

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY
— EDUCATION PACK PART B —



così BY LOUIS NOWRA

30 APR — 8 JUNE
SOUTHBANK THEATRE, THE SUMNER

A co-production with STC
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Throughout these notes, look out for these icons for opportunities to learn more:



Activity



Discuss



Interview



Video



Podcast

WELCOME



While there are a number of great Australian classics, there are few that manage the trifecta – withstanding the test of time, having successful iterations across multiple artforms and maintaining their place on school curriculums. *Così*, Louis Nowra’s love letter to theatre, is one of these.

25 years after *Così*’s debut, this new production brings Nowra’s much-loved characters back to MTC for the first time since their Russell Street Theatre premiere. The play is also coming home, to the city where Nowra, while directing a play at the Mont Park asylum, was inspired to write *Così*.

This special story reminds us all of the transformative power of music and performance, and how art can make us soar – even if just for a moment. It is vital for us as human beings and something MTC promotes year round through our productions and special programs.

MTC Education helps you to get the most out of your visit to the theatre and to make meaningful connections between the work we do at MTC and your studies. We hope this life-affirming new production inspires your own creative work, and we look forward to continuing the conversation with you throughout the year.

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

— ABOUT THIS RESOURCE —

Part B of the *Così* Education Pack for is designed to help you analyse the production in relation to your VCE Theatre Studies curriculum. This is a post-show resource, and is best used in combination with Part A of the Education Pack. Revisit Part A for information about the structure, setting, characters, contextual information, theatrical styles, and the playwright. While this pack is intended to support your study, teachers and students should consult the VCE Study Design and VCAA documents for information about assessment tasks and examinations



Revisit Part A

Revisit Part A of this Education Pack for information about contexts, setting, structure, characters, theatre styles, and the playwright.

GO BACKSTAGE

There are many more resources on the MTC website to support your study of this production of *Così*, including videos, podcasts, interviews, feature articles and glimpses into the work that happens in other MTC departments.



Behind the poster

Step inside the MTC marketing department and see how the poster for *Così* evolved over the course of many months.



Meet the cast

Hear from the actors in the midst of their photo shoot for the *Così* poster, as they discuss what they love about the play and what *Così* is all about.



Podcast with Louis Nowra

Listen to playwright Louis Nowra discuss his real-life experience directing a musical at a Melbourne mental asylum, which inspired this play.



Esther Hannaford, Bessie Holland, Katherine Tonkin, Glenn Hazeldine, Sean Keenan, Gabriel Fancourt and Robert Menzies

— CHARACTERISATION —

Hear from the actors about the rehearsal process, and how they use voice, movement, facial expression, gesture, stillness and silence to interpret their characters in *Così*. In this production, two actors have been double cast, and must use their expressive skills to embody two separate characters. Similarly, most of the actors playing patients must also act as actors during the rehearsals and performance of *Così fan tutte*.

Robert Menzies and Sean Keenan



LEWIS

Lewis is played by Sean Keenan. Lewis has just left university and has agreed to direct a play with patients from a mental institution because he needs the money. Lewis is loosely based on the playwright of *Così*, Louis Nowra.

Keenan says Lewis is driven by a desire to investigate madness. 'Lewis' relationship to this is personal,' explains Keenan, 'his grandmother went mad, and somewhere inside him there's a fear that this predisposition could manifest in him.' Ostensibly Lewis takes the job for the money, and to test himself as a director, but Keenan says 'beneath this is a desire to explore what it means to be clinically mad, and how the resulting institutionalisation affects one's ability to interpret the world around them.'



Sean Kennan (Lewis)

'Lewis is the audience's anchor in the somewhat abstracted world of the asylum. He is surrounded by larger-than-life characters, some of whom have large barriers to overcome when it comes to human connection and interaction. Others have a completely unfiltered approach to human connection. Lewis is a grounding force in this world and our link between these opposing ends of the human spectrum.'

Keenan says he found it was important instil Lewis with an air of patience, control and relaxation that juxtaposes the chaos surrounding him. 'He does snap, but only when he is pushed well beyond his ability to drive the activities at hand with language.' The performative aspect of direction was something Keenan played with: 'There's a clear-cut difference between Lewis in his

moments of privacy and his moments in the theatre acting as he thinks a “director should”.’ Keenan says Lewis’ initial hubris upon entering the asylum, characterised by his lack of preparation and his judgements of the people and location, are a reflection of the views of his counterparts outside the theatre. ‘In the 1970’s there was still great stigma around madness and mental health, and to be institutionalised was not only an indication of illness, but a rejection by society.’



Sean Kennan (Lewis)

‘While Lewis planned on directing a Brechtian piece of theatre with the patients, he quickly finds himself tackling a play with themes he finds trite, outdated and unimportant in the social climate. But as the theatre slowly becomes a place of warmth and life, the patients his friends, and the play a realisation of the transformative power of performance, his personal judgements begin to make way for an appreciation of the triumph of human connection, and the capabilities of the unreliable mind.’

Keenan says Lewis realises that his friends’ judgement of the downtrodden, institutionalised members of the asylum demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature. ‘The wants and needs of the institutionalised have just as much worth as those outside the theatre, but their loss of agency, rejection by society and inability to be heard only exacerbates their existing conditions.’

In rehearsal, Keenan lead ‘theatre sports’ activities in character with the cast, which he found to be a useful indicator of the levels of energy and persistent patience required when relating to each specific character. ‘Trying to achieve a singular goal with a group of uncooperative minds, especially when each has they’re own dearly held vision of what is being created, is an incredible challenge and where the comedy of the piece springs from.’

Keenan notes that improvisation played an important part in rehearsal, particularly when it came to Lewis’ relationship with Lucy, and his friendship with Nick. These existing relationships in his life only have one or two establishing scenes in the play before they start to derail. ‘Exploring a shared history through improvisation was a fantastic way to build these relationships,’ says Keenan, ‘and explore the dynamic that exists between these three people, who live in the same house, who are seeing each other every night they get home from work.’

