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# MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

SOUTHBANK  
THEATRE



# BERNHARDT/ HAMLET

BY THERESA REBECK  
DIRECTED BY ANNE-LOUISE SARKS

EDUCATION PACK – PART B

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**Activity**



**Discussion**



**Reading**



**Video**

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Education  
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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.

We accept the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and support a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Australian Constitution.

# Introduction

The Bernhardt/Hamlet Education Pack B is designed to help you unpack the performance after watching it onstage. This pack should be used in tandem with Part A, the pre-show resource. The interviews in this pack are intended to help you understand the creative intentions behind the work, and give you a more sophisticated understanding of the production. However, it is ultimately your experience of the live production that matters most, and hopefully this resource will transport you back into your seat at the theatre. Also included are some analysis questions for you to consider as you reflect on the production, but always remember to consult official VCAA documents when preparing for VCE assessments and examinations.



Dushan Philips, Sahil Saluja, Tahlee Fereday, Kate Mulvany and Marco Chiappi



## Revisit Part A

Download Part A of this resource for information about context, characters and direction. Reflect on your predictions and expectations now that you've seen the production.



## Southbank Theatre virtual tour

Explore the theatre where *Bernhardt/Hamlet* was performed, the Sumner at Southbank Theatre, in this virtual tour. Learn more about the lighting positions and the fly system.

# Cast and creatives

## CAST

**Constant Coquelin** Marco Chiappi  
**Lysette Tahlee** Fereday  
**Louis John** Leary  
**Maurice William** McKenna  
**Sarah Bernhardt** Kate Mulvany  
**Francois/Worker** Dushan Philips  
**Raoul Sahil** Saluja  
**Alphonse Mucha** Tim Walter  
**Edmond Rostand** Charles Wu  
**Rosamond Izabella** Yena

## CREATIVE TEAM

**Director** Anne-Louise Sarkis  
**Set & Costume Designer** Marg Horwell  
**Lighting Designer** Amelia Lever-Davidson  
**Composer & Sound Designer** Joe Paradise Lui  
**Movement & Fight Director** Nigel Poulton  
**Voice & Text Coach** Geraldine Cook-Dafner  
**Voice & Text Coach** Amy Hume  
**Associate Set Designer** Jacob Battista  
**Costume Associate** Sophie Woodward  
**Assistant Director** Tasnim Hossain  
**Intimacy Coordinator** Amy Cater  
**Stage Manager** Whitney McNamara  
**Deputy Stage Manager** Meg Richardson  
**Assistant Stage Manager** Finlay Pedler  
**Stage Management Intern (VCA)** Liz Bird  
**Rehearsal Photographer** Charlie Kinross  
**Rehearsal and Production Photographer** Pia Johnson  
**Marketing Campaign Photographer** Jo Duck



Charles Wu, Dushan Philips, Marco Chiappi and Sahil Saluja



## Read the programme

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

*Bernhardt/Hamlet* is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. [www.concordtheatricals.com](http://www.concordtheatricals.com)

Commissioned and Originally Produced by Roundabout Theatre Company, New York, NY  
Todd Haimes, Artistic Director  
Harold Wolpert, Managing Director  
Julia C. Levy, Executive Director  
Sydney Beers, General Manager

# Acting skills

Learn more about each actor's performance in these interviews.



Kate Mulvany

## KATE MULVANY SARAH BERNHARDT

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

Sarah Bernhardt is a person who is well-ahead of her time. She sees the way women are viewed in society – the inequity and bias that forces them to be inferior – and she challenges that notion by taking bold risks in her work and in her life.

### How do you embody your character?

Sarah was famous for her physicality and voice. She made audacious choices onstage that kept her audience captivated, but these choices may not have that same power on a modern stage. So it is important to me to emulate her form, rather than impersonate it.

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

The designers' vision is as much a part of my character as any choice I make. We all bring our piece of the jigsaw to create the picture that becomes the show. For Sarah, who is determined to play Hamlet, she is inhabiting a costume she has longed to wear, but has never been given the chance. She is creating a world she has never been allowed into. And so I'm exploring a discomfort and a restlessness in her as she tries to navigate her choices, via the costume, props and sets that I get to play her on.

### Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

There is a sword fight in the show, and so many of our rehearsals have a stage fighting component to them. This is exhausting, but also a gift, because you get to learn a beautiful stagecraft whilst also strengthening your own body.

**'Sarah was famous for her physicality and voice. She made audacious choices onstage that kept her audience captivated.'**

KATE MULVANY



Working as a team with your fellow cast mates as you lunge at them with swords is a deeply metaphorical exercise that teaches you to always support one another, protect one another and spar safely, be it with weapons or words.

**Do you consciously experiment with variation in your performance?**

Definitely, as long as it is in keeping with the director's wishes. A play script is like a map through a dense forest. There are many pathways, and sometimes you have to find a different entry point to help you find your way. My job is to keep the audience captivated, to keep the drama bubbling, to keep finding surprises within the story and the character. So experimentation is key to keep the play fresh and alive night after night.

**What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?**

Sometimes you have to break the rules to make great change.

**What's it like to play a character of such legendary status? What do you hope audiences will love about Sarah Bernhardt's story?**

The biggest thing I've learned doing this play is how grateful I am to trailblazers like Sarah Bernhardt who refused to take no for an answer – who challenged society to do better, to think better, to act better. She demanded equality and respect and she went out of her way to get it – not just for herself, but for all women that were to follow throughout time. Myself included. There is something incredibly beautiful about thanking her for that legacy from the very place she instigated change – the stage. And she was such a vibrant, funny, unique human. To step into her body every night is an absolute delight. I hope people go home after the show and Google Sarah's name so they can learn even more about her wicked and wondrous life after the play.



**Acting skills**

Consider Mulvany's comments about embodying Sarah Bernhardt's performance style. Consider how the theatre style of melodrama and acting skills like voice and gesture are interconnected.



**Costume**

Consider Mulvany's comments about Bernhardt's Hamlet costume. How do the garments influence her movement and facial expressions?

## CHARLES WU EDMOND ROSTAND

**Tell us about your character in a nutshell.**

**What drives them?**

Edmond is a playwright who is always working on his next masterpiece. He looks for beauty in the written word; it consumes him. He is driven by the desire for a lasting legacy, and by his love for and dedication to Sarah Bernhardt.

**How do you embody your character?**

Edmond is proud of his work, and he's got a bit of an ego, so I work on keeping my body upright, and moving about with swagger. Further into the play as he is consumed by his work of adapting *Hamlet*, a deeper, more existential part of him is threatened. His voice deepens, and I introduce a writhing energy into his body.

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

Design elements influence how a character moves and interacts with their surroundings. It's always helpful for me to wear similar shoes in rehearsal to know how a character holds themselves.

**Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?**

Edmond has a lot of monologues that detail his work process. He can be moved by his own words and despair at the torturous process of bringing them into being, sometimes in the same sentence. A helpful technique of illuminating different thoughts in a tricky sentence or paragraph has been to repeat the sentence. I say it over and over, one word at a time with my eyes closed and 'live' in the words, interrogating them again for the different possibilities, images and nuances in performance.

**Do you consciously manipulate contrast in your performance? How so?**

What interests me most about Edmond is his supreme confidence at times, in contrast to his deeply terrifying struggle with comparing his artistry to Shakespeare, and the ugliness this can bring out in him. His love for Sarah can seem so all-encompassing and joyous, but when he feels threatened by her, a vindictiveness can come from the despair of being in thrall to what may seem like an addiction.

