

11—27 MAY  
2023

# MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

SOUTHBANK  
THEATRE



# I WANNA BE YOURS

BY ZIA AHMED

DIRECTED BY TASNIM HOSSAIN

EDUCATION PACK – PART A



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Department of 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.

# Melbourne Theatre Company

**At Melbourne Theatre Company we believe theatre is for everyone. We are Melbourne's home of live storytelling, producing an annual season of plays created for and about the world today.**



Southbank Theatre

Beyond the stage, we run a range of initiatives that support artist development, champion new writing, invest in future audiences and address under-representation across the industry.

## OUR VISION

To be recognised as one of the world's preeminent theatre companies, leading the cultural conversation and chosen as a favourite destination for Australians.

## OUR PURPOSE

To share remarkable stories that enable people to better understand the world around them.



### Melbourne Theatre Company HQ Virtual Tour

Walk the halls of our 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.

# About the play

## SUMMARY

Haseeb and Ella meet at a performance workshop. He's a poet and she's an actor, from opposite sides of the Thames, hired to help him with his enunciation. Their attraction is immediate. They start dating, get serious and fall in love. Soon there is each other's family and friends to navigate, and then big questions about the future – moving in together, marriage, children. Does it matter that Haseeb is British-Pakistani and Ella's a white girl from Yorkshire? Can their love surpass the cultural and physical boundaries between them?

## ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

This production contains sexual references, coarse language and references to racism. For detailed information about the production's content, visit our production content guide.

## DURATION

Approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes, no interval.



Director Tasnim Hossain, Oz Malik and Eleanor Barkla



## Read the programme

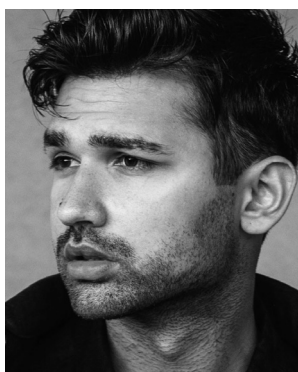
Explore the digital programme for this production to read about the cast and creative team, and see more photos from the rehearsal room.



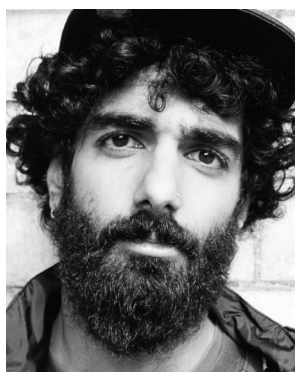
# Cast and creatives



**Eleanor Barkla**  
Ella



**Oz Malik**  
Haseeb



**Zia Ahmed**  
Writer



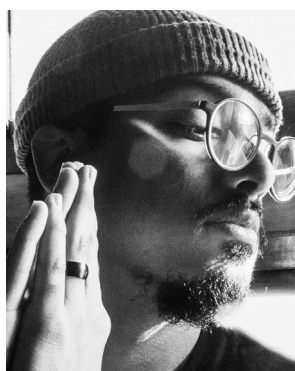
**Tasnim Hossain**  
Director



**Kat Chan**  
Set & Costume Designer



**Rachel Lee**  
Lighting Designer



**Mufeez Al Haq**  
Composer & Sound Designer



**Geraldine Cook-Dafner**  
Voice & Dialect Coach



**Gurkiran Kaur**  
Dialect Coach (UK)



**Jonathan Homsey**  
Movement Consultant



**Isabella Vadeloo**  
Intimacy Coordinator



## Read their bios

Explore the digital programme to read the biographies of the cast and creatives working on this production.

# Characters and acting skills

*I Wanna Be Yours* is a two-hander script, with two actors playing one character each. The cast in this play will use voice, movement, facial expression, gesture, stillness and silence to embody Haseeb and Ella.



Oz Malik and Eleanor Barkla

## **HASEEB OZ MALIK**

### **What is your role in the play?**

I play Haseeb Hameed. He's a young guy from North London of British Pakistani origin. British Pakistanis are a significant minority in England and they've been there for generations. They are represented everywhere in Britain; from politicians and educators to workers in factories. It's a significant community that has achieved a lot but they have also faced a lot of challenges. In this play we see the themes of racism, bigotry and the inter-racial divide as well. So Haseeb is involved in all of these things – racism and class divide – and he's navigating through it.