LEWIS: Without love the world wouldn’t mean so much.

LUCY

Lucy is played by Esther Hannaford, who doubles as Julie. Lucy is doing an MA thesis and lives with her boyfriend, Lewis. She is passionate about politics and is protesting the Vietnam War.

LUCY: Working with these people has changed you. We used to talk about things. Important things. Now all you can talk about is reactionary drivel like *Così fan tutte*.

Hannaford’s Lucy has a straight posture, and her speech is direct and clear. You can hear her education in her voice, and her movements reflect her character’s assuredness and confidence. Lucy is distinguished from Julie in costume with much more of Lucy’s skin covered up, and notably her hair is tied up neatly, almost severely, out of her eyes.



Esther Hannaford (Julie & Lucy)

‘When I first started reading the piece, I thought these two women were the antithesis of each other. The more I explore the text the more similarities I find. The difference is the way they choose to operate in the world. Both understand that there are double standards for women in the world in regards to love and work. It is an interesting device to play both women in the piece so that will be a challenge for me.’

Source: Gill Canning (2019) Esther Hannaford quoted in A Life on the Stage, MINDFOOD May 2019, p.36

JULIE

Julie is also played by Esther Hannaford. Julie is 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'.

JULIE: I've always thought that love was being foolish and stupid. It's about being on the edge and I like being on the edge.

In contrast to her portrayal of Lucy, Hannaford's interpretation of Julie uses fidgety gestures to show an aspect of her addiction. Julie moves around the stage fluidly, sometimes as if in a dream. Her posture is slightly hunched, and she speaks with long vowels and much emotion.



Compare and contrast

Compare and contrast how actor Esther Hannaford interpreted her characters, Lucy and Julie, by analysing her use of facial expression, gesture, voice, movement, stillness and silence.



NICK

Nick is played by Gabriel Fancourt, who doubles as Zac. 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. Nick grows more and more distant from his friend Lewis, at the same time becoming more and more successful in his anti-war Activism. 'Nick is an intellectually driven character,' says Fancourt, 'so I try to lead with the head.'



Gabriel Fancourt (Nick & Zac)

'Nick's driving force is to change the way Australia views the war in Vietnam. He lives his life by absolute ideals and values.'

Speaking of the similarities between the two characters he plays, Fancourt says both Zac and Nick have an uncompromising view of the world. 'Neither will back off an inch from what they believe is correct.' Fancourt notes that they differ in terms of what they value: Zac lives in a creative free flow and Nick works from socio-political ideals and beliefs. 'I find that in rehearsals if I can start to think the way the character thinks; to get a sense of their internal monologue running in between the text that motivates what they say and what they take exception to, then things start to flow from there.'

NICK: Only mad people in this day and age would do a work about love and infidelity. They're definitely mad.



Compare and contrast

Compare and contrast how actor Gabriel Fancourt interpreted his characters, Nick and Zac, by analysing his use of facial expression, gesture, voice, movement, stillness and silence.

ZAC

Zac is also played by Gabriel Fancourt. Zac is the musician of the group, and he has been in and out of mental institutions. Fancourt says Zac's driving force is pure creative energy. 'He's an artist and works from a creative impulse that is completely his own.' Fancourt says Zac has a growing frustration through the play that his creative ideas aren't being taken seriously. Fancourt finds Zac interesting because, although he's one of the most creative characters, Zac is not in the opera performance in Act 2. 'His drug habit gets the better of him, so he doesn't have the catharsis that the other characters have through performing in the show.'



Gabriel Fancourt (Nick & Zac)

'I use a physical entry point for my characters. For Zac, it's his medication that will dictate how he behaves in any given scene, so I'll look for clues in the text to get an idea of what physical state he's in (tired, dizzy, agitated, focused), and carry that into the scene in pursuing his goals. I like to wear his big jacket in rehearsals to keep a sense of how he moves.'

Reflecting on the rehearsal process, Fancourt believes improvisation is incredibly important. 'It's only by improvising and experimenting that you start to find the limits of what your character can be. I think that's what rehearsals are for, for the most part. In every wrong choice you make, you're mapping out a clearer picture of your character.'



Gabriel Fancourt as Nick, with Robert Menzies



Gabriel Fancourt as Zac, with Sean Keenan

JUSTIN

Justin is played by George Zhao. A social worker, Justin 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. Zhao says that Justin is driven by the need for the theatre program to be a success. 'He wants this program to succeed,' says Zhao, 'but as the play progresses he begins to doubt it will. He is completely surprised but ultimately joyous at the end result.'



George Zhao (Justin)

'Justin will sometimes look down on people, although he treats them kindly and with a measure of respect, he still has a subconscious bias against those who are deemed mentally ill. This means that his gait is one that is quite confident and measured.'

Zhao says movement helped him interpret his character, and that walking around the stage with a straight back and looking down at things immediately puts him in the mindset of Justin.

ROY

Roy is played by Rob Menzies. Roy is 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. When describing how he inhabits his character, Menzies says 'I just try to be as relaxed and open as possible. Everything follows from that.' While Menzies doesn't find formal improvisation helpful for interpreting characters, he loves feeling free to play in rehearsal.

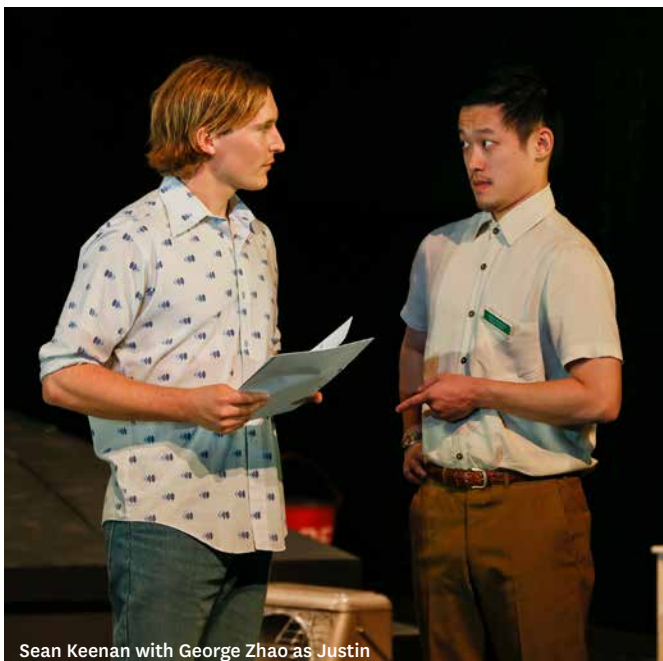


Robert Menzies (Roy)

'Roy's driving force is to be loved. He finds fulfilment during the course of the play, for a brief moment.'