**What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?**

The world moves, and we must move with it.

**What do you think audiences can learn from Sarah Bernhardt's story?**

**Why should we still be talking about her today?**

Sarah is told endlessly that as a woman, she must stay in her lane. Her desire to play Hamlet, to transcend her station, is met with intense scrutiny and derision, mostly from men. Women still go through this every day, in all walks of life. This story reminds us of the work we still must do, to do better, to listen and to act.



Charles Wu

**'Edmond is proud of his work, and he's got a bit of an ego, so I work on keeping my body upright, and moving about with swagger.'**

CHARLES WU



### Acting skills

Consider Wu's comments about how his movement and voice change as the story progresses. How is he using his acting skills to show Rostand's journey in the play?



### Contrast

Consider Wu's comments about contrast within his character. Identify examples from the production to illustrate this and analyse how he uses acting skills in these moments.

## MARCO CHIAPPI CONSTANT COQUELIN

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

Benoît-Constant Coquelin, referred to simply as Constant in the play, was a greatly acclaimed French actor of the 19th century (1841–1909). He met with great success early in his career with a particular gift for comedy and was the first actor to play the role of Cyrano in Edmond Rostand's famous play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Bernhardt and Coquelin shared the stage many times in France and internationally. In *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, Constant has been called in to play Polonius to Sarah's Hamlet and to aid in the play's rehearsal with less than stellar results.

### How do you embody your character?

I don't think I ever approach a character with the notion 'How do I embody this role?' or perhaps more accurately 'embodiment' is not a conscious primary concern. Rather, as the familiarity with the text develops from first reading to performance, it is the issue of necessity that perhaps demands the bulk of my attention. Why does the character say these things? Why do they respond in this way? In playing with these necessities you inevitably start playing with aspects of the character's physical and vocal being. As ever some intuitions are spot on and of course some should never see the light of day again.

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

The industrial model of theatre in Australia usually demands that all decisions regarding set and costume design are settled before the play begins rehearsal. As an actor you are thus entering a physical world that is as fixed as the text. There have been approaches where the stage and costume design arise from the rehearsal process itself, but this is a much more costly enterprise and can't be readily adapted for a four-week rehearsal.

Designers are usually really good about accommodating their costume designs to the requirements of the actor. In my experience such conversations have generally been rewarding as the actor is getting the opinion of an expert and sensitive eye and a perspective wholly different to the obsession of the actor.

To me, costumes and props are extra toys to play with that may allow greater specificity in characterisation. My relationship to the set design is perhaps more muted in that it is not the scenic element to which I am chiefly responding (that's for the audience) but the opportunities or indeed the productive impediments the arranged space provokes.

### What is an example of a technique you're using as you rehearse this show?

Get your lines learnt as quickly as possible so you are as free as possible to try any number of approaches on the rehearsal room floor. One or two of them may end up useful.

### Do you consciously experiment with rhythm in your performance? How so?

Experimenting with rhythm is a constant of rehearsal regardless of text. Obviously when performing something from say the Elizabethan or Jacobean era the verse requires a technical proficiency in rhythm without which intelligibility is compromised.

When performing in contemporary language, no matter how prosaic it may appear on the page or perhaps precisely because of how prosaic it may appear on the page, playing with rhythm can be a fascinating exercise in revealing or consolidating the emotional and mental dynamic of the character.

**'Get your lines learnt as quickly as possible.'**

MARCO CHIAPPI



Marco Chiappi



### Working with design

Consider Chiappi's comments about the opportunities presented by a set design. Identify two moments in the production where he manipulated motion and analyse the spatial flow.



### Acting skills

Chiappi's character is an actor himself. Consider how Chiappi's acting skills vary between Constant Coquelin and the characters he plays, such as Polonius and Cyrano.



## TAHLEE FEREDAY LYSETTE

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

Lysette is flirty, sassy, grounded but also has a quiet confidence. She is driven by her love of performing and her desire to see change on the stage. This is why she admires Sarah Bernhardt, as Sarah is paving the way for women to have a voice and have a sense of equality in the theatre.

### How do you embody your character, and does costume impact your performance?

Embodying Lysette for me comes with the costume. This is because her style is more feminine than my own, particularly when she plays Ophelia. This makes it easier for me to shift my mannerisms as the costume simply makes me feel more feminine. The costume also encourages me to make bigger shapes, as the clothing is more heightened than the everyday clothing we wear today.

### Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

Active listening on stage! Lysette is often on stage but doesn't actually say too much. The trick is keeping engaged on stage when action is happening that doesn't directly involve your character. What helps me is to try and listen to discover something new in the other characters' dialogue each time I hear it. For me, this is a lot easier when the ensemble is performing the traditional *Hamlet* text, as I always discover new images or meanings.

### Do you consciously manipulate variation in your performance? How so?

Yes, and without even trying sometimes. As we know acting is reacting, so if someone delivers their line differently this instantly changes my performance as ideally I should be reacting to what is being said in front of me – not what happened in the previous run.

### What do you think audiences can learn from Sarah Bernhardt's story? Why should we still be talking about her today?

If I saw the play, I think I would actually be thinking about how someone becomes a celebrity without the influence of social media. Sarah was one of the first celebrities. She had an actual following of people not an online following of people. WILD. I think audiences can learn what theatre used to look like and have hope that even more change will come.



### Costume and gesture

Consider Fereday's comments about how her costume impacts her acting skills. Analyse the scenes where Lysette is playing Ophelia and identify how Fereday is manipulating gesture while wearing her *Hamlet* costume.

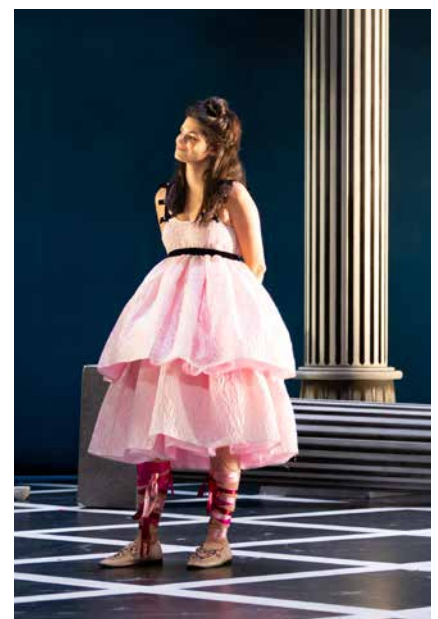


### Describing Lysette

Consider the phrases Fereday uses to describe Lysette and make a list of additional words you could use to describe her character and acting skills.

**'The costume also encourages me to make bigger shapes, as the clothing is more heightened than the everyday clothing we wear today.'**

TAHLEE FEREDAY



Tahlee Fereday



Tim Walter

## TIM WALTER ALPHONSE MUCHA

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

My character, Alphonse Mucha, was a real person who created several posters for Sarah Bernhardt's plays. He found tremendous success depicting beauty in the feminine forms that gave rise to the Art Nouveau movement. But Sarah Bernhardt playing Hamlet forces him to rethink his most tightly held beliefs about art and beauty and the role of women in art. He is driven by his career and continuing success, but he must also confront the conundrum that Sarah presents to create his latest work.

