



AN MTC NEXT STAGE ORIGINAL

SLAP. BANG. KISS.

MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

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.

MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne.

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COVID-19 Arts Sustainability Fund – an Australian Government initiative



Australian Government
Sustainability Fund

Melbourne Theatre Company presents

AN MTC NEXT STAGE ORIGINAL

SLAP. BANG. KISS.

By **Dan Giovannoni**

Directed by **Katy Maudlin**

19—30 April 2022

Southbank Theatre, The Lawler

3 May—10 May 2022

Regional Tour

ABOUT THE PLAY

SLAP. A video of 16-year-old Immi hitting a security officer goes viral. BANG. Sofia's impassioned speech for the victims of a school shooting makes international news. KISS. In the car park of a small-town Woolies, people rally around Darby and Daniel as the boys lock lips in an attempt to set the world record for the longest kiss. But when their stories go viral and the whole world is watching, what will they do next?

CAST

Sofia / As cast Sarah Fitzgerald

Darby / As cast Conor Leach

Immi / As cast Tsungirai Wachenuka

CREATIVE TEAM

Director Katy Maudlin

Set & Costume Designer Kate Davis

Lighting Designer Amelia Lever-Davidson

Composer & Sound Designer Ian Moorhead

Stage Manager Jess Keepence

Assistant Stage Manager Zsuzsa Gaynor Mihaly

Standby Cover Slone Sudiro

Creative Development Photography Tiffany Garvie

Production Photography Tiffany Garvie

This production contains coarse language, references to gun violence and homophobia, theatrical haze effects and dynamic sound.

For running time for this production is approximately 65 minutes with no interval.

NEXTSTAGE

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. Thank you for sharing our passion and commitment to Australian stories and Australian writers.

This production and tour forms a central part of MTC's award-winning Education Program which is generously supported by the Betty Amsden Foundation, Paul & Wendy Bonnici and Family, Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM, Tom & Elana Cordiner, the Gailey Lazarus Foundation, Jane Hansen AO & Paul Little AO, Linda Herd, The Ian Potter Foundation, Anne & Mark Robertson OAM, the John & Myriam Wylie Foundation, Telematics Trust, Victorian Department of Education & Training and MTC's Education Giving Circle Donors.

This production of *SLAP. BANG. KISS.* was developed in 2019 and 2020 under the direction of Prue Clark and with the participation of Tahlee Fereday and Artemis Ioannides.

AN INVITATION FOR CHANGE



Conor Leach and Tsungirai Wachenuka

Can young people really change the world? Playwright Dan Giovannoni knows they can. We talk to him about the origins and evolution of *SLAP. BANG. KISS.* and the play's journey to stage.

What's the origin story of *SLAP. BANG. KISS.*? How did you start to write it?

I'd been thinking about some of the myths we are told about teenagers – that they're apathetic, apolitical, disinterested. The teenagers I meet are engaged, curious, angry and keen to be listened to. And actually they're everywhere: taking the microphone at climate strikes, suing the federal government over their failure to ensure a safe future for young people,



Dan Giovannoni. Photo: Melanie Sheridan

sharing themselves authentically with friends and family. I wanted to write something that rejected the idea of a teenager as simply a smelly grump sulking in their bedroom. While the stories in *SLAP. BANG. KISS.* are ultimately works of fiction, they reference the real world and take as their starting point the same idea – that young people are shaped by the world around them, but are also capable of doing the shaping.

‘It's the most open text I've written – there are lots of locations, dozens of characters. It's ... a challenge ... to create a space that can be transformed over and over.’

How would you describe the style of your writing in *SLAP. BANG. KISS.*? Does it lend itself to a particular style of performance that you prefer?

I don't choose a performance style before I write, or really have a preferred one. I let the play tell me what it needs. With this play it seemed to me that the best way for us to hear the characters' stories was for them to tell us directly. I'm quite fond of art that celebrates language – I came of age as a playwright watching and reading the work of artists like Angus Cerini and Patricia Cornelius, whose use of language still inspires me. I love fast language, musical language, storytelling, and I knew that *SLAP. BANG. KISS.* was going to be a fast-moving and expansive story, and so the style kind of evolved around that.



