

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY
— EDUCATION PACK PART A —

così

BY LOUIS
NOWRA



30 APR — 8 JUNE
SOUTHBANK THEATRE, THE SUMNER

A co-production with STC
SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO

MTCC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

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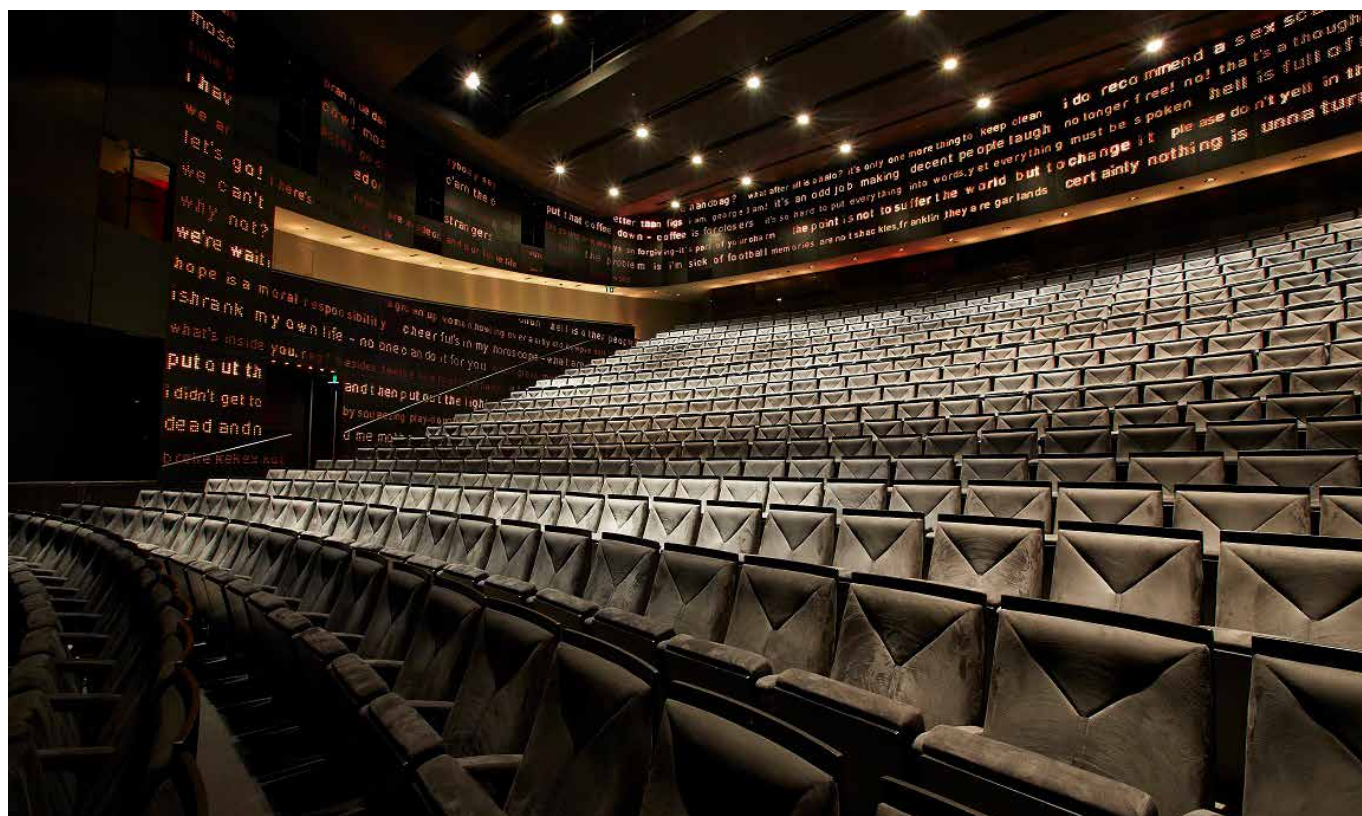


Video



Podcast

— MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY —



Southbank Theatre, The Summer. Photo by Benjamin Healley.

MTC is Melbourne's home of live storytelling, producing an annual mainstage season of up to 12 plays, an annual Education production and diverse learning program, play readings, and more. MTC is one of the major performing arts companies in Australia, and one of the largest theatre companies in the English-speaking world. Founded in 1953, MTC is also the oldest professional theatre company in Australia, and currently exists as a semi-autonomous department of the University of Melbourne.