### **How do you embody your character?**

In rehearsals, I have been experimenting with different vocal and physical choices to bring the character to life. I have been trying to find a grounded quality in my body and an open chest resonance in my voice, while at the same time relishing the language of the text and trying to bring the images alive like a painter might. As he wrestles more and more with the dilemma of Sarah playing Hamlet, I have been exploring a looser, more unraveled physicality.

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

I'm at a stage in rehearsals where I am dying to put on the costume. I feel it will be an important step in this process. The way the clothes feel and encourage you to move has a great influence. Props such as my oversized sketchbook, drawing tools, scripts and papers, wine glasses, etc. all help to immerse me in the world of the play.

### **Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?**

I'm a big fan of the freedom to 'play' in rehearsals. I like to try many different approaches and throw lots of ideas around on the floor. It reminds me to be brave, to stay loose and flexible with ideas, and not hold on to my first ideas too tightly.

### **Do you consciously manipulate contrast in your performance?**

Yes, absolutely. In every character arc, there's always a journey of change. How you begin a story is different to where you'll end up. It's important to find these

**'I have been trying to find a grounded quality in my body and an open chest resonance in my voice.'**

TIM WALTER

contrasting moments of how your character experiences change. I also like to think about how my character is different to the other characters onstage. What are the things that make him unique? Even vocal and physical contrasts can breathe a spark into a character and keep him alive and interesting.

**What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?**

A big idea connected to my character is the role of women in art, both as its subject and its creator; how women were portrayed within a long art tradition and culture as pure, demure or beautiful, and how pioneers like Sarah Bernhardt represented a change within art, and in culture and society more broadly. Alphonse Mucha finds himself at the top of a cresting wave of change and must question long-held ideas and be brave enough to follow Sarah as she pursues authenticity.

**What do you think audiences can learn from Sarah Bernhardt's story?**

**Why should we still be talking about her today?**

As one of the earliest 'celebrities' and a force for cultural change, Sarah's story highlights both our progress and the strikingly familiar themes we still navigate when it comes to women in art and culture, the nature of beauty in art, and what it means to speak with an authentic voice in our society.

Tim Walter and William McKenna



**Acting skills**

Consider Walter's comments about vocal resonance and grounded movement. How else would you describe his acting skills?



**Props**

Describe how Walter interacts with props, particularly Mucha's sketchbook.

## DUSHAN PHILIPS FRANCOIS

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

Francois is one of the players in the company of actors assembled by Sarah Bernhardt. He defines himself by his craft and has been validated by his installation into this production but is struggling with not being taken seriously through the rehearsal process.

### How do you embody your character?

We're playing within the framework of a 19th-century acting style so we're juxtaposing those grand gestures with a counterpoint of very contemporary postures when not in performance mode. I'm also interested in being driven by the character's need to be large. When he is shut down is he small, or should he justify his being employed by taking the space that's required? This is a play within a play and this is a wonderful way to vary those two ideas.

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

The whole aesthetic, of course, alters the performance, but how that happens will truly come to light when we go into tech and dress rehearsals. Right now my imagination is riding wild and moving through space as if I am embroidered with lavish regal fittings. It's nice to exercise the wonder while currently dressed in a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. The only thing 'fancy' about me at the moment is my 19th-century inspired facial hair.

### Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

I'm an international nomad by circumstance, meaning I've lived in many countries. My chameleon skills come quite naturally and thus my process often revolves around the notion that I find my character's place in the story and amplify my stakes to best help tell that story. I'm really interested in figuring out how to make *Hamlet* (the play within this play) mean everything to Francois. That is the window to his discoveries.

### Do you consciously experiment with rhythm in your performance? How so?

Yes – with language, with movement, with intention. Often we get stuck in one way of playing something and then find it nigh on impossible to break out of that rhythm if needed. Staying malleable and mobile keeps things fresh. That is until you land the rhythm. Once you find it, then lock that in, and learn to play within those limitations.

**'I'm also interested in being driven by the character's need to be large.'**

DUSHAN PHILIPS

(left) Sahil Saluja and Dushan Philips;  
(below) Dushan Philips



### What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?

One of the major themes is the gender politics of a 19th-century woman playing the coveted male part of Hamlet. Francois is always the grave digger (an actual line in the play) and is confronted by jealousy, envy and frustration especially when Sarah overtly denigrates Shakespeare and his overindulgent very verbose writings. How dare she mock the great Bard!

### What do you think audiences can learn from Sarah Bernhardt's story? Why should we still be talking about her today?

Sarah defined her own success and made up her history. She refused to be pigeonholed into an idea of her that was oft bestowed on her by her critics and naysayers. Her life was very publicly scrutinised. We live in a world where our public profiles have a Frankenstein-esque quality that our private selves are in unconscious competition with. I say, like Sarah Bernhardt, we must live both bigger and richer than the avatar of ourselves that we put forward to the world.



#### Acting skills

What kind of an actor is Francois? What motivates him? Consider Philips's comments about being 'large' and how this is shown through movement and gesture in particular.



#### Rhythm

Consider Philips's comments about rhythm. Select a scene with Francois and analyse the pace, timing and tempo in Philips's performance.

## SAHIL SALUJA RAOUL

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

Raoul is driven by his curiosity to learn from the best. He is a dreamer, a problem solver and avoids conflict. Wherever he can, he tries to offer new suggestions to the rest of the company to bring Sarah's version of *Hamlet* to fruition.

### How do you embody your character?

Part of the challenge was to find a different voice for each of the different *Hamlet* and *Cyrano* characters that Raoul plays. I worked with amazing Voice & Text coaches Amy Hume and Geraldine Cook-Dafner to find a range of resonance from the top of the head all the way down to my toes. Anne-Louise Sarkis and Assistant Director Tasnim Hossain provided great clarity in finding 19th-century gestures that would support the *Hamlet* and *Cyrano* characters. Nigel Poulton, our Movement & Fight Director, helped us amplify those gestures to provide clear distinctions of when I was playing Raoul (more casual) as compared to *Hamlet* and *Cyrano* characters that were heightened to match the genre of 19th-century theatre in France.

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

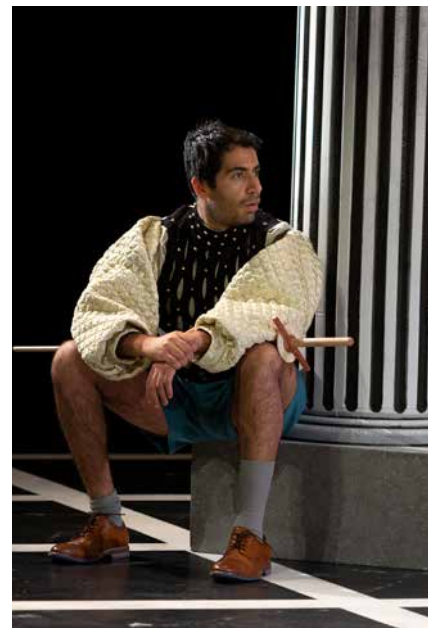
Sword fighting under the guidance of Nigel Poulton helped me condition my body to a 19th-century world. It also helped me sharpen my awareness when walking around with a rapier. Putting on the period costumes and specifically pushing my pants up around my waist (which I am not used to) greatly affected my breathing, which in turn affected my body language and gestures. Finally, the grand scale of the set, especially pillars, gave me a range of choices to explore entrances and exits around the stage, giving my character nuance and specificity.

### Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

Active listening and heightened awareness of space helped me ground myself during this show. Finding my inner monologue while listening to other characters when I'm present in the scene but not talking was extremely helpful in identifying what I was specifically responding to.

### What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?

The big idea through Raoul's lens is Sarah Bernhardt's 'non-traditional' take on *Hamlet* and her vision of working with a team of actors she trusts to bring her vision to life, even though there is constant internal and external resistance.



Sahil Saluja

Sarah Bernhardt emphasises the need to take risks to create something groundbreaking, which in my opinion is the definition of an artist. She also creates space literally and metaphorically for future artists to follow their artistic endeavours, the benefits of which we are reaping even today and will do in the future.

**What do you think audiences can learn from Sarah Bernhardt's story?  
Why should we still be talking about her today?**

We sit on the shoulders of giants like Sarah Bernhardt. She laid the foundation of the first feminist movement in my opinion. She also showcases the personal dilemma between our private and public lives especially as an artist. Finally, she encourages us to look at our own lives and find little moments of creativity and play wherever possible.

**'Part of the challenge was to find a different voice for each of the different *Hamlet* and *Cyrano* characters that Raoul plays.'**

SAHIL SALUJA



Kate Mulvany, Sahil Saluja and Dushan Philips



### Playing the part

Consider Saluja's comments about making the roles Raoul plays distinct. Make a list of words you can use to describe Saluja's acting skills as Raoul, and also as his *Hamlet* character.



### Active listening

Discuss Saluja's comments about active listening onstage and make connections to Fereday's discussion of active listening on page 7.

## JOHN LEARY LOUIS

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

Louis is a powerful theatre critic. His opinion dictates taste and shapes the views of the public. He represents the status quo against which Sarah Bernhardt often railed.

### How do you embody your character?

There is something relaxed about the way Louis is so thoroughly convinced of the value of his own opinions. I wanted to try and incorporate that in my body. When he sits, he lounges. His gestures are large and languid. He is very used to being listened to, is definitive in the construction of his sentences, and he seems to enjoy debate and conflict in his conversations. I am trying to reflect that vocally by exaggerating the tonal range and volume of my voice.

### How do design elements like set/props/costume impact your performance?

#### What helps and how?

The designer of the show, Marg Horwell, has a very collaborative way of arriving at the look of a character. I have really enjoyed looking at her sketches and references and sharing my ideas of how I think my character Louis would dress. Sometimes a piece of clothing can really inform how a character moves or stands. In the same spirit of collaboration, a table at which I sit was made smaller to accommodate the way I wanted the character to sit.

### What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?

Louis challenges the legitimacy of Sarah Bernhardt taking on the role of Hamlet. In his view, it is radical to the point of scandalous for a woman to play Hamlet. He questions whether the act of an audience looking at a man is different to looking at a woman. He has a rigid and gendered view of women in particular.

### What do you think audiences can learn from Sarah Bernhardt's story?

#### Why should we still be talking about her today?

Sarah Bernhardt was a radical nonconformist, an uncompromising woman who challenged the status quo.



### Collaboration

Identify a comment from Leary's Q&A about how he collaborated with the creative team on the set design.



### Acting skills

Make connections between Leary's comments about voice and gesture and his description of what drives Louis. Consider also the big ideas in the play and how Leary explains Louis's role in telling this story.

**'There is something relaxed about the way Louis is so thoroughly convinced of the value of his own opinions. I wanted to try and incorporate that in my body.'**

JOHN LEARY



John Leary



Kate Mulvany and William McKenna

## **WILLIAM MCKENNA** **MAURICE**

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

I play Maurice, who is the son of Sarah Bernhardt. Maurice grew up with only one parent, Sarah, and never knew who his father was. He is 35 years old and currently studying at university. His relationship with his mother is very close and often oscillates between who is playing the parent and child role. Money drives Maurice as he has grown up with fluctuating economic stability.

### **How do you embody your character?**

Maurice was born and raised by Sarah Bernhardt, therefore I have chosen to observe and form from Kate Mulvany's performance as Sarah. Her voice is resonant and tonally dances from high to low, so I have chosen to embed that into my vocality. My performance, gesturally, is quite large, which is again from Sarah's context of being a famous theatrical player of the time.

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

My scene takes place in Sarah's dressing room, therefore there is an assumed context that Maurice has spent his life growing up around the furniture. This helps Maurice's comfort; sitting anywhere and standing anywhere in the space. My engagement with props is also informed by this assumed context.

### **Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?**

A rehearsal technique I am implementing is being present and observing when I'm not in the scene. Getting to watch how others work and see the sense of play that each actor is bringing is inspiring. Also writing down each intention on each line helps me keep a guided template of my character's motivations.

### **Do you consciously manipulate motion in your performance? How so?**

Motion is particularly important for my character and the scene I am in. His sense of urgency after Sarah's letter has been sent to him brings him into the scene ready to berate and interrogate Sarah. I have tried experimenting and manipulating how fast my gait is to see the different pitches of emotion I could bring into the scene. I have found that fast works best.

**'Maurice was born and raised by Sarah Bernhardt, therefore I have chosen to observe and form from Kate Mulvany's performance as Sarah.'**

WILLIAM MCKENNA





Kate Mulvany and William McKenna

**What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?**

The big idea in the play for my role and character is to understand how love can be both damaging and blinding, and how that can seemingly change a person. This is in reference to Maurice's interrogation of Sarah and Edmond's secret relationship.

**What do you think audiences can learn from Sarah Bernhardt's story?**

**Why should we still be talking about her today?**

I think audiences will take a lot from Sarah Bernhardt's story. It's a timeless tale of breaking down enforced barriers and blatant stereotypes and how important that is in our lives. I see it as a kind of message for people to continue to break the norm and see how far their own passion and skill can take them.



**Acting skills and space**

Consider McKenna's comments about his character's relationship to the dressing room location where his scene takes place. How are McKenna's choices regarding movement, gesture, voice, facial expression, stillness and silence influenced by this space?



**Mother and son**

Make connections between McKenna's and Mulvany's acting skills as Maurice and his mother, respectively. Can you identify familial similarities?

## IZABELLA YENA ROSAMOND

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

Rosemonde Gérard was a real person who lived in the 19th and 20th centuries. She was an accomplished writer – mostly poetry – but also published a couple of plays. Despite her success, she was perhaps best known for having married Edmond Rostand (the famous playwright of *Cyrano de Bergerac*). In *Bernhardt/Hamlet* Rosamond's intellect and courage are on show. Appearing only once in the play with Sarah Bernhardt herself, Rosamond's presence is both surprising and unnerving. She arrives unannounced in Sarah's dressing room where we believe a confrontation about Sarah and Edmond's affair will occur, only to reveal that her main reason for visiting was to show Sarah Edmond's new play (an early draft that will become *Cyrano de Bergerac*). Unlike other characters in the play, Rosamond is very controlled and not easily swayed by Sarah's theatrics. She sees Sarah as her equal and matches her on intellect and aplomb.

### How do you embody your character?

In rehearsals we worked extensively with Geraldine Cook-Dafner (Voice & Dialect Coach) and Nigel Poulton (Movement & Fight Director). Both have such a distinct and unique approach and language of performance. I worked with Geraldine to find Rosamond's confidence and direct tone through lots of pitch-range exercises and observing the punctuation of the scene. We discovered that no matter where the voice sits in the body (chest resonance or head resonance) the most important thing is your intention. This informed my pitch in most cases. Similarly, with the work we did with Nigel, there was a large focus on intention and direction of movement. A large foundation of the work with Nigel was based in biomechanics, a system of movement created by Vsevolod Meyerhold. Within this, we focused on a rhythm made up of three parts; *otkaz* – preparation; *posil* – action, and *tochka* – end point. I used this rhythm not just in movement but applied it when thinking about where and how Rosamond might move through the space.

### Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

We worked heavily with a sense of impulse when discovering our scenes. This means we were given freedom to explore all possible versions of the scene and encouraged to play and explore what felt right and impulsive to do, within the bounds of the scene and set. Sometimes there were versions of the scene where we stayed sitting throughout, and other times flowers were being flung off tables. By exploring the extremes, we were able to find what staging and vocal intention was essential and learn where to be in space, to best tell the story we wanted to tell.

### Do you consciously manipulate motion in your performance? How so?

Yes, absolutely. When I think of motion I think of how my body is moving through space and this involves pace and weight as well. For example, when Rosamond first enters Sarah's dressing room, she strides past Sarah in a direct and fast-paced manner and places her bag down at the table. We wanted Rosamond to be confident and unafraid of Sarah; they are equals. To convey that, it was important that Rosamond moved in a way somewhat akin to Sarah. If Rosamond entered the scene slowly and in trepidation, it tells a different story.

Another example of motion within performance is how Rosamond touches Sarah's belongings. I made a conscious effort here to move with a sense of intrigue and softness, like when touching any furniture. This endows Sarah's space as something to be admired and respected, which Rosamond very much feels. This is a foreign place to her and so she is seeing it for the first time. Mixing these two different rhythms and motions culminates in a very interesting duality for Rosamond.

### What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?

There are so many wonderful ideas within *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, but what pertains particularly to Rosamond is the idea of authorship (who owns what stories, who gets to tell certain stories), loyalty and also a love of art and writing. Every character in this play is utterly in love with art and words, it is in many ways all their greatest strengths and leads to some of their downfalls. Rosamond's concern is for Edmond to finish his new play, which she believes will be a 'masterpiece'. As a writer herself, the love and respect for the process of writing is expressed when Sarah asks Edmond to rewrite *Hamlet* – something Rosamond believes has distracted Edmond from his true work of genius. Entwined in all this, is Edmond and Sarah's love for each other, which is

**'Appearing only once in the play with Sarah Bernhardt herself, Rosamond's presence is both surprising and unnerving.'**

IZABELLA YENA



Izabella Yena

undeniable. Rosamond's sense of loyalty is also on show, something we see throughout the play in relation to the question, must we stay loyal to the original Shakespearean text?

**What do you think audiences can learn from Sarah Bernhardt's story?  
Why should we still be talking about her today?**

Sarah Bernhardt was a pioneer in championing women in the theatre and being unapologetic in the process. Bernhardt was able to pave the way for many more women to take on traditionally male roles and be taken seriously doing so. In a world where gender is being openly discussed and examined more and more, Bernhardt's determination to see Hamlet as a person beyond his gender is a valuable lesson to take into our professional lives as actors (when approaching new characters) and also as people operating in our constantly evolving society. In addition to this, she challenged others to think about who can tell what stories and why and why not – something that is definitely a conversation still happening today at large.

**'When Rosamond first enters Sarah's dressing room, she strides past Sarah in a direct and fast-paced manner and places her bag down at the table.'**

IZABELLA YENA



**Motion**

Consider Yena's description of her entrance into Bernhardt's dressing room. How is she manipulating motion in this moment? How do her acting skills enhance this motion?



**Collaboration**

Consider Yena's comments about working with the Voice & Text Coaches and Movement & Fight Director. How have these roles helped inform Yena's performance?

Izabella Yena and Kate Mulvany



# Set and costume design

Learn more about the set and costume design for *Bernhardt/Hamlet* in this interview with Marg Horwell.

## Where did you begin your research for *Bernhardt/Hamlet*?

We started researching lots of different topics. We started looking at Sarah Bernhardt as a person – and a mythology – and how she was perceived in her own time, but also since then. We explored how painters, artists, actors and makers – and pop culture – have viewed her over her life and beyond.

We also looked at theatre making of the time – a style that was very handmade, pre-technology, and very representational with painted cloths and props, such as fake trees or rocks that were made to look real. In this style, real objects met representations of objects. Sometimes physical stairs met paintings of stairs, and painted buildings had doors but you couldn't step through them. There was a friction between the real and the representation.

We looked at how images were put together and how theatre was made, and then we really interrogated how we make theatre. The play is set in a theatre, but we didn't feel the need to create a theatre within a theatre. We wanted to use the bones of what we have in the Sumner, but that does raise a lot of questions of where contemporary meets period, where our performance mode meets a performance mode that we are interpreting from the 1800s. We interrogated all of the tropes of those things to see how they speak to each other.

## How did Sarah Bernhardt's career and life influence your set and costume designs for *Bernhardt/Hamlet*?

Before starting this project I didn't know a lot about Sarah Bernhardt. I was aware of her as a figure and I'd seen paintings of her, but I didn't really understand how incredibly groundbreaking and eccentric she was. Discovering that is really great for someone who's designing a show about her. There's a lot of rumours or stories about her – like she had a hat made from a bat. She was an artist herself and a lot of her artwork was about female forms or faces and often there would be crabs coming out of their mouths – exciting and provocative kinds of thinking for a woman at that time. So it feels like a great way to furnish a world that is full of imagination and art that revels in her eccentricities and the way she knew she was perceived. When you are aware that you're being looked at all the time, I think you present yourself in a slightly different way or you're very aware of how you present yourself.

There's a really famous photoshoot she did where she posed in a coffin and it is an amazing set where she put the coffins on an angle and there are flowers – there's reference to it in the play. There's this amazing history of her – like Cindy Sherman or artists who have made self-portraits – of being really conscious of the work that's being put out into the world.



Marg Horwell



Charles Wu and John Leary



Marco Chiappi, Charles Wu, Tim Walter, Kate Mulvany, John Leary and William McKenna

We looked closely at her house and her dressing room in the theatre. She spent so much time in there and there's a sense of theatre props being mixed with personal items from her life and the way those two lived together. She made very full, artistic, exciting spaces. Personally, when I was starting out as a designer, I remember I kept some props and I put them in my house and they lived in my house, and it's the merging of those kinds of things that just become the furnishings in your life.

**How does your design help communicate the 'two worlds'?**

We've created two separate visual theatre languages. Firstly, we have explored a more painterly kind of old-world theatrical language, so flown cloths and painted images. It's a kind of optical illusion of 3D meets 2D, of how people navigate those spaces which are quite presentational, very front-on and kind of 'performer in front of that backdrop'.

And secondly, there are scenes interspersed in the show where they are 'outside' of the theatre. We've tried to imbue that with our own theatre making language, which feels more fully furnished with objects that you can touch or inhabit in a more realistic way. But we've presented them on trucks – rooms or sections or corners of rooms that are wheeled on stage.

We're acknowledging that there's still a set within our production, but it's a different kind of set. We have the 3D fleshed-out world and then a more 2D theatre making world. Hopefully what we're building feels like a collage. We're aiming for those two worlds to merge so that we can blend our 2D trees with our 3D rooms.

All of this is a theatre language. They are theatre conventions and they start to blend by the end of the show. I think that speaks to someone who lives a life in the public eye, who is always at the centre of what is happening and who lives their life in the theatre in a way that is very presentational. So actually, that whole person's life is theatre. No matter what vision.

