

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY  
EDUCATION PACK

AN MTC NEXT STAGE ORIGINAL

# Laurinda

A NEW PLAY BY

Diana Nguyen

WITH Petra Kalive

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY Alice Pung

DIRECTED BY Petra Kalive

6 Aug—10 Sep 2022  
Southbank Theatre, The Sumner

MTC MELBOURNE  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

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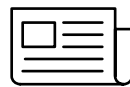
Throughout these notes, look out for these icons for opportunities to learn more:



**Activity**



**Discussion**



**Reading**



**Video**

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Notes prepared by Nick Tranter Design by Helena Turinski Production photography Jeff Busby Rehearsal photography by Sarah Walker  
Marketing campaign photography by Brett Walker Costume photography by Jacinta Keefe and Joshua Vickery-Stewart

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.

# Melbourne Theatre Company



Petra Kalive, Chi Nguyen, Fiona Choi, Ngoc Phan, Xanthe Beesley, Jenny Zhou and Roy Phung in rehearsal

MTC is Melbourne’s home of live storytelling, producing an annual mainstage season of plays, and a suite of signature programs including the NEXT STAGE Writers’ Program, MTC Education, First Peoples Young Artists Program, Cybec Electric play reading festival, and more artist access programs.

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 MISSION

To create exceptional theatre, relevant to our times, for the broadest possible audience.

## OUR VISION

To be the leading theatre company in Australia, reflecting the changing world around us and enriching lives in the way only great theatre can.



### MTC HQ Virtual Tour

Explore MTC’s production headquarters in our virtual tour. Walk the halls of MTC HQ in this virtual tour and explore the spaces where plays are rehearsed, sets are built, costumes are sewn, and wigs are created one strand of hair at a time.

# Cast and creative team

## CAST

Katie/Mrs Leslie/As cast Fiona Choi  
Linh/Brodie Gemma Chua-Tran  
Trisha/Mrs Grey/Mrs White/As cast Georgina Naidu  
Mum/Amber/Charlotte/As cast Chi Nguyen  
Lucy/Lucy-38 Ngoc Phan  
Dad/Dr Vanderwerp/As cast Roy Phung  
Tully/Chelsea/Mrs Newberry/As cast Jenny Zhou

## CREATIVE TEAM

Director Petra Kalive  
Set Design and AV Concept & Design Eugyeene Teh  
Costume Designer Karine Larché  
Lighting Designer Rachel Lee  
Composer & Sound Designer Marco Cher-Gibard  
AV Designer Justin Gardam  
Movement Director Xanthe Beesley  
Assistant Director & AV Composition Roshelle Fong  
Cultural Consultant Alice Qin  
Voice & Dialect Coach Mark Wong  
Dance Consultancy Vietcharm Traditional Dance Group  
Rehearsal Stage Manager Christine Bennett  
Show Stage Manager Brittany Coombs  
Assistant Stage Manager 1 Whitney McNamara  
Assistant Stage Manager 2 Lucie Sutherland  
Vietnamese dialogue by Chi Nguyen

## ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

This production contains coarse language, references to bullying, racial violence and mature themes. For detailed information about the production's content visit our production content guide.

## DURATION

Approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes with no interval.



### Read the programme

Download the programme for this production to read about the cast and creative team, and see more photos from the rehearsal room.

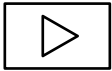


Chi Nguyen, Ngoc Phan, Roy Phung, Gemma Chua-Tran and Jenny Zhou

# About the play

Laurinda tells the story of Lucy Lam, a 38-year-old woman who still has a lot to learn from her 15-year-old self when she is thrust back to the year she won a scholarship to a prestigious private school. The smart and well-liked student is not prepared for the new world she's suddenly propelled into. It's a world of wealth and opportunity, overseen by The Cabinet – a trio of girls who wield power over their classmates, and even their teachers. But when The Cabinet turn their attention to Lucy she has to make a choice: fit in and succeed, or stay true to herself. Either way, there's a cost

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## Watch the trailer

Watch the video trailer for this production and make predictions about how the story described above will play out on stage. Describe the various characters you can identify. What clues do you get from the video about the themes in the show? What theatre style are you expecting this show to be performed in? Make a list of questions you have about the play.



Ngoc Phan, Chi Nguyen, Fiona Choi, Gemma Chua-Tran and Jenny Zhou

# Alice Pung's novel



Alice Pung

After writing her incredibly successful and celebrated memoirs *Unpolished Gem* and *Her Father's Daughter*, Alice Pung set her sights on writing her first novel in 2014.

The result was *Laurinda* – a coming-of-age story about 15-year-old Lucy Lam's struggle for identity and belonging as she lands a scholarship to the prestigious and exclusive girls' school called Laurinda. It is also a truthful and compelling exploration of family, culture and class.

Pung was partly inspired to explore these topics in fiction because of her own high school experiences. 'I changed high schools five times during my teenage years, and as an author have visited hundreds of high schools in Australia and all over the world,' she says. 'From firsthand experience I know the difference that going to, say, a state school in the Western suburbs (of Melbourne, Sydney or Adelaide) and a private school in a leafier suburb can make to a child's experience of education, the friendships they make, their outlook on the world, their exposure to adult hardships and their relationship to work. So much is at stake when we put up with such inequalities for Australian children.'

Fortunately, the private school Pung attended wasn't horrible like the fictional Laurinda of her novel, but she also remembers the real sense of alienation she felt. She couldn't relate to the other students, for instance, who spent more than \$400 on their formal dresses. 'Dresses that my friends' parents might have sewn for below minimum wages in their home garages. So this is the world of Lucy Lam in *Laurinda*,' she explains.

What Pung was also interested to examine in the novel was the idea of a powerful institution against an individual. 'I still find it a bit baffling how some private schools are concerned about their reputations to a degree you might not find in state schools ... they are also places where early "networking" goes on. So Laurinda is a satire about toxic private school culture.' Though she is clear to state she knows this isn't the case for all private schools. 'But I am never surprised when teachers from private schools come up and secretly tell me that *Laurinda* describes their culture,' she adds.

Throughout the novel, the toxic environment of Laurinda becomes overwhelming for Lucy. At first excited and hopeful for her world to open beyond the suburb of Stanley where she grew up, dealing with the politics of popularity and power at Laurinda – personified by a trio of girls called The Cabinet who control the student body and some of the teachers – starts to take its toll.

'Lucy is not only a different culture, but a different class to the majority of her new classmates,' Pung explains. 'So her mannerisms, speech and even movements are different; and she is a bit chameleon-like in her ability to try and adapt to the new environment.' But these efforts cause her increasing unhappiness. 'At times she's excruciatingly ashamed of her family, not for their poverty but the small and subconscious ways this manifests (eating with their mouths open, for instance) and ashamed of herself for becoming like haughty Pip in *Great Expectations*,' Pung says.

At the end of the novel, Lucy comes to the understanding that 'having integrity means piecing together all the separate parts of yourself and your life.' Pung hopes this resonates with audiences of all ages, even those who have long left high school behind. 'Kurt Vonnegut says "life is nothing but high school" – you see this play out in workplaces, politics and anywhere where groups of adults are forced to work and be together.'

Source: Farrell, P. (2022) *Life is nothing but high school* on mtc.com.au.



## Read the novel

Read the source material for this play ahead of seeing the production on stage. Although the characters are mostly the same, there are differences in the way the story is told. As you read, think about how you would adapt the novel for the stage. What's different about telling a story with theatre compared to in a book?



## Context



Diana Nguyen



Petra Kalive

This play, written by Diana Nguyen with Petra Kalive, is an adaptation of Alice Pung’s novel *Laurinda*. Nguyen and Kalive developed the play in 2020, initially over Zoom, with the support of many Asian–Australian actors and creatives. Nguyen and Kalive describe Pung’s novel as ‘an honest, uncomfortable and exposing investigation of the negotiation necessary to walk between cultures.’

