

A woman with blonde hair styled in a bouffant, wearing a red sequined jacket over a black sequined dress with a scalloped pattern. She is wearing a multi-strand pearl necklace and a ring. The background is dark blue with light flares.

**MELBOURNE
THEATRE COMPANY**

**A VERY JEWISH
CHRISTMAS CAROL**

BY **ELISE ESTHER HEARST** WITH **PHILLIP KAVANAGH**
AFTER **CHARLES DICKENS**
DIRECTED BY **SARAH GILES**

RELAXED PERFORMANCE
VISUAL STORY

3'AOA



Wominjeka / Welcome

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.

Relaxed Performance

The relaxed performance of *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* will take place on Saturday 16 December at 2pm.

Relaxed Performances focus on relaxing or adapting the theatre environment while maintaining the creative integrity of the show.

Relaxed Performances are for anyone who would benefit from a more relaxed environment.

During a relaxed performance:

- We may make minor changes to sensory elements of a show such as reducing bright lighting or loud noises
- There is a relaxed attitude to noise and movement
- You are welcome to bring in, and use, stimming devices
- The theatre doors remain open and the house lights remain on, but dimmed, throughout the performance
- Your seat number will be on your ticket but you can move to an empty seat if you'd feel more comfortable sitting somewhere else
- You can leave the venue at any time and a designated quiet area is available in the foyer on level 1.

Visual story

Visual stories are designed to help prepare you for your visit. They include information about the venue and what will happen during the performance. Visual stories are suitable for people who wish to be familiar with what to expect prior to attending. Please note that the information includes spoilers which may impact on your experience of the production.

Visit **mtc.com.au/access** to learn more.

Contact

If you would like more information in the lead up to your visit, please contact Melbourne Theatre Company on **03 8688 0900** during business hours or email **info@mtc.com.au**

The production

***A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* is a laugh-out-loud re-telling of Charles Dickens's classic tale with time-travelling ghosts, overbearing relatives and a life lesson or two.**

The story is about local baker Ely who is trying to recreate her Bubi's famous Polish gingerbread recipe. Bubi is the name Ely calls her grandmother.

It's proving difficult with her family's Chrismukkah celebrations – and she is about to give birth.

The play is a fantasy, with time-travelling ghosts, about a dysfunctional family during the festive season.

The play is a comedy, so people in the audience might cheer and laugh out loud.

Venue

This production will be performed at The Sumner which is inside Southbank Theatre. The Sumner is wheelchair accessible.

Length

1hr 40min with no interval.

Age recommendation

Ages 13+.

Theatre guidelines

- Face masks are recommended indoors
- Photography is not permitted during the performance.

Content warnings

This production contains smoke/haze effects and mature themes.

Scripted dialogue contains description, mention or reference to:

- Culturally/religious sensitive commentary – historical reference to oppression of Jewish people
- Overtly sexual language/ innuendo – multiple references to sex, innuendo and sexuality
- Death – humorous reference to murdering a child, the loss of a loved one is mentioned throughout, references to suicide, death, dying and ghosts
- Medical – references to female reproductive system and addiction (smoking, alcohol)
- Violence – reference to war
- Dysfunctional families – multiple mentions of dysfunctional family dynamics.

Sensory warnings

We may make minor changes to sensory elements of this show, such as reducing bright lights or loud noises. This production may contain:

- Music with performers singing. If the music gets too loud during the performance, you can cover your ears with your hands or put on headphones
- Some sudden noises may occur, including bakery equipment that starts to move by itself
- A kabuki drop (where a large curtain suddenly falls to the floor) and sniffer (where the curtain is quickly vacuumed up and out of sight)
- A ghost created onstage with lighting effects
- Fake snow falling onto the stage and actors
- Video projected surtitles
- Sound effects layered on top of actor's voices
- A life-size gingerbread costume
- Smoke and haze.

Venue information

A Very Jewish Christmas Carol is being performed at Southbank Theatre, 140 Southbank Boulevard in Southbank, Victoria.

The building has lots of white poles on the outside that look like cubes from some angles.



Entering the building

You can enter the building through the doors on Southbank Boulevard or the Dodds Street entrance.

When you arrive at the building you will see other people who are also going to see *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* like you.

You will also see people wearing black uniforms. They are called ushers.

They can help you with directions or answer any questions you may have about the performance.