This affects his relationships with people, but he finds himself through spoken word poetry. That's his outlet – being a spoken word artist. He also works at a falafel factory, which sounds awesome, probably smells great as well, but being a spoken word artist in England is a way of him getting his emotions out, telling his story, and he ends up meeting a girl that he falls in love with.

Ella, to him, is beautiful. He really does love her. The challenge, though, is that Ella is from a different background. She's not the same skin colour as him, not the same religion, and she's not even from the same area. So these challenges start to come up.

**'He's a young guy from North London of British Pakistani origin ... he finds himself through spoken word poetry.'**

OZ MALIK



### How do you embody these characteristics?

The way that I've been approaching the character of Haseeb has primarily been through music. I love listening to UK music and getting the rhythm of the place. I've been listening to music from North West London, which has a particular style and tone. I also like to see the type of fashion and clothes in the area. I'm a very visual person and once I see paintings, films or music, that inspires and informs where I can take my character.

Then after that I look at the voice. The North West London accent is particular. I've been working on that and figuring out how it sounds. That grounds me and helps me then move into my body and the character's physical movement.

It's been fun and interesting, but Haseeb is different to me, as a person from Melbourne. There are, however, a lot of similarities because I'm of Pakistani heritage. I know what it feels like to live in an environment where you may be different. I'm also Muslim like Haseeb, so I know the aspects of Ramadan and Eid which are referenced in our story. That makes it easy for me to fit into the character and his lived experience.

## ELLA ELEANOR BARKLA

### Who is your character and where do they come from?

I play Ella, a girl in her twenties. She's from Yorkshire in England, from a little town called Hebden Bridge, and she's currently living in South London trying to make a career for herself as an actor and working three jobs to try and make it all come together. She's really struggling with missing her hometown as well and not knowing where she should be. What drives her in this play is essentially her career and what she wants to do, but also a real sense of needing to be home and missing home and missing family, and also her love for Haseeb. So she's really pulled in a lot of different directions and we see her ebbing and flowing a lot throughout the show.

### How do you embody your character?

Ella is very specific in a lot of ways. For me it starts with her voice. Her accent is so specific to place, specifically Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire. Learning that has allowed the movement to follow. She's got a singsong, lyrical and easy way about her, both in her accent and the dialogue as well. That has flowed onto her posture and her movement and the way she moves through the world.

It's also important to notice the movement differences between Ella and Haseeb. Haseeb comes from a culture and a family that he says is quite restricted, whereas Ella talks about coming from a family that's very warm and expressive. So I think denoting those differences has been really helpful as well – she hugs, touches and talks with her hands. So my preparation all started from the voice and place and flowed through the rest of it.



### Acting skills

Identify the acting skills each actor mentions as they discuss how they will embody their character. Select a script excerpt and explain how you would develop the character in that scene.



### Hear from the cast

Learn more about the characters in extended interviews with the cast at [mtc.com.au](http://mtc.com.au)



Oz Malik



Eleanor Barkla

**'What drives [Ella] in this play is essentially her career ... missing home and missing family ... and also her love for Haseeb.'**

ELEANOR BARKLA

# Context and setting



London

***'I Wanna Be Yours is about two young people who meet in London – Haseeb, who is of Pakistani heritage and from North London, and Ella, who is from Yorkshire and lives in South London. It's about how these two people come together and fall in love in spite of all of the differences between them and all of the things that might keep them apart.'***

**DIRECTOR TASNIM HOSSAIN**

## LONDON

Haseeb and Ella are from opposite sides of the River Thames. Haseeb lives in the north, while Ella lives in the south. Ella and Haseeb meet in central London at a performance workshop. Haseeb is a poet and Ella is an actor hired to help him with his enunciation.

London is the capital of England and the United Kingdom, with a population of just under 9 million (almost double that of Melbourne). London's diverse cultures encompass over 300 languages. The city sits on the River Thames and is connected by a vast public transport system including the London Underground.

## CRICKLEWOOD

Haseeb is from Cricklewood, a district of North London. The largely working class area has an industrial history (it was home to the first Smith's Crisps potato crisp factory). In the 1950s following World War II, thousands of people from across the United Kingdom, Ireland and Pakistan came to Cricklewood to work in its many factories.