**What technologies are involved in the design?**

It's funny because we're using technology to try and make it look really low-fi. Some of it is quite complicated to build – we're using automation and the fly system – but what we're actually trying to achieve is something that looks very manual and handmade.

You'll notice little things at half-mast or in the process of being moved, like they're being stored or they're incomplete. These elements come and go in full view of the audience and in full light, so we're integrating the movement of theatre into the aesthetic of the show. There's quite a complicated truck – which feels like a simple action – where we see a portion of Bernhardt's dressing room in Act One and then we see a more fully-formed version in Act Two. The latter is actually three trucks manually pushed together and connected, then it drives itself away. The effect is that time has passed, so Bernhardt sits with a script at the table and the world should fall away behind her – she is just left at the table by herself. But to do that without a lot of people pushing it – so it feels very simple – requires incredibly complicated automation.

Early on we introduce a language where we have people pushing the trucks (they're actually pretending to push the automated truck so we can build the convention of it), so we feel like there are more people in the theatre – actors, stagehands, stage managers – and we're owning that this is artificial. Later we blend the two theatre making languages and we can invest in the moment when it falls away without us having to think about it. Even though it's very complicated programming that we are testing and testing, but we are yet to gain the simplicity of that thought like a breathing out, that's where our most complicated effect is.

**The world of the play isn't very period accurate. Can you talk about the decision behind this?**

Dramatising theatre making is actually a really tricky thing to balance. For example, a costume that isn't exactly period accurate might still be read by an audience as period, or if something's a bit off then an audience might only see that mistake. What we're trying to do is show that these people are in rehearsals, so we're introducing contemporary elements like tracksuit pants, contemporary shoes and socks – things that are just what we would normally wear. We mix them with Shakespearean doublets and neck ruffs to show that there's a disconnect – that it's not the full image but we're halfway there.

If we are interpreting something – and this play is about someone interpreting something – then I think there's interesting complexity to be had with the details of those things. I think someone can look at the scenes in the show where they move away from a big performance style down to something that feels more real – the poetry has been taken out. To make something look 'high' and then to try and break through that, to have something more 'real',

**'We're playing with her proportion constantly to manipulate the gender representations in order to make the struggle of Bernhardt proving she can play Hamlet more visible.'**

MARG HORWELL

Tahlee Fereday, Kate Mulvany,  
Marco Chiappi and Dushan Philips



sometimes it's easier to take off a bit of costume and you can see the shape of their body or their slumped shoulders, or their knees – that shows them as a bit more vulnerable and you can break through that in a more successful way.

Kate Mulvany's costume plot as Sarah Bernhardt – who's rehearsing the role of Hamlet – is almost entirely in costume as Hamlet. So we looked at a lot of photos of Sarah dressed as Hamlet, which is quite a 'big' look with lots of different pieces and a wig (in the show they talk about how her hair is terrible, so we're looking at quite a strange sort of a helmeted wig). We've deliberately made the pieces so that they can deconstruct. The doublet and sleeves can come off separately, so she can just have the sleeves with shirts underneath – she can find ways of working with her costume. Finding that track is quite satisfying, as it's also working with her looking more masculine or looking more feminine as we go through the show. We have averaged out her shapes so that she looks broader in the shoulder and doesn't have much of a waist and then when she takes that off, she has her tiny waist and broader shoulders. We're playing with her proportion constantly to manipulate the gender representations in order to make the struggle of Bernhardt proving she can play Hamlet more visible.

The costumes are based on period shapes but they all use contemporary fabrics, and I think some of them look really fashionable when she's wearing those pieces separately. Depending on where we are, she can feel more vulnerable and small, or more powerful and broad.

**Tell us about some of the 'Easter Eggs' within your design that are drawn from the archives of Melbourne Theatre Company?**

I think what's exciting about this show is that it's about a theatre company that owns their own theatre – and that's the context we're making it in at Melbourne Theatre Company. There are references in the script to where characters say, 'Go and get me some stuff from stock, but make sure it's not from that show', or, 'I wore this in that show, go and get me those shoes'. It's something I'm increasingly interested in doing anyway in the interest of sustainability, but for this show which is about theatre making, re-using things from past productions is great. Melbourne Theatre Company has done so many big Shakespearean shows so we've been able to re-use lots of bits and pieces from stock.

For example we're using the noses from the *Cyrano de Bergerac* production that the Company produced in 2005, as well as some of the costume pieces from that show, which just makes me feel excited that those costumes are representative of that production. So many props have been re-used and repurposed. We're using bases of trees that I think are maybe from a show about 30 years ago. When you have a company with a huge history, like Melbourne Theatre Company, it makes for quite a genuine history within this production.

Sarah Bernhardt was widely lauded as the greatest actress of her time, and we're really investing in the mythology of Kate Mulvany as a performer as well. There are several pieces in the show where we have replicated Kate, like posters of Sarah that we've modified to be posters of Kate. Thematically this is a visual representation of how someone is seen by many people in the public eye. There's an artist in the show as well, Alphonse Mucha, who is sketching Bernhardt. So there are sketches of Kate from rehearsals in the actor's sketchbook that are part of the show, too. There's a rich tapestry of representations of a person threaded throughout, which feels great. I think it feels like many eyes on someone that feels like someone who lives their life in public. I think it's largely subliminal, but those images all build the mythology of our performer, Kate Mulvany, in a way that's honouring the way that Sarah Bernhardt was seen in her company in that time.



### Costume designs

Compare the selection of costume renders on the following pages with the final costume designs you saw onstage. Discuss how the costumes might have evolved during the theatre production process.



### Storyboard

Explore the set design storyboard on the following pages to see the set model in its various configurations for each scene. Identify the components of the set (e.g. tree trunks, cloths, etc.) that were used in the production.



Marco Chiappi and Kate Mulvany

**'All of this is a theatre language, all of these are theatre conventions and they start to blend by the end of the show. I think that speaks to someone who lives a life in the public eye, who is always at the centre of what is happening and who lives their life in the theatre in a way that is very presentational.'**

MARG HORWELL

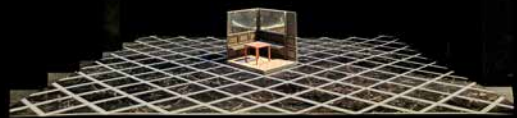
# Set design storyboard



Act 1 - Scene 1 - The Stage - Hamlet



Act 1 - Scene 2 - Dressing Room



Act 1 - Scene 3 - Café - Having a Drink



Act 1 - Scene 4 - The Stage - Hamlet



Act 1 - Scene 4 - The Stage - Hamlet



Act 1 - Scene 4 - The Stage - Poster



Act 1 - Scene 4 - The Stage - Poster



Act 1 - Scene 5 - A Paris Street - La Samaritaine Poster



Act 1 - Scene 6 - The Stage - Hamlet - Ghost



# Interval



Act 2 - Scene 1 - The Stage - Hamlet



Act 2 - Scene 1 - The Stage - Hamlet



Act 2 - Scene 2 - Edmond's Study



Act 2 - Scene 3 - Dressing Room



Act 2 - Scene 4 - The Stage



Act 2 - Scene 4 - The Stage



Act 2 - Scene 4 - The Stage



Act 2 - Scene 5 - The Stage - Cyrano Curtain Call "Kabuki"



Act 2 - Scene 6 - The Stage - "Empty" Hamlet

# Costume designs



Sarah (Hamlet)



Sarah (fencing)



Raoul



Rosamond

# Costume designs



Louis



Lysette



Maurice



Alphonse

# Costume designs



Sarah (dinner party)



Edmond (dinner party)



Constant (dinner party)



Constant (as Cyrano)

# Composition and sound design

Learn more about the composition and sound design for *Bernhardt/Hamlet* in this interview with Joe Paradise Lui.

