chan  
**Fight Choreographer** Lyndall Grant  
**Stage Manager** Julia Smith  
**Deputy Stage Manager**  
(performance season) Millie Mullinar  
**Assistant Stage Manager 1/Stage Manager**  
(performance season) Lisette Drew  
**Assistant Stage Manager 2** Brittany Coombs  
**Directorial Secondment VCA** Joseph Dias  
**Stage Management Intern VCA** Brooke Simmonds  
**Production Photography** Jeff Busby  
**Rehearsal Photography** Charlie Kinross

For information regarding running time, please see a member of the Front of House team.

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*Torch the Place was commissioned through MTC's NEXT STAGE Writers' Program with the support of our Playwrights Giving Circle Donors, as well as the Ian Potter Foundation, Naomi Milgrom Foundation, the Myer Foundation, Malcolm Robertson Foundation and the University of Melbourne.*

Media Partner



**NEXTSTAGE**

# FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

Benjamin Law explores compulsive hoarding disorder in his debut play.

**A**s a kid, I was near incapable of letting physical objects go. If I made a masterpiece out of playdough, my sense of triumph was quickly replaced by panic that there was no way of keeping it forever. When I got my school's Aussie of the Month award – which came with a golden badge we got to wear and then pass on – I cried like someone had died when I had to relinquish it. I anthropomorphised plush animals, felt real anguish at the idea of discarding them, and slept with them until they took over my bed – well into my teens. Maybe it was a childhood response to a fear of oblivion. Because if something can't be kept or preserved forever, what's the point of existence? Look, I could be a pretty intense kid.

By the time I grew out of it, I was growing up with it. Like so many migrant Australians, my parents struggled to let things go. In my memoir *The Family Law*, I wrote about living with compulsive hoarding before I even had the vocabulary for the condition. 'We were

sentimental to the point where it became pathological,' I wrote. 'We kept everything: every book we ever read, all the tennis trophies and tenpin-bowling medals we won. Things accumulated like plaque, growing out ramshackle from the walls. As we grew, the house contracted. We found ourselves tiptoeing around piles of ancient magazines and shoeboxes of old school projects, and I became too embarrassed to have friends sleep over.' In adulthood, I discovered this was small fry compared to some of my friends' experiences. One friend's parents' hoarding got so bad, they began to smell. Another came from a family that hoarded living animals.

Even if you're not one of the estimated 1.2 million (not a typo) Australians living with compulsive hoarding disorder, you've probably witnessed it somehow. The one neighbourhood house with trolleys and rusted car shells spilling into the yard. All the TV specials, from Oprah to Marie Kondo. The entire sub genre of shock reality TV,

... the abundance of inexpensive and easily accessible objects makes [hoarding] the disorder of the decade.

— Randy O Frost & Gail Stakete, *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things*

*Charles Wu, Diana Lin  
Michelle Lim Davidson,  
and Fiona Choi*





*(Above) Director Dean Bryant; (below) Diana Lin, Charles Wu; (right) Michelle Lim Davidson, Diana Lin, Charles Wu and Fiona Choi (obscured); (below right) Michelle Lim Davidson with Director Dean Bryant and members of the cast and creative team*





sensational horrors like *Hoarders*; *Hoarding: Buried Alive*; *Britain's Biggest Hoarders*; *The Hoarder Next Door*; *Hoarders: Family Secrets* ... you get the idea. There's a ghoulish delight in seeing how bad things can get, replaced with a prim satisfaction at seeing such epic messes so promptly cleaned up. But for many hoarders, swift clean outs are dangerous. Some report emotional distress at similar levels to those who've experienced sexual assault. Suicides happen in the aftermath. Yet at the same time, it's also paramount these people live with hygiene, safety and dignity. It's a diabolical Catch-22.



