

24 JAN—
22 FEB 2025

MELBOURNE

SOUTHBANK
THEATRE

THEATRE COMPANY

37

BY **NATHAN MAYNARD**
DIRECTED BY **ISAAC DRANDIC**

EDUCATION PACK – PART A

Contents

- 3 Melbourne Theatre Company**
- 4 About the play**
- 5 Cast and creatives**
- 6 Playwriting**
- 9 Context**
- 12 Directing**
- 14 Set design**
- 16 Expressive skills**
- 22 Performance styles**
- 23 Dramatic elements**

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the support of the Department of Education, Victoria, through the Strategic Partnerships Program.



Department
of Education



Digital Education resources are generously supported by the Ian Potter Foundation

Melbourne Theatre Company's Education activity is generously supported by our Education Giving Circle Donors.

Editors Nick Tranter, Tilly Graovac, Emily Doyle
Graphic designer Sarah Ridgway-Cross
Rehearsal photographer Joshua Scott
Cover photographer Jo Duck

Images in this pack feature the original 2024 Melbourne cast.

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung 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 Nations people, their Elders past and present, and their enduring connections to Country, knowledge and stories. As a Company we remain committed to the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for voice, truth and treaty.

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



Activity



Discuss



Read



Video

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.
Photo: Benjamin Healley

Beyond the stage, we run a range of initiatives that support artist development, champion new writing, invest in future audiences and address underrepresentation 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 Headquarters Virtual Tour

Walk the halls of Melbourne Theatre Company Headquarters 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: mtc.com.au/eduhub

About the play



Tibian Wyles and Ngali Shaw in rehearsal

The local footy team of this small coastal town have spent so long at the bottom of the ladder they might as well be welded to it. This year a new hope arrives: the Marngrook cousins. Named after the Aboriginal game that inspired AFL, they're match fit to bring home the team's first flag in forever. A little sweary and very sweaty, it hits just as hard with the laughs as it does its searing social commentary.

Set within the era of Adam Goodes's war cry – and named for the number he immortalised – 37 asks ten actors to throw themselves into this world of blood and sweat to get at the values that drive a national obsession. Community, identity, the price of winning and the meaning of a goal: they're all up for grabs.

Penning by **Nathan Maynard** – twice named Tasmanian Aboriginal Artist of the Year – and directed by **Isaac Drandic**, 37 is a reminder that honest conversations are more than a ball toss. It matters where you stand.

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

This production contains coarse language, mature themes, racially sensitive commentary, partial nudity, loud noises and the use of smoke, haze effects and organic dust effects. For detailed information about the production's content, visit our production content guide at mtc.com.au/production-content-guide.

DURATION

Approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes with no interval.

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: mtc.com.au/programmes

Co-producer

**QUEENSLAND
THEATRE**

Supported by MTC's 37 Giving Circle; Fitzpatrick Sykes Family Foundation, Angie & Colin Carter, Patricia Faulkner AO, Diane John, Larry & Petra Kamener, Marcia Langton AO & Craig Semple.

NEXTSTAGE

Commissioned through Melbourne Theatre Company's NEXT STAGE Writers' Program with the support of our Playwrights Giving Circle.

Cast and creatives



Syd Brisbane
The General



Mitchell Brotz
Gorby



Samuel Buckley
Apples

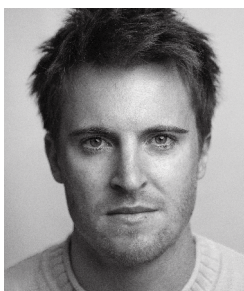


Read their bios

Explore the digital programme to read the biographies of the cast and creatives working on this production:
mtc.com.au/programmes