**How would you describe the music and sound design you've created for *Bernhardt/Hamlet*? What is the world of this play?**

I think it's a feeling of trying to marry the past and present. Something of the time period (late 19th century), but also of the now. So there's orchestral arrangements, with contemporary feeling music and rhythms. It's a world that is about making theatre, and we are making theatre, so there are many layers of a fun 'onion' to peel, and we want to see all the things at the same time – like a Panopticon (an old-fashioned circular prison design with cells arranged around a central point, where prisoners could be observed at all times) ... like a funyun ... like a panopticon funyun.

**Are there particular sounds, instruments or motifs we should listen out for?**

Maybe a fun game is: what sounds sound more classical to you and what sounds sound more modern? Drum kits and electronic sounds amidst woodwinds and strings. Piano themes abound! Listen out for everything.

**How does your work help with the transitions between scenes?**

The music helps by creating a non-diegetic dreamscape while scene changes happen, so scene changes become less about being functional movements of set pieces and props, and more a fantasia of shifting landscapes and art objects.

**Is there a moment in the play that you're particularly excited about, regarding your design?**

I'm particularly excited about the big fight scene for *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the end. I think the play suddenly goes somewhere different, and the music gets to go with it.

**Are there any examples of diegetic sounds you're using in your design?**

It's a really interesting piece of thinking about diegesis. What should or shouldn't be diegetic? It is full of not just plays within plays, but play making within play making. Questions around what is 'right', in terms of what sounds can be heard, present interesting questions around what is 'real'. We've gone with a very stripped back approach toward things, but there might be a couple location-based diegetic sounds to help us work out where we are.



Joe Paradise Lui



## Composition and sound design analysis

Based on Lui's comments above and your memory of the music and sound in the performance, write short responses to these questions:

- How did music help support transitions between scenes?
- Can you identify moments where music was manipulating mood? Describe the music in detail.
- Can you recall any diegetic sounds that evoke a specific location?
- How does the music for *Cyrano de Bergerac* contrast to the music earlier in the performance?



Tim Walter, Tahlee Fereday, Marco Chiappi and Kate Mulvany

# Props

This production of *Bernhardt/Hamlet* uses many props, including consumable props, paper props, props used for set dressing and meta-theatrical props. The list below is by no means exhaustive, but might prompt your memory of what you saw onstage.

## LARGE PROPS

- Theatrical rehearsal props: tree stumps, polystyrene columns and boulders
- Flowers in Act One, Scene Four as the cast make a tableau for the Mucha poster
- Park bench in Act One, Scene Five
- The ornate chair in *Hamlet* rehearsals (modelled on Bernhardt's real-life chair) with 3D-printed monkey heads on the armrests

## HAND PROPS

- Rapiers (swords)
- Coffee cups
- Champagne glasses, goblets, tumblers (polycarbonate plastic so as not to break onstage)
- Mucha's notebook (with sketches inside created by Melbourne Theatre Company Scenic Art department)
- Mucha's *Hamlet* poster (in Mulvany's likeness)

## PAPER PROPS

- The *Hamlet* scripts actors hold in rehearsal
- The *Cyrano de Bergerac* script Rosamond gives Sarah

## CONSUMABLE PROPS

- Fake coffee in the café
- Becherovka (fake beverage Rostand and Alphonse drink in the study)
- Drinks at Bernhardt's dressing room dinner party (fake wine and spirits, made from water and food colouring or tea)
- Alcohol-free sparkling wine (in a bottle with cork that pops)

## SET DRESSING PROPS

- Books in Rostand's study
- Many props in Bernhardt's dressing room for the dinner party (most of which have come from stock at Melbourne Theatre Company) including busts, candelabras, a large golden skull, crowns, bolts of fabric, upholstered armchairs, a portrait of Bernhardt (in Mulvany's likeness), side tables with turned legs, bunches of fake flowers, jewellery draped on a mannequin torso, a golden horse statue and more!



Tahlee Fereday, Marco Chiappi and Kate Mulvany



Tim Walter and Charles Wu



Bernhardt's dressing room

# Safe and ethical working practices

To create a safe and ethical work environment, the *Bernhardt/Hamlet* team includes a variety of specialist roles such as Intimacy Coordinator, Movement & Fight Director and Voice & Text Coaches. These roles work with the creative team to ensure the cast are maintaining safe practices during the developing and presenting theatre stages of the theatre production process.

Melbourne Theatre Company is committed to providing a safe and accessible work environment for all of our staff, crew, cast and creatives. The responsibility to ensure a safe and ethical work environment is a whole company approach. Learn more about our policies and commitments that shape the way we work at [mtc.com.au/company-documents](https://mtc.com.au/company-documents)



Charles Wu and Kate Mulvany

## INTIMACY COORDINATOR

Intimacy Coordinators (ICs) work with actors to develop language and movement around how they use their bodies in relation to each other and the space. They also take into account the cohesion, motion and rhythm of a production to coordinate all the intimate moments such as kissing, touching and close contact between actors.

## MOVEMENT & FIGHT DIRECTOR

The job of a Movement & Fight Director is to work with the Director to choreograph the composition and structure of movement, gesture and stylisation in scenes. They often consider the variation, contrast, motion, rhythm and emphasis of scenes to develop safe ways to portray moments of conflict, fight scenes and choreographed movement.

## VOICE & TEXT COACHES

The job of a Voice & Text Coach is to support the Director in creating the vocal life of the play, work with the cast to ensure the meaning comes across in the language, and ensure each actor has the vocal stamina required for performing the season.

# During rehearsal

During production development creatives often schedule specific rehearsals to develop, maintain and reinforce safe and ethical work practices.



Kate Mulvany and William McKenna.  
Photo by Charlie Kinross

## INTIMACY COORDINATOR AMY CATER

At the beginning of the rehearsal process the IC will meet with actors to build a relationship of trust and promote clear discussion channels surrounding boundaries and comfortability with intimacy. This meeting gives actors the space to talk through and develop language around intimacy prior to conversations in the room, including the agreement of touch. Here is what Amy Cater had to say about working as an IC on this production.

'One of the pivotal aspects of intimacy coordination is the agreement of touch. This essentially is a conversation of agreement that allows each cast member to advocate to the other, in the presence of the IC, Director and Stage Manager (SM), what parts of their body they are happy to include in the intimate scenes and what preferences they might have around touch. They are also asked what they are happy to touch on the other person. If there is undressing in the script. We discuss this here too.' An example of that advocacy could go like this:

For this scene I am happy to take my shirt off but want to keep my pants on. I'm happy for mouth kissing, no tongue to be used. It's okay to touch my face, neck and hair. My ears are ticklish so avoid those.

The IC is listening for what body areas are covered and I enquire around others that aren't mentioned for clarity and more detailed preferences. This is done with both actors in the scene. We then find overlaps of what is available from each actor to use for the scene. We choreograph the pace, pressure and duration of the touch specific to each person's preferences.'