Cricklewood





(left) Dulwich; (right) The Amersham Arms in New Cross, South London

## DULWICH

Ella lives in Dulwich, a leafy, affluent, village-like neighbourhood in South London with boutique shops and restaurants. Dulwich is surrounded by parks and has a countryside feel despite being a short train journey to central London.

Haseeb and Ella travel to, and reference, several other locations in London during the play.

## SOUTH LONDON

Camberwell, Peckham, New Cross and Honor Oak are all trendy neighbourhoods in South London. Time Out London calls Peckham 'London's coolest neighbourhood', and describes Camberwell as 'an artistic part of town', while New Cross has 'perfect growing conditions for gentrification' and new restaurants continue to open in the once-quiet Honor Oak. In the script, Haseeb and Ella take an Uber to New Cross and dance at the Amersham Arms, a trendy bohemian pub popular with students and locals.

Dalston and Hackney are among the eclectic neighbourhoods of East London, packed with bars, restaurants, pubs and arts venues. In the script, Haseeb and Ella attend a house party in Dalston. Later, Ella watches Haseeb perform a spoken word set in a tiny Hackney studio.

## YORKSHIRE

Ella is from a little town called Hebden Bridge in the Yorkshire region of Northern England. The town has a population just over 5,000 (comparable to Kyneton in regional Victoria).



Hebden Bridge

Hebden Bridge is known for being a welcoming and inclusive town with a strong artistic identity. Artists and writers flocked to the town in the 1970s and 80s, giving the town a creative and bohemian atmosphere. The town is 45 minutes by train from Leeds, the largest city in Yorkshire and its unofficial capital. The journey from Leeds to London is about 2.5 hours by train.

## UNITED KINGDOM

Most of the play takes place in the United Kingdom, in the city of London and the Yorkshire region in Northern England. The United Kingdom is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Geographically, the United Kingdom is small – about the same size as the Australian state of Victoria.

## ICELAND

In the play's final scenes, Ella and Haseeb travel to Iceland, a sparsely populated European nation, to visit hot springs and go hiking. The journey from London to Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, is a 3-hour flight. The population of Iceland is about the same size as that of Canberra.

Iceland has traditionally been a homogenous society, but that has changed over the past two decades. Iceland is witnessing an alarming rise in racism, with growing hostility towards Muslims in particular.



Iceland



### The world on stage

Research the locations mentioned in the script and brainstorm ways you might condense all these places into one set design. Pay attention to the silhouettes of buildings or landmarks. What shapes do you notice?



### Mapping London

Explore the interactive **digital pre-show resource** for *I Wanna Be Yours* to see where each location is situated on a map.



# Directing

Learn more about Tasnim Hossain's approach to directing *I Wanna Be Yours* in this interview.

**What connected you to this story?**

I loved this story when I first read it because I really responded to the language. The writer, Zia Ahmed, is a spoken word poet and the language is lyrical and muscular and robust. I could just see it bursting off the page onto a stage for a young audience to pick up and run with. I think the characters are larger than life and our ability to connect with them, to understand them and to fall in love with them as they fall in love with each other, is something pretty special.

**What's unique or interesting about the way that Zia Ahmed has written this play?**

Zia Ahmed is an award-winning London poet laureate. He has this incredible spoken word experience and rhythms that really come through in this work. Zia's writing is so big and visual, making this – his debut play – jump off the page and take up space in a way you wouldn't expect an intimate, two-hander love story to do.

**There are many locations in this script. How do you realise that on stage?**

This script is really grounded in place. We get a real sense of Ella's South London and Haseeb's North London. And so for me, it was really important to create a space that could connect to Australian audiences as well. I worked with our Set & Costume Designer Kat Chan in realising the shapes and silhouettes of a high street in London or in Cricklewood, Haseeb's neighbourhood in North London, or a house in Yorkshire where Ella might have grown up. We've recreated those shapes on stage for us to interact with in a much more theatrical, lyrical way. Our set design incorporates trucks, which are moving platforms, and each of them are an almost miniaturised version, made out of plywood, that we're going to move around and through and over, to bring a sense of place into this work.