As Australia changed, MTC has changed with it. We like to think that we have frequently been at the forefront of Australian culture, introducing new ideas and new ways of looking at our lives, our society and the world; helping to explain a swiftly evolving landscape as we moved through it. Today, with Southbank Theatre as our performance home and our headquarters in Sturt Street, Southbank, MTC strives to present Melbourne audiences with the best drama from Australia and overseas to the highest standards.

Our Vision: To enrich lives with understanding and empathy through the storytelling power of the finest theatre imaginable.

Our Artistic Purpose: To produce classic and contemporary Australian and international theatre with style, passion and excellence in order to entertain, challenge and enrich audiences.

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. We pay our respects to all of Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors and Elders, and to our shared future.

— PREPARING TO SEE COSÌ —

Part A of this Education Pack is designed to help you prepare to see the MTC and STC co-production as a part of VCE Theatre Studies Unit 3, Outcome 3. This is a *pre-show* pack with information about context, setting, characters and the playwright. This resource will help you to get the most out of your visit to the theatre, priming you to see beyond the performance and consider the connections to your drama curriculum. **Once you've seen the production, download Part B** of the Education Pack for further insights to the production roles, theatre styles, and elements of theatre composition.



Sarah Goodes (Director) with Katherine Tonkin, Esther Hannaford, Robert Menzies, Bessie Holland, Glenn Hazeldine and Rahel Romahn in rehearsal.

— ABOUT THE PLAY —

It's 1971 Australia and outside a nation is protesting the war in Vietnam. Inside, a cast of complete amateurs are preparing for a performance of Mozart's famous comic opera, *Così Fan Tutte*, even though no-one can sing, act or speak Italian. Its aspiring young director, Lewis, has just finished drama school and his first directing gig is at a psychiatric facility. What could possibly go wrong?

Così was first performed in 1992 by Company B at the Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, directed by Adam Cook with a cast including David Wenham, Barry Otto and Ben Mendelsohn. The play's first production at MTC was in 1994 at the Russell Street Theatre, directed by Nadia Tass with a cast including Nadine Garner, Pamela Rabe and Barry Otto. *Così* was released as a film in 1996 starring Toni Collette, Ben Mendelsohn, Barry Otto, Rachel Griffiths, Colin Friels, Jacki Weaver, Pamela Rabe, Colin Hay and David Wenham (the film changed the setting from 1970s Melbourne to 1990s Sydney).



Hear from Katherine Tonkin (Ruth)

Hear actor Katherine Tonkin talk about *Così* in a video on [YouTube.com/melbtheatreco](https://www.youtube.com/melbtheatreco). What general impression of the play do you get?

Sources: AustLit (2019) *Così* on austlit.edu.au; The Australian Live Performance Database (2019) *Così* on ausstage.edu.au

— SETTING —

Nowra offers the following note about setting in his script:

The time is 1971. The play is set in a Melbourne mental institution.

In his stage directions for Scene One, Nowra adds 'A burnt-out theatre. It is day outside but pitch black inside the theatre. A heavy door opens, a chink of daylight enters, as do three people.'

The play is also set in the context of the Vietnam War, and the sexual revolution. This production will adhere to the original 1971 setting.

— STRUCTURE —

The play is split into two Acts: Act One has four scenes, and Act Two has five scenes. Between each scene, varying amounts of time pass. The stage directions read that the play both begins and ends in blackout.

Act 1, Scene 1 *Lewis arrives at the mental institution and meets the patients. Roy insists on performing Così Fan Tutte.*

Act 1, Scene 2 *Auditions for Così Fan Tutte. Lewis listens to Nick on the radio talking about the coming moratorium to protest the Vietnam War. Doug lights a fire in the toilet.*

Act 1, Scene 3 *Rehearsals for Così Fan Tutte, Doug lights a second fire.*

Act 1, Scene 4 *Rehearsals continue for Così Fan Tutte and Lewis is convinced to play a role. Nick arrives to help direct the opera, but offends the patients.*

Act 2, Scene 1 *Rehearsals, and madness, continue. Cherry and Julie develop an attraction for Lewis.*

Act 2, Scene 2 *Lucy tries to get Lewis to join the moratorium, and reveals she and Nick are having an affair.*

Act 2, Scene 3 *Opening Night for Così Fan Tutte and pre-show jitters.*

Act 2, Scene 4 *The performance of Così Fan Tutte.*

Act 2, Scene 5 *After the performance. In the play's final moments, Lewis addresses the audience and gives an epilogue describing what happens to each of the characters.*



Sean Keenan, Robert Menzies, Rahel Romahn, Gabriel Fancourt and Esther Hannaford in rehearsal.