### XENOPHOBIA IN AUSTRALIA

Nguyen and Kalive decided to set *Laurinda* deliberately in 1997 and 2021 – two periods they describe as being characterised by ‘intense and visible Asian-hate in Australia’.

Upon forming the One Nation Party in 1997, Pauline Hanson called for the halting of migration to Australia because she feared that Australia was being ‘swamped by Asians’. Over time, Hanson and her party contributed to the normalisation of xenophobia in Australia. In 2020, with COVID-19 first identified in Wuhan, China, anti-Asian hate crime soared in many parts of the world.

### VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

The playwrights also deliberately centralised the Lam’s family home of Vietnamese refugees. ‘We both have lived experience of growing-up as second generation Australians,’ say Nguyen and Kalive, ‘and felt it was important to articulate the specific pressures on a young Vietnamese–Australian woman.’ As the Vietnam War was ending in 1975, it became clear that North Vietnamese forces would overrun South Vietnam. Just before Saigon fell, United States and other foreign forces evacuated thousands of people seeking to escape South Vietnam. A second wave of refugees emerged as the communist government began to dismantle the old regime.

## DRAMATIC FORM

In adapting *Laurinda* for the stage, Kalive and Nguyen took inspiration from the coming-of-age classic *Freaky Friday* and chose a dramatic form where adult Lucy revisits her teenage years at Laurinda. ‘We made the character of Lucy begin the play as a woman in her late 30s, living today, reliving her 15-year-old self through the lens of her adulthood ... Lucy is transformed into her own body, 20 years younger. This form allows us to stay true to the comedy and light touch of Alice Pung’s novel, but layers in a dramatic tension that gives the play momentum.’

## LANGUAGE

Nguyen was also thrilled at the prospect of bringing a Vietnamese play to a mainstage. ‘For more than 17 years of my career, my aim has been to welcome my people to come and see theatre that looks and sounds like them. So I was very excited about the prospect of having Vietnamese language on stage.’

In Pung’s novel, however, Lucy Lam is from two cultural backgrounds. ‘She’s Teochew Vietnamese,’ Nguyen explains. And Lucy’s mum in the novel speaks Teochew, a Chinese dialect. The Teochew people, also known as the Chaozhou people, are native to the Chaoshan region, which is in Guangdong, a coastal province in southeast China. Today, however, vast contingencies of Teochew people live outside China throughout Southeast Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia, and around the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US.

‘Teochew is part of the Chinese language,’ Nguyen says. ‘But we received approval from Alice to make this more Vietnamese centric.’ So with Pung’s blessing, in this version of *Laurinda* Lucy and her family speak Vietnamese, the language Nguyen’s own mother speaks.

Sources: Kalive, P. & Nguyen, D. (2022) *A coming of age for every age* on mtc.com.au; National Museum of Australia (2022) *Vietnamese refugees boat arrival* on nma.gov.au; Farrell, P. (2022) *Layered stories* on mtc.com.au



### Context connections

Choose one of the areas above and research it in more detail. Find images of the people, places or events described and create a mood board. After you’ve seen the production, discuss connections between the play and the information above. What themes can you identify in the play?



# Characters



## LUCY AND LINH

In the present day, adult Lucy is a teacher. Linh is the embodied spirit of 15-year-old Lucy who guides her through her memories as a schoolgirl in the 1990s. Only Lucy can see or hear Linh.



## THE CABINET

Three students at Laurinda rule the school. Ambitious and competitive Brodie is the ringleader. Amber wants to be seen, and Chelsea is trying to keep it cool but just wants to scream.



## TRISHA AND KATIE

Friendlier students at Laurinda include the honest-to-a-fault Katie who befriends Lucy and talks a mile a minute. Trisha is a genius pianist who is bullied by The Cabinet.

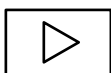


## MUM AND DAD

Lucy's family are Vietnamese refugees who live in Stanley, a fictional suburb in Melbourne. Mum doesn't feel confident speaking English. Dad wants success for his daughter.

## OTHER CHARACTERS

Tully is Lucy's friend from her old school, Christ Our Saviour. Mrs Grey is the principal of Laurinda, Dr Vanderwerp teaches History, and Mrs Leslie is the Literacy Coordinator (she's also Amber's mum). We also meet Mrs White (Chelsea's mum) and Mrs Newberry (Brodie's mum) at Amber's birthday party. In the present day, Charlotte is a student of Lucy's



### Meet the characters

Seven actors transform into 17 characters to bring *Laurinda* to life on stage. Discover who's playing who from the people that know them best – the talented cast.



### Character analysis

After you've seen the play:

- Describe how social values were revealed in the play through one or more characters.
- Choose one character and describe how the actor embodied them as an actor using voice, movement, facial expression and gesture.
- Draw a 'family tree' that identifies Lucy's relationship to each character.



Ngoc Phan and Gemma Chua-Tran

# Acting

Learn more about the characters in *Laurinda* in these Q&As with the cast.



Ngoc Phan

## NGOC PHAN (LUCY/LUCY-38)

### What is *Laurinda* about in your own words?

This story is about a woman named Lucy Lam who is in her 30s and has lost sight of her true self. She is taken back in time to when she was 15 years old, in order to unlock and embrace the parts of her that she'd forgotten all those years ago.

When Lucy was 15 years old, she went through a cultural, educational and class change that shook her foundations as a young woman, but despite all the challenges, she found her way through and discovered who she truly was. But as time went by, that sense of self slowly eroded because of cultural and societal pressures, power and oppression, and this story is her quest to get her essence back.

### Tell us about your central character in a nutshell. What drives them?

The role I play in *Laurinda* is Lucy Lam, at age 15 and now at 38. So many things drive Lucy, but one that is quite powerful is finding her voice in order to speak up and stand up for what is truly good, in a world that tries to silence her.

I read an interview with Alice Pung and she said, 'When I write profile pieces or investigative pieces, I like to find people who would otherwise not have a voice or who possess an unassuming humility.' I really feel that is the case for Lucy Lam.

### How do design elements like set and costume impact your performance? What helps and how?

Design and costume have a huge impact on my performance. I love seeing and experiencing the work of these creatives. As an actor, I tell stories through speaking words and movement, but the designers are able to tell and/or enhance the same story through visual and aural details. It evokes so much imagination that sometimes words alone might not achieve.

### What's your favourite line in the play?

I have two: 'Some things are just good, too good to be judged,' and 'Yeah. I am. Ready. Let's do this.'

### What resonates most with you in the play?

#### Or what's most exciting about working on *Laurinda*?

I recognise a lot of myself in both young and adult Lucy. I know what it feels like to have to shape shift in order to survive and fit in, and how that can weigh on you as you get older. I also know what it feels like to find that inner strength that will not be compromised.

This play shines a light on the young people (and older) who live in two cultures and highlights how that may affect your class and social standing. Lucy is in a free country but sometimes doesn't feel free within herself. It can be a very conflicting place and, in some ways, there is a pressure to choose one way of being over the other. She is the grey within the grey. What is so exciting about working on this play is that we get to look at this under the microscope and give voice to it.

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### Character description

Write your own description of Lucy that explains her hopes and dreams, her mannerisms, fears, likes and dislikes. Base your description on this Q&A and your research into Alice Pung's novel and this play.



Ngoc Phan



Gemma Trua-Chan

## GEMMA CHUA-TRAN (LINH/BRODIE)

Tell us about your central character in a nutshell. What drives them?

My primary character in *Laurinda* is Linh, the embodied spirit of 15-year-old Lucy; untainted, free and headstrong. I also play Brodie, Lucy's arch nemesis, who is manipulative, sickly sweet and representative of the blatant classism and racism present in Australian private schools. Linh's primary goal in the play is to guide Lucy through her experiences as a 15 year old, through the lens of 38-year-old Lucy. Stripping away naivety and innocence of her adolescent mindset; Lucy is now able to view her experiences as they were; confronting and uncomfortable. Micro-aggressions are now magnified into something that can be processed, with ungovernable and cheeky Linh by her side.

What is *Laurinda* about in your own words?

