

ARTS CENTRE
MELBOURNE

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

21 OCT—
26 NOV 2022



GIRLS & BOYS

BY DENNIS KELLY

DIRECTED BY KATE CHAMPION

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, create and gather.

We pay our respects to all First Peoples, their Elders past and present, and their enduring connections to Country, knowledge and stories.

Melbourne Theatre Company
is a department of the
University of Melbourne



Melbourne Theatre Company is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria.



Melbourne Theatre Company presents

GIRLS & BOYS

BY **DENNIS KELLY**

DIRECTED BY **KATE CHAMPION**

21 OCT—26 NOV 2022

ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE, FAIRFAX STUDIO

ABOUT THE PLAY

A smart, witty woman. A funny, passionate man. They meet, fall in love, get married, start a family. So far, so unremarkable. Their life together accumulates its regular successes and disappointments, its many universal touchpoints, until it takes an unexpected turn all too shocking, and all too common.

CAST

Performer Nikki Shiels
Leanne (image) Hannah Bickerton
Danny (image) Jared Bickerton

CREATIVE TEAM

Director Kate Champion
Original Set & Costume Designer Marg Horwell
Lighting Designer Amelia Lever-Davidson
Composer & Sound Designer Sidney Millar
Voice & Dialect Coach Geraldine Cook-Dafner
Set & Video Designer Romanie Harper
Associate Costume Designer Sophie Woodward
Assistant Director Stephen Phillips
Mime Consultant Steph Kehoe
Standby Cover Emily Goddard
Stage Manager Lisette Drew
Assistant Stage Manager Brittany Coombs
Rehearsal Photographer Charlie Kinross
Production Photographer Jeff Busby

This production contains frequent coarse language, mature themes and descriptions of graphic violence and suicide.

The running time for this production is approximately 1 hour and 50 minutes with no interval.

Girls & Boys was first presented by The English Stage Company at The Royal Court Theatre, London on 8 February 2018.

Major Marketing Partner

The Monthly
The Saturday Paper
7am

This production deals with content that some audience members might find distressing. If you or someone you know needs information or support, these organisations are here to help:

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Melbourne Theatre Company wishes to thank Claudia Kardaras of the Centre for Positive Psychology for her support and guidance throughout the rehearsal and performance process.

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KATE CHAMPION AND NIKKI SHIELS IN CONVERSATION

Director Kate Champion and actor Nikki Shiels discuss what drew them to *Girls & Boys* and why its subject matter is incredibly relevant for our stages.



Director Kate Champion and Nikki Shiels

Director Kate Champion and Nikki Shiels



Kate Champion: What drew you to the play in the first instance?

Nikki Shiels: Two things. Firstly, the theatrical challenge of a single woman holding the audience's attention as she tracks the events leading up to the most significant event in her life. Secondly, the content and how the play offers an insight into the personal experience of a tragic event that we often receive via the news, detached from the private sphere of those involved. I love how the play uses storytelling and imagination to burrow into this subject matter and interrogate how it plays out beyond the media.

Kate: I had an instant and complete attraction to the character. I wanted to hang out with this woman, to bask in her wit, her charm and her disarming

honesty. She had me at the first line of the play – or rather Dennis Kelly did. Beyond that I've also, like you, always been fascinated with how one person can hold our attention on stage. Ultimately though, I was drawn to a story that has at its centre an extraordinary experience of grief by a character who refuses to embody the clichés society often places on people who are in extreme grief. I'm interested in how we do – and don't – allow people to share their painful loss and how we all learn how to live with it.

'I love how the play uses storytelling and imagination to burrow into this subject matter and interrogate how it plays out beyond the media.'

— NIKKI SHIELS

Nikki: What were your thoughts behind the form and the way to realise the mode of telling this story?

Kate: As I read and re-read the play I came to think of the process that the character was going through as a physical form of diarising. Yes, she's retelling her story to us the audience, but at the same time she's conducting a kind of

‘Translating an imagined interpretation of this uncomfortable issue to theatrical form ... offers an opportunity to engage with and question why it still happens.’

— KATE CHAMPION



Director Kate Champion

archaeological dig into her own emotional history. In fact it was the notion of rehearsing her memories to process reason, to understand her role in the events that came to pass, that ultimately inspired how we found the form of the piece.

Nikki: As the performer, I am very focused on the language Dennis Kelly gives the protagonist, and the journey she embarks on to begin to articulate the unspeakable. The tension between her eloquence and vulgarity, her humour and her gravitas and the persuasiveness of her arguments. Formally, in rehearsals I have been fascinated by the character's double trajectory of delving into the

Nikki Shiels



heightened theatrical space of her imagination alongside the unfolding present as she engages directly with the audience. It's thrilling to be exploring and making theatre that demands such attention to the present by way of the past as the play moves towards its climax.

Nikki: Why this piece? Why now?