Fellow cast member Glenn Hazeldine echoes Menzies' comment, citing Roy's passion for music in this line:

ROY: Music is what love between humans should be.



Sean Keenan with George Zhao as Justin



Robert Menzies as Roy

'At drama school we were taught that acting is the passionate pursuit of your objectives,' says Hazeldine. 'This line seems to be one of the main things that drive Roy to inspire the patients to commit to the production of *Così fan tutte*. They find a profound connection to one another along the way. It always strikes me how much this line means to him.'



Cast biographies

Read the biographies of each cast member in the show programme at mtc.com.au/backstage

HENRY

Henry is played by Glenn Hazeldine. A former lawyer who is now a patient, Henry 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. Hazeldine says Henry values loyalty very highly. 'He appears to be deeply conservative and old-fashioned, but reveals himself to be a staunchly committed member of the troupe and surprisingly tolerant.'

HENRY: My fffffather fought in the war for you. For you and ffffor me. He was a ggggreat man. You are traitors.

Hazeldine notes that Nowra provides specific instructions in the script regarding Henry's physical peculiarities: an injured arm, inability to maintain eye contact or tolerate physical contact, he stutters and generally has a nervous disposition. 'This gave me a helpful springboard into building the character,' says Hazeldine. 'It's my job to empathise with all facets of the character, and so I allow him to evolve as my understanding grows throughout the rehearsal process. I try to avoid any pre-determinations or judgements and instead let the circumstances of the scene inform his responses and behaviour.' Over the course of the rehearsal period, Hazeldine discovered finer details and allowed them to be layered in organically, all the while keeping an ear out for notes from the director.



Glenn Hazeldine (Henry)

'At the outset, Henry is extremely insecure. The most obvious change you see in him is his growth in confidence amongst his cohort. His ever-present stutter disappears completely whilst he's performing in *Così fan tutte*. In a profound sense he finally finds his voice.'

Hazeldine says improvisation is important to embrace in any rehearsal situation, because it allows actors to explore the myriad ways in which a character might respond and behave. 'It's good to surprise yourself by exploring further afield than initial instincts may have dictated,' says Hazeldine. 'Rather than be limited by the old cliché, "my character wouldn't do that" it's good to push yourself from time to time with the response, "what if they had to?". Humans are infinitely capable of contrary behaviour and our characters should be too, so long as it doesn't corrupt the storytelling.'



DOUG

Doug is played by Rahel Romahn. Doug 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. In his words, he has 'a problem with social mores'.

DOUG: I'm not prying or anything, am I? It's just that in here you miss out on a lot of the changes in society's morals.

I believe the driving force behind my character is his inability to fit in, to understand why people don't seem to find him likeable. He continues to attempt form of attention seeking which goes back to a deep seated issue of his relationship with his mother.



Rahel Romahn (Doug)

'I inhabit my character by falling into a state of physical and expressive freedom. There is a particular rhythm in which he speaks which leaps of the page for me. Once I fall into this melodically, I am then able to exist with liberation and behave the way in which the play requires.'

Romahn says Doug grows by learning that he has dreams, hopes and aspirations. 'He continues with his pyromania behaviour, but as the play progresses and he loses the opportunity to woo his crush (Julie) and perform in a play where he can shine, he realises that he may have made a big mistake. We witness this in his subtle physical behaviour and wording.'



Rahel Romahn (Doug)

'I realised that as wild as this character is, the moments of vulnerability where we see the benevolent child which once existed and had his mind tarnished due to the harsh environment in which he lived, was just as pivotal and important.'



Rahel Romahn as Doug, with Sean Keenan

CHERRY

Cherry is played by Bessie Holland. Cherry 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. Holland says desire is one of Cherry's driving forces. 'Her desire to be loved and to love. To be heard and to belong. She's intelligent and quick witted. She's results-driven, but unfortunately uses manipulation and bullying to get what she wants. I'd say Cherry herself is a driving force.'

CHERRY: Go burn a cat!



Bessie Holland (Cherry)

'Cherry's voice is how I tune in and inhabit her. It's very import for Cherry to be listened to, she demands to be heard. Tonally, I wanted to pitch her voice uniquely different from my own. I wanted there to be a juxtaposition of how she looks and how she sounds. Cherry can be very intimidating and aggressive, she's psychically imposing. So placing her voice in a higher register, which almost sounds childlike, feels like a good way to balance her.'

Holland notes that when the audience first see Cherry, she enters the space defensively, barking back at Roy 'it was a long walk' then screaming at Doug 'go burn a cat'. But by the end of the play, in her final scene with Doug, Cherry has grown. 'We see she has softened and isn't so aggressively reactionary,' says Holland. 'She isn't baited by his taunts like she once was. We see Doug and Cherry share a mutual love for each other.'



Bessie Holland (Cherry)

'Through doing *Così*, Cherry has gained confidence and hope. Like all of the characters in the institution, she has been dismissed a lot in her life, but through doing *Così* she has been able be an important contributor in a collaborative space.'

Holland says that in the final scene between Cherry and Lewis, Cherry is vulnerable and honest with without having to buffer her feelings with tomfoolery. 'While kissing Lewis she lets go of the knife, and chooses love over fighting.' Holland says improvisation and experimentation are very important in the rehearsal process as a way to discover new things or possibilities. 'You have to honour your instinct, but resist the urge to cement things too early as it can become rigid. The key is to keep playing.'