Once a moment of intimacy has been choreographed, the IC will continue to check in through the rehearsal process.



Amy Cater



## VOICE & TEXT COACH AMY HUME

During the rehearsal the Voice & Text Coach will work with actors both in the room and in one-on-one voice sessions. During these sessions we focus on different aspects of voice, such as articulation. Here is what Amy Hume had to say about working as a Voice & Text Coach on this production.

‘One way to draw attention to articulation is to physically explore the vowels and consonants of the text. We used an exercise where the actors look at how different vowels and consonants move the body in different ways – some are fast, others are slow, some feel higher in pitch and others feel deeper.

To begin, the actors would take a line from the text, and remove all the vowels, focusing only on the consonants. This means a line like “Yorick has been in the ground” becomes “y-r-k-h-z-b-n-n-th-g-r-n-d”. As you say each consonant, you allow it to bring a different movement to the body and it becomes clear that each has a different feel. For example, “k” is explosive and light, and can move your body quickly, whereas “n” is continuous and smooth, and might move you more languidly. Then you return to the vowels. The same line becomes “oh-ih-a-ee-ih-eh-ow”. Through physically exploring each vowel you discover which ones are long, which are short, and if they require the lips to be spread (eg. “ee”) or round (eg. “ow”). Then you put the line back together and suddenly the voice has more strength, carrying power and range. Not only the words can be heard clearly from further away, they are infused with meaning – so the actor is speaking clearly but with intention.’

## MOVEMENT & FIGHT DIRECTOR NIGEL POULTON

‘During *Bernhardt/Hamlet* rehearsals the Movement & Fight Director’s work involved training the actors in concepts around the composition and structure of movement, gesture and stylisation; in addition to training them in theatrical swordplay. Then help develop a specific physical language for the production; in addition to developing and setting the sword fight choreography for the two sword fight scenes that are in the play.

The training focused on developing agility, strength and coordination throughout their bodies, and specific exercises to develop the fine motor skills required for swordplay. Lots of focus on form and structure, as these concepts transcend both areas of my work in this production, and then refining all this through specific technical functional exercises. As we progressed I introduced more partnered work. Many of the exercises carry a certain physical risk so the stakes are high which inspires an exceptional intensity of attention and mutual support.’



Amy Hume



Nigel Poulton



Charles Wu, Tim Walter, Kate Mulvany and John Leary

# During the performance season

**Once the actors move into the theatre and commence performances, the focus on safe and ethical working practices remains. A range of exercises and protocols ensure the cast keep communicating about safety onstage.**

## **INTIMACY COORDINATOR AMY CATER**

'An intimacy call is integrated into the pre-show call of every performance. It is always done with the presence of a third person (e.g. Stage Manager). The cast can talk through the physical blocking of the scene as a reminder of the choreography. They can ask for a beat/action swap out (temporarily or permanently) if something has changed in their consent or touch preference. For instance if someone feels like they have a cold, they may swap out a kiss for an embrace or warm hand hold.

Intimacy check-ins throughout a season support the cast's understanding of the scene, its repeatability and the actor's body sustainability. The choreography is locked so they can rely on it and sink into character. But they always have the ability to change beats in a structured way, should they need an adjustment to better support their ongoing work.'

## **VOICE & TEXT COACH AMY HUME**

'One of the challenges of performing in the Sumner is the acoustics of the space. It requires the actors to have energised articulation and carrying power in their voices, so the audience can catch every word.

It is vital that the actors warm-up their voices before each show. A vocal warm-up can be anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour, depending on what the actor needs. It will begin with physical stretches (particularly the neck, shoulders and lower body), which is key to releasing any residual tension in the body that can interfere with accessing breath support.

A warm-up would then move on to activating the breath and then doing easy sounding, such as humming, lip trills or tongue trills. From there, it is worthwhile spending time massaging the jaw, releasing the tongue and exercising the soft palate – these are all part of what's called the vocal channel, and their flexibility is paramount in the actor having range and flexibility in their voice. Finally the actors wake up the main resonators (usually chest, mouth, sinus and nasal) before blending their range and energising the articulators. A vocal warm-up is not only a valuable tool in keeping the voice fit and healthy for performance, many actors say it helps them mentally prepare for a performance.

Cooling down after a show can also be beneficial. The actors' voices have worked hard during the performance, and it is soothing for the muscles of the neck and throat to have a gentle stretch and massage after the show. These can usually be done while dressing down, on the tram or train, or even in the car. Gentle humming is a great way to ease the vocal folds after a demanding performance.'

## **MOVEMENT & FIGHT DIRECTOR NIGEL POULTON**

During the performance season I advise actors to do rigorous pre-show preparation that's suitable for the tasks they are required to perform in the production. This includes a Fight Call before every show – where they run through each sword fight a number of times.



Kate Mulvany and Charles Wu

# Analysis questions

The following questions are designed to help you investigate moments in *Bernhardt/Hamlet* through the lens of VCE Theatre Studies. Remember to always consult official VCAA documents when revising for VCE assessments and examinations.



Kate Mulvany, Dushan Philips, Tahlee Fereday, Charles Wu, Sahil Saluja and Marco Chiappi

## ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

### The stage

- Discuss how one actor manipulated two acting skills in this scene.
- Explain why the set design included painted cloths, 3D tree trunks and flown tree canopies with reference to the script's context and implied theatre styles.
- Analyse how emphasis and one other element of theatre composition was manipulated in this scene.
- Discuss why the actors are wearing these particular costumes in this scene.



Charles Wu, Tim Walter and Dushan Philips

## **ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE** **A Paris street**

- With reference to at least one other scene in the performance, discuss how cohesion was manipulated by the set designer.
- Discuss how the theatre styles implied in the script were interpreted in this scene.
- Discuss reasons why this Art Nouveau poster was used in this scene, with reference to the script and its context.
- Analyse how one actor manipulated two acting skills in this scene.



Marco Chiappi, Charles Wu, Kate Mulvany,  
Tim Walter and John Leary

## **ACT TWO, SCENE THREE**

**Sarah is having a dinner party in her dressing room**

- Discuss how motion was manipulated in this scene.
- Analyse how two production roles (costume and set designer) interpreted this scene.
- Evaluate how one actor used variation and rhythm to interpret this scene.
- Analyse how acting and one or more areas of design (costume, make-up, props, set, lighting, sound) conveyed the intended meaning of the play in this scene.



Kate Mulvany

## **ACT TWO, SCENE 6** **The empty stage**

- Evaluate how Kate Mulvany and costume design applied the element of emphasis to interpret this scene.
- Analyse how the theatre technology of a kabuki drop was used just prior to this scene.
- Discuss how this scene contrasted to the rest of the performance.
- Analyse the actor-audience relationship in this specific moment.

# Learn more



## ONSTAGE GALLERY

See more images from the Melbourne Theatre Company production of *Bernhardt/Hamlet* in our online gallery.

View the gallery at [mtc.com.au/backstage](http://mtc.com.au/backstage)



## THEATRE TECHNOLOGIES

Learn more about the theatre technologies used in this production, including trucks, fly system and kabuki drops.

Explore the resource at [mtc.com.au/education](http://mtc.com.au/education)



## THE SARAH BERNHARDT QUIZ

See the cast answer questions about the real Sarah Bernhardt and learn more about the context of this production.

Watch the video at [mtc.com.au/backstage](http://mtc.com.au/backstage)

### PHOTO CREDITS

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