In order to help, we must understand. In their 2010 book *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things*, Dr Gail Staketeer and Dr Randy O Frost wrote that until recently, we simply didn't know what triggered compulsive hoarding, let alone avenues for effective treatment. This has led to all sorts of false assumptions about the disorder taking hold, like the idea that hoarders must come from lives of deprivation, that it's a response to a mindset of frugality in a world of abundance. (Not true. There are plenty of rich hoarders.) We also assume hoarders are simply untidy and slovenly, which doesn't account for the fact that hoarders have almost medical-level concerns about hygiene and tidiness, though obviously according to their own criteria. What is true is that the root cause of compulsive



Charles Wu and Max Brown

## Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.

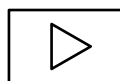
— Confucius

hoarding is usually trauma. People who hoard don't have broken minds, per se. They have broken hearts.

There's also another way of looking at compulsive hoarding: that the mind of a compulsive hoarder has its own particular magnificence. Those who hoard imbue objects with meaning others simply miss. In objects that'd be considered useless to anyone else – mundane items others would regard as trash – hoarders can see a million different uses, myriad reasons why they're special, and have countless stories behind their origin. 'Hoarders do appear to think in more complex ways,' Stakete and Frost write. 'In particular, their minds seem

flooded with details about possessions that the rest of us overlook.'

Which is why I can't judge. Full admission: I'm still a hoarder too. All writers are. Not of physical objects necessarily, but of stories, anecdotes and details. We obsessively file and archive and stow away notes – just in case. Classic hoarding behaviour, when you think about it. In a strange way, all of us are working in a similar pursuit then, of finding some meaning in this grand mess that is life.



Hear Benjamin Law and the cast discuss what they could never let go at [mtc.com.au/backstage](https://mtc.com.au/backstage)



## CAST & CREATIVE TEAM



### MAX BROWN | PAUL

Max Brown is delighted to be appearing for the first time with Melbourne Theatre Company. His previous stage credits include *Young Tycoons*, *The Entrée Was Death* and *Waiting for Gotterson*. His television credits include the recurring role of David Goldman in the award-winning series *Glitch*, as well as roles in *Hungry Ghosts*, *Bad Mothers*, *Secret City*, *Neighbours*, *Home and Away* and his latest role as Oscar Wolfe in the Stan Originals series *The Gloaming*. Max's film credits include *We're Not Here to F\*ck Spiders*, *Waiting for Angel*, *Small Packages*, *The Opposite of Solitude* and *The Tender Hook*.



### FIONA CHOI | TERESA

For Melbourne Theatre Company, Fiona Choi has appeared in *Golden Shield*, *The Lady in the Van* and *Metamorphoses*. A graduate of WAAPA, Fiona's musical theatre highlights include *Dragon Lady: The Many Lives and Deaths of Anna May Wong* for the 2019 Adelaide Cabaret Festival; the original Australian cast of *RENT* (Cameron Mackintosh); *Mamma Mia!* (Littlestar/Dainty); and *Plainsong* (Black Swan) as well as creating roles in Off-Broadway productions of *Apathy - The Gen X Musical*, *Insecurity*, *The Street* and *FAMBAM360*. In New York, Fiona appeared on stage in *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Manhattan Repertory Theatre); *The Silken Phoenix* (Core Ensemble) and guest starred on television in *Homeland*, *Law & Order*, *Person of Interest*, *Unforgettable* and *The Newsroom*. Back in Australia, Fiona is best known for her role as Jenny Law in Benjamin Law's award-winning SBS comedy *The Family Law*, for which she received an AACTA nomination for Best Performance in a Television Comedy and two Equity Ensemble awards. Fiona has also been seen on Australian television in *My Life is Murder*, *Utopia*, *Mustangs FC*, *The Letdown*, *Secret Bridesmaid's Business*, *Harrow*, *Get KrackIn* and *True Story with Hamish & Andy*.