— CAST AND CREATIVES —



Gabriel Fancourt
Nick / Zac



Esther Hannaford
Julie / Lucy



Glenn Hazeldine
Henry



Bessie Holland
Cherry



Sean Keenan
Lewis



Robert Menzies
Roy



Rahel Romahn
Doug



Katherine Tonkin
Ruth



George Zhao
Justin



Sarah Goodes
Director



Dale Ferguson
Set Designer



Jonathon Oxlade
Costume Designer



Niklas Pajanti
Lighting Designer



Chris Williams
Composer & Sound
Designer



Amy Holley
Associate Sound
Designer



Rachel Chant
Assistant Director

— CHARACTERS —

LEWIS

21, has just left university. Lewis is the protagonist of *Così*. He has agreed to direct a play with patients from a mental institution because he needs the money. Lewis is loosely based on Louis Nowra himself.

LUCY

20–23, is doing an MA thesis and lives with Lewis. Lucy is also Lewis' girlfriend. She is passionate about politics and is protesting the Vietnam War.

NICK

21–24, also doing a thesis and directs student productions. Nick is Lewis and Lucy's roommate, and is also very involved in the protest against the Vietnam War. An experienced director, Nick promises to help Lewis direct *Così Fan Tutte*, but his priorities lie elsewhere.

JUSTIN

A social worker in his late 30s or early 40s. He is neat and precise. His behaviour toward the patients is condescending and, at times, disrespectful. Justin has organised for the patients to be part of the theatre project.

ROY

40–50, a mental patient who has spent much of his life in institutions. He is adamant that the group perform *Così Fan Tutte*, even though nobody can sing or speak Italian. Roy does all that he can to bring to life the dream opera production he envisages. Roy is an orphan, is prone to mood swings, and has been from ward to ward.

HENRY

40–50, a former lawyer who is now a patient. Like Roy, he has spent much of his adult life in institutions. He is shy, rarely speaks, and avoids eye contact. Henry is very loyal to his country and the cause that his father fought in Korea.

DOUG

20–30, has a liking for fires, but has not been in institutions very long. Doug is a pyromaniac (someone with a compulsion to set things on fire), and has previously set fire to his mother's cats and home. He supports the sexual revolution, but has some misogynistic views. In his words, he has 'a problem with social mores'.

CHERRY

25–35, has been in institutions for some time. She develops a crush on Lewis and becomes overly protective, perhaps possessive, of him. She has an abusive personality and carries a flick knife.

JULIE

21–25, in a mental institution for the first time because of drug dependency. Julie and Lewis develop a mutual love interest during the play. Julie voices opinions about fidelity and the double standards of unfaithful men. Julie's moods swing wildly, and says 'drugs make me feel sort of living'.

RUTH

30–40, an obsessive personality, who is in and out of mental institutions. Ruth focuses on things like how many steps to take in a scene, or whether or not props on stage are real or fake. Ruth often frustrates her peers with her obsessive behaviour.

ZAC

25–30, the musician of the group who has been in and out of mental institutions. Zac is catatonic, perhaps as a result of shock therapy.



Character clues

Read the script and note every time the stage directions or another character describes the characters in *Così* (e.g. 'Lewis is out of his depth'). What insight do you get from the text? Make a list of adjectives that are used to describe the characters.



Characters' journeys

Discuss how the characters in *Così* change throughout the play. Who rises or falls in status? Which characters grow apart, and which together? What have they learnt by the play's conclusion?



Meet the cast

Meet the cast of *Così* and hear them discuss their characters in a video on [YouTube.com/melbtheatreco](https://www.youtube.com/melbtheatreco)



Download Part B

After you've seen *Così*, download Part B of the Education Pack to hear more from the actors about their characters.



Bessie Holland, Sean Keenan and Gabriel Fancourt in rehearsal.

— CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION —

Così is a one of three semi-autobiographical plays written by Louis Nowra, all of which share the same central protagonist, Lewis. *Così*, the second in this trilogy, is bookended by *Summer of the Aliens* and *This Much is True*, and echoes the political climate of its setting.