Kate: This play at this time because, unfortunately, the story it tells is a tragedy that continues to repeat itself in reality to this day. Translating an imagined interpretation of this uncomfortable issue to theatrical form and thereby a public forum offers an opportunity to engage with and question why it still happens.

Nikki: The play examines extreme male violence in our contemporary world by way of a female character. The play is also written by a man giving voice to a woman's experience of this male violence. This is an interesting tension to hold and wrestle with as artists. And in no way does Dennis Kelly's writing shy away from the gravitas of its subject matter. In our production, we are interested in interrogating the complexities of male violence in society and making space for audiences to engage with the questions that Kelly's play poses. ■



Explore interviews with
the cast and creatives
at mtc.com.au



Director Kate Champion
and Nikki Shiels

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM



NIKKI SHIELS PERFORMER

Nikki Shiels has previously worked with Melbourne Theatre Company on *Home, I'm Darling, The Cherry Orchard, True Minds, Top Girls* and *Don Parties On*. Other theatre credits include *The Picture of Dorian Gray, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, A Cheery Soul* and *Three Sisters* (Sydney Theatre Company); *My Brilliant Career, They Divided The Sky, The Sugar House, The Rover* and *Twelfth Night* (Belvoir); *Picnic at Hanging Rock, Night on Bald Mountain, The Dragon* and *Elizabeth – Almost by Chance a Woman* (Malthouse Theatre); *The Last Wife* (Ensemble); *The Unspoken Word is 'Joe'* (Griffin/La Mama); *The Dream* (Bell Shakespeare); *Joan* (The Rabble); *M + M* and *The Dollhouse* (Daniel Schlusser Ensemble); *Madeleine* (Black Sequin Productions/Arts House). Screen credits include *Safety Net, Bloom, House Husbands, Childhood's End, Rush IV* and *The Eye of the Storm*. Nikki won the 2020 Green Room Award for Most Outstanding Performer for her performance as Judy Martin in *Home, I'm Darling* for Melbourne Theatre Company.



DENNIS KELLY WRITER

Dennis Kelly is a British writer for theatre, television and film. Work for theatre includes *Debris, Osama the Hero, After the End, Love and Money, Taking Care of Baby, DNA, Orphans, The Gods Weep, The Ritual Slaughter of Gorge Mastromas, Girls and Boys* and *The Regression*. For television, he has written and created *Utopia, Pulling* (co-written, co-created), *The Third Day* (co-created) and *Together*, and for film he wrote the screenplay for *Black Sea*. He also wrote the book for the Olivier and Tony Award-winning *Matilda: The Musical* and in 2010 *DNA* became a set text on the GCSE English Literature syllabus.



KATE CHAMPION DIRECTOR

Kate Champion was the founding Artistic Director and CEO of Force Majeure (2002–15), and has worked for over 30 years in theatre, dance, circus, opera and musical theatre with productions including *Never Did Me Any Harm* (Melbourne Theatre Company and Sydney Theatre Company); *Under the Influence*, *Every Brilliant Thing*, *My Brilliant Career* (Belvoir); *That Eye The Sky*, *A View From the Bridge* (STCSA); *The Rise and Fall of Saint George* (Performing Lines); *La Strada* (English National Opera); *Bliss*, *The Ring Cycle* (Opera Australia); *Evie May* (The Hayes); *Fully Committed*, *Honour* (Ensemble); *Meat Eaters*, *Perfect Stranger* (NIDA); *Please Hold* (NICA) and *Swallow* (National Theatre of Parramatta). Kate created and performed two critically acclaimed solo shows, *Face Value* and *About Face* and has been awarded Helpmann, Green Room and Australian Dance Awards. Kate is the newly appointed Artistic Director of Black Swan State Theatre Company of Western Australia.



MARG HORWELL ORIGINAL SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Marg Horwell is a multi-award-winning set and costume designer. Marg's previous credits with Melbourne Theatre Company include *The Truth*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *Lilith: The Jungle Girl*, *Birdland*, *I Call My Brothers*, *Peddling*, *Cock*, *Constellations*, *Music* and *Marlin*. Other credits include *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *How to Rule the World*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Because The Night*, *Blasted*, *Melancholia*, *Caravan*, *The Testament of Mary*, *The Real and Imagined History of The Elephant Man*, *Edward II*, *I Am a Miracle* and *The Good Person of Szechuan* (Malthouse); *The Happy End* (Victorian Opera); *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Sopranos*, *The Human Voice & The Call* (Opera Queensland); *Lorelei* (Opera Queensland/Victorian Opera); *Salomé* (English National Opera); *Avalanche* (The Barbican); *Unsere Kleine Stadt* (Theater Basel); *Common Ground* (Chunky Move) and *Leviathan* (Circa). Marg has won nine Green Room Awards and three Sydney Theatre Awards.