Blake Draper
Ant



Thomas Larkin
GJ



Eddie Orton
Woodsy



Ben O'Toole
Joe



Ngali Shaw
Jayma



Anthony Standish
Dazza



Tibian Wyles
Sonny



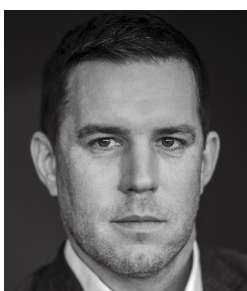
Nathan Maynard
Writer



Isaac Drandic
Director & Co-Choreographer



Dale Ferguson
Set & Costume Designer



Ben Hughes
Lighting Designer



James Henry
Composer & Sound Designer



Waangenga Blanco
Co-Choreographer



Matt Furlani
Voice & Text Coach



Kamarra Bell-Wykes
Assistant Director



Lyndall Grant
Fight Choreographer



Isabella Vadeloo
Intimacy Coordinator

Playwriting



Writer Nathan Maynard and Anthony Standish in rehearsal

NATHAN MAYNARD

Nathan is a Trawlwoolway man and multidisciplinary artist from Larapuna country, Lutrawita/Tasmania. He began his theatre career in 2013, starring in *Shadow Dreams* (Terrapin Puppet Theatre). Since then, Nathan has written seven plays that have been performed across Australia, including Sydney Opera House's Drama Theatre. His other writing credits include *The Season*, *At What Cost*, *A Not So Traditional Story* and *Hide the Dog*. His directing credits include *The Box*, which he co-wrote (Mudlark Theatre Company); *Back on Track* (JUTE Theatre); *Crumbs* (Yirramboi/Melbourne ArtPlay); *Journey of the Free Words* (Junction Festival). He was also assistant director for Belvoir's production of his play *At What Cost*. Nathan is a two-time Tasmanian Aboriginal Artist of the Year, and his writing has earned him a Green Room Award and an Errol Award. In 2019, he was awarded both a Churchill Fellowship and the Balnaves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Fellowship.



Writer Nathan Maynard

WRITER'S NOTE: GOING BIG

By Nathan Maynard

I won't go into what I think the play is about, because that wouldn't be fair to either you or me.

As a writer, I don't enjoy writing a dry summary for a story that has taken me years to write through a creative lens. And as an audience member, I always enjoy trying to figure out what the writer or director is trying to ask us through their creative expression. I don't want to steal the joy that comes with the game between the creative and the viewer.

Instead, I'm going to speak about the wonderful opportunity this play has given me, and in particular, the opportunity Melbourne Theatre Company and Queensland Theatre have given me with the play. Not only to express my cultural and political voice as an Aboriginal person, but as a creative who loves nothing more than an opportunity to dream big.



Contemporary drama practices

Discuss what Nathan Maynard's writer's note tells you about the process of writing the script for this play. What role have other artists, like actors and dramaturgs, played in its development?

'The footy in this play is the vehicle that carries the story, yet it's a story that goes beyond football.'

NATHAN MAYNARD
WRITER



The cast of 37 in rehearsal

When I met Melbourne Theatre Company's then Head of New Work Chris Mead for a yarn and a ten ounce of Boags at Salamanca on a crisp Tassie arvo, my mind was racing: 'What play do I pitch to this man?' I'd been workshoping three plays in my head in the months leading up to our scheduled meeting but had not yet decided which play to pitch to him. In the moment, I decided to pitch all three of them.

My mentor Annette Downs had arranged the meeting. Annette and Chris were mates and I knew she would have gone in hard for me and talk me up big. Thanks Annette.

I'm extremely shitty at articulating my story ideas, I'm always going off on tangents (like I am now). So, I clumsily pitched the three stories to Chris, and I can't remember what the other two ideas were now, but Chris liked the idea of a footy play and he liked the bigger themes I planned to stash within it.

He then said, 'go away and write me a treatment about the play and remember, you're writing for the Melbourne Theatre Company, so write it for scale.' With those words I could have kissed Chris on his head.

I'd been itching at the bit to write something of size and get it on the big stage. As a viewer, works of scale have always been my jam. From major installation pieces, to the biggest paintings in the gallery and, of course, the big theatre productions. There are many aspects I enjoy in works of scale and ambition is one of them.

Even a musical. I'm not a lover of musicals, but I appreciate the ambition of a big musical. And I enjoy the repetitive language and the energy that comes with a chorus. So, right from the beginning, I knew I wanted to bring a musical feel into the script (minus the extended sing songs). I also enjoy the physical action you see on the stage in a musical, and with 37, I wanted to create a script that was as engaging on the eye as was on the ear. And I think anyone who sees 37 will agree with me when I say Isaac and Waangenga's choreography is more than engaging; the cultural nuances masterfully layered through the movement make it absolutely captivating.