MENTAL ILLNESS AND ASYLUMS

Così is based on Nowra's experience of working with patients in the Mont Park asylum complex in Melbourne when he was twenty years old, where he directed (and performed in) a production of *Trial by Jury*.



Louis Nowra (Playwright)

'Lewis' experiences of the asylum are mostly benign. His absorption into the lives of the performers transforms him, as it did me. In writing the play, I wanted to make it a comedy. I was reacting against all those movies – *Shock Corridor* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* – that portrayed mentally-ill people as a hysterical mix of aggression and torment. That was not my experience at all, and it's not Lewis' either.'

Nowra says he wrote *Così* as a way to process the idea of madness. 'After all,' he says, 'both my grandmothers ended up in Mont Park, and my mother was pursued by her own demons,' (she shot and killed her father). He was interested in what makes someone mentally ill.

The first asylum for the mentally ill in England was London's Bethlem Royal Hospital, which became notorious for brutal treatment of its insane patients. The hospital was popularly called 'Bedlam' (which explains the origin of this word, meaning a scene of mad confusion). Similar institutions were established in Australia in the mid-1800s, and housed patients experiencing illnesses such as post-natal depression, schizophrenia, epilepsy and dementia. These asylums were poorly resourced and crammed. Due to welfare cost-cutting and the advent of psychotropic drug treatment in the 1980s, most Australian asylums were shut. The psychiatric services collection at Museums Victoria contains artefacts that evoke daily life in the impoverished and overcrowded institutions.

The early 1970s mental asylum depicted in *Così* is not like the mental institutions featured in novels and films like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or *American Horror Story*. According to Nowra, the patients weren't screaming, ranting or raving, they were given drugs to calm them. Nowra describes the asylum as 'an oasis'. However, there are examples in the play of treatments now known to have severe long-term negative effects, such as shock therapy. Nowra portrays the patients in *Così* as unique humans, not 'madmen', and instead critiques the societal abandonment and stigma of people with mental illness.

VIETNAM WAR

The Vietnam War (known in Vietnam as the American War) took place from 1955 to 1975. It was a war in Vietnam (and eventually Laos and Cambodia), fought officially between North Vietnam (supported by the Soviet Union, China and other communist allies) and South Vietnam (supported by the United States, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia Thailand and other anti-communist allies). Both sides wanted the same thing, a unified Vietnam, but the north wanted a nation modelled after other communist countries, and the south wanted a Vietnam with cultural and economic ties to the West. More than 3 million people were killed in the roughly 20-year war, and more than half of these were Vietnamese civilians. Australia's involvement commenced in July 1962 with the arrival of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) in South Vietnam.

The war bitterly divided American and Australian society. By 1969, protests were gathering momentum in Australia. In Australia, the National Service Scheme required 20-year-old men to register for a ballot which, if their name was drawn, meant conscription into the army (in *Così*, Lewis and Nick are 21). The ballot resembled a lottery draw, with numbered marbles representing birthdates being chosen randomly from a barrel, and some draws were fully televised. A 'Don't register' campaign to dissuade young men from registering grew support, and some protests became violent.

In 1970, US and South Vietnamese troops were ordered to cross the border into Cambodia – a violation of international law.

These events inflamed anti-war sentiment in Australia and led to the Moratorium marches in 1970 and 1971, where hundreds of thousands of people gathered to protest the war across the country. At protests in the US at college campuses, some students were shot and killed by police.

Australia's participation in the war was formally declared at an end in January 1973, after the election of the Labor government in 1972. The war ended two years later when communist forces seized control of South Vietnam.

SEXUAL REVOLUTION

The topic of fidelity is explored throughout *Così* and is also a theme in the opera *Così Fan Tutte*. The Free Love movement, originally seeking to separate personal relationships from state regulation, evolved into a liberation of sexuality from traditional codes of behaviour. Some of the significant catalysts of the sexual revolution include the introduction of the Pill (a contraceptive that allowed women to separate sex from procreation), younger generations in the midst of civil rights and anti-war movements rejecting their parents' traditional values, and the rise of a singles culture that celebrated sexual exploration over virginity and marriage. A double standard existed where, although it was acceptable for single men to have sex with different partners, young women were expected to be monogamous.