Director Katy Maudlin with Sarah Fitzgerald



(above) Sarah Fitzgerald, Conor Leach, Tsungirai Wachenuka
(below) Tsungirai Wachenuka, Conor Leach and Sarah Fitzgerald



How would you describe your writing process for this play?

There were a few things I knew pretty early on that guided the writing process. I knew the characters – I knew it was about someone who stood up to a figure of authority, someone who survived a school shooting, and someone who wanted to set the world record for the longest kiss. I read lots – I read about real-life examples of each of those scenarios. I read about social movements started by young people, I read about events that went viral on social media, and how that happened, how small moments captured people's attention. I talked to young people a lot, putting some early material in front of teenagers who offered their advice and feedback, and we had great roundtable conversations about the ideas in the play. And I re-wrote lots, with drafts guided by my dramaturgs at MTC (Chris Mead and Jenni Medway), the Education team and the production's director at the time, Prue Clark.

***SLAP. BANG. KISS.* had a development week before the first lockdown, early in March 2020. As the playwright, what did you do during the development week?**

Write! Learn! Panic! I met with (then) director Prue several times before the 2020 development, and we made a little plan of the things we wanted to achieve in the week. She wanted to see a rough draft of what the whole play looked like with the actors using Kate's beautiful design as a kind of playground, so she could understand better how it might be staged. I wanted to write a new draft of the whole play, working scene by scene to make sure all the elements I was playing with were interrogated and re-drafted. During the week, I would bring in new versions of scenes most days, and we'd read them, talk about the changes I'd made and

what we missed from the old versions. Then the actors would play with the text on the set, and I'd go home at night and do some more writing. Development weeks are so useful – I really relish that kind of forensic analysis of the text.

After the initial developments in 2019 and 2020, the *SLAP. BANG. KISS.* team returned to MTC HQ in February this year for further creative development. How did it feel coming back to work on the play with a new director Katy Maudlin and some new cast members?

Like everything work-related in the last two years, there was lots of sadness at losing the thing that was – the original team stitched so much of themselves into the fabric of the play and I am so grateful for their work. But there was a really thrilling energy for this new thing, too. I have always wanted to work with Katy, and our new cast members brought great new questions and perspectives.



Director Katy Maudlin

Do you like to insert challenges for the production team into your script? Leave things open to interpretation by a director? Or try to be specific with stage directions?

A bit of both. I don't go out of my way to insert challenges, but I also don't shy away from a difficult-to-realise moment or image. I've never written anything that hasn't been staged in some way – but maybe that speaks more to theatre's capacity to invent and transform, as well as my collaborators' ability to make difficult things happen in creative ways. There are not many stage directions in *SLAP. BANG. KISS*. It's the most open text I've written – there are lots of locations, dozens of characters. It's a bit of an offer, I suppose, or a challenge, to a creative team, to create a space that can be transformed over and over. The world needs to be a big city, a suburban high school, a country town, a train, a street, a thousands-strong march, a cupboard; the actors need to be teenagers, parents, government officials, senior citizens. In that way, writing it felt like a bit of an experiment – how can I can carry my audience through this story cleanly without compromising the vision I had for the way I wanted the story to be told?