**What are the major themes or ideas explored in the show?**

*I Wanna Be Yours* explores a whole range of different big and meaty themes. It looks at first love. It looks at expectations around culture and family, both for Ella and for Haseeb. It looks at what it means to belong. It looks at ideas of home and what that is. Haseeb has this beautiful line where he talks about home being the place where people understand you and he laughs it off as



Director Tasnim Hossain

**'I worked with our Set & Costume Designer Kat Chan in realising the shapes and silhouettes of a high street in London or in Cricklewood ... or a house in Yorkshire ... We've recreated those shapes on stage for us to interact with in a much more theatrical, lyrical way.'**

DIRECTOR TASNIM HOSSAIN



Oz Malik, Director Tasnim Hossain and Eleanor Barkla

being a little bit pretentious. But actually I think that colours the whole script. The sense of home that these characters have, both within themselves and within their geographies, but also in each other.

**Can you please describe how you work with other creatives in the production to help you realise the story?**

I'm working with a large team of Creatives, including Set & Costume Designer Kat Chan, Sound Designer & Composer Mufeez Al Haq and Lighting Designer Rachel Lee. When I've spoken to them about the world, I've talked about the theatrical potential of this script. I'm interested in the abstracted theatrical possibilities rather than the literal – the literal realisation of a lot of those moments. I'm interested in how we can make them bigger and make them more present. How we can shape what can be really dry into something that's elevated and theatrical. When we're in the theatre, that's what we do.

When I've been speaking with Mufeez, who is working on both original composition and sound design – which includes the background sound you might hear within scenes or in between scenes – I mention how I'm less interested in the grounded reality of where these characters are. Whether it's a cafe, club or a park, I'm more interested in their emotional worlds and where they are. So looking at the theatrical potential of that, to underscore that relationship with the story in the space and where they are in time, rather than where they are literally in space.

**What do you think audiences will relate to in this story?**

I think audiences will relate to these two characters. I think we love 'love'. Many people know what it is to fall in love for the first time and to have to fight for the thing that they want. There's something so beautiful in specificity. These characters are so grounded in place; where they're from, who they are and what they love. When we delve into that, we find our own way in as Australian audiences, as audiences here in Victoria, rather than there in London or Yorkshire. When we find characters who are real, who are fully realised, who are true, there's no way we can help but feel connected to them and the things that they want. Their struggles and their love and their hopes.

**'I'm interested in the abstracted theatrical possibilities rather than the literal ... When we're in the theatre, that's what we do.'**

DIRECTOR TASNIM HOSSAIN

Director Tasnim Hossain, Eleanor Barkla and Oz Malik







Director Tasnim Hossain, Oz Malik and Eleanor Barkla



### **Emphasis**

What is Tasnim Hossain wanting to emphasise in this production? What directing choices would you make in order to give this a particular focus or prominence? Select a scene from the play and rehearse it with this intention.



### **Creative collaboration**

How does Hossain collaborate with the other people in the creative team? How are the various production roles working together to create a cohesive artistic vision?

# Set and costume design

Learn more about the set and costume design for *I Wanna Be Yours* in this interview with Set & Costume Designer Kat Chan.

Tell us about the world of this play and the design language you're using.

The world of the play is contemporary London, UK. It is built so vividly by the fast-paced text that we decided to use a slightly abstracted design language with a simplified aesthetic to emphasise the performers.

There are many locations in the script. How does your design allow the story to move between these places while maintaining cohesion?

One of the key words when designing the set was 'playground'. Our combination of scaled-down British buildings allows the performers to move freely across different levels while supporting them to create a more specific location with their words.

Where have you drawn inspiration from for your costume designs?

For costume, we researched British street fashion from mid-2020. It was so important to get the fashion nuance of these two characters from different backgrounds. Inspiration came from research including shows such as *Starstruck* and people like Riz Ahmed.

How do Haseeb and Ella's costumes communicate their character?

Both have a very individual style, but at the same time both dress relaxed and slightly slouched and casual. Ella's costumes are more op-shop chic while Haseeb's are slightly street intellectual. Their costumes are heightened in colour to draw focus and allow them to stand out against the set. It was important to take notes from the script because it mentioned Haseeb's beanie, Ella's coat and jumpsuit – we've taken these as loose prescription of the season. Added to that are the seasonal changes, so we had to root the costumes in winter but be flexible enough for the many different locations and times – what makes sense to wear inside but also outside.