Nikki Shiels



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 *SLAP. BANG. KISS*, *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); *K-BOX*, *Because the Night*, *Australian Realness*, *Trustees* and *Turbine* (Malthouse Theatre); *My Self in That Moment*, *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 Actors' Theatre); *MKA's 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.



SIDNEY MILLAR **COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER**

Sidney Millar is a Melbourne-based sound designer and composer. Originally from Adelaide, she moved in 2015 to study at the Victorian College of the Arts (Fine Arts – Production), and has since designed for theatre, dance, film and installations. Her unique style has emerged from her extensive experience as a performer and composer of classical and jazz music. She particularly enjoys using sound and music to create emotional states and subtle tensions in a work. Sidney's prior sound designs include *Wild* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *LOTUS* and *Lousical the Musical* (Melbourne International Comedy Festival); and *Three Blind Mice* (Melbourne and Adelaide Fringe). She was the composer and musician for *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Victorian College of the Arts Acting Company 2017). In 2018 she participated in Melbourne Theatre Company's Women in Theatre Program.



GERALDINE COOK-DAFNER **VOICE & DIALECT COACH**

Geraldine Cook-Dafner previously worked for Melbourne Theatre Company on *The Lifespan of a Fact*, *Home*, *I'm Darling*, *Golden Shield*, *Wild*, *The Children*, *Hay Fever*, *Di and Viv* and *Rose*, Melbourne Talam, *John*, *The Odd Couple*, *Straight White Men*, *The Distance*, *Birdland*, *The Waiting Room*, *Top Girls*, *The Heretic*, *The Swimming Club*, *The 39 Steps*, *The History Boys*, *All My Sons*, *The Clean House*, *Boy Gets Girl*, *Take Me Out* and *The Glass Menagerie*. Geraldine has also worked at SBS, Malthouse and Musica Viva. She trained at Middlesex University, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has a doctorate from the University of Melbourne. Geraldine is an Honorary Senior Fellow at the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, where previously she held positions as Head of Voice, Head of School of Performing Arts and Associate Dean. She is currently voice and dialect coach for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*.



ROMANIE HARPER **SET & VIDEO DESIGNER**

Romanie Harper is a designer based in Naarm/Melbourne. Romanie has previously worked for Melbourne Theatre Company on *The Violent Outburst That Drew Me To You*. Recent design credits include *K-BOX*, *Australian Realness*, *Trustees*, *Good Muslim Boy*, *Little Emperors* and *Turbine* (Malthouse); *8/8/8:WORK* (Rising Festival); *Hercules* (Arts House); *The Cherry Orchard* and *Packer and Sons* (Belvoir St Theatre); *What Am I Supposed to Do?* and *Equinox* (Deep Soulful Sweats); *Hercules*, *Die! Die! Die! Old People Die!*, *We All Know What's Happening* and *Never Trust a Creative City* (Arts House); *Contest* and *Moral Panic* (Darebin Arts' Speakeasy, 2018); *Runt*, *This Is Eden*, *Resident Alien* and *Triumph* (fortyfivedownstairs) and *M+M* (Daniel Schlusser Ensemble).



The creative team in rehearsals

Director Kate Champion, Company Manager Julia Smith, Nikki Shiels and Psychologist Claudia Kardaras





SOPHIE WOODWARD **ASSOCIATE COSTUME DESIGNER**

Sophie Woodward is a Melbourne-based set and costume designer. Sophie graduated with a Bachelor of Production (Design) from VCA in 2010 winning the Beleura John Tallis Design Award in her final year.

Sophie recently designed costumes for Melbourne Theatre Company's *Come Rain or Come Shine*. Recent set and costume designs include *Fast Food*, *Iphigenia in Splott* and *Grace* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *#No Exemptions* (LaMama Courthouse) and *Burn This* (fortyfivedownstairs). Earlier design work from Sophie includes *Hungry Ghosts* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *The One and Mr Burns*, *A Post Electric Play* (fortyfivedownstairs); *Those Who Fall in Love Like Anchors Dropped Upon the Ocean Floor*, *Between the Clouds*, *Pyjama Girl* and *Letters from the Border* (HotHouse Theatre); *Extinction*, *Rules for Living*, *You got Older*, *The Honey Bees*, *The Village Bike*, *Wet House*, *Love Love Love*, *4,000 Miles* and *Day One. A Hotel, Evening* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *Thigh Gap* and *A Long Day's Dying* (La Mama Theatre). Sophie was Design Assistant on *An Ideal Husband* and *Twelfth Night* (Melbourne Theatre Company).