Every footy game – country or AFL level – is a semi-improvised work of scale. Chris gave me permission to go big, but it made sense that a footy play had to be big.

Ask all AFL fans which games are best and they'll say finals football because the stakes are higher. However, the highest stake in this play is a lot bigger than football. The footy in this play is the vehicle that carries the story, yet it's a story that goes beyond football. It's the footy play that isn't.

Thank you **Melbourne Theatre Company** and **Queensland Theatre** for allowing us to dream big.

I'd also like to thank:

Chris Mead: Thanks for the beer, the opportunity and the support.

Victorian College of the Arts (VCA): Through a VCA development and production of the work, we discovered what this play looks like. Thank you.

The 2022 VCA 3rd year boys: You left your DNA in the characters you played and they are all the better for it.

Jenni “from the block” Medway: Your dramaturgical guidance has been much appreciated mate and myself and the story thank you deeply for it.

Waangenga Blanco: You have helped us take the physical language of this work to the next level. Thank you, my brother.

Kamarra Bell-Wykes: Your sophisticated dramaturgy and sharp eye in the room is always a blessing, sis. Thank you!

Isaac Drandic: My big Noongar brother, thanks for playing theatre with me again. Putting the game of football on stage must be the biggest challenge I've given you yet. And like always, your creative brilliance has shone through and you've made this play a shit load better than it was on paper.

And last but certainly not least, my kids, Jamani, Jayla, Lilyana and Clay. Thanks for letting your silly thespian dad chase his silly thespian dreams all around the countryside.

Up the Currawongs!



Script notes



Nathan Maynard, Syd Brisbane & Isaac Drandic.
Photo: Sapphic Flicks

Learn from Playwright Nathan Maynard, Actor Syd Brisbane and Director Isaac Drandic about how they use the 37 script to bring the play to life on stage at mtc.com.au/eduhub



Break down a scene

Use the Script Notes video to analyse a section of the script. Download the lesson plan at mtc.com.au/eduhub

Context



Marlene Gilson, *Marngrook Football*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 80x100cm, Merri-bek Art Collection.

Image courtesy the artist and Merri-bek City Council

MARNGROOK AND THE MODERN-DAY GAME

By Tilly Graovac

What is Marngrook?

Marngrook cousins Sonny and Jayma are named after the game that inspired AFL. A game with rich heritage, Marngrook is the Gunditjmara word for 'game ball'. It was played by First Nations people using a ball made from possum skin and tied with kangaroo sinews. It involved two teams of between 50 to 100 players, with some games said to last for days. There were no goals, but instead each team competed to catch the ball after it was dropped onto the foot and kicked high into the air. At the conclusion of the game, the player who kicked it highest was responsible for burying the ball in the ground. Variations were played across Victoria.

Now accepted as the game that inspired AFL, this was not always the case. The discovery of Mukjarrawaint man Johnny Connolly's personal account of Marngrook was one factor that helped achieve more widespread recognition.

Influence on AFL

Tom Wills, who hailed from Moyston in north-western Victoria, is credited with penning the first official set of recorded AFL rules in 1858, along with several others including his relative, Henry Colden Antill Harrison. Whether Wills was influenced by the game of Marngrook has over the years been heavily debated

by historians. In 2008, for example, a book commissioned by the AFL, *The Australian Game of Football Since 1858*, included a chapter from historian Gillian Hibbins insisting there was no link between the modern game and Marngrook. Much of the refusal to acknowledge so was due to a lack of evidence linking the game to the area where Wills grew up.

While collating research on Tom Wills, historian and Monash University Professor Jenny Hocking stumbled upon one of the only text-based recorded accounts of the game while examining ethnographer A.W. Howitt's notes in the State Library of Victoria. It came from Mukjarrawaint man Johnny Connolly and described the game he played with his relatives.

'It's not surprising there was little record of it, given our European notion of what a record is – text-based documentation,' says Prof. Hocking. 'A culture that is inherited in song and dance and art and other forms of expression won't necessarily have a record that can be picked up and read, and particularly that area that was decimated so quickly by the arrival of white settlers. But if you fossick into the archives hard enough, it is there.'