Bessie Holland as Cherry, with Sean Keenan

RUTH

Katherine Tonkin plays Ruth, 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. Tonkin says Ruth is driven to clarify and seek consistency in the way both she and others interpret events around them. 'She's a fiercely intelligent character,' says Tonkin, 'who sees the world in a very unique way. She is driven. She deals in facts and absolutes, as she feels great anxiety when sensing chaos and uncertainty around her.'



Sean Keenan with Katherine Tonkin as Ruth



Katherine Tonkin (Ruth)

'Particularly during the first half of the play, Ruth is driven to create order, although the fact that she has volunteered to be part of the production suggests that she is seeking ways to extend the realms of her own comfort. It's a wonderful journey to go on with her.'

During rehearsals, Tonkin and Sarah Goodes (Director) spoke about Ruth's need to cling to facts for safety – like rungs on a ladder. As a result, Tonkin's interpretation of Ruth sees her moving through space from point A to point B with great directness, rarely with a moment to meander. 'A little like a line moving through a dot to dot painting – all angles and no deviation – although this softens throughout the course of the play.'



Katherine Tonkin (Ruth)

'Throughout the course of the play Ruth comes to embrace the chaos and free-fall that accompanies the journey of putting on a play. She comes to trust herself and others more – something beautifully symbolised by the moment she lets herself fall and be caught by Henry when her character "faints" in the performance. In the playing of Dorabella, she loses herself for a moment, and in this "letting go" she finds something new and joyous.'

RUTH: Comedy is better when it's real.

Early in rehearsals, the cast did some physical and vocal warm up exercises in character, with either Lewis or Roy leading the session. 'Apart from being entertaining watching the chaos unfold, it was a great way to start inhabiting Ruth's mindset,' says Tonkin. 'These sorts of improvisations helped to highlight the similarities and differences between ourselves and our characters, and the voracity with which these characters have been forced to defend themselves against attack and ridicule.'



Katherine Tonkin (Ruth)

'I found the process of gathering props and costume elements particularly helpful in developing Ruth. The sturdiness of her bag, the organisation of pills and stationery items, the 'preparedness' of her thermos, the sharpness of a poised pencil ... all these things helped me to flesh out her inner workings and characteristics.'

Tonkin says putting on Ruth's glasses for the first time was a huge help too. 'They gave this wonderful sense of her reaching into the world to seek meaning but at the same time being set apart from it, like someone standing behind a window watching the world unfold on the other side, trying to make sense of something she's not quite able to feel a part of.'



Hear more from the cast

To read more Q&As with the *Così* cast, visit mtc.com.au/backstage

— ACTOR-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP —

The actor audience relationship changes throughout the performance of *Così*. For much of the performance, the audience observes the action 'through the fourth wall', with the actors performing in a mostly naturalistic style. During the performance of *Così fan tutte*, the audience becomes the opera audience, with the actors performing to them and acknowledging their presence in the space. In Lewis' final monologue, he directly addresses the audience in an epilogue of sorts, explaining the outcome for each character.



Discuss direction

Discuss how the director made use of theatre styles and the performance space to manipulate the actor-audience in two key moments.



The performance space

Write a paragraph describing the performance space and provide two examples relating to the space about how motion is used to enhance the performance. You may wish to discuss the placement of doors, the raked stage truck, or the hole in the ceiling.

Sean Keenan, Esther Hannaford, Glenn Hazeldine,
Bessie Holland, Robert Menzies and Katherine Tonkin



Glenn Hazeldine, Robert Menzies, Esther Hannaford, Bessie Holland, Sean Keenan and Katherine Tonkin

— COSTUME DESIGN —



Jonathon Oxlade

Jonathon Oxlade designed the costumes for this production of *Così*. He says *Così* is about the importance of art and connecting through art. 'Art can bring us together,' says Oxlade, 'it can build bridges between peoples' ideologies, their moral foundations, the way they see each other and the world around them.' He says it's an incredible play to costume design for, partly due to the 1971 setting, which Oxlade describes as a 'pivotal political point in Australia'. Oxlade's costumes, like the script, are grounded in reality, but also reach out to the fantastic world of art and imagination.

Oxlade says the creative team have incorporated the idea of the show progressing through a colour palette throughout this production, beginning in more muted tones that reflect their state of mind, and climaxing in the opera' with full, bright, illuminated colour and light. By the time *Così fan tutte* is performed, 'it should feel like they are shining from within and filling the stage with the full spectrum of colours, a rainbow.'



Revisit design references in Part A

Oxlade says 'I always look at what is happening in the year that the play is set – social, political, fashion – but also before.' He notes that characters often drag the past with them in their clothing. Identify which characters are wearing garments from earlier decades, and which are more 'on-trend'. To revisit Oxlade's design references, download Part A of this Education Pack at mtc.com.au/education.



Jonathon Oxlade (Costume Designer)

'Some of the characters are more eccentric than others. Roy for instance is quite theatrical, and I liked the idea that he had a brightly coloured suit that he probably wore daily with different additions. It's like his uniform in his daily life, a little like when you see the same person on the street that pops out of the ordinary, their choice is bold, but it's so pleasing.'



Jonathon Oxlade (Costume Designer)

'I like that the costumes in *Così* display a wide gamut of different types of humans with different takes on the world they live, with their different traumas and abilities. The common thread for them is being in an institution and being different from one another, they find their commonality; through finding each other, they find their light, joy, and what it means to be an empathetic human, together.'

Così premiered on stage in 1992, and was released as a film in 1996. Over the years, the story has been presented in many different ways, sometimes being recontextualised into different decades and political climates. 'I hope that this version of the play opens up a new way to look at its storytelling,' says Oxlade. 'It's always a challenge to create a new feeling for something that is so trusted and has had many appearances before. Hopefully we have done that.'

Oxlade suggests one of the highlights in the play is the 'getting ready' moments, where the audience see the characters constructing their costumes, making sets and learning lines to put on the opera. 'Hey, isn't that the best bit of putting on a show?'