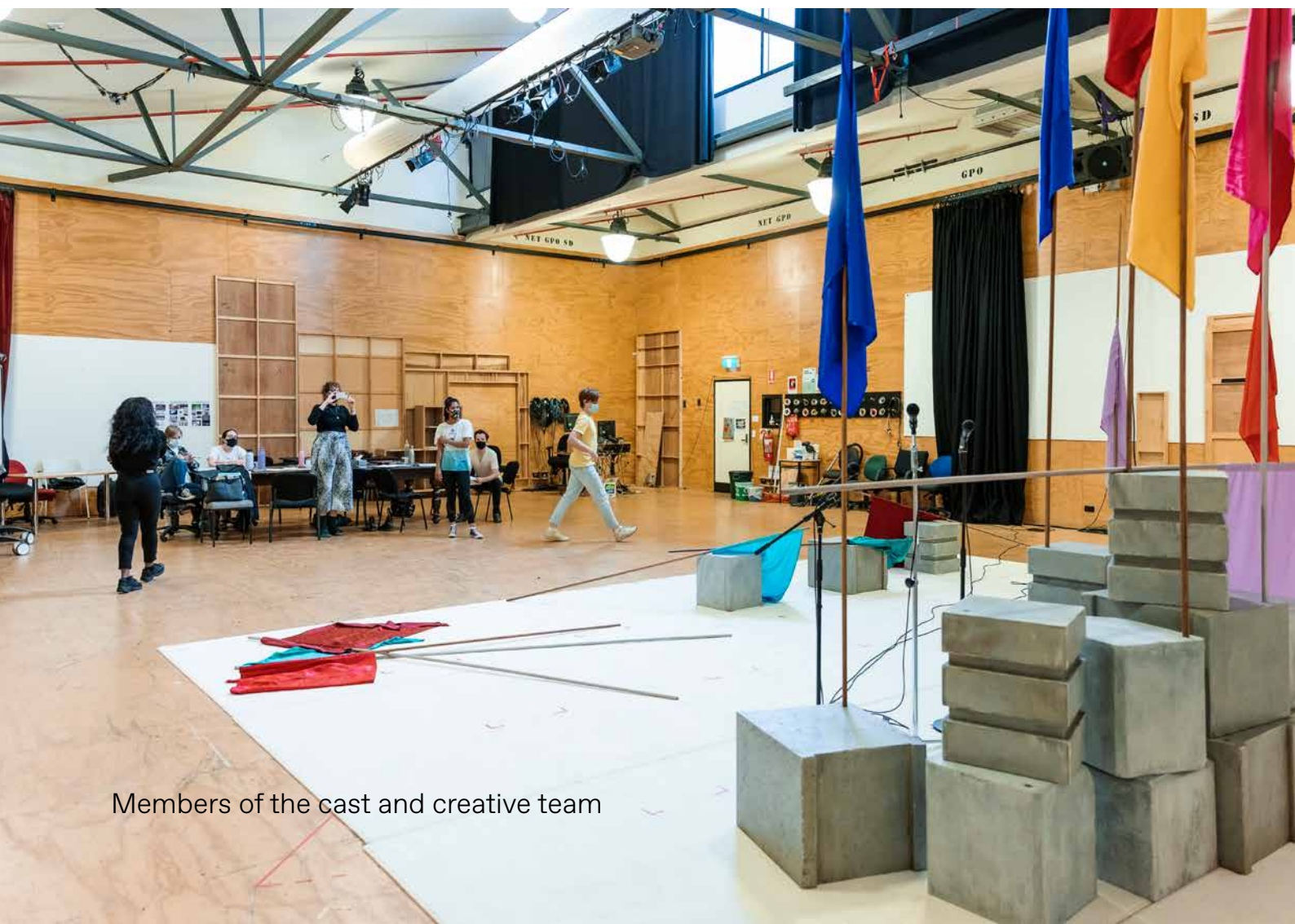
Hope is a key theme in a lot of your work, particularly this play. How does *SLAP. BANG. KISS*. speak to our rapidly changing world?

There's lots to be scared about in the world. That might always have been the case, but right now this time on Earth feels particularly overwhelming. It's easy to feel small in a big world, and easy especially for young people to feel small, to feel ignored, to feel like they're inheriting a mess of broken systems and that they don't have a say in how to fix them. Hope is something you have to work at, I think, and I'm working at it myself. That's partly why I write for young people,

I reckon – it pushes me to work against worry and fear and live with hope, to offer pathways to new thinking, to create a space where people can imagine themselves anew. I suppose I could have written a play about how horrible the world can be, how aggressive regimes squash people, how poor policy and weak governments fail their citizens, how fear can divide us – but I wanted this play to be an invitation to young people stepping into the world, an opportunity to see folks like them leading change, demanding their voices be heard. ■



Explore more content, including interviews with the cast and creatives, at mtc.com.au



Members of the cast and creative team

Conor Leach



Cast & creative team



SARAH FITZGERALD — SOFIA/AS CAST

Sarah Fitzgerald is an Anglo-Indian actor born and raised in Naarm (Melbourne). After graduating from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2018, they have performed in *The Great Australian Play* (Montague's Basement); *Analog* (Three Fates Theatre) and *Oh No! Satan Stole My Pineal Gland!* (Melbourne Fringe Festival). They recently worked on *The Quest* (Productions on Rye) as an orc. In 2019, the cast of *Oh No! Satan Stole My Pineal Gland!* won Best Emerging Ensemble Award at the Melbourne Fringe Festival and *The Great Australian Play* was nominated for Best Production at the 2021 Green Room Awards.