*Laurinda* is a play highlighting the struggles of assimilation for people of colour within Australia, commenting on classism and racism in a Western context. It holds a mirror to society, asking audience members to reflect on their personal biases and lived experiences. This coming-of-age story portrays a universal Asian Australian experience; trying to fit in to a culture of adversity. *Laurinda* is also a very personal story for me, as I've now had the time to reflect upon my own lived experiences and channel those mixed emotions into the characters I portray.

How do design elements like set and costume impact your performance? What helps and how?

Costume is a large factor in *Laurinda*. My characters, Linh and Brodie, present themselves in starkly different ways. Linh, with her theatre blacks and bright yellow bomber jacket, reminds myself and the audience that although she still moves and grows throughout the story, she's also a part of the backdrop of Lucy's memory bank; undulating throughout the set and controlling the context of Lucy's journey. Brodie, on the other hand, wears a starched blue blazer and a knee length skirt. The uniformity of all the students at *Laurinda* makes it easy for Brodie to camouflage her hostility. Performing in a school uniform also aids me in playing up the high school pettiness Brodie has to offer.

What's your favourite line in the play and why?

Probably the 'f\*\*k youse' lines, it feels so powerful when I'm in the performance. And almost therapeutic, something I'd never get to say in my day-to-day life.

What resonates most with you in the play? Or what's most exciting about working on *Laurinda*?

*Laurinda* has given me the chance to view and experience the systems within Melbourne Theatre Company. It's been a largely emotional effort to consider the ways in which I am marginalised, especially within the realm of performing arts. But to have other POC creatives surrounding me to offer their support and guidance, it's felt like such a safe space to voice uncomfortable feelings and concerns. I truly hope that *Laurinda* will be a tool to instill change, showcasing Asian Australian immigrant stories in an accessible manner.

Jenny Zhou, Chi Nguyen and Gemma Chua-Tran





Fiona Choi

## FIONA CHOI (KATIE/MRS LESLIE/AS CAST)

Tell us about your central character in a nutshell. What drives them?

Katie is Lucy's first friend at Laurinda, and has the energy of an enthusiastic, playful, loyal puppy. She talks a mile-a-minute and loves history and the band Silverchair. She is driven by a fierce desire to connect, to belong and find her tribe.

How do design elements like set and costume impact your performance?  
What helps and how?

Costume always informs the physicality of a character. Putting on a school blazer and T-bar shoes immediately takes me back to my own private school days. My body remembers the way the uniform constricted my movements and forced certain postures and body shapes.

The *Laurinda* set is all about how much space you have in each scene: some scenes are intimately squashed into a tiny amount of playing space to represent feeling trapped or stuck, other scenes are played out in a cavernous vacuum to represent vast emptiness or feeling small.

What's your favourite line in the play and why?

My favourite line is when Linh articulates why she has cast herself in the role of Brodie: 'An Asian playing a role other than Asian'. Because at this stage of my stage career, having been fortunate enough to play many amazing Asian characters, this is my dream of the next step in true representation and inclusion: to be able to play significant roles within the theatrical canon as 'neutral', without any need for the fact that my face is Asian to even be a factor.

What resonates most with you in the play?

Lucy's journey through *Laurinda* feels so personal to me. In many ways it parallels my own story of being caught between two cultures (immigrant Chinese and Aussie) AND two social classes (working class and being awarded a scholarship to Wesley College), and never quite fitting into any of the boxes. It also intimately reflects the crisis of identity I've been navigating recently as an Asian-Australian actress still feeling invisible and wondering what more I could have done to pave the way for those coming after me.



**What's most exciting about working on *Laurinda*?**

What's exciting for me is the fact that our cast, comprised entirely of second-generation Asian-Aussies, gets to embody the full spectrum of characters in the world of *Laurinda*, regardless of race, age and social standing. I love getting into the skin of a pure and passionate 15 year-old AND a privileged, patronising society matron in the same story.



**Character values**

Discuss the ways in which Mrs Leslie and Katie reflect or reveal human experiences and social values in contemporary Australia.





### GEORGINA NAIDU (TRISHA/MRS GREY/MRS WHITE/AS CAST)

Tell us about your central character in a nutshell. What drives them?

Trisha is a virtuosic musician who is focused on being 'THE BEST'. She is too scared of the school bullies to speak up but finds strength through Lucy's braveness.

How do design elements like set and costume impact your performance? What helps and how?

These elements really place my characters in time and space. As I fly from one character to another, all the design elements support where I am in the story, physically and emotionally. The costumes give me so much of my characters and really help in building the differences between the three different characters I play.

What is *Laurinda* about in your own words?

For me, *Laurinda* is about how we, as people of colour, constantly deal with and navigate oppression, and the barriers that colonialism, privilege and unconscious bias create. It's about finding strength and truth, while carrying the burden of being 'othered'. How do we be our best and forage a better future for all?

What's most exciting about working on *Laurinda*?

Working with an all-Asian cast and so many fantastic people. It's an incredible team!



Georgina Naidu



(Left) Gemma Chua-Tran, Georgina Naidu, Jenny Zhou and Chi Nguyen; (right) Ngoc Phan and Georgina Naidu



Chi Nguyen

### CHI NGUYEN (MUM/AMBER/CHARLOTTE/AS CAST)

Tell us about your central character in a nutshell. What drives them?

I based the character Mum on the Vietnamese mums and aunties around me. Lucy’s mum never forces her to be a doctor or a lawyer like stereotypical portrayals of Asian parents we often see – all she wants is for her daughter to be a good person. Mum worries that being in Laurinda might put a lot of cultural and hierarchal pressure on Lucy, therefore she disagrees with Dad’s ideology of Lucy needing to fit in with the rich kids and get out of Stanley from the start. And as Lucy’s scholarship experience demands more labour from Mum (sewing skirts and catering rice paper rolls for parties, paying for uniforms and extracurricular activities), she expects her daughter to help more around the house. Yet Lucy is consumed with studies and the social aspects of Laurinda, making her unable to assist Mum like before and growing distant. It’s a vicious cycle of miscommunication and inability to express love to one another that is always present for these two characters. That said, Mum deeply understands Lucy’s nature and

is extremely observant of her daughter. Mum knows when her daughter is struggling, and when Lucy needs it most. Mum always knows the right thing to say to comfort her.

What’s your favourite line in the play and why?

As the character Mum, I enjoy saying ‘we had to then, but you don’t have to now’ to Lucy every time. The line is so simple yet able to encapsulate the sacrifice and generational difference that exist in their mother–daughter relationship. For all her life, Lucy’s mum has been vigilant and silent, and she teaches her daughter that way of living as well. But in the end, she still cops racist remarks and hate crimes when living in Australia, being hit and spat on; she asks herself: what’s the point of putting her head down for all these years? This line to her daughter is Mum’s slamming on the accelerator and claiming her power for the first time. Mum is telling Lucy not to make the same mistake; to be bold and proud, to take up her space, to do what her heart desires, and to not accommodate for others. Mum has given up a lot in her life, so that Lucy does not have to now, which is an incredibly moving notion and acts as a turning point in the play for our hero.

What is *Laurinda* about in your own words?

*Laurinda* is a memory play about Lucy Lam, a 38-year-old Vietnamese–Australian teacher being transported back in time to re-experience her 15-year-old life, navigating a whirlwind of change when accepted into the prestigious private school Laurinda as the ‘scholarship girl’. Predominantly set in 1997, the audience will witness the casual racism, class discrimination and social norms that teenage Lucy had to experience and overcome. Through the magic of theatre, adult Lucy will learn important



Ngoc Phan and Chi Nguyen



lessons from her younger self that ultimately inspires her actions in the modern day, giving her the strength and fire she's been searching for. With this framework design, we aim to ignite a sense of change and action following presentations of discriminatory issues that Asian–Australians have to face, and in turn encourage conversations to start within the audience after experiencing the work.