Jonathon Oxlade (Costume Designer)

'The opera costumes are intended to look like the characters have constructed them using items they have found; real flowers, fabric, existing garments, and then decorated and embellished them. The characters are a little like bowerbirds that have created costumes like nests, adding and choosing the right elements to draw attention to themselves.'



Costume design for Lewis by Jonathon Oxlade



Sean Keenan as Lewis, with George Zhao



Costume design for Julie by Jonathon Oxlade



Esther Hannaford as Julie, with Rahel Romahn



Costume design for Nick by Jonathon Oxlade



Sean Keenan with Gabriel Fancourt as Nick



Costume design for Ruth by Jonathon Oxlade



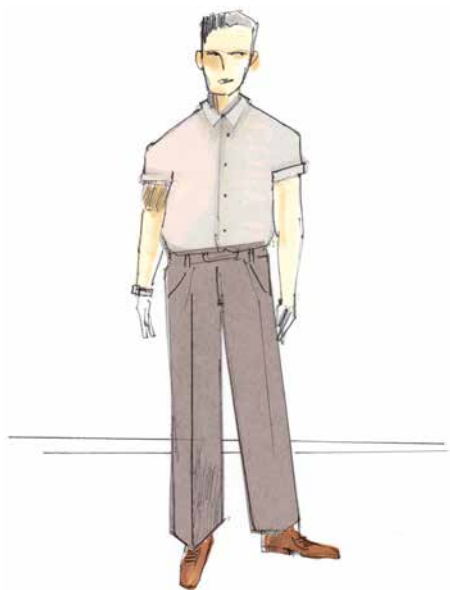
Sean Keenan with Katherine Tonkin as Ruth



Costume design for Henry by Jonathon Oxlade



Robert Menzies with Glenn Hazeldine as Henry



Costume design for Justin by Jonathon Oxlade



Sean Keenan with George Zhao as Justin



Costume design for Cherry by Jonathon Oxlade



Sean Keenan with Bessie Holland as Cherry



Costume design for Doug by Jonathon Oxlade



Rahel Romahn as Doug with Sean Keenan



Costume design for Zac by Jonathon Oxlade



Gabriel Fancourt as Zac with Sean Keenan



Costume design for Albanian soldiers by Jonathon Oxlade



Sean Keenan and Robert Menzies



Costume design for Despina by Jonathon Oxlade



Bessie Holland (centre)



Costume design for Fiordiligi by Jonathon Oxlade



Esther Hannaford (centre)

— LIGHTING DESIGN —



Niklas Pajanti

Lighting designer Niklas Pajanti says *Così* is very much ‘of its time’, and Louis Nowra’s script explores the culture and politics of 1970’s Australia; the Vietnam War, Communism, gender politics, drug usage, definitions of sanity. ‘He is also making fun of (in a loving way) theatre makers,’ says Pajanti. ‘Nowra comically demystifies opera by deftly stripping back and deconstructing *Così* fan tutte as part of the action onstage.’ Pajanti says *Così* is also about the transformative and therapeutic nature of theatre making or storytelling. ‘My lighting will support this as a progression from bleak naturalism to more magical heightened realities as the play unfolds, the rehearsals continue, and the characters gain confidence in themselves.’

LIGHTING TWO WORLDS

Pajanti’s lighting design reflects both the real world of the institution (an abandoned, fire-damaged building in 1971), and the internal world of the patients, whom Pajanti notes ‘have also been abandoned and are damaged people’. You will be able to identify small moments of magical realism in the production; lighting effects that don’t exist in reality but are an expression of the patients thought processes, ideas or flights of fancy due to being heavily medicated.



Niklas Pajanti (Lighting Designer)

‘I will use a combination of fixtures. Visible onstage will be some lights that are accurate for the era (1960-70’s technology) and everywhere else I will use the more contemporary equipment commonly used in theatres today. Intelligent fixtures including moving heads and LEDs and also modern tungsten fixtures.’

THE JOURNEY FROM DARK TO LIGHT

Pajanti’s design quite literally supports the creative team’s concept of the production progressing from dark to light. ‘The external world visible through the doors is glowing white and by the end of the play we will turn the black burnt-out theatre inside out and bring that external luminescence into the space. The characters carry that transformation in piece by piece.’



Niklas Pajanti (Lighting Designer)

‘The theatre itself, the burnt-out room they’re rehearsing in, is also a character in the show. It will have a presence all of its own that will be obvious at some times and may be more subtle at others.’

Pajanti says his mini opera design has been one of the most fun aspects of rehearsals. ‘I have been treating it exactly as I do the larger design concepts presented to me by Sarah Goodes (Director) and Dale Ferguson (Set Designer).’ Pajanti has to respond to the opera set and costume designs, and the story inside the story. ‘It is the part of the show where I will get to add the most colour and be a bit over the top. Like all opera is.’



Niklas Pajanti (Lighting Designer)

‘There are multiple special effects in this show that I have to specifically light or support through lighting. Objects that have a certain life of their own due to the focus put upon them by a patient, imbuing them with a bit of magic.’



Cohesion and Emphasis

Identify some of the special effects Pajanti refers to above, and discuss how the lighting design enhanced these moments on stage. How did different elements contribute to the overall cohesion?

A DESIGN TO GO ON TOUR

Pajanti must also consider practical and logistical limitation in his design. For example, this production transfers to the Sydney Opera House later in the year, so an important aspect to keep in mind that anything he designs for the Sumner Theatre has to be able to be replicated in the Drama Theatre at the Opera House. ‘These two venues are very different in size and shape,’ says Pajanti, ‘so it’s a challenge to make this lighting design work in both spaces.’



Hear more from the Lighting Designer

To read the extended Q&A with Niklas Pajanti, visit mtc.com.au/backstage.