### MICHELLE LIM DAVIDSON | NATALIE

Michelle Lim Davidson's theatre credits include *An Ideal Husband* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Banging Denmark*, *How to Rule the World*, *Top Girls* and *Power Plays* (Sydney Theatre Company); *The Feather in the Web* and *The Lysicrates Prize* (Griffin Theatre Company); *Play School Live* (ABC); *The Laramie Project* (STC Education); *The Plant* and *Seminar* (Ensemble Theatre); and *Far Away* (Black Swan Theatre Co). Her television credits include *Get KrackIn*, *Top of the Lake: China Girl*, *Utopia*, *Doctor Doctor*, *Live from Planet Earth*, *Big Ted's Big Adventure*, *Black Comedy* and *Jay's Jungle*. Michelle is also a regular presenter on *Play School*. Her film credits include Ivan Sen's *Goldstone*, *The Wiggles: Pandemonium* and the short film *Beyond the Bubble*. For *The Feather in the Web*, Michelle was nominated for Best Female Actress in a Mainstage Production at the Sydney Theatre Awards. She was a recipient of the 2013 Mike Walsh Fellowship, and the 2016 Equity Award for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series for *Utopia*.



### DIANA LIN | MUM

Diana Lin (Xiaojie Lin) has a long history with film, television and theatre work, both in Australia and abroad. Her theatre work includes *Little Emperors* (Asia TOPA/Malthouse Theatre). Her film work includes the Golden Globe Best Picture nominated feature film *The Farewell*, as well as *Piano Mums*, *Shang Jie*, *Xiang Min* and *Australia Day*. On television, she appeared in *The Family Law* (SBS). For *Little Emperors*, Diana received a 2018 Green Room Award nomination for Best Female Performer (Theatre Companies). She was a nominee for the Golden Rooster Award for Best Supporting Actress in China, and she was also nominated for Best Actress at the Queen Palm International Film Festival for *Piano Mums*, and for Best Leading Actress in a TV Miniseries at the Australian Film Institute Awards in 1996 for *Under the Skin* (The Long Ride). She was a recipient of the Equity Award for an Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in Comedy Series for *The Family Law*.

## CAST & CREATIVE TEAM



### CHARLES WU | TOBY

Charles Wu is excited to be joining the cast for Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *Torch the Place*. Charles graduated from NIDA in 2014 and immediately started his professional career. His theatre credits include *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *Chimerica*, *Three Sisters* and *Mosquitoes* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Samson*, *Jasper Jones*, *An Enemy of the People* and *The Overcoat: A Musical* (Belvoir); and *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company). His TV credits include *Doctor Doctor*, playing the much loved Ken, and *Here Come the Habibs*, playing Joey Chau, for the Nine Network; *Secret City* for Showtime on Foxtel; and *The Letdown* season 2 for Netflix and ABC, playing Brian. For ABC, Charles will appear in season 3 of *Harrow*, playing Nate Young. Charles has also worked alongside Bryan Brown in the feature film *Australia Day*, playing the role of David Tso.



### BENJAMIN LAW | PLAYWRIGHT

Benjamin Law is an Australian writer and broadcaster. *Torch the Place* is his playwriting debut. He's the author of the memoir *The Family Law*, the travel book *Gaysia: Adventures in the Queer East* and the *Quarterly Essay* 'Moral Panic 101'. He's the editor of the anthology *Growing Up Queer in Australia* and creator and co-writer of three seasons of the award-winning SBS TV series *The Family Law*, based on his memoir. He has also written for over 50 publications in Australia and beyond, including *The Monthly*, *frankie*, *Good Weekend* and *the Guardian*. He co-hosts ABC Radio National's weekly pop culture show *Stop Everything!* and recently hosted ABC TV's *Waltzing the Dragon*. Benjamin is a researcher and associate producer on Blackfella Films' *Deep Water: The Real Story* (SBS) and a writer on Endemol Shine's *Sisters* (Netflix/Ten). In 2019, he was named one of the Asian-Australian Leadership Summit's 40 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australians (winning the Arts, Culture & Sport category) and one of *Harper's Bazaar's* Visionary Men.