**How do design elements like set and costume impact your performance? What helps and how?**

The set design is versatile, transformative and acts as a blank canvas for endless opportunities. The columns can come up and down to form vignettes of Lucy's memories, and the carpeted flooring creates a warm and cosy sensation, alluding to Lucy's internal world that the audience is looking into. The AV design also plays a massive role in assisting with the time travelling nature of the work, and at times performs the voices that live inside Lucy's mind.

As an actor playing multiple roles, the costumes have helped me immensely as a gateway to enter these different characters quickly between scenes, like a cheat-sheet in a way. The costumes when put on the body becomes an immediate and tactile reminder of the characters' age, class, occupation and how they view themselves.

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**Compare and contrast**

Look at the costume designs for Mum and Amber and identify how they communicate two very different characters. How did the actor embody these characters using voice, movement, facial expression and gesture?

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**What's most exciting about working on *Laurinda*?**

Being able to work amongst a full Asian–Australian cast and collaborate with a predominantly Asian–Australian creative team has been the most exciting thing about working on *Laurinda* for me. Especially when the work investigates such complex and nuanced subject matters, working with people who share and understand my experiences has made the rehearsal room such a safe space for me to speak my mind and to also learn and try new things. And as a Vietnamese artist who has been working in Australia for years, *Laurinda* is one of the few productions I've been a part of that tell Vietnamese stories and incorporate Vietnamese music, language and dance in the blueprint of the work. I'm excited to take part in sharing Vietnamese culture with Australian audiences artistically through *Laurinda*.

**How do you approach a bi-lingual script in rehearsal?**

When I was asked to write the Vietnamese dialogue for this play, I approached the task through a character-work lens instead of it being a word-by-word translation task (for example: different generations in the family would use different vocabularies, and Lucy would be less fluent in Vietnamese than her parents). And as the family's origin is from Southern Vietnam, I made sure to imbed slangs and intonations from that dialect into the script as well. Keeping in mind that the production is not using subtitles on stage, and that non-Vietnamese speakers may not fully understand those dialogues when they watch the play, I place my focus on storytelling and intention every time I work on the Vietnamese texts in rehearsal. From there, I discover and play with non-verbal indicators that can complement and colour what is being said, and trust that as long as I am clear about what my character is trying to action in every scene, audiences can understand my character regardless of what languages they speak. Above all, as Australian theatres predominantly put on English-speaking productions, this is a great opportunity for audiences from Vietnamese communities to hear their stories and language spoken authentically on a mainstage.



Chi Nguyen, Gemma Chua-Tran and Jenny Zhou



Roy Phung

### ROY PHUNG (DAD/DR VANDERWERP/AS CAST)

Tell us about your characters in a nutshell. What drives them?

Dad (Warwick) is a proud, hardworking Vietnamese dad that wants the best for his family. He wants his daughter Lucy to have a bright future and opportunities he never had in Vietnam.

Dr Vanderwerp is a passionate history professor who loves inspiring young minds, who has a lot of challenges inspiring his current class at Laurinda. He has to face family issues and work politics but finds that his teaching methods do reach and inspire a few in his class.

What’s most exciting about working on *Laurinda*?

A play with an all-Asian cast and telling a Vietnamese Australian story means a lot to me as an actor. Three years ago I realised when playing Jeffrey Lu in *Jasper Jones* that the biggest role for a male Vietnamese actor in Australian professional theatre was of a 14-year-old boy. I get to play a Vietnamese adult this time, which means there is progress. Also being able to tell a beautiful heart-aching story of what it was like with my lived experience shown on stage means a lot to me.

How do design elements like set and costume impact your performance? What helps and how?

Design style and themes can help the actor bring to life colour to a directors paint palette as they try to weave us into the moving theatre picture they envision. Working with a set and/or costume can really help the actor find their characters in how they walk and gesture or imagine to be. All clothing is an expression and how you set up your room is an art in itself. From the poster or art you put up on your walls to the clothes you put on to show who you are. Being in a curated designed space really helps inform your decisions and the clothes you wear can change how your create and perform as your characters with the actor’s imagination.

How do you approach a bi-lingual script in rehearsal?

Vietnamese was my first language but from when I was seven years old until now I turned it into a foreign language in many ways. So trying to learn and relearn Vietnamese as an actor has been terrifying. But with the help from Chi and friends and family I’ve been able to relearn and prepare for this role.



### Actor–audience relationship

Think about the scenes in Dr Vanderwerp’s classroom. How did you feel toward the teacher? How do the characters, setting and events featured in these scenes shape your response?



Ngoc Phan and Roy Phung



Jenny Zhou

## JENNY ZHOU (TULLY/CHELSEA/MRS NEWBERRY/AS CAST)

Tell us about your central character in a nutshell. What drives them?

Chelsea is a member of The Cabinet, assumedly born into wealth and, with that, a higher social standing. Alongside Amber and Cabinet leader Brodie, Chelsea abuses their status through pranking teachers, complaining about marks and bullying fellow students. In her eyes they are untouchable and if a problem did arise, their parents would make it go away. She is driven by the power and status of The Cabinet but also the need for a family unit. As a child of divorce, she yearns for connection, attention and stability.

What is *Laurinda* about in your own words?

*Laurinda* is a coming-of-age story that details what it is like to grow up Asian Australian back then in the 90s and now in the present. It highlights how things have changed but also reminds us of how many issues are still yet to be addressed. It has a central focus on family and specifically that of an immigrant family – the trials and tribulations of a new culture and country,

trying your best to fit in and create a better life for your children so they can reap the benefits of their new home. It highlights generational trauma and also learned behaviour and the harm this can cause the next generation.

What's most exciting about working on *Laurinda*?

The amazing team I get to work with is a dream come true every day. A lot of us are debuting with MTC and it's so fulfilling seeing so many people of colour in the arts industry all in one room, sharing ideas, bonding over memories, working together and coming together! I'm really excited at the prospect of this play bringing in a new group of audiences, people who have never been to the theatre before, people from the Vietnamese community, high schoolers and more. This play is all about coming together and I can't wait for this family to keep growing. This play has also gifted me the knowledge of what my own parents would have gone through as immigrants. I view my upbringing in a completely different lens and it has made me so much more grateful for everything they have sacrificed and done for me.

How do design elements like set and costume impact your performance? What helps and how?

Set, costume, lighting and sound play an integral part in bringing the world of *Laurinda* to life. As the music from the 90s flows, the lighting changes and the set of *Laurinda* comes to life I feel that I can fully immerse myself into the characters. Even just wearing T-bars and wearing the beautiful *Laurinda* blazer that the costume department has generously created allows me as an actor to embody the character and walk in the character's shoes (literally and figuratively). Without these departments there would not be a play, they truly bring the story to life and allow me to be a better actor.

What's your favourite line in the play?

Katie's line: 'There are other Asians here, but unless they're winning maths awards you kind of forget they're here. They're so quiet'.



Ngoc Phan and Jenny Zhou



Jenny Zhou and Chi Nguyen

# Themes



Jenny Zhou, Ngoc Phan, Gemma Chua-Tran and Chi Nguyen

You might identify several themes in *Laurinda*, including the ones listed below. Read about some of the big ideas in the play that resonated with the cast and creative team.

## POWER AND CLASS

'My character Brodie is integral in exploring the themes of power and class in *Laurinda*. As the sort of 'ringleader' of the popular girls, she invades Lucy's space and treats her in a condescending manner to inadvertently highlight her privilege and power. Brodie owns her class privilege in a way where she looks down upon those she deems 'lesser' than her. Being at *Laurinda*, she's hyperaware of her class privilege. She uses that knowledge to manipulate her classmates and superiors by playing pranks and sometimes taking them a little too far, because she has her wealth and whiteness to fall back on.'