CONOR LEACH — DARBY/AS CAST

Since graduating from VCA, Conor has worked extensively across theatre, film and television. He's thrilled to be making his Melbourne Theatre Company debut with *SLAP. BANG. KISS*. Conor's stage credits include *Hell's Canyon* (La Mama Theatre & The Old 505 Theatre); *Disparate Scenes for Millennial Dreams* (Periscope Productions); *AntigoneX* (Theatre Works & Zeb Fontaine Theatre); and *The Coal Story* (The Butterfly Club). Conor is best known for playing the lead in AACTA-nominated feature film *Sequin in a Blue Room*. He has appeared on television in *New Gold Mountain* and *Preacher*, and in short films *Intimate Partner* and *Outsider*. Conor has also worked as a physical theatre performer in *Dancing with Death* (Pichet Klunchun Dance Company & Asia TOPA) and *_CONTROL* (Alchemiststudio). He has created and developed works for Melbourne Fringe Festival and Australian Theatre for Young People. Conor is a proud Equity member.



TSUNGIRAI WACHENUKA — IMMI/AS CAST

Tsungirai Wachenuka is a Zimbabwean performer who grew up in England before relocating to Australia in 2010. Her professional debut was in Stage Art's *The Colour Purple* in 2016, playing the role of Olivia/Ensemble.

Early in 2017 she played the lead role of Sosina in the creative development of the theatre production *The Abyssinian Contortionist*, produced by Performing Lines and directed by Kate Champion. The last few years Tsungirai toured internationally with *LifeLikeTouring In Nickelodeon's Paw Patrol Live* and recently starred in Podcast of the Year *Private Affairs* written and produced by Christine Mwaturura. Tsungirai is thrilled to be working with Melbourne Theatre Company and this brilliant cast.



DAN GIOVANNONI — PLAYWRIGHT

Dan Giovannoni's plays for families, young people and adults have been produced across Australia in theatres, school halls, parks, tents and even a barn outside of Hobart. Plays include *The Great Un-Wondering of Wilbur Whittaker* (2022), *HOUSE* (2021), *Mad as a Cute Snake* (2019), *Air Race* (2018), *Bambert's Book of Lost Stories* (2016), *Jurassica* (2015), *Cut Snake* (2011) and two adaptations of Christos Tsiolkas's writing, *Merciless Gods* (2018) and *Loaded* (2020). He has won three Green Room Association awards – for *Loaded*, *Merciless Gods* and *Jurassica* – and *Bambert's Book of Lost Stories* won a Helpmann award for Best Presentation for Children, and was nominated for Best New Australian Work. He was an inaugural writer-in-residence at Melbourne Theatre Company as part of the NEXT STAGE Writers' Program, where he was commissioned to write *The Body* and *SLAP. BANG. KISS*. A graduate of NIDA, Dan lives on Wurundjeri country in Melbourne with his husband, daughter and two dogs.

Tsungirai Wachenuka





KATY MAUDLIN — DIRECTOR

Katy Maudlin is an award-winning director focused on new writing and feminist dramaturgies. She has worked extensively across Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Notable directing credits include *Cybec Electric* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Right Now* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *AntigoneX* (Midsumma Festival); *The Last Ten Minutes of History* (Victorian College of the Arts); *Giant Teeth* (Auckland Theatre Company). Assisting credits include *Lungs* (MTC); *For the Ones Who Walk Away* (St Martins Youth Arts); *Merciless Gods* (Little Ones); *The Moors* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *Otello* (Croatian National Theatre); *Giulio Cesare* (Croatian National Theatre). She was the dramaturg for *Apokalypsis* (Next Wave Festival), which won numerous Green Room Awards, including Best Production. Katy undertook a secondment with Katie Mitchell on *Lucia Di Lammermoor* (The Royal Opera, Covent Garden). She has been the recipient of the Veronica Kelly Award (2021), the Melbourne Global Scholars Award (2016) and the Orloff Family Trust Scholarship (2015).