Set & Costume Designer Kat Chan

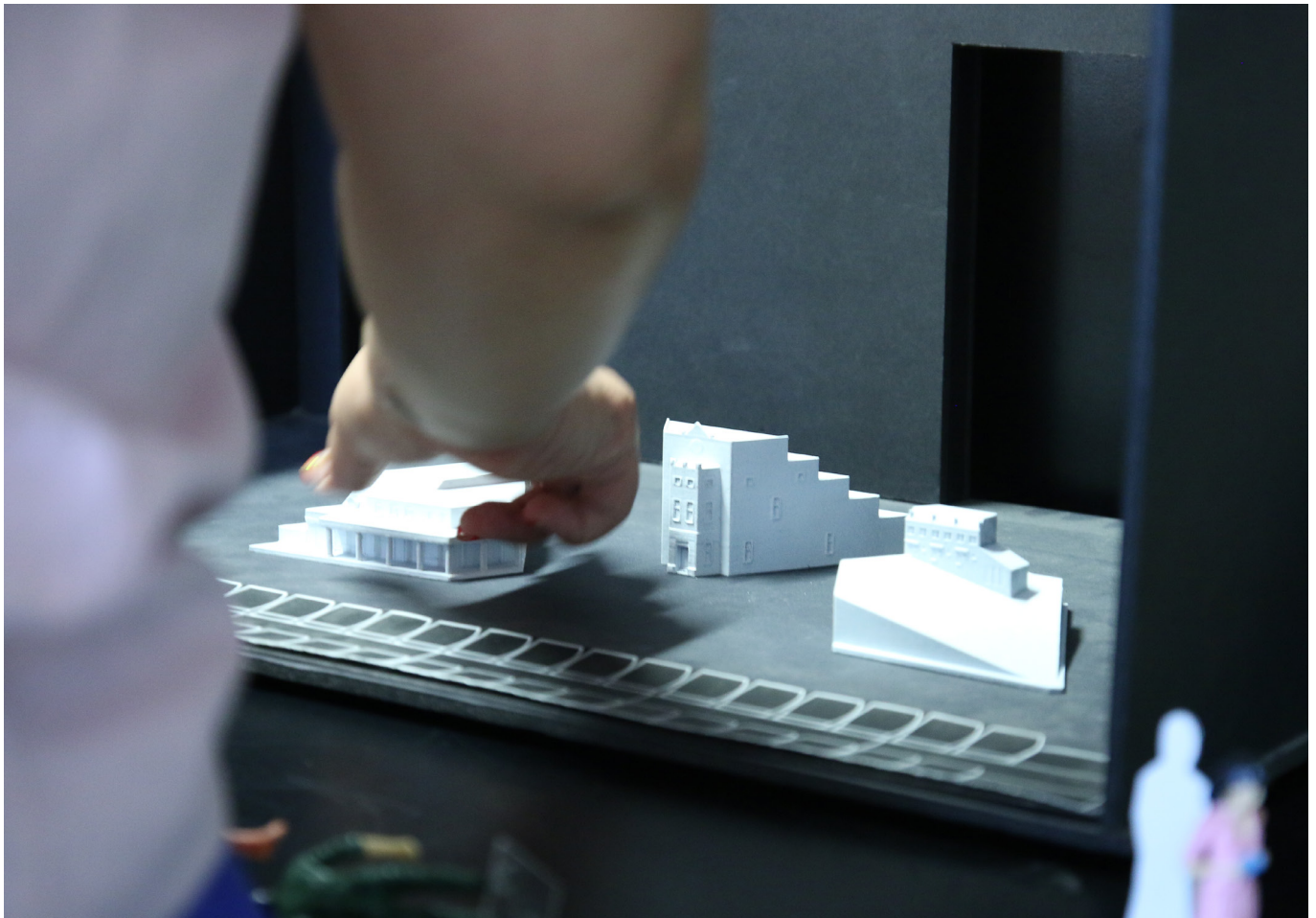
**'The world of the play is contemporary London, UK. It is built so vividly by the fast-paced text that we decided to use a slightly abstracted design language with a simplified aesthetic to emphasise the performers.'**

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER KAT CHAN



Costume designs by Kat Chan





### How do you collaborate with the other creatives?

Set model

My main collaborators are Director Tasnim Hossain and Lighting Designer Rachel Lee. It worked best when we brainstormed together because it's such an intimate piece. Every design decision we made had to be explored dramaturgically – from the mood of colours/lights, placement of set electrics (lights within the set), and how they would be used in which moments. We tried to coordinate design elements to function together to build the scene before the actors get on the stage.