—Gemma Chua-Tran

'Another character I play is Amber Leslie, a member of The Cabinet and therefore a symbol of power and class. It's very easy to label Amber as "the bully", especially when we see the types of pranks she schemes and performs on teachers and students at *Laurinda*. But it is my job as an actor to examine the character's upbringing neutrally, to understand why they behave the way they do and find compassion for them without judgement in order to play them authentically. Especially in this circumstance where I am an Asian performer playing a Caucasian character who is racist, I find it important to do deep character research to truly understand where the racism comes from. With Amber, her outlook on life is tainted by her fractured relationship with her mother. That pent up anger and jealousy towards Lucy for having all of her mum's attention, as well as the need to uphold The Cabinet's tradition of power, reveals why Amber acts the way she does and says the things she says.'

—Chi Nguyen

'For Chelsea – popularity, family, tradition, power, class, social standing, wealth, beauty and insecurity. Tully – cultural identity, over achiever, ROTE learner, one track mind, need for change and to get out of Stanley, wants to do more with her life.'

—Jenny Zhou



## IDENTITY

'There are so many themes, but the biggest one is identity in the face of racism, class, culture, power and family.'  
—Ngoc Phan

'Playing a Vietnamese character that is an adult means the world to me as an actor. There are not many roles in theatre in Australia where a Vietnamese actor can play a real human being representing their lived experience in some way. This includes film and TV as well. So I would say cultural identity is a big theme for me in this play.'  
—Roy Phung

'Another theme is self-acceptance. The idea being that we can't truly be happy or contribute confidently to the world if we haven't accepted ourselves for who we are, with all our imperfections. The final moments of the play explore this idea with Lucy at 38. She sees what her 15-year-old self was able to accomplish by being unashamed and unafraid and finally accepts her alto ego (her true self) back into her body.'  
—Petra Kalive

'*Laurinda* speaks about many themes. It is an Australian story that reflects on friendship, identity, racism, migration, 'integration', culture, education, adolescence, family and, most importantly, self-acceptance.'  
—Karine Larché

## INTEGRITY

'Katie is integral to exploring the themes of integrity, legacy and social responsibility. She is a multi-generational Laurindan and therefore feels immense pressure to uphold the traditions and class-structure she was born into. But at the same time she is an outsider and is driven by the fierce desire to rise above the shameful shadow cast by her mother, who was a Cabinet victim, and forge her own path. She is trying to balance living within the 'system' while staying true and open to her own integrity and moral code.'  
—Fiona Choi

'*Laurinda* is about being true to yourself in a world that constantly asks you to be something else. This is often explored in young adult fiction and plays, as a coming-of-age story. But this is a coming-of-age story for a 15-year-old and a 38-year-old woman. Because we are always coming of age and the fight to stay true to yourself, never really ends.'  
—Petra Kalive

## RACISM AND PRIVILEGE

'Trisha explores bullying and finding her voice. Power, popularity, being othered. Themes of racism and privilege are what resonate.'  
—Georgina Naidu

'Racism and classism. Othering of people is a big theme in the play. What we are often exploring are the microaggressions or the unconscious everyday comments that wear a person down, that make them feel unwelcome or subordinate. There is a monologue that Lucy has towards the end of her Laurinda year, where she lets loose and tells the school exactly what she thinks – and it is powerful and full of rage.'  
—Petra Kalive



### Thinking about themes

Choose one of the themes above, or another theme you identify in *Laurinda*, and write about how it is explored in the play. Refer to one of the quotes above and think about a specific moment in the play that demonstrates your theme.



# Directing

Learn more about how Petra Kalive directed *Laurinda* in this Q&A.



Petra Kalive

**What is *Laurinda* about, in your own words? What is the world of this play?**

*Laurinda* follows the story of Lucy who at 38 years old is dragged back into her 15-year-old self by her alter ego Linh and made to relive Year 10 at the private girls school Laurinda. Lucy, the daughter of Vietnamese refugees, is from Stanley (a fictional suburb in Melbourne). She is lucky enough to be the inaugural recipient of an Equal Access Scholarship for Youth to Laurinda. Here Lucy's race and class brush up against entitlement and privilege for the first time. She sacrifices her own integrity to join The Cabinet, a trio of girls who have it all. They are smart, gorgeous, rich and powerful. But halfway through the year Lucy's inner-self pops out, because she can't take being silenced anymore and that's when Lucy's true reckoning begins. She is forced by her inner-self, to speak truth and she puts it all on the line. Lucy has no idea that by doing that, she causes a series of ripples, that not only dramatically change the culture of the school, but even ripple into her adult life, reminding her, she is much more than she gives herself credit.

Like falling down the rabbit hole into Wonderland or landing in Oz, this play traverses Lucy's memory, in a surreal landscape to arrive at some great inner wisdom.

**How would you describe the performance style of this production?**

We use lots of physical comedy, and exaggerated character in this production. As the story mainly exists in Lucy's memory, we are having great fun exploring how exaggerated (bordering on grotesque) we can make these characters. Tonally this work uses humour and satire to hold a mirror up to the audience.

**Most of the cast play several characters. How do you help them to make these characters clear and distinct?**

We have talked about voice placement, where weight is held in the body – what part of the body leads that character. And also distinctive costuming.



Roy Phung, Ngoc Phan, Georgina Naidu, Jenny Zhou, Fiona Choi, Gemma Chua-Tran and Chi Nguyen



Ngoc Phan and Chi Nguyen

**Could you elaborate on the vision for the AV in this production? How does the inclusion of AV affect your direction?**

We have been working at using AV to aid the storytelling of this production, so it is dramaturgically linked into the surreal, rabbit hole aspect of the work. It helps frame the alter ego Linh and allows us to play with perspective.

**What has been an exciting challenge to tackle/solve in rehearsals so far?**

While this is a Vietnamese story, we have specifically focused on the Asian Australian experience and so the majority of the cast and creative team have an Asian Australian background. But everybody's perspective and experience is so different. Landing on a collective understanding of a single moment let alone the whole play is challenging, but also very exciting (because our audience's experience will be very different as well).

Working with the AV in the rehearsal room and getting the actors to interact with the filmed material is laborious, but so satisfying when it works. A new work is always challenging in a good way. Lots of changes, edits, reworkings happen on the floor constantly – we are constantly asking ourselves is this the best way to tell this story.

**How do you collaborate with other members of the creative team? Do you use any particular technologies/software?**

I use Milanote, Google Docs, Instagram and Spotify to collaborate with my designers.

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### Directing

After reading the interview with Kalive, choose a scene from the play and discuss how you might direct it. You might start by writing lots of questions. What is the setting? Which character do I want to focus on? Is there a big idea I want to emphasise or explore? Do I want to make the audience laugh in this scene?

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# Set design and AV

Learn more about the set design and AV components in *Laurinda* in this Q&A with Eugyeene Teh (Set Design and AV Concept & Design), Justin Gardam (AV Designer) and Roshelle Fong (Assistant Director & AV Composition).