Bessie Holland, Glenn Hazeldine, Robert Menzies and Gabriel Fancourt



COMPOSITION & SOUND DESIGN



Chris Williams

Chris Williams has composed the music and created the sound design for *Così*. ‘There are worlds inside worlds inside worlds for *Così*,’ says Williams, ‘the 90s when it was written, the 70s when it’s set, and the 1790s when Mozart’s opera was premiered (not to mention Zac’s ‘Romantic interjections’ with Wagner).’ Williams notes that the script is already imbued with music: Mozart, Wagner, and 70s rock. Williams sees his role as ‘really about revealing those musical moments, and finding ways to make those moments tie the show together.’



Chris Williams (Composer and Sound Designer)

‘There’s a lot of Mozart, but some of it’s in disguise. There’s a bit of everything in there, really, and hopefully a lot of colour, too. You’ll hear voices, orchestra, organ, guitar, strings, piano accordion, piano, broken bottles, electrical SFX, and the unmistakable sound of rain on a corrugated iron roof!’



Identify the sounds

Using Williams’ comments above as a starting point, make a list of the sounds and music you heard. Connect each example to a specific moment in the play, and discuss how it was enhanced by the music and/or sound design.

OPERATIC ELEMENTS

Due to the operatic elements inherent in Nowra’s script, Williams has included lots of edited extant recordings in his sound design. ‘I’ve been finding looping points, playing with speed and reverb, thinking through where the harmony connects and where it can afford to jump to another moment when we need to do so dramatically.’ Williams has also done some studio recordings. ‘I wanted to have access to Zac’s piano accordion, and as the piano is such a central character in the play it felt right to include some solo piano recordings too.’ Williams says all the actors contribute to the music of the play, playing and singing, so working with them to find their ‘bits of music’ was another aspect of creating music for the show.



Chris Williams (Composer and Sound Designer)

‘*Così* is about many things but at its heart it’s about people, how we treat them, and the beautiful complexity they bring into the world. It’s about seeing people for who they are - inconsistent, loving, honest, dishonest - and knowing that we are richer for being in the world with this diversity.’

MUSICAL THEMES AND THE PLAY’S BIG IDEAS

Williams says the musical ideas written into the text help this already. ‘Roy’s sense of world order, or ‘the harmony of the spheres’ is strongly identified with Mozart and classicism more generally,’ says Williams, ‘while Zac’s musical and philosophical interjections with Wagner disrupt this philosophical trope - just as musical Romanticism overtook Classicism historically, with less predictably ordered musical structures and the idea of The Sublime and The Transcendent.’ This leads to another key idea in *Così*: transformation – how we transform and if we can. Williams says Nowra has always been interested in how people are able to transform, and how the theatre can contribute to this.



Gabriel Fancourt and Sean Keenan



Chris Williams (Composer and Sound Designer)

‘Most of what I’ve made for the show, sonically, is about transformation. I began by sitting down with the piano score for the opera and just playing it, then started ‘playing around’ with it, finding figures I thought were useful and letting the Mozart be the spring-board for related ideas. In some parts of the design, there’s a blend of Mozart-like figures, with original music, and vice versa.’

Williams and the creative team felt that the characters needed to be seen singing in *Così fan tutte*, which meant teaching the cast to sing (at times rather complicated) Mozart counterpoint. ‘We’ve given the cast a lot more of the opera to sing than the text specifies, in part because we felt it was crucial to see them actually producing sound, as the catalyst for the transformations we see at the end of the play.’



Rhythm

Discuss how the composition and sound design are used to manipulate the pace, timing and tempo within this interpretation of *Così*.



Hear more from the Composer and Sound Designer

To read the extended Q&A with Chris Williams, visit mtc.com.au/backstage.

— SET DESIGN —



Dale Ferguson

Dale Ferguson has designed the set for *Così*. His design evokes a burnt-out theatre, as described in Nowra's stage directions, with a raked stage on trucks in the centre of the room. Ferguson's design is a deceptively simple classic box set, with the side walls angled out for optimal sight lines. This dark space is contrasted by stark, bright white space beyond the theatre walls, where the audience sometimes witness elements like fire and water.

Ferguson has worked from the premise that, although this theatre is damaged, it's still able to be played in. Everything is warped from the fire, but as light and colour are gradually introduced into the world of the play, Ferguson's design inhabits the idea that out of something damaged, things can grow.