STEPHEN PHILLIPS **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

A graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, Stephen Phillips's prior Melbourne Theatre Company credits include *The Architect*, *Boy Gets Girl*, *Take Me Out*, *Metamorphoses*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *The*

Madwoman of Chaillot, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Realism*. Other stage credits include *The Odyssey* (Malthouse); *The Tempest* and *As You Like It* (Bell Shakespeare) and *Complexity of Belonging* (Chunky Move). Stephen is the Artistic Director of acclaimed physical theatre ensemble 5AngryMen. TV credits include *The Leftovers*, *Childhood's End*, *Barracuda*, *The Secret River*, *House Husbands* and *Blue Heelers*. Feature film credits include *Disclosure*, *X*, *Turkey Shoot Reloaded* and *The Killer Elite*. Stephen works extensively as a voiceover artist, audiobook narrator and motion capture artist. Stephen will next be seen in the *Thai Cave Rescue* series on Netflix in the role of Major Henson and in feature film *Subject* from Continuance Pictures.



Nikki Shiels



The Arts

Welcome to **The Arts**
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provocations from *The Monthly*
and *The Saturday Paper*.

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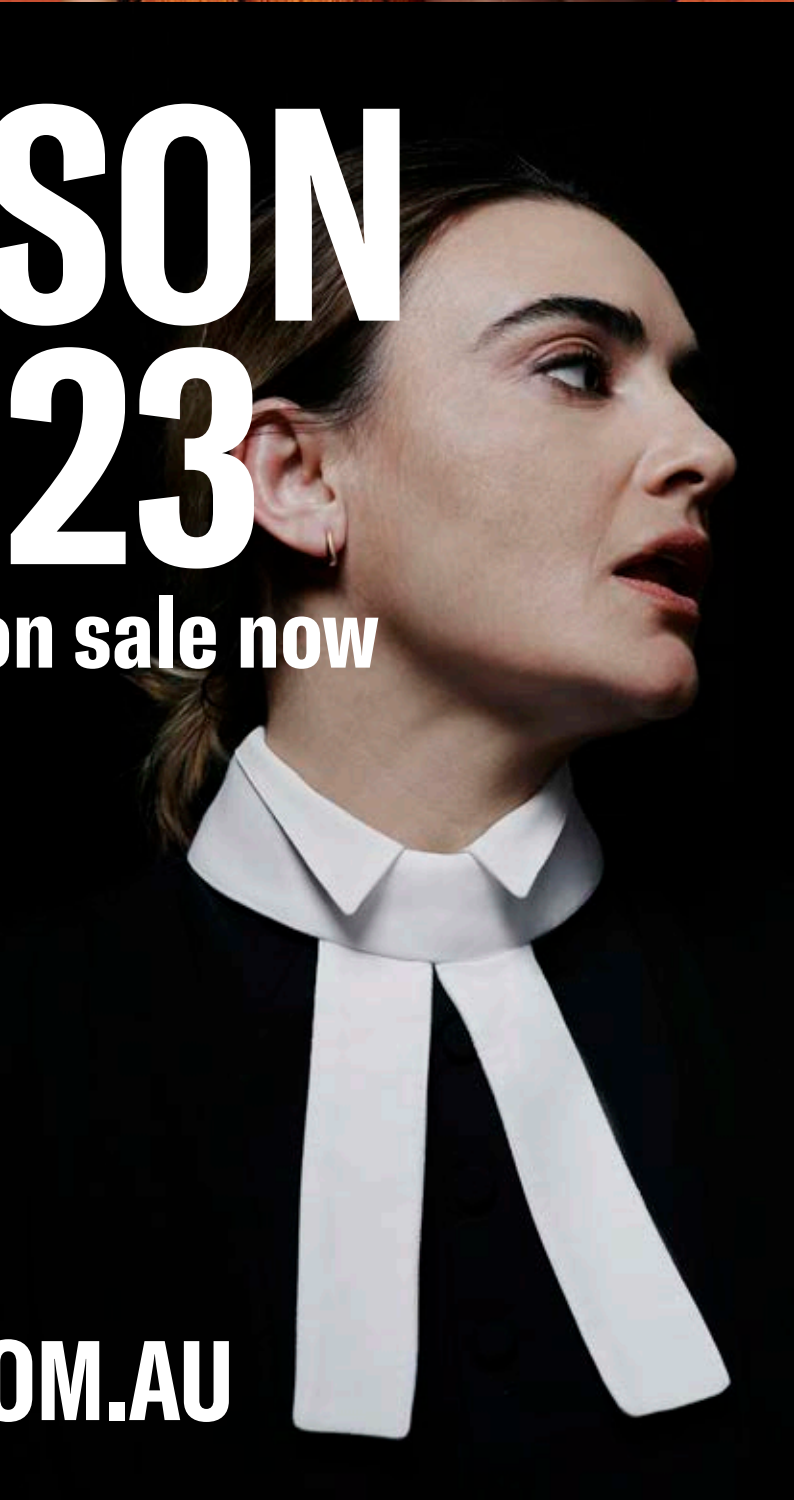
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