Find your way

There are two theatres inside Southbank Theatre. Today you are going to The Sumner Theatre.

You might need to walk down up some stairs or use the lift to get to door listed on your ticket.

The venue might be busy when you arrive, so you might wish to allow yourself extra time or wear headphones if it's noisy.



The friendly ushers will help you find your way.

Before going inside The Sumner you may like to use the bathroom.

Accessible toilets are available on all levels, so please feel free to ask for directions.

Mobile devices (e.g. iPads) are permitted for live captioning and to assist with communication – please inform the ushers or ask for assistance. It's always fine to use a device in the foyer or quiet areas.



Seating

The doors to the theatre will open about 30 minutes before the start of the show. You can go into the theatre and find a seat early if you want to.

You will see an usher waiting at the door to the theatre.

You will need to show the usher your ticket before you can go inside. The ushers can help you find your seat or you can find it yourself.

Remember, your seat number is on your ticket but if you want to change seats you can. Just wait until all the audience is seated.



During the show

The play will go for about 1 hour and 40 minutes. There is no interval but if you need to take a break during the show you can leave your seat and come out to the foyer area. You can do this whenever you need to.

There will be a Quiet Area in the foyer on level one that has comfortable beanbags and calming lighting where you can relax if you want to.

You can return to the theatre and watch the rest of the show whenever you feel ready.



After the show

To say thank you to the artists for their work, we ask you to join us at the end of the show in a Deaf clap.

This means using an Auslan sign for clapping by waving your hands in the air.

Some people in the audience may clap their hands together in applause.

If it gets too loud, you can cover your ears.



The set

We spend most of the play in the large commercial kitchen of Ada's Bakery.

During the show, bakery equipment will move by itself.

The set contains several tricks including trapdoors, secret entrances and lights to create pretend ghosts.

At the end of the show, the stage transforms into Poland and most of the furniture that is inside the bakery is taken offstage.

The picture below is of the set model created by Set Designer Jacob Battista.

The stage will look like this for most of the play.



The characters

Seven actors play different characters to tell the story.

Some actors play multiple characters, so you will notice they wear different costumes and change their voice and movement.

These character illustrations are of the costume designs by Dann Barber.



Ely

This is Ely, a young Jewish woman in her 30s. The character is nine months pregnant.

She has inherited her Bubi's bakery (Bubi is the Polish word for Grandmother) and is trying to recreate Bubi's famous gingerbread recipe.

Ely is played by actor Miriam Glaser.





Fran

This is Fran, Ely and Sarah's mother. She is excited about the baby's arrival and concerned that Ely is not taking good care of herself after the death of her fiancée.

Fran is played by actor Natalie Gamsu.



Lilith

This is Lilith. Lilith is the Ghost of Chrismukkah Future, based on the Jewish matriarch of the same name. She is a large, spooky presence.

Lilith is played by actor Natalie Gamsu, the same actor who plays Fran.



Renia

Renia is Bubi's mother, who we see in scenes from the past.

Renia is played by Natalie Gamsu, the same actor playing Fran and Lilith.





Bubi

This is Bubi, Ely's grandmother. Bubi's first name is Misha, but her family call her Bubi. Bubi has died at the age of 99 and returns as a ghost to help fix Ely's life.

Bubi is played by actor Evelyne Krape.

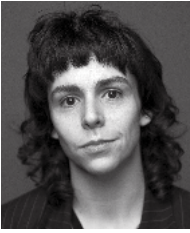


Golem

Golem is the Ghost of Chismukkah Present. They are a giant gingerbread that Ely creates and accidentally brings to life. In Jewish lore, a golem is a creature formed out of a lifeless substance that comes alive.

Golem is also played by Evelyne Krape who plays Bubi.





Sarah

This is Sarah, Ely's sister. She is in love with Rabbi Rivka. She helps out Ely in the bakery a lot.

Sarah is played by actor Emma Jevons.



Misha

This is Misha, who is Bubi in the past. We see this young version of Misha in flashbacks to 1930s Poland, where she lives with her family. Misha's best friend is Ada.

Misha is played by actor Emma Jevons, the same actor who plays Sarah.





Carol

This is Carol. Carol is the mother of Ely's fiancée, Ben. Carol loves Christmas.

Carol is played by actor Louise Siversen.