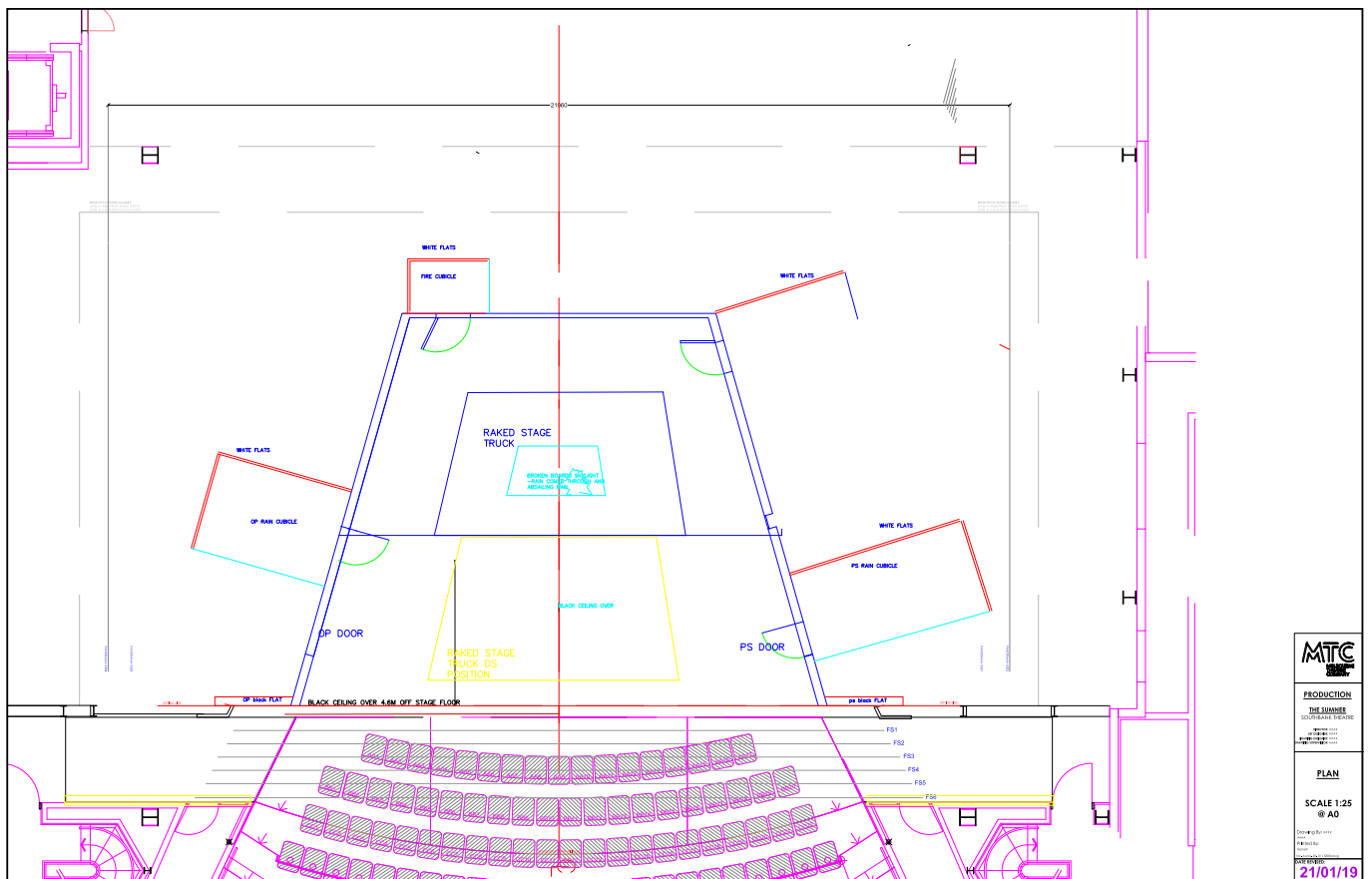


Set design glossary

Create a glossary of key terms to describe various elements of the set design. Be specific in your description of colour, shape, texture, and how it functions in the story.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR OPERA

In Act 2 as the performance of *Così fan tutte* approaches, the cast begin to set up the stage for the opera. The raked stage has a lid, which opens upstage, creating a wall at the back of the truck, and revealing a bright white space for the colourful opera to bloom. Ferguson has also designed white flats that attach to the raked stage, creating an intimate box within the burnt-out theatre that sits on the Sumner stage – a theatre, within a theatre, within a theatre. The audience in the Sumner becomes the audience for the opera.



Ground plan of Dale Ferguson's set design



Wangi Power Station

PHOTO BY TIM FRAWLEY



Fire damage

PHOTO BY AMANDA COWAN/THE COLUMBIAN

MAGIC REALISM

Ferguson and the creative team have also introduced some new ideas into this interpretation of *Così*. When Roy enters the room, he smashes through the ceiling and abseils in. Some props in the production have an inner glow that emanates light later in the performance, quite literally embodying the idea that theatre is transformative and makes people feel like they're radiating light. Through various design elements, characters have magical interactions with the outside world.



Discuss magic realism

Make a list of several moments from the performance where you saw elements of magic realism (a realistic view of the world with magical elements) in the direction and/or design.

During the planning stage of the production process, Ferguson researched various inspiration images that would inform his design concept. The images above were particularly influential for his set design, in terms of the look and feel of the space he wanted to create on stage.



Set design models by Dale Ferguson



— ANALYSIS QUESTIONS —

The following analysis questions are offered to help you unpack the performance and make connections between components of the VCE Theatre Studies Study Design. These questions should be considered as a starting point. Discuss your responses with your peers and explore how other members of the audience may have perceived the performance differently. Make sure you use specific examples and evidence from the production to support your ideas. Always consult VCAA documents when preparing for examinations.



FIRE

- Evaluate how theatre technologies were used to enhance this moment.
- Analyse how one actor used two acting skills in this moment.
- How are design and acting interrelated in this moment?
- Discuss this moment in relation to the entire production, regarding cohesion.



ZAC PRESENTS THE SET DESIGN

- Evaluate how lighting is used in this moment.
- Analyse how one actor used non-verbal skills in this moment.
- Discuss the intention of the creative team's interpretation of this moment from the script.
- How is motion used in this moment?



COSI FAN TUTTE

- Evaluate how costume design enhances this moment.
- Discuss how contrast is used in this scene.
- Analyse how sound design enhanced this moment.
- Evaluate how one actor used two acting skills in this scene.



Sean Keenan

EPILOGUE

- Discuss the actor-audience relationship in this scene.
- Evaluate how rhythm is used in this scene.
- Discuss how contrast is manipulated in this moment.
- Analyse how the actor used voice and stillness in this moment.

— CAREERS AT MTC —



Many hands make a show

The production you've seen on stage is the product of many people's work over many months. Read the list of jobs below, research what each role entails, and discuss what work they did on this production.

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT

Artistic Director & CEO
Brett Sheehy AO
Executive Director & Co-CEO
Virginia Lovett
Executive Assistant to the Artistic Director & CEO
Nick Doherty
Executive Administrator to the Executive Director & Co-CEO
Kathleen Higgs

ARTISTIC

Producer
Martina Murray
Associate Artistic Director
Sarah Goodes
Associate Director
Dean Bryant
Literary Director
Chris Mead
CASTING DIRECTOR
Janine Snape
CASTING ADMINISTRATOR
Carmen Lai
Company Manager/Assistant Producer
Stephen Moore
Deputy Company Manager
Leah Milburn-Clark

NEXT STAGE

Administrator
Karin Farrell
Literary Associate
Jennifer Medway

CATERING

Catering Manager
Andrea Purvis
Assistant Manager
Anita Lyovic
Café Staff
Bev Reinmuth