The pill arrived in Australia in 1961, and was initially only made available to married women. The feminist movement hailed the invention as an equaliser, which gave them the same sexual freedom as men, and many more women entered the workforce because they no longer had to choose between having a career and having a relationship. 1967 saw the Summer of Love, when the media came to identify and focus on the hippie movement. Thousands of hippies gathered, most notably in San Francisco, to cast off conservative social values by experimenting with drugs and sex. The hippie movement soon caught on in Australia, with the Aquarius Festivals in Canberra and Nimbin.



Discuss the script

Based on your understanding of the play from reading the script, discuss how this contextual information might relate to an interpretation of *Così*. Draw a mind map with the class, and connect this information to specific scenes in the play.



Contexts

This is by no means an exhaustive or authoritative summary of the contexts for this play. Do your own research of the social, historical and political contexts. Discuss how these contexts are shown in the script.

Sources: Louis Nowra (2017) *'This Much Is True' and 'Così'* playwright Louis Nowra on writing himself for the stage on smh.com.au; Vels, N. (2008) Psychiatric Institutions of the Past in Museums Victoria Collections on collections.museumvictoria.com.au; Australian War Memorial (Accessed 2019) *Vietnam War 1962–75* on awm.gov.au; History.com Editors (2019) *Vietnam War* on history.com; Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs (Accessed 2019) *The Birthday Ballot* on anzacportal.dva.gov.au; Public Broadcasting Service (Accessed 2019) *The Pill and the Sexual Revolution* on pbs.org; Brigid Andersen (2012) *Timeline: the women's movement* on abc.net.au; The Guardian (2007) *What was the summer of love?* on theguardian.com



Glenn Hazeldine in rehearsal.

— COSÌ FAN TUTTE —

Within the play *Così*, the characters rehearse and present the comic opera *Così Fan Tutte* (which roughly translates to ‘they are all like that’ or ‘all women behave the same’). This was a deliberate choice by Nowra, substituting his real-life experience of Gilbert and Sullivan for Mozart instead. He wanted the characters to attempt something larger than an operetta, and he chose the opera that people consider the most trivial. ‘I also liked that it was about the war of the sexes,’ says Nowra. ‘That was very interesting to me because in an asylum, especially at that time, there was a rigid separation between men and women.’

Così Fan Tutte is about two young men boasting about their lover’s fidelity, but the cynical old bachelor Don Alfonso scoffs at their certainty. Determined to prove him wrong, the pair dress up as Albanians and attempt to seduce the other’s lover. Their young fiancées are amused, then intrigued. Temptations and trickery put both relationships to the test.

The main characters in *Così Fan Tutte* are:

- Fiordiligi: a young woman
- Dorabella: another young woman, Fiordiligi's sister
- Despina: their maid
- Ferrando: a soldier, engaged to Dorabella
- Guglielmo: a soldier, engaged to Fiordiligi
- Don Alfonso: an old philosopher

Mozart used stock comedy characters in *Così Fan Tutte*, much like the characters Nowra created in *Così*. For a time, Nowra worked as a playwright for Lighthouse (now State Theatre Company of South Australia), which had a company of actors that would perform across a variety of productions (by contrast, MTC has no company of actors and instead auditions for each play separately). Nowra realised he had to write into his plays an ‘aria’ (a long solo for a singer) of sorts for each actor, so they’d be pleased and that there’d be no jealousy. ‘I think that flowed on to *Così*,’ reflects Nowra, ‘I gave every character an aria, an importance.’



Così* and *Così Fan Tutte

Discuss how Nowra’s decision to include this opera connects to the big ideas in the script. What connections can you make between the characters in *Così* and those in the opera? Can you identify the ‘arias’ Nowra might have written for characters in his script?

Sources: Louis Nowra & Fiona Gruber (2019) *Louis Nowra* [MTC Talks] on player.fm; Opera Australia (2019) *Così Fan Tutte* on opera.org.au



Katherine Tonkin, Rahel Romahn, Gabriel Fancourt, Sarah Goodes (Director), Bessie Holland, Sean Keenan and Esther Hannaford in rehearsal.

— THEATRE STYLES —

The script of *Così* lends itself to a naturalistic style of acting, however a director could choose to apply a range of theatre styles to an interpretation of the play. Included below are some theatre styles that you may be able to identify elements of in this production.

ECLECTIC THEATRE

Eclectic Theatre is a term used to describe a theatre style that incorporates many different theatre styles. Eclectic theatre is considered to be a style from the modern era of theatre, and many contemporary theatre productions are presented in an eclectic style.