Halina

Halina is Bubi's grandmother who we see in the past.

Halina is played by Louise Siversen, the same actor playing Carol and Rein-Dybbuk.



Rein-Dybbuk

This is the Rein-Dybbuk of Chrismukkah Past, a Reindeer possessed by a Dybbuk (a demonic spirit in Jewish lore).

Rein-Dybbuk is played by actor Louise Siverson, the same actor who plays Carol.





Rivka

This is Rivka, she is a Rabbi. Rivka has been a key support to the Scroogavitz family – particularly Sarah who she is in love with.

Rivka is played by actor Jude Perl.



Ada

Ada is Misha (Bubi)'s friend from Poland. She is not Jewish and loves Bubi and her family. Ada's mother makes very delicious Gingerbread.

Ada is played by Jude Perl, the same actor who is playing Rivka.





Ben

This is Ben. Ben was Ely's fiancée. Ben died after being stung by a bee. He did not know he was allergic to bees. Before he died, Ben ran a group of Christmas carollers who later become the Chrismukkah Carollers.

Ben is played by actor Michael Whalley.



Jakob

Jakob is Bubi's brother who we see in the past.

Jakob is played by Michael Whalley, the same actor who plays Ben.



Chrimukkah Carollers

The Carollers appear throughout the play singing carols outside the bakery.

They are played by various members of the cast, in different combinations, throughout the show.





The story

When the play begins, you will see a large red curtain in front of the stage with neon signs displaying festive greetings.

The actor Jude Perl (dressed as a dreidel) and actor Michael Whalley (dressed as a Christmas tree) appears from behind the curtain and sing a song.

A hand with a white glove appears from behind the curtain and sprinkles fake snow onto the actors.





The curtain rises and we see Elysheva Scroogavitz, known as Ely, in the commercial kitchen of Ada's Bakery.

Ely is nine months pregnant and frantically making gingerbread.

She has inherited her Bubi's bakery and is trying to recreate the famous recipe that had customers lined up around the block.



Ely's mother, Fran, arrives with the Chrismukkah Carollers. Every time the bakery door opens, a shopkeepers bell jingles loudly.

Fran and the Carollers attempt to cheer Ely up. However, Ely declares that she hates Chrismukkah and won't be celebrating again, yelling at them to go away.

Ely's sister Sarah, her mother-in-law Carol and the rabbi Rivka arrive.

Ely thinks they have come to cheer up Ely. They have actually come to try to convince her to shut the bakery.

Ely is running the bakery into the ground with her obsession with making this gingerbread which she is failing at spectacularly.

Her family don't think she is coming to terms with the recent death of her fiancée or the upcoming birth of her child.





Ely's family also don't think she should be living out of the bakery and that she should instead sell it. Ely is furious about her family's meddling in her life.

She says Ben is dead and with that, her family is dead and they need to leave her alone, kicking them all out of the bakery.

Ely gets her wish and is alone when she is visited by the ghost of her Bubi.

We see a lighting effect on the bakery window of Bubi's ghost, and hear mysterious sounds as bakery appliances appear to move by themselves.

Bubi suddenly runs onstage through the oven. The oven is not hot and the actor is safe. There is also low fog and a gust of fake snow.

Ely is relieved and thinks this means Bubi will give her the gingerbread recipe, meaning customers will return to the bakery and her problems will be solved. Bubi however has been sent on a mission from a higher power.

Channelling an ancient ancestor she tells Ely that she has lessons to learn, and so this Chrismukkah Eve Ely will be visited by three ghosts. Bubi magically sends Ely to sleep and disappears.



The oven bell rings, Ely hears the echoes of the Chrismukkah Carollers and the bakery appliances all make noise at once and move, signalling the arrival of the Rein-Dybbuk of Chrismukkah Past.

We briefly see the character of Ada, standing in the bakery doorway.

The Rein-Dybbuk is a Dybbuk – a malicious spirit in Jewish lore – who has possessed the body of a reindeer.

Largely uninterested and not overly helpful, the Rein-Dybbuk takes Ely back to her past.

Loud cuckoo clock sounds and pulsing lights indicate we are travelling through time.





Ely and Rein-Dybbuk travel to Christmas/Hanukkah Eve, seven years earlier. Ely is the only person who can see Rein-Dybbuk.

The bakery is now a bustling, busy place and Bubi is hard at work making her famous gingerbread.