### How are you using colour in your overall design?

Colour features more in the costumes to contrast from the set, which is a pale grey – to bring out the performers and make them 'pop'. The show is about the two characters so we wanted to focus on their presence; their love story.

### What did you research when creating your set design?

For the set, there was a lot of research on the specific locations mentioned – Cricklewood, South London, Leeds, Yorkshire, etc. and the types of architecture that create these local environments.

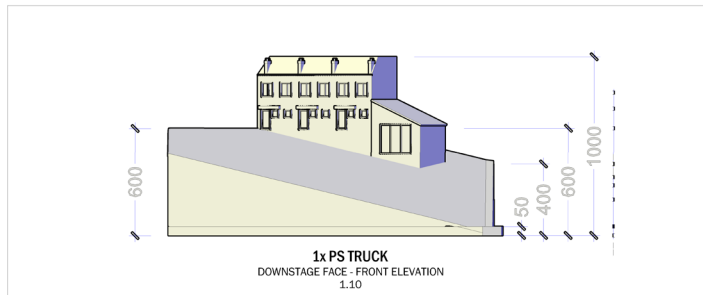
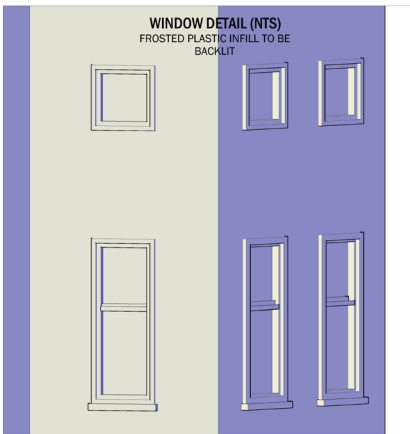
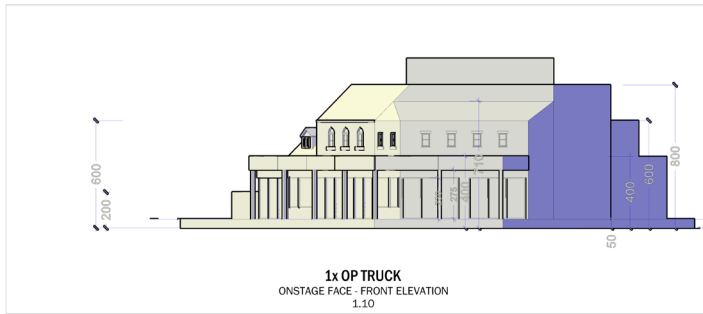
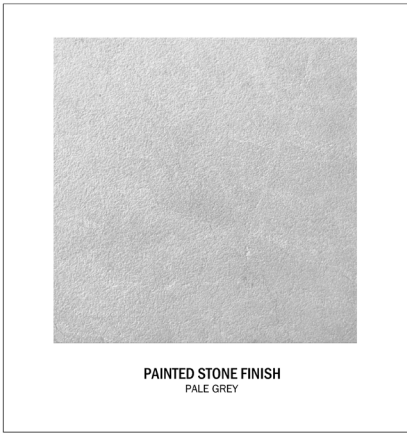
### In your opinion, what are the big ideas being explored in this play that your design is supporting?

I think the main exploration of the play is the love between these two characters from different backgrounds and the impact of external factors creeping into their relationship – personal history, religion, family, society.