Eugyeene Teh



Justin Gardam

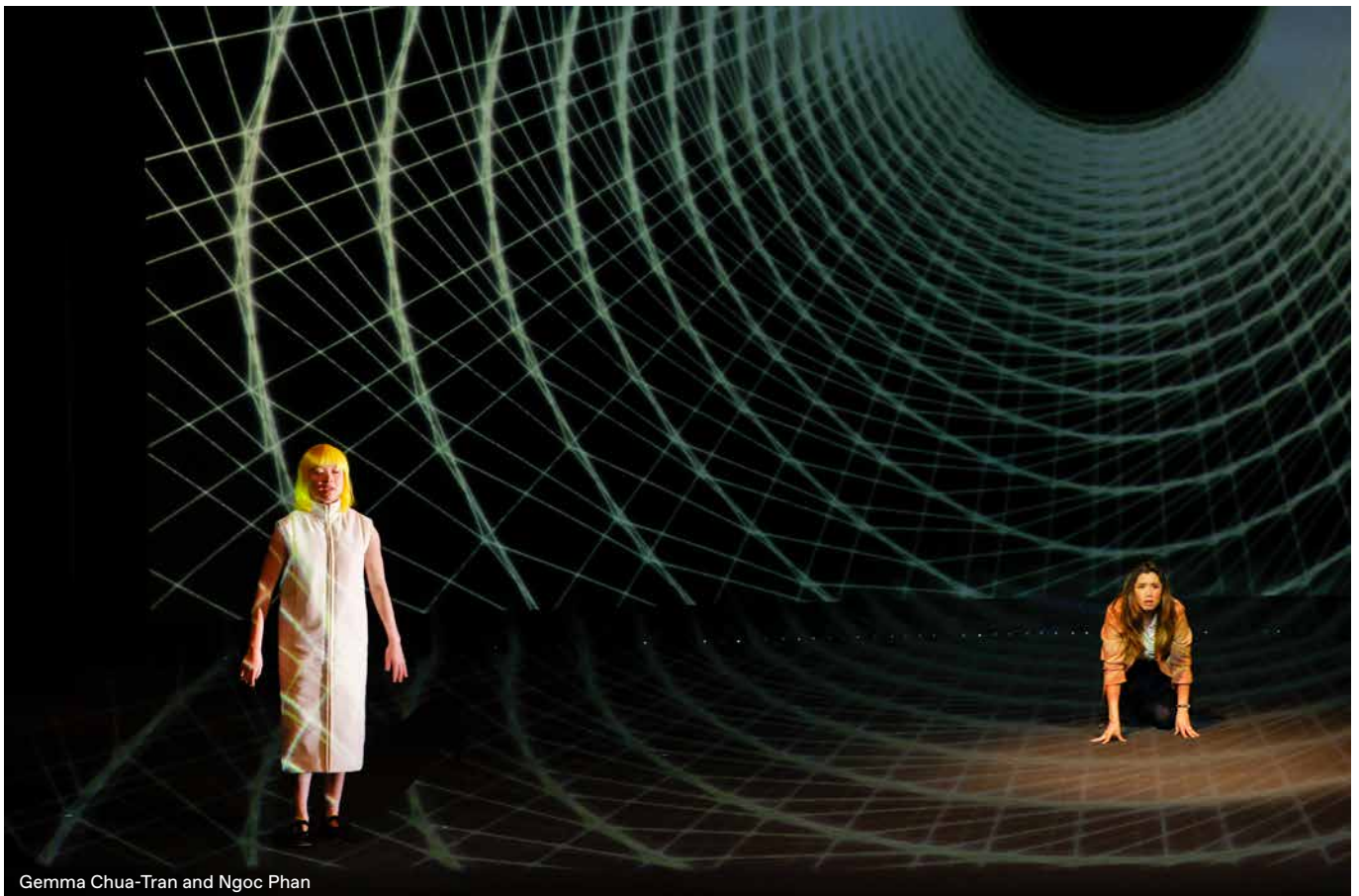


Roshelle Fong

**What is *Laurinda* about in your own words? What is the world of this play?**

*Laurinda* is about navigating the intricacies of life as a teenager while coming to terms with identity in relation to race and class. We follow introverted scholarship student Lucy as she is suddenly plunged into a private school which presents a stream of oppressive (and funny) events. Friendships blossom and sour as she processes where she stands in relation to everything going on around her.

In the play, Lucy (with her alter-ego Linh) moves seamlessly from the expansive grounds of the private school of Laurinda to her home in the working-class (fictional) suburb of Stanley, to typical locations in a school including the classroom, library, the principal's office and the toilet. Most of these locations occur through the lens of Lucy/Linh's mind, giving us and the audience free creative reign when framing the scenes.



Gemma Chua-Tran and Ngoc Phan



#### How would you describe the design language of the set?

As a meta-theatrical irony to the fact that *Laurinda* (the school) represents the colonial structures that still define our society. The design intentionally subverts a conventional naturalistic 'set' to one that is blank, minimalistic and anti-capitalistic, but is thoroughly considered and responsive. There are no overt visual indicators of 'Asian'-ness in the design but its philosophy is firmly Eastern.

The entirely carpeted set, including the columns, might be a playful wink at Lucy's father's job at 'Victory Carpet Factory,' but sets up the vast stage for light sculpted space to define specific moments. AV is used to define the virtual space used and conjured up by Linh, who is sometimes blocked out of the 'real' world but appears concurrently with Lucy. The glowing grid we see hints at a nostalgic 90s aesthetic, borrowing from a contemporary subversive VaporWave form; One that is lo-fi but still boundless in its capacity. Occasionally, the yellow grid suggests the oppression of *Laurinda* for Linh. Ultimately, the textured set absorbs the light particles and gently disperses them, giving Lucy and the audience a sensation of a fuzzy warm hug.

#### How does the AV enhance the storytelling?

Lucy experiences life-changing spatiotemporal travel to the 90s and through her own mind. The role of AV is to work with the actors and other design elements to immerse audiences into Lucy's metaphysical journey. From digitalised depictions of Linh, writ-large on stage as an omnipresent force, to scenes symbolic of Lucy's subconscious landscape, AV shows us the scale of Lucy's external pressures internalised, and gives us clues around her relationship with Linh. Use of a projected flat grid also extends the stage's playing space to an infinite digital horizon, which challenges the audience's perception of what constitutes 'the stage' and 'reality' within the play. In these ways, AV enhances storytelling not just by supporting dialogue and action, including scene and world transitions, but by embodying the character of Linh and showing the audience what she tries to show Lucy; illuminating how subconscious and conscious worlds collide, how the past, present and future influence each other, and how microaggressions and racism can be embodied and healed.

#### How does direction influence the design process in rehearsals and vice versa?

The overarching directorial vision of *Laurinda* encompasses the spirit of Alice Pung's novel, dramatised through Diana Nguyen and Petra Kalive's script, along with insights and dreaming from the cast and creative team. Our design process on this show has been incredibly collaborative and responsive to direction and ongoing discoveries made in the rehearsal room. For AV-performer interactions, our process has involved testing projections with actors and re-filming or re-editing assets as required, to make sure they react to and flow seamlessly with the action. And for sequences like the freedom ballet when we glimpse Lucy's subconscious, the dance choreography and AV were devised in response to each other, to achieve a cohesive explosion of irreverent but organised chaos.



### What practical considerations do you have to be aware of when designing the set?

The script dictates that the scenes and characters jump from one scene to the next in one split second. Characters shift, emerge and disappear at an equally rapid pace. The set has to respond seamlessly and elegantly to keep the pace going. A few simple key elements form a kit of parts for various scenes to be defined and deconstructed at the snap of Linh's fingers. The fuzzy carpet and columns are designed with lights in mind, to enable focused areas and masking for light sources so that the images are more magical.

### What theatre technologies/digital programs are you using to create the designs?

We used a combination of software including Adobe Premiere Pro, After Effects, and Photoshop to create the AV assets themselves. Once rendered, the assets were then assembled in order of appearance in QLab, so that they can be easily fired in sequence by the operator. We also used QLab, in conjunction with MadMapper, to map each of the many assets to different projectors and parts of the stage, as well as program fades to respond to the movement of the columns and intensity of the stage lighting in real-time.

### Are there some examples of symbolism in your designs that you can elaborate on?

The wallpaper in Mrs Leslie's house is one of those perpetual expansive images produced through the lens of white male artists (in this case, it is Henri Rousseau,) exoticising the people, or animals and plants, of faraway lands that were ultimately colonised by them. One of our references is the artwork of Maori artist Lisa Reihana called *In Pursuit of Venus* where she subverts the gaze of the colonial 19th century panoramic wallpaper, *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifiques* and reclaims the conceptual framework of the Indigenous culture through modern day technology. We ultimately see this wallpaper shift into a more sinister image in the jungle themed party scene, highlighting the silhouetted stalking prey as Lucy is caught in a modern day jungle of manipulation and exploitation.

On a lighter note, we also defined the space as a dreamscape, with some references to Alice in Wonderland, with Linh's disappearing act hinting at the Cheshire cat. One fun fact is that writer Alice Pung's father named her Alice because when they arrived in Australia, everything seemed like a wonderland.