Festive music plays on the radio.

You will see that the shelves are now full of pastries and breads.

Fran yells at Bubi – she thinks Bubi works too hard and it's impacting her health and relationships. Bubi argues back.

The Rein-Dybbuk uses their power to put Ely into this moment. Ely tells Fran and Bubi to stop arguing.

When Bubi leaves to use the toilet, the bakery is visited by some Christmas carollers led by Ben – Ely’s fiancée.

We relive the first time Ben and Ely meet. It is charming and awkward. When Rein-Dybbuk moves them on from this moment, Ely protests, wanting to stay.





Ely and Rein-Dybbuk travel forward in time to the bakery six years ago. Ben and Ely officially present the inter-cultural holiday event Chrismukkah (which they claim to have invented) to their family.

This is the moment Ben officially meets Bubi. Ben and Ely present a song to Bubi, Fran and Sarah.

Ada appears in the doorway and joins the singing – she is seen by Bubi, but invisible to the others.

The song makes Bubi angry, she tells them it's ridiculous and that everyone should leave the bakery.

In the present, Ely reflects on this reminder of their annual Chrismukkah tradition which brought her and Ben so much joy.



Rein-Dybbuk takes Ely through time to seven months before present day. Ely has been living in the bakery after the very recent death of her fiancée.

Sarah comes in to bring Ely fresh towels and deodorant. Ely has begun a quest to bake Bubi's gingerbread despite being unable to find the recipe.

Sarah tastes the dough Ely is currently working on. It is horrible.

Ely tells Sarah that she is pregnant. Sarah wants to talk to Ely more about the pregnancy but Ely continues to make gingerbread, saying she'll 'figure it out'.

The Rein-Dyybuk prepares to leave Ely, giving her a feedback form.

Ely wants to go spend more time with Ben in the past – she hasn't learned anything it seems.

Rein-Dyybuk magically sends her to sleep and leaves.

While Ely sleeps, Ben appears beside her and sings a Christmas carol lullaby as it gently snows onstage.





Ely wakes up in present time to the sound of the bells and appliances and readies herself for the second ghost.

Without her noticing, the giant gingerbread she has been working on from the first scene appears from behind the bench. It announces itself as the Gingerbread Golem of Chrismukkah Present.

Golem has secretly appeared onstage using a trapdoor and lift.

Golem offers a part of itself for Ely to eat.

It is delicious. The actor playing Ely does not actually eat part of Golem.

Golem begins showing Ely present-day Chrismukkah day in the bakery.

Rivka and Sarah arrive at the bakery to celebrate Chrismukkah, despite Ely telling them it wasn't happening.

Ely is noticeably absent. When Ely asks Golem about why she's not there, Golem informs her that she is in labour in an Uber and the driver is currently lost.



Rivka and Sarah discuss their relationship. They have been hiding it from the family.

Rivka wants Sarah to tell her mother, Fran.

Sarah has delayed telling her mother because of Ely's stressful circumstances.

Rivka says they will need to break up because Sarah cannot be honest about their relationship. Rivka leaves.

As an observer, Ely is learning all this for the first time and is devastated that she might be the one to come between them.





Fran arrives for
Chismukkah and finds
Sarah alone.

Sarah attempts to tell her
mother about Rivka but her
mother doesn't understand.

They argue and Sarah
leaves. Ely is even more
upset that she is causing
the rifts between her family.

Carol arrives for Chrismukkah spreading Christmas cheer, which annoys Fran. Golem, charged with protecting her maker (Ely) any threat, sees this as an opportunity to come to Ely's aid and try to kill Carol.

Ely protests – Carol is family. But Golem knows a mission when they see one and sets about trying to take Carol down throughout the scene.





Fran finally snaps at Carol, still upset that her family is falling apart. She goes to leave but Carol pulls her up – Fran is doing to Carol what the rest of the family are doing to Fran.

Carol's only child Ben has died, and Carol will likely not be part of the grandchild's life – unlike Fran. Carol says they should go and find Ely, but Fran has given up. Ely has abandoned her like Bubi did.

Ely is granted her wish – to be left completely alone. But she realises it's not how she thought it would be.

She knows what she has to do – disappear and leave everyone. She thinks they are better off without her.