### DEAN BRYANT | DIRECTOR

Dean Bryant was Associate Director of MTC from 2016 to 2019. He has previously directed *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *The Lady in the Van*, *An Ideal Husband*, *Wild*, *Vivid White*, *Born Yesterday*, *Skylight*, *I'll Eat You Last* and *Next to Normal* for the Company. For Hayes Theatre Company he directed *Assassins*, *Sweet Charity* (Helpmann Award) and *Little Shop of Horrors* (Sydney Theatre Award); for Opera Australia, *Two Weddings*, *One Bride* and *Anything Goes* (and GFO). Other credits include *The Skin of Our Teeth* (VCA); *Once We Lived Here* (London season); *DreamSong* (Theatre Works); *Straight* (Red Stitch Actors Theatre), *The Last Five Years* and five musicals for The Production Company. With composer Mathew Frank, he wrote Green Room Award-winning musicals *Prodigal* and *Once We Lived Here*, as well as *Virgins: A Musical Threesome*, *The Silver Donkey* and an Amy Winehouse musical for Channel 10's *Mr & Mrs Murder*. The pair just debuted a musical version of *My Brilliant Career*. Dean created verbatim piece *Gaybies* (Midsumma, Darlinghurst Theatre Company) and is Worldwide Associate Director of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert - The Musical*. He is a graduate of WAAPA.



### MARGOT MORALES TANJUTCO | ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Margot Morales Tanjutco is a writer, performer and comedian. She is the creator/performer of solo show *Vanity Fair Enough* (Melbourne International Comedy Festival at The Coopers Malthouse) – an hour of original songs, sketch and stand-up about sexy capitalism. She developed a short play with Melbourne Theatre Company and Emerging Writers' Festival's First Stage and was also shortlisted for Midsumma's Queer Playwriting Award. Her work has been featured by ABC's *The Mix* and *Stop Everything!*, The Wheeler Centre and SBS *Voices*. She directed a series of music videos for VCA First Commissions and was also a part of Film Victoria's Cinespace Story Lab. Her previous shows include *Romeo is Not the Only Fruit* (Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Brisbane Festival, HotHouse Theatre). She was nominated for the 2019 Golden Gibbo and is excited to bring *Vanity Fair Enough* to Griffin Theatre Company's Batch Festival as well as to tour with comedy showcase *Spice Night* (The Milstead Company) at the upcoming Sydney Mardi Gras.

# CAST & CREATIVE TEAM



## ISABEL HUDSON | SET DESIGNER

Isabel Hudson is an award-winning set and costume designer. *Torch the Place* is her debut with Melbourne Theatre Company. Her previous designs include: *Farnace* (Pinchgut Opera); *Winyanboga Yurringa*, *Every Brilliant Thing* (Belvoir); *American Psycho*, *Cry-Baby* (set design), *Razorhurst*, *The View Upstairs*, *She Loves Me* (Hayes Theatre Co); *Jess & Joe Forever*, *Tuesday* (Belvoir 25A); *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company.); *The Shifting Heart*, *Blackrock* (Seymour Centre); *Dry Land*, *She Rode Horses Like the Stock Exchange* (Kings Cross Theatre); *King of Pigs*, *Eurydice* (Old Fitz); *Chamber Pot Opera* (Sydney Opera House, world tour); *Intersection* (ATYP); *The Rolling Stone* (Outhouse Theatre Co); *The Plant* (Ensemble); *The Incredible Here and Now* (National Theatre of Parramatta); and *Hurt* (Hothouse/Downstairs Belvoir). Isabel won the 2019 Sydney Theatre Award for Best Set Design. She is a NIDA graduate and lecturer, and holds a Bachelor of Arts (Screen and Sound) from UNSW.



## KAT CHAN | COSTUME DESIGNER

Kat Chan is a set and costume designer for theatre, dance, video and installation. Originally trained as an architect, Kat worked in architectural practices in Adelaide and Tokyo before moving to Melbourne to study at the Victorian College of the Arts. She graduated with a Postgraduate Diploma in Production Design, then a Masters in Production Design, receiving the inaugural Trina Parker Scholarship. She was a participant of the MTC Women in Theatre Program in 2018. Kat's credits include *Golden Shield* (associate designer) for Melbourne Theatre Company; *Beached* (costume designer) for MTC Education; *From Silence* (set & costume designer), *From Something, To Nothing* (costume designer) and *The Sleeping Beauty* (design associate) for The Australian Ballet; *Mother* (set & costume designer) for IF Theatre + Belvoir; *The Australian Ugliness* (costume designer/art direction & video artist) for Eugenia Lim/Open House Melbourne; *The People's Currency* (set & costume design) for Asia TOPA Fed Square, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.