OPERA

Opera is a staged drama set to music in its entirety, made up of vocal pieces with instrumental accompaniment, usually with orchestral interludes. The English word opera is an abbreviation of the Italian phrase ‘opera in musica’ (work in music). There are many opera traditions in Asia (e.g. Beijing Opera), however most operas staged in the Western tradition are sung in Italian, French, German and English, and come from a repertoire by well-known composers such as Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Rossini and Puccini. Opera typically has extravagant scenery and costumes, large casts and orchestras, making it often a costly performance style. In *Così*, the characters stage a production of Mozart’s *Così Fan Tutte*.

NATURALISTIC THEATRE

Naturalistic theatre was a movement in the late 19th Century that aimed to present accurate depictions of ordinary people on stage in realistic settings. Konstantin Stanislavski developed a ‘system’ for actors to create realistic performances (including techniques such as given circumstances, objectives and emotional memory). Naturalistic theatre makes use of the fourth wall, inviting the audience to observe the action unfold on stage.

EPIC THEATRE

Epic Theatre is a theatre style created by Bertolt Brecht in early 1900s Germany. His work had a strong political voice, as Brecht served as a medical orderly during the First World War and fled Germany when the Nazis came to power in 1933. His most acclaimed work is *Mother Courage and Her Children*, often regarded as one of the finest anti-war plays. Brecht sought to distance or ‘alienate’ his audience from emotionally investing in the characters so they could think critically about the message in his drama. To do this, he used conventions such as breaking the fourth wall, narration, direct address, placards, multi-rolling (an actor playing more than one character), minimal set/costumes/props, montage, and episodic scenes.



Discuss theatre styles

Based on your reading of Nowra’s script, what theatre styles would you use in a production of this play? Which styles are already evident in the text?

Sources: BBC (2019) *Epic theatre and Brecht* on bbc.com; BBC (2019) *Naturalism and Stanislavski* on bbc.com; VCAA (2018) *VCE Theatre Studies Study Design 2019-2023* on vcaa.vic.edu.au; Herbert Weinstock & Barbara Russano Hanning (2019) *Opera* on britannica.com



Sarah Goodes (Director) with Sean Keenan and Rahel Romahn in rehearsal

— THE PLAYWRIGHT —



Louis Nowra

Louis Nowra based *Così* on his own experience of producing a play (*Trial by Jury*) at the Mont Park Asylum in Melbourne in the early 1970s. 'A friend and I re-wrote the script to include Bee Gees songs,' recalls Nowra. 'The cast were mental patients except for my friend and I'. However, that experience is not the only one to influence his writing.



Louis Nowra (Playwright)

'Like the actual events of those days [the play] is, I hope, full of comedy and affection. Real madness and angst only occurred when I worked with professional actors.'

EARLY INFLUENCES

Nowra (born under the name Mark Doyle) grew up in a housing commission in Melbourne, a stone's throw from Mont Park Asylum. He became interested in theatre at a young age because his uncle, Bob Herbert, worked as a stage manager and director for J.C. Williamson's, a company that produced musicals such as *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot*. 'My younger self was attracted to the short concise scenes, the songs, the colour and dancing,' says Nowra. 'I also adored the idea that theatre was an act of the imagination and one could set a play anywhere.' Nowra says it was these attributes of musical theatre that made him open to playwrights such as Brecht, Bond and Arden, 'but the obvious point to make is that because of my youthful theatre-going I was drawn to the non-naturalistic play'.

The first play Nowra saw was in his sixth year of high school, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. 'I, who had been used to musicals, Shakespeare and movies, loathed it.' He found the characters drab, and found the realism excruciatingly fake. 'I found myself having to stop an impulse to hop on stage and stop the show, saying "This is not real, this is pretending, why are you pretending this is real?"'

A BUDDING PLAYWRIGHT

Nowra enrolled at La Trobe University in the early 1970s, but despised the atmosphere of privilege and smugness. 'This was the period when I belonged to a street theatre group which performed rather shrill, crude protest plays.' He famously walked out of his Australian literature studies during a tutorial on Patrick White's novel *The Tree of Man*, saying it was dreadful, and never finished his degree. Nowra described his decision to abandon university as 'a protest against everything and nothing'. He decided to drive as far away from Melbourne and his family as possible, but his car broke down in the NSW town of Nowra (inspiring his name change). Shortly after, Nowra rewrote one of the street theatre plays and sent it to Melbourne's La Mama Theatre, who invited him to put it on. Reflecting on that play's 1975 production, Nowra says it was 'atrocious', but made him 'determined to do better'.