### Thinking about one scene in particular, how does the set/AV support the drama?

In the opening scene, the AV depicts a realistic wall of bathroom tiles supporting 38-year-old Lucy's panic attack in the school toilet. As we time-travel back to the 90s, this wall of tiles glitches and falls backwards, morphing into a looped travelling grid. This helps transport Lucy and the audience from present-day 'reality' into a more liminal space where memories, subconscious

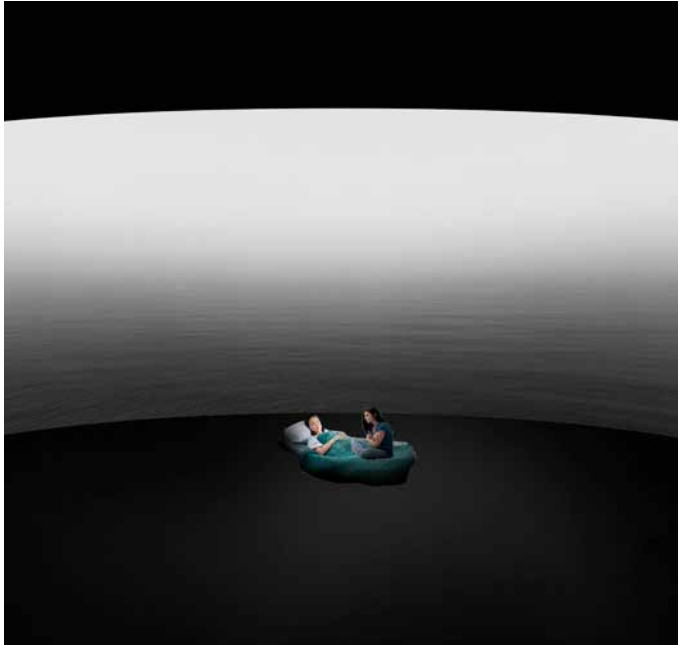
environments and traumas co-exist and weave in and out. The grid's movement also supports Lucy's discombobulation as the floor under her feet, the literal foundations of her life as she knows it, gets away from her.

#### **How do you work together, and with the other creatives, to create a cohesive design?**

Despite the usual parameters from production to resolve the design months before rehearsals even begin, we always value a very collaborative process. We are subverting a traditional production model to suit a more contemporary approach to theatre making. The decision to implement a versatile kit of parts and incorporating AV means that some of the design considers development on the rehearsal floor and responds directly to decisions made by all the creatives and cast. Some AV and scenic decisions are being made close to production week to ensure seamless integration between design and performance.

Fiona Choi, Ngoc Phan, Georgina Naidu and Gemma Chua-Tran





Set renders by Eugyeene Teh

# Costume design

Learn more about Karine Larché's costume designs for *Laurinda* in this Q&A.



Karine Larché

## How would you describe the design language of your costumes?

Apart from the first scene in the bathroom and one brief episode, the costumes in *Laurinda* are a mélange of 1990s vibes reprocessed through Lucy's memory of a (traumatic) time of her life, and that of her alter ego or imaginary friend, Linh. It all happens in Lucy's mind, and gives us the perfect excuse to distort things.

I have kept most of the form, but been more playful with colours and details. For example, the logo inside Laurinda's emblem is a banana, which is how Linh first appears to Lucy in the bathroom: as a banana. Distortion, as you might notice, goes wild in the birthday party, a highly traumatic event which Lucy does not want to remember, where animality is exaggerated ... or is it?

## Thinking about one character as an example, what does their costume tell us about them?

The costumes tell us more about Lucy's perception of these characters. There aren't many costume changes per character, because each character is somehow encapsulated in one outfit.

For example, let's consider the character of Mum. The colours of her costume are more subdued compared to the world of *Laurinda*, as she belongs to Lucy's 'Stanley' world, her suburb. Throughout the play, Mum wears the same combination of faded fluoro tracksuit pants, jumper and plastic sandals. As Linh reminds Lucy: 'Remember she only goes out to shop, collect the mail or attend church.'

Mum is always wearing those 'home clothes', which she probably made herself because she is an outworker (outworkers are people who sew at home, often in their garage, outsourcing for well-known Australian brands, for a meagre income).



Detail of the Laurinda emblem on school uniform costumes

In *Laurinda*, Mum is always working, and always very anxious about money, mentioning money a few times within the play. Thrifty, she has her favourite addresses where she knows she will find affordable products. The sandals she wears in the show were probably bought in the same shop where she purchased the \$3 trays for the rice paper rolls she made for Lucy's friend party.

## What practical considerations do you have to be aware of when designing these costumes?

The main challenge of costumes in this play is the number of quick changes. Each actor has about three different roles or costumes. As they sort of 'appear', randomly summoned by Linh with a snap of her fingers, I had to think carefully about what would be easy to slip on, about which item can be left on and added to facilitate a quick change. To get this to happen smoothly relies on teamwork: it takes the wardrobe's ingenuity, the director and stage managers' practical solutions in blocking the scenes and of course the actors' talent, swiftness and goodwill.

## Are there some examples of symbolism in your designs that you can elaborate on?

Yes, the banana – and its yellow colour – is really the thread of the costume design throughout the show. The banana, as some would know, is a metaphor often used by people of Asian diaspora living in Western countries to describe themselves: yellow on the outside and white on the inside. This speaks to the struggles that come with living within two different cultures.



Costume Designer Karine Larché and Scenic Art Supervisor Shane Dunn discuss how a kimono will be painted by hand; (inset) Karine Larché and costumier John Van Gastel in the costume department at MTC HQ



Banana and yellow also allude to the racism that Lucy has had to face and that still happens today. So my colour palette embraces yellow in various forms and shades in the costumes: (almost) fluoro details on the uniforms, golden details on Mrs Leslie’s costume, yellow-golden palette of the costumes in the birthday party, even the darker tones in Lucy’s opening blazer or Dr Vanderwerp’s brown jacket.

**What is *Laurinda* about in your own words?**

*Laurinda* speaks about many themes. It is an Australian story that reflects on friendship, identity, racism, migration, ‘integration’, culture, education, adolescence, family and, most importantly, self-acceptance. While working on *Laurinda*, I kept thinking of Whitney Houston’s (or more George Benson’s) ‘The Greatest Love of All’:

‘I believe that children are our future/Teach them well, and let them lead the way/Show them all the beauty they possess inside [...] No matter what they take from me/ They can’t take away my dignity [...] Learning to love yourself/ It is the greatest love of all!’

It says it all, don’t you think? And what a coincidence that Whitney Houston’s video clip takes place on an (empty) stage, which is where Linh takes Lucy to learn to accept and love herself once and for all!

**Is there anything else you’d like to share about your designs?**

In general, drawing, rendering and painting play a major part in my processes. I do read, think, gather information and inspiration, and discuss extensively with the director prior to sketching, but my brain really starts working actively only when I am sitting in front of my easel (and 220g textured paper) with a pencil in my hand.

My research continues as I am drawing and painting, looking through pictures of cast, sifting through prior research, researching some more for styles, volumes, colours and textures and moods, and also as I keep reflecting on the character.

The end result is very detailed as I try to think of everything, even seemingly insignificant details such as the type of ring and the way it will be worn or how much mascara the character will wear. These renderings are important working documents that I use to communicate with the whole team throughout the making of the show.



**Character clothes**

Choose a costume design from the production to analyse. How has the designer used colour, texture, pattern and line to communicate character? Include references from this Q&A in your analysis.



Costume designs by Karine Larché



# Composition and sound design

Learn more about Marco Cher-Gibard's composition and sound design for *Laurinda* in this Q&A.



Marco Cher-Gibard

**What is *Laurinda* about in your own words? What is the world of this play?**

I would say the play is a memory piece that revisits experiences of racism and trauma from the perspective of a first generation Vietnamese migrant family and the education system. Implicitly within this there is also an exposition of class differences between east and west Melbourne. It uses humour to disarm and bring to light experiences that can hopefully be universally understood.