## AMELIA LEVER-DAVIDSON | LIGHTING DESIGNER

Amelia Lever-Davidson is a lighting designer based in Melbourne, whose practice encompasses theatre, dance, television and events. Her design credits include *The Violent Outburst That Drew Me To You* (MTC); *Every Brilliant Thing* (Belvoir); *They Divided the Sky* (Belvoir 25A); *Australian Realness*, *Trustees*, *Turbine* (Malthouse Theatre); *Diaspora* (Chamber Made); *Next Move II* (Chunky Move); *Moral Panic*, *Contest*, *Niche*, *Conviction*, *Dream Home* (Darebin Speakeasy); *Hand to God* (Vass Productions); *Looking Glass*, *Triumph* (fortyfivedownstairs); *desert*, *6.29pm*, *Jurassica*, *Foxfinder* (Red Stitch Actors Theatre); MKA's *Double Feature* (MTC Neon); *Ground Control*, *Camel*, *Hello There*, *We've Been Waiting For You* (Next Wave Festival). As lighting associate, *The Nico Project* (Melbourne Festival) and as tour lighting associate *Minnie and Liraz* (MTC). Amelia's work has been recognised with Green Room Awards for *Contest*, *Looking Glass* and her 2015 body of work. Amelia is an Australia Council ArtStart and JUMP Mentorship recipient, and a past participant in the Malthouse Besen Family Artist Program and the Melbourne Theatre Company's Women in Theatre Program.



## CLEMENCE WILLIAMS | COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Clemence Williams is a director, composer and sound designer for theatre and opera. A graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (Directing) and the Sydney Conservatorium (Music), Clemence's work includes: as composer, *Heisenberg*, *Arbus & West* (MTC); *Banging Denmark*, *A Cheery Soul*, *Lethal Indifference* (Sydney Theatre Company); *A View from the Bridge* (Ensemble); *Romeo and Juliet* (Bell Shakespeare); *The Wolves* (Belvoir); *A View from the Bridge*, *The Wind in the Underground*, *The Humans*, *Paper Doll* (Redline Productions); *Chapel Perilous* (New Theatre); *Fallen* (fortyfivedownstairs); as director, *Chorus* (Old Fitz); *Findr* (Eternity Theatre); *Chamber Pot Opera* (creator, Sydney Opera House, Adelaide, Edinburgh, St Petersburg); *Unfinished Works* (Seymour Centre); *The Cherry Orchard* (New Theatre); and *Transience* (KXT). Clemence received Sydney Theatre Award nominations for Best Original Score for *A Cheery Soul* and Best Sound Design for *The Wolves*.

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dramaturgy and voice coaching.

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Jurga Celiakiene  
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Wardrobe Maintenance  
Josephine Johnson  
Stella Cadzow  
Wardrobe Casuals  
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Lyn Mollay  
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Jess Maguire  
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# NEXT STAGE WRITERS' PROGRAM

*Torch the Place* was commissioned through MTC's NEXT STAGE Writers' Program. It is the first of four NEXT STAGE Originals to debut on our stages in 2020, with Joanna Murray-Smith's *Berlin*, Dan Giovannoni's *SLAP. BANG. KISS.* and Aidan Fennessey's *The Heartbreak Choir* to follow throughout the year.

A \$4.6 million investment by MTC and MTC's Playwrights Giving Circle, the NEXT STAGE Writers' Program has introduced the most rigorous playwright commissioning and development process ever undertaken by the Company, and set a new benchmark for play development in Australia.

Now in its third year, there are 25 writers under commission or in residence. In 2019 the first NEXT STAGE Original, *Golden Shield* by Anchuli Felicia King, premiered at Southbank Theatre, marking an exciting milestone for this landmark program.



**Thank you to MTC's Playwrights Giving Circle – its donors, foundations and organisations – for sharing our passion and commitment to Australian stories and Australian writers.**

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