'When I wrote my early plays,' says Nowra, 'I thought I was quite poor at play structure and so I wrote my scenes on index cards and shuffled them around on a large table to try and develop a narrative that had a strong drive or push to it.' Ahead of writing *Così*, Nowra said an important aim for his writing was to 'get my scenes as concise and brief as possible'. He wanted his plays to resonate, rather than pontificate.



Context

Discuss the contexts that Louis Nowra was writing in, and how these may have influenced *Così*.

A PROLIFIC PLAYWRIGHT

In the mid-70s Nowra moved to Sydney, where John Bell (the founder of Bell Shakespeare) directed his play *Inner Voices* at the Nimrod Theatre in 1977, and Rex Cramphorn his *Visions* in a converted cinema near Hyde Park in 1978. Over the 1980s he was resident dramatist with the State Theatre Company of South Australia, wrote *The Golden Age* (1985), and adapted Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* for the Belvoir Theatre (1988). His first semi-autobiographical play, *Summer of the Aliens* (1992), was followed immediately by his second, *Così* (which won the New South Wales Premier's Literary Prize) and, much later, a third, *This Much is True* (2017). Along with dozens of plays including *Radiance* (1993) and the 'Boyce trilogy' of 2004-2006 he has brought forth the memoir *The Twelfth of Never* (2000), which won the *Courier-Mail* Book of the Year Award, and the novel *Ice* (2009) which was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award. He was a member of the writing team for the acclaimed SBS TV series, *First Australians*, which took out several major writing awards in 2009. His non-fiction writing includes the long essay *Bad Dreaming* (2007), *Kings Cross: A biography* (2013) and *Woolloomooloo: A biography* (2017).

LOUIS AND LEWIS

Discussing the differences between Nowra and his semi-autobiographical creation, Lewis, Nowra says Lewis is much nicer. 'I think he's probably gentler, less acerbic, probably allows more things to happen to him, to change him ... he's probably a bit more naïve.'



MTC Talks Podcast

Hear more from playwright Louis Nowra on the MTC Talks podcast at mtc.com.au/backstage

Sources: Louis Nowra (1987) *Australian Playwrights: Louis Nowra*, Veronica Kelly (Ed.) Rodopi: Amsterdam; Sarah Corridon (2019) *The Triumph of Art* on mtc.com.au; Louis Nowra (2017) 'This Much Is True' and 'Così' playwright Louis Nowra on writing himself for the stage on smh.com.au; National Portrait Gallery (2018) *Study of Louis Nowra* on portrait.gov.au; Louis Nowra & Fiona Gruber (2019) *Louis Nowra* [MTC Talks] on player.fm



Bessie Holland, Sean Keenan and George Zhao in rehearsal.

— SCRIPT EXCERPTS —

The following excerpts from Nowra's script offer you ways to interact with the text before seeing the production. The excerpts are accompanied by activities and prompt questions, which will assist you to better understand these moments in the play.

LEWIS: *Do you think we should be doing something like this?*
ROY: *You don't want to do a masterpiece?*
LEWIS: *In these days, you know, the Vietnam war –*
ROY: *They can pretend to be going off to the Vietnam war! Now you're cooking.*
LEWIS: *I meant about the theme. Love is not so important nowadays.*



Love is not so important

Discuss this scene from Act 1, Scene 1. Why does Lewis think love is not so important? What is Roy's obsession with *Così Fan Tutte*? How would you perform this scene? Why did Nowra choose to insert this particular opera into *Così*?

JUSTIN: *Lewis, they all have to be back in their wards at four. Love to be here, but I've got a day of meetings. Rush, rush. Where would the world be without social workers?*
DOUG: *In tip top condition.*



Tip top condition?

Discuss this interaction between Justin and Doug (Act 1, Scene 1). What's the sentiment behind Doug's comment? How did society view mental illness in 1971 Australia? What has or hasn't changed in this regard?

ROY: *We'll never do it.*
LEWIS: *We will. But we'll also have to rehearse on Friday afternoon.*
JULIE: *Isn't that the first day of your moratorium?*
LEWIS: *This comes first.*
CHERRY: *Good.*



This comes first

Discuss this excerpt from Act 2, Scene 1. How has Lewis' attitude changed? What has brought about this change of heart?