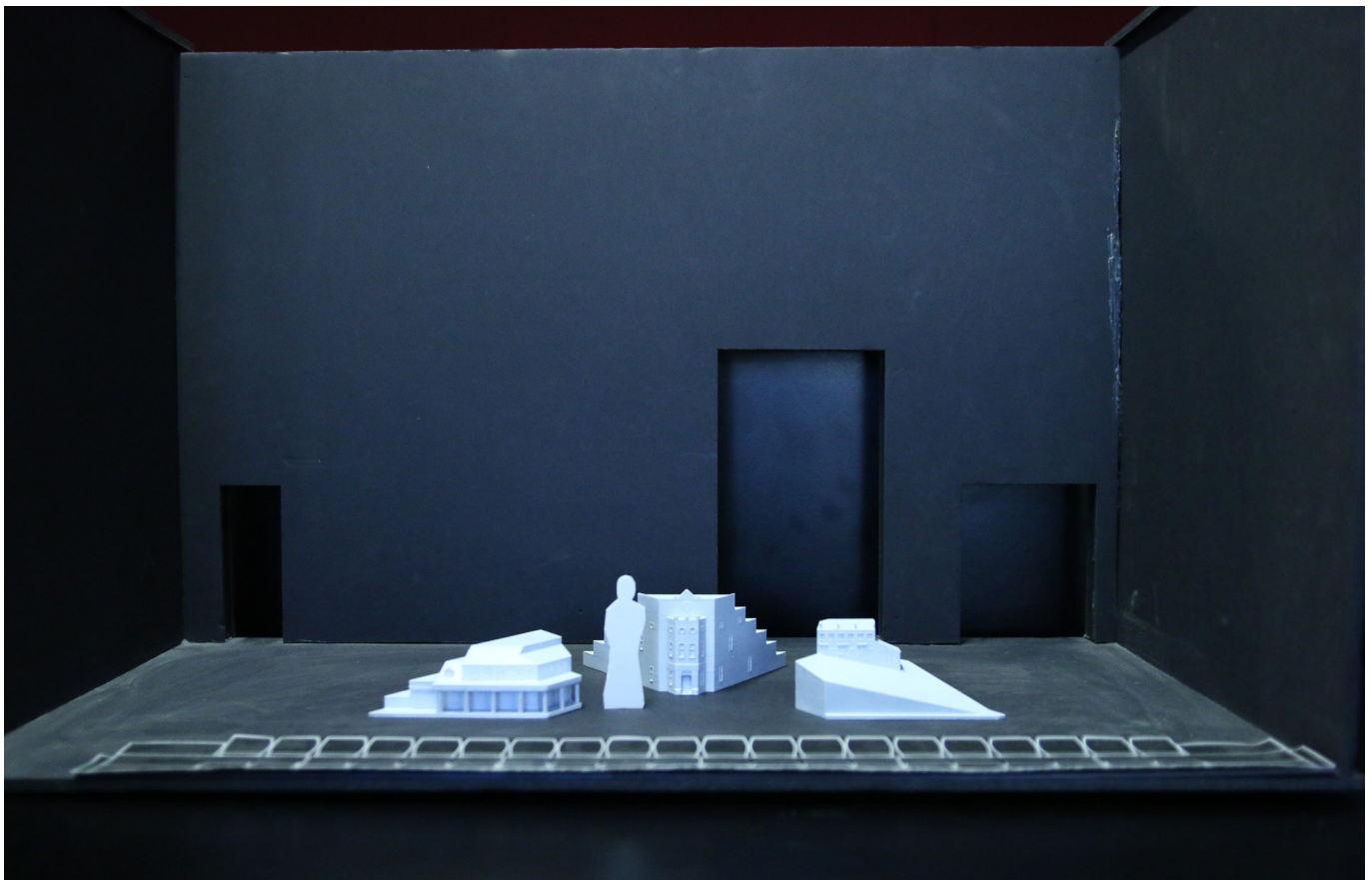
### Design predictions

Based on your knowledge of the direction and design, and the images in this section, discuss how the set may be used during the production.



|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| <b>PRODUCTION</b>                          |                   |
| <b>I WANNA BE YOURS</b>                    |                   |
| BY ZIA AHMED<br>DISCUSSION-HANDLES PROGRAM |                   |
| <b>DESIGNER</b>                            | <b>DISCUSSION</b> |
| YOUNG-ANDERSON                             | NOT CHINA         |
| <b>STAGEHANDS</b>                          | <b>STAGEHANDS</b> |
| BRUCE, LEE                                 | NOT CHINA         |
| <b>MODEL</b>                               | <b>MODEL</b>      |
| 1x OP TRUCK                                | 1x CENTRE TRUCK   |
| 1x CENTRE TRUCK                            | 1x PS TRUCK       |
| FRONT ELEVATION                            |                   |
| <b>DATE</b>                                | <b>FILE</b>       |
| 22.02.23                                   | 1.10BA1           |

Set design front elevations by Kat Chan



Set model by Kat Chan



# Theatre styles

## POOR THEATRE

This production of *I Wanna Be Yours* uses aspects of poor theatre. With minimal set, costumes and lighting, actors use their skills to transform the performance space into various imaginative worlds.