Golem clings to her trying to stop her but as Ely pushes Golem away, she knocks off a piece of Golem. Golem has a tantrum and then leaves.



The appliances shake and make noise once more ready for the arrival of the third ghost.

Spooky lights and sound signal the arrival of Lilith, a terrifying demon.

Lilith floats downstage with three minions carrying the large train of her costume.

There is dim lighting and eerie sound as she enters the bakery.

Lilith has come to show Ely her future.

It does not look good and it is full of loneliness.

Lilith's costume appears to cover the whole stage in darkness, and a large black curtain fills the stage.

Bubi interrupts the visitation to check on Ely and realises that things are not going well.

Bubi realises this is her fault. Rather than seeing her future, it is Bubi's job to take Ely back even further to Bubi's own past – the past she would never talk about: Poland, 1938.

The black curtain kabuki drops to the floor and disappears – this moment will happen suddenly.

The bakery has disappeared and we are in a vast, empty space where it is snowing. This is Poland. Two young women Ada and Misha appear playing as Bubi and Ely watch.



Ada and Misha begin speaking Polish, then Bubi magically makes them speak English.

We realise that Misha is in fact a younger version of Bubi and we hear them confess their dreams to have a bakery together in Warsaw one day.

Ada gives Misha a gift for Hanukkah. It is her grandmother's famous gingerbread recipe which Ada makes Misha memorise.

Misha has no gift for Ada in return, as Misha thought they had agreed not to exchange gifts.

We see them reach the same conclusion as Ely and Ben do about a joint holiday that bring Christmas and Hanukkah together: Chrismukkah.





The ghost of Bubi takes us to a scene at Misha's home, where we also see Misha's grandmother, mother and brother.

Ada and Misha introduce the idea of Chrismukkah to Misha's family and hand out gingerbread.

Some characters speak Yiddish in this scene, which is translated into English on the subtitles projected onto the windows.

Ely and Bubi watch the family and Ada warmly celebrate and dance all together.

It is a beautiful moment of happiness and joy.



We travel to sometime later when Misha's family and Ada gather round as Misha prepares to travel to another country to study.

With the threat of war looming, they reiterate the plan that if things become dangerous, Misha is to keep travelling as far as she can, until she is safe and can send for them.

She kisses each of them goodbye and then leaves.

Bubi brings Ely back to the present. Bubi realises she still grieves the loss of her loved ones.

Bubi tells Ely of the moment she learned the fate of Ada and her family. Bubi was sitting in a café and she met a woman from her home town in Poland. This woman told Bubi that when the deportations began, Ada's family sheltered her family.

The woman continues to tell Bubi that the authorities found Bubi's family and took them away. Ada's family were in trouble for hiding Bubi's family and forced to live on the streets. Bubi tells Ely she was the only one from both families to survive the war.



Bubi realises that in holding onto this grief, she has closed herself off from her family and let it consume her.

She encourages Ely to face her own grief, so history doesn't repeat itself.

The ghosts of Bubi's family reappear, but for only a moment, leaving the ghost of Jakob remaining.





Ely attempts to speak to Jakob but Bubi corrects her, informing Ely that he is actually the ghost of Ben, her fiancée.

Bubi has brought him to Ely as a parting gift.

Bubi disappears. Ely is both overjoyed and furious with Ben for leaving her.

They talk about their daughter, their love for one another and their hopes for the future.

Ben leaves during the music of the Chrismukkah Carollers and the appearance of various ghosts and characters from throughout the play.



At last, all the ghosts disappear leaving Ely alone in the bakery. Ely realises that she is in labour.

Ely calls Fran. Ely tells Fran she needs her, that she can't do it alone and asks her to bring Sarah and Rivka, and even Carol, so they can all be together.

We hear Ely discover that her mum is already outside and the lights fade to black.

The show ends.

The actors come back on stage and line up and bow, while the audience claps or waves their hands to show their appreciation.



Closed

Photography

Images of Southbank Theatre by James Henry and Emily Doyle.
Production photography by Pia Johnson. Set renders
by Jacob Battista. Costume renders by Dann Barber.

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

DEVELOPED BY WORKING DOG AND MTC'S NEXT STAGE WRITERS' PROGRAM, SUPPORTED BY THE DONORS, FOUNDATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS OF MTC'S PLAYWRIGHTS GIVING CIRCLE.

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NEXTSTAGE