DEVELOPMENT

Director of Development
Rupert Sherwood
Events Manager
Mandy Jones
Annual Giving Manager
Chris Walters
Major Gifts Manager
Sophie Boardley
Philanthropy Coordinator
Patrick Crummy
Partnerships Manager
Syrie Payne
Partnerships Executive
Isabella Wren
Partnerships Coordinator
Alice Fitzgerald

EDUCATION

Head of Education & Families
Jeremy Rice
Community Outreach Manager
Karin Farrell

Education Coordinator

Nick Tranter

HUMAN RESOURCES

HR Administrator
Christine Verginis
EHS Coordinator
Liz Mundell

FINANCE

Finance Director
Liz Chappell
Finance Manager
Ness Harwood
IT & Systems Manager
Michael Schuettke
IT Support Officer
Darren Snowdon
Assistant Accountant Irene Budiono

Payroll Officer

Julia Godinho
Payments Officer
Lisa Maundrell

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing & Communications Director
Vanessa Rowsthorn
Marketing Manager
James Wright
Digital Manager
Daniel Coghlan
Marketing Campaign Manager

Ebony Addinsall
Marketing Executive
Rebecca Lawrence

Lead Graphic Designer/

Art Director
Emma Wagstaff
Graphic Designers
Helena Turinski
Victoria U

PR & Communications

Manager
Rosie Shepherdson-Cullen
Publicist
Georgia Fox
Communications Content Producer
Sarah Corridon
Communications Coordinator
Jacqui Bartlett
Receptionist
David Zierk

PRODUCTION & TECHNICAL

Technical & Production Director
Adam J Howe

PRODUCTION

Senior Production Manager
Michele Preshaw
Production Manager
Damion Holling
James Lipari
Production Coordinator
Michaela Deacon

Marta Losiewicz
Props Buyer/ASM Swing
Jess Maguire
Production Administrator
Alyson Brown

TECHNICAL

Technical Manager Lighting & Sound
Kerry Saxby
Senior Production Technician
Allan Hirons
Production Technicians
Nick Wollan
Marcus Cook
Denis Irving Award
Mungo Trumble
Technical Manager – Staging
Andrew Bellchambers

CAD Drafting
Jacob Battista
Alexander Rothnie
Kris Bird
Staging Supervisor HQ
Nicholas Stace

PROPERTIES

Properties Supervisor
Geoff McGregor
Props Maker
Colin Penn

SCENIC ART

Scenic Art Supervisor
Shane Dunn
Scenic Artists
Tansy Elso
Colin Harman

WORKSHOP

Workshop Supervisor
Aldo Amenta
Deputy Workshop Supervisor
Andrew Weavers
Set Makers
Ken Best
Brian Easteal
Nick Gray
Philip de Mulder
Peter Rosa

WARDROBE

Wardrobe Manager
Keryn Ribbands
Wardrobe Staff
John Molloy
Jocelyn Creed
John Van Gastel
Lyn Molloy
Julie Renton
Costume Coordinator
Sophie Woodward
Costume Hire
Liz Symons
Costume Supervisor
Kate Seeley
Buyer
Joanne Paterson
Millinery
Phillip Rhodes

Wigs & Makeup

Jurga Celikiene
Wardrobe Maintenance
Stella Cadzow
Josephine Johnson
VCA Wardrobe Intern
Carmody Nicol

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Christine Bennett
Ben Cooper
Brittany Coombs
Lisette Drew
Jess Keepence
Whitney McNamara
Meg Richardson
Julia Smith
Pippa Wright

SOUTHBANK THEATRE

Theatre Operations Director
Mark D Wheeler
Building Services Manager

Adrian Aderhold
House Services Manager
James Cunningham
Production Services Manager

Frank Stoffels
Bar Manager

Claire Marsh
Lawler & Events

Technical Supervisor
Tom Brayshaw

Lighting Supervisor
Richard Gorr

Staging Supervisor
Grant Kennelly
Sound Supervisor

Terry McKibbin
Head Flyman

James Tucker
Stage & Technical Staff

Matthew Arthur
Trent Barclay
Sam Berkley
Simon Bond
Michael Burnell

John Carberry
Nathan Evers
Eugene Hallen

Kylie Hammond
Adam Hanley

Luke Hawley
Jake Hutchings

David Jenkins
Louis Kennedy

Robert Larsen
James Lipari

Marcus Macris
David Membery

Stephanie Morrell
James Paul

Will Patterson
Nathaniel Sy

Raff Watt
Max Wilkie

Michael Taylor

Michelle Thorne

Joy Weng

HOUSE & BAR SERVICES

House & Bar Supervisors

Paul Blenheim
Sarah Branton
Kasey Gambling
Paul Terrell
Drew Thomson

House & Bar Attendants

Faith Angaika
Stephanie Barham

Tanya Batt
Matt Bertram

Max Bowyer
Zak Brown

Michael Cutrupi
Leila Gerges

Rosie Howell
Kathryn Joy

Laura Lethlean
Will McRostie

Natasha Milton
Yasmin Mole

Daniel Moulds
Ernesto Munoz

Emma Palackic
Adam Rogers

Richard Saxby
Sophie Scott

Myles Tankle
Bella Vadiveloo

Rhian Wilson
Jamaica Zuanetti

TICKETING

Director of Ticketing Operations

Brenna Sotiropoulos
Subscriptions Supervisor

Jessie Phillips
Database Specialist

Ben Gu
Data Analyst

Megan Thomson
VIP Ticketing Officer

Michael Bingham
Education Ticketing Officer

Mellita Ilich
Box Office Supervisor

Kieran Gould-Dowen
Box Office Attendants

Brent Davidson
Peter Dowd

Jean Lizza
Bridget Mackey

Ross MacPherson
Debra McDougall

Laura McIntosh
Daniel Scaffidi

Tain Stangret
Lee Threadgold

— ATTENDANCE INFORMATION —



Glenn Hazeldine, Robert Menzies, Esther Hannaford, Bessie Holland, Sean Keenan and Katherine Tonkin



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 A of this Education Pack is available for free on our website. To download it, and 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**