Poor theatre was a theatre style developed by Polish director Jerzy Grotowski in the 20th century. He rejected the idea that theatre should (or could) match the spectacle of film, and argued that the most important aspect of theatre was the actor-audience relationship.

## PERFORMANCE POETRY

Zia Ahmed's performance poetry background is evident in his evocative and playful use of language, imagery and symbolism in the script for *I Wanna Be Yours*. The play is written in short, striking vignettes (brief, evocative descriptions).

British performance poetry thrives at open mic nights, poetry slams, literary festivals and arts festivals like Glastonbury. Melbourne is one of the most active live poetry and spoken word communities in Australia.



Eleanor Barkla and Oz Malik



### Poor theatre

Consider how this theatre style will be applied by the various production roles. Do you expect to see many props? Will there be costume changes? How many theatre technologies might be involved? Consider what aspects of this theatre style are inherent in the script, and which are artistic choices made by the creative team.



### Performance poetry

Investigate other examples of performance poetry from the United Kingdom and Australia. Explore videos online of poets performing their work at poetry slams. Analyse the rhythm of the language and how the delivery of the text can enhance its intended meaning.

# Elements of theatre composition

The following questions, provocations and ideas are intended to help you experience and analyse *I Wanna Be Yours* through the lens of VCE Theatre Studies.

## COHESION

- Thinking about the various locations in the play, how might the set and costume design create cohesion across the scenes?

## MOTION

- How might movement be used in scenes where characters travel across London or the United Kingdom?
- When might the set be moved by the actors and why?

## RHYTHM

- Discuss the pace, timing and tempo that is inherent in the script. Select a scene to rehearse and perform in several different ways as you experiment with rhythm.

## EMPHASIS

- What are the big ideas or themes that are inherent in the script, and how might these be emphasised in performance?
- Discuss how the design choices made by the creative team emphasise the characters onstage.

## CONTRAST

- How might the actors use their acting skills to contrast Ella and Haseeb?
- How might the action that takes place in Iceland contrast to earlier scenes?

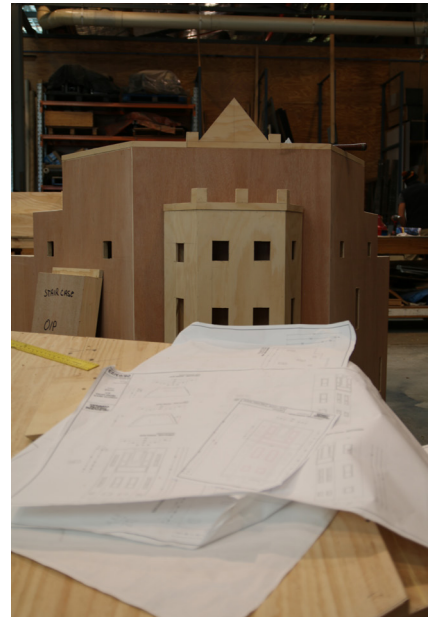
## VARIATION

- How might moments of tension be created and broken in the play? Think about the scene in the curry house.



### Download Part B

After you've seen *I Wanna Be Yours*, download Part B of this Education Pack to read more from the cast and creative team, see photos from the production, and respond to analysis questions.



Set manufacture



Stage Manager Zsuzsa Gaynor Mihaly



Oz Malik and Eleanor Barkla



# Learn more



## THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Hear from the cast and Director Tasnim Hossain as they discuss the world of *I Wanna Be Yours* in this video.

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



## WATCH THE TRAILER

Watch the video trailer for *I Wanna Be Yours* and make predictions about how the cast will bring this story to life onstage.

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



## THE LAWLER VIRTUAL TOUR

Explore the Lawler at Southbank Theatre, where *I Wanna Be Yours* will be performed in Melbourne, in this interactive virtual tour.

Go backstage at [mtc.com.au/education](https://mtc.com.au/education)

## SOURCES

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## PHOTO CREDITS

Page 3 Zia Ahmed headshot Finn Constantine Page 6 (top) Ilya Grigorik, (bottom) Mike Quinn Page 7 (top left) Ungry Young Man, (top right) Chris Whippet, (bottom) Tim Green Page 8 Alte Mo Page 13 (top) Emily Doyle Page 14 (bottom) Emily Doyle Page 16 (middle and bottom) Tiffany Garvie Page 17 (top and middle) Brett Walker (bottom) RealTour3D