**How would you describe the musical language of your music/sound?**

In architecture, a parti is a design concept or organising principle for a building. I've kind of taken this approach for sound design. My organising principle was 'musical threat' from a 1990s reference point. It should be celebratory and treating to burst into musical moments as much as possible. Budget restrictions have stopped this production from becoming an actual musical and I suppose I've never been able to let go of that desire. I've also been inspired to reference radio, which had a strong role in building and affirming both identity and community prior to the internet.

My approach to sound effects has mostly been hyper-affect. I made that term up, but what I mean is that I focus on affecting the audience through sound rather creating a 'realistic' soundscape. What is the effect of a moment and how does that feel through sound, rather than how to realistically represent that sound onstage. If the choice was between Chekov or Disney, I choose Disney for this production.

**What are some sounds or instruments that students could listen out for? Why have you included them?**

It's probably more interesting to think about the collisions of culture and genre. Listen out for references to hardcore/hardstyle, and while you're there look up videos on the 'Melbourne Shuffle'. The Drum n Bass dream sequence also incorporates instrumentation and melodies from a famous Vietnamese ballad. Music is interesting because it's a constant cross-cultural discussion. What would contemporary pop music be without hip hop? In Australia we're historically familiar with the cross Atlantic dialogue in Western pop music – the backwards and forwards between UK and US culture. Musically in this production I've been interested in locating moments of 90s culture and bringing them into dialogue together, either by proximity or literally mashing them together.



Gemma Chua-Tran

Listen out for the sounds of the Chinese Masonic Society’s Lion Dance/Kung Fu school. They were generous enough to allow me to record after a rehearsal in their space. It was very very loud! There is a lot of Chinese culture in Vietnam. These particular instruments are a ‘Southern’ style which is the prevalent style in Vietnam. The northern style is much closer to Beijing Opera and the gong ‘sings’ more. This style of music normally accompanies a lion, which you may know from Chinese Lunar New Year events.

I became interested in a particular dance that accompanied a money god and while I couldn’t find a troupe that played this style in Melbourne, the idea of using the same instrumentation and attaching it as a theme to the ‘mean girls’ of Laurinda kind of stuck. In the end, it functions less as a theme, I have to admit, and more as part of the musical language of the show. I particularly like how the drums charge the power up sequence that happens when Lucy and Linh are reunited.

**How are you creating your music/sound? Any particular programs, technologies?**

I’m mostly working ‘in the box’ which means my laptop. I use Reaper for arranging and editing and Abletone live for composing with notes and stuff. I like reaper because it’s cheap and super powerful. I also like the idea of spending my money on plugins and not software upgrades!

I recorded the piano with a beautiful pianist and artist, Madeline Flynn in her house and we made a conceptual arrangement of a lesser known Rachmaninov piece called ‘Italian Polka’. I liked it because the start of it sounds a bit like *Harry Potter* (to me). We recorded many variations of the first couple of bars. Listen out for the Nils Fram version! It’s kind of a joke/nuanced critique about how male pianists seem to get away with playing this musical trope and are hailed as genius, while female pianists (who far outnumber men) are rarely hailed for playing the same music.

The choir recording towards the end is made from many layers of the cast recorded in MTC’s studio. The melody comes from a Malay nursery rhyme about a cockatoo and that I rewrote using the school’s Latin motto.

**Thinking about one scene in particular, how does the music/sound design support the drama?**

If we take the start of the play, sound helps support Lucy’s present day panic attack and places her at an event with a large audience. Then Linh uses music as a time machine to bring us into the 90s, through the classic song, ‘Pump Up The Jam’ by Technotronic. Reverb functions as a memory signifier and the soundscape helps to move the audience through space and time to suburban Stanley and highlight narrative elements.

A lot of sound/music’s role in this piece is to control our experience of time. With music you can slow or speed up our experience of time. I did a lot of work helping things flow in Laurinda through its soundtrack.

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**Sounds you heard**

Make a playlist of sounds and music that you recall from the production and that are mentioned in this Q&A. Reflect on how each piece of music makes you feel. How is this manipulating your experience of the story, your mood and emotions, throughout the play?

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# Movement direction

Learn more about Xanthe Beesley's work as Movement Director on *Laurinda* in this Q&A.



Xanthe Beesley

## How would you describe *Laurinda* in your own words?

We meet Lucy on the verge of an existential crisis as she begins a journey of confronting her past as a young person desperately trying to fit in. With the help of a 'guide' Lucy travels to observe herself growing up to better understand who she was as a teen, to reconcile her past with the woman she has become. It's a funny and touching story of finding compassion for yourself and for others, of searching for your voice and finding the courage to be you.

## What is your role as Movement Director on this production?

As Movement Director, it's my job to help build ensemble, to work with the cast devising movement material for moments in the show, and to support the development of character through physical processes. I also always have an eye on the physicality and safety of the actors, the physical dramaturgy or meaning making of the movement and how that works in with the staging of the production.

## How do you build ensemble through movement?

We start early in the process (day 1 to be exact!) with physical warmups, games and a whole raft of movement explorations. These explorations are pertinent to the aims we have as a group and are one way we explore the content and themes of the play. We slowly work to awaken the movement potential of the piece and some physical vocabulary and motifs to draw upon throughout the rehearsals.

## What's an example of a movement exercise you're doing in rehearsal?

There's one exercise I've called 'Best Worst Dance Move Ever'. Standing in a circle the actors are asked to offer an over-the-top dance move to the best (or worst) 90s tune ever. Everyone is encouraged to copy and clap loudly in support of the performer. This is a fun way to kick off a devising process, as nothing can ever be 'wrong', it's all for the joy of it and there's lots of positive reinforcement and laughter. For our process, this exercise acted as an entry point into the 90s setting and from this simple exercise we already had some moves to add to the dance moments in the work.



Xanthe Beesley

**How is movement helping to anchor the story in a particular time and place?**

The play takes place in Australia in the 1990s, but also in two distinct suburbs of Melbourne and, importantly, Lucy’s brain-space. There are a couple of moments when we allude to the popular culture of the 90s which helps define the setting and tone of the era. What’s needed for this work is a playfully ambiguous approach to movement, which builds a fluid language that we draw on throughout the process. This helps us to spring quickly from the present day to a memory space or bounce from a party scene to a classroom and slip between 38-year-old Lucy and her younger self. As we play in Lucy’s imagination, we use movement techniques like slow motion, heightened characterisation, dance sequences and dynamic changes which work together to build a semi-surreal movement landscape and offer the poetic licence that allows us to be inside someone’s brain.

**Do you recreate or re-interpret movement and dance styles from past decades?**

You’ll see a little bit of 90s dance, which comes from popular culture of the era. The cast also spent time with traditional Vietnamese dancers, which enabled them to explore cultural dance and weave this through some of the movement moments in the play.

**How do you collaborate with the cast and creatives in rehearsal?**

As a theatre maker, I’m most interested in collaboration – so I’m always looking to draw out the ideas of the amazing actors we work with. This is a process of offering and responding, making an offer of a task, activity or exercise and then allowing the cast to respond to this in their own way. Sometimes I’ll do the responding, seeing what material has been created and offering movement ideas to clarify, or shape, add some tone or dynamic to a moment – it’s a process of ‘Yes And’ between us all. Bit by bit, this builds the play.

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**Best Worst Dance Move Ever**

Try the dance activity described in this Q&A as a warm-up for your next drama class.

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## MEET THE CHARACTERS

Hear the cast discuss each of the characters they play in *Laurinda* in this backstage video at [mtc.com.au/education](http://mtc.com.au/education).



## COSTUMES COME TO LIFE

See the *Laurinda* costume designs come to life at MTC HQ in these behind-the-scenes photos and learn more about Karine Larché's vision for the production at [mtc.com.au/education](http://mtc.com.au/education).

## BUY THE SCRIPT

Purchase the script for *Laurinda*, by Diana Nguyen with Petra Kalive, based on the novel by Alice Pung, at [mtc.com.au/scripts](http://mtc.com.au/scripts).