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE: *The theatre. The walls are white. It is opening night. ZAC is dressed as a Bavarian, wearing lederhosen, with a small bandage across the bridge of his nose where RUTH hit him.*



The walls are white

Think about how you would achieve this set change from Act 2, Scene 2 (the burnt-out theatre), to one with white walls. Make predictions about how this effect will be achieved in this production.

— COSTUME DESIGN SNEAK PEEK —



Jonathon Oxlade

The design team for *Così* includes creatives working in the domains of set, costume, lighting, and sound design. Detailed information about their work will be available in Part B of this Education Pack. Here, we give you a sneak peek of the costume designs.

COSTUME DESIGN

Costume designer Jonathon Oxlade always starts by looking at what was happening in the year that the play is set, in regards to the social and political climate, and of course fashion. He also researches these aspects of the time period prior to the setting:



Jonathon Oxlade (Costume Designer)

‘Characters often drag the past with them in their clothing, some characters are ‘on trend’, but the majority of the time you can see time and their gathering of items in their costume journey; a favourite jacket, a worn pair of jeans etc. It was important to reflect what was happening in 1971 Australia, but also create a sense of play in the characters so they do not become too much of a caricature.’

Oxlade’s designs are deliberately warm in tone, to play against the starkness of the burnt-out theatre space in the set design. Each character’s costumes also provide insight into their personality, e.g. Nick is politically minded so his costume incorporates protest elements, while Roy is more heightened so his costume reflects his idiosyncrasies.

The opera costumes for *Così Fan Tutte* are constructed by the patient characters, so Jonathon is using many old costumes from MTC stock, layering them, building over them, and adding hand-made details.



Jonathon Oxlade (Costume Designer)

‘*Così* is such an incredible show to costume design for. It’s set in a pivotal political point in 1971 Australia very much landed in reality, but also it reaches out to the fantastic and invented worlds of art and the imagination... of theatre. These two polar offerings set up interesting aesthetics, it almost like two shows; there is a show within a show.’

The design process, like most of theatre, is highly collaborative. Jonathon created a Dropbox with reference material to show other members of the creative team what direction he envisioned the costume design heading.



Jonathon Oxlade (Costume Designer)

‘The team really liked the idea of the show progressing through a colour palette, beginning in more muted tones that reflect their state of mind, and climaxing in the ‘Opera’ with full, bright illuminated colour and light. It should feel like they are shining from within and filling the stage with the full spectrum of colours, a rainbow.’



Discuss the design concept

Discuss Jonathon’s concept for the costume designs, specifically in regards to colour and the idea of ‘shining from within’.



Detail of Jonathon Oxlade's design references for the *Così* characters' pre-performance costumes (left) and opera costumes (right).



Mood Board

Create your own mood board with reference images that evoke your own aesthetic for the design of *Così*. Annotate each image to highlight features that inspire you.



Costume design

Choose one of the 'mental patient' characters from *Così* and design a costume for them, and also their role in *Così Fan Tutte*. Keep in mind Oxlade's comments about colour, period fashion, personality and light, and make sure your design allows the actor to do everything that's required in the script.



Download Part B

After you have seen *Così*, download Part B of this Education Pack to see Oxlade's designs and hear more from the creative team.



Esther Hannaford, Sean Keenan, Rahel Romahn, Bessie Holland, Glenn Hazeldine and Katherine Tonkin in rehearsal.

— ATTENDANCE INFORMATION —



Sarah Goodes (Director), Robert Menzies and Rahel Romahn in rehearsal.



When you visit Southbank Theatre, share your experience on Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag **#mtcCosi** and tag **@melbtheatreco**



Like MTC Education on Facebook for behind-the-scenes information about our Education Program and discover ways for you to get involved with MTC: **facebook.com/MTCEdu**

CONTENT

This production contains coarse language, sexual references, drug references and references to suicide.

For detailed information, visit our website at **mtc.com.au/production-content-guide**

Part B of this Education Pack will be available once the production opens. To read more about visiting with school groups visit **mtc.com.au/education**

DURATION

Approximately 2hrs 40mins (including interval)

BOOKINGS

Email **schools@mtc.com.au** or phone **03 8688 0963**.

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

For general MTC Education enquiries, email **education@mtc.com.au** or contact our Education Coordinator **03 8688 0974**