KATE DAVIS — SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

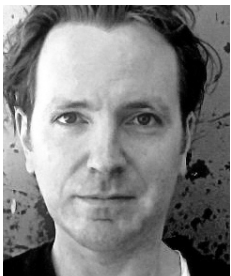
Kate Davis is a multi-disciplinary artist working as a director, set designer, costume designer, visual artist and florist. She is the co-artistic director and co-CEO of the feminist, experimental theatre company THE RABBLE. Melbourne Theatre Company credits include *Lungs*, *What Rhymes with Cars and Girls* and *The Effect*. Kate is an award-winning freelance set and costume designer, who has worked for many companies across the country including: Chunky Move, Back to Back Theatre, Joel Bray, Fraught Outfit, Belvoir, Carriageworks, Dance House, Griffin Theatre Company, La Mama Theatre, Performance Space, Terrapin Puppet Theatre, Shopfront Theatre, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company and many more. For THE RABBLE, Kate has created and designed 20 works since the company was formed in 2006. Kate has taught and mentored for VCA, Arts House, HATCH arts program, Australia Council JUMP Mentorship program, Monash University, Melbourne Fringe Festival, Melbourne Festival Directors Lab and Dublin Fringe Festival.



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 *Admissions*, *Torch the Place* and *The Violent Outburst That Drew Me To You* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Julius Caesar* (Sydney Theatre Company); *My Brilliant Career* and *Every Brilliant Thing* (Belvoir); *They Divided the Sky* (Belvoir 25A); *Because the Night*, *Australian Realness*, *Trustees* and *Turbine* (Malthouse Theatre); *System_Error* and *Diaspora* (Chamber Made); *Next Move 11* (Chunky Move); *Leviathan* (Circa); *Hydra*, *Moral Panic*, *Contest*, *Niche*, *Conviction* and *Dream Home* (Darebin Arts' Speakeasy); *Looking Glass* and *Triumph* (fortyfivedownstairs); *Desert 6.29pm*, *Jurassica* and *Foxfinder* (Red Stitch); *MKA Double Feature* (MTC Neon); *Ground Control*, *Camel* and *Hello There We've Been Waiting for You* (Next Wave Festival). Amelia's work has been recognised with four Green Room Awards. Amelia is an Australia Council ArtStart and JUMP Mentorship recipient. She was part of Melbourne Theatre Company's inaugural Women in Theatre Program.



IAN MOORHEAD

— COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Ian Moorhead is a Melbourne-based artist specialising in music composition and sound design. He has performed around Australia and internationally including New York, London, Edinburgh, Dublin, Wellington, Calgary and Vancouver. He has previously worked with Melbourne Theatre Company on *The Violent Outburst That Drew Me To You* and *Happy Ending*. Other theatre credits include *HELLO, WORLD!*, *Caravan*, *Turbine* (Malthouse Theatre); *The Give and Take*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *A Number* (State Theatre Company South Australia); *Hir*, *Desert 6:29pm*, *The Realistic Joneses*, *Dead Centre/Sea Wall*, *Eurydice* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *Archimedes War* (Northcote Town Hall); *Fathom* (Ten Days on the Island); *Broken* (Lab Kelpie); *Amphibian* (Windmill Theatre); *Bambert's Book of Lost Stories* (Barking Gecko); *This is Eden* (fortyfivedownstairs); *Taxi*, *Waking Up Dead* (Susie Dee and Associates). He has been nominated for two Greenroom Awards for Composition and Sound Design for *Jurassica* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre) and *Looking Glass* (New Working Group).

A young woman with long dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt with a graphic and dark pants, stands in the lower center of the frame. She is holding several flagpoles. To her left, a flag is partially visible, hanging from one of the poles. The background is a solid, bright yellow. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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