A St Kilda fan herself, Professor Hocking followed the discussion closely.

'I knew the discovery would make a big difference because a key element in the denial of the possibility of a link between the Indigenous game and Australian Rules Football was the absence of evidence of Marngrook being played in that area of the Western District where Tom Wills grew up.'

In 2019, in the AFL's apology to former Sydney Swans champion Adam Goodes, the league made a formal acknowledgement of the link between Marngrook and AFL.

'The footballs I'm talking about were made from reeds, from kangaroo skins. And in Victoria, the birthplace of AFL, they were made from possum skin and mobs there called this game Marngrook.'

JAYMA IN 37 BY NATHAN MAYNARD



Adam Goodes celebrates the Sydney Swans 2012 AFL Grand Final win.
Photo: Tim Ellis

The statement read: 'Aboriginal history tells us that traditional forms of football were played by Australia's first peoples all over Australia, most notably in the form of Marngrook in the Western Districts of Victoria. It is Australia's only Indigenous football game – a game born from the ancient traditions of our country. It is a game that is proudly Australian.'

Keeping Marngrook alive

Bunurong/Gadigal artist Ngairee Anderson made a Marngrook for our production of 37. She began the practice after attending Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association seven years ago.

'My journey to find my songlines has been an emotional one and with the help of wonderful community at our nearest Aboriginal gathering place in Hastings, I have grown within myself and embraced my culture more than ever,' she says.

'I started [making Marngrooks] at our bubup's (children's) group and for my own children. I was then offered a couple of contracts from a beautiful friend and fellow artist Emily Webbers of Wurruck Yambo and the rest they say is history.'

Anderson sources possum skin from New Zealand as possums are a protected species in Australia, then uses imitation sinew or thread to sew it into the shape of a ball.

'Traditionally they were just made into an oval shape almost like a football and stuffed with balsa rocks, shells, stringybark and ash,' she explains.

'As with any culture, it is important to keep the stories and traditions alive... We are 60,000-plus-year-old culture. We are awakening languages and awakening traditions that we thought were long gone. By teaching our sons and daughters their culture we ensure that they keep our songlines going strong and raising future elders.'

ADAM GOODES AND THE NUMBER 37 GUERNSEY

Adam Goodes played for the Sydney Swans from 1999–2015 and was loved by the AFL and spectators, admired for his skill and leadership for most of his outstanding career. A star football player, Goodes was also named 2014 Australian of the Year for his efforts to fight racism and his work with Indigenous youth community programs. 'If I'm only known for football, I've failed,' he said. Goodes is from the Adnyamathanha, a contemporary Indigenous people from the Flinders Ranges in South Australia.

Goodes wore Guernsey number 37 – as referenced in this play's title – and played for the Sydney Swans his entire AFL career.

During the Indigenous Round in May 2014, where the Swans played against Collingwood Football Club, a 13-year-old Collingwood fan yelled a racist slur at Goodes. Goodes asked security to have the girl removed from the stadium, resulting in intense media scrutiny of both the fan's behaviour and Goodes' response.

The following year, after kicking a goal, Goodes celebrated with a cultural dance in front of Collingwood fans, in which he threw an imaginary spear. 'Performed by Aboriginal men across Australia, the "spear dance" symbolises when men are facing other men from a different clan/tribe for war,' says Julie Andrews, Professor and Academic Director (Indigenous Research) at La Trobe University, 'like teams facing each other before the siren.' This is the game referenced in 37, Scene 12: Spearing a Cheer Squad.

Many spectators misinterpreted Goodes' dance as a war dance, a threat against white people, and from then on, Goodes was booed across Australia whenever he played. After 18 years of playing elite football, the unrelenting media attention and intense national debate around his actions caused him to leave the AFL.



Read the full article

Learn more about Marngrook in the full article on our website: mtc.com.au

'By teaching our sons and daughters their culture we ensure they keep our songlines going strong...'

NGAIREE ANDERSON
BUNURONG/GADIGAL ARTIST

Sources

Graovac, T. (2024). *Marngrook and the modern-day game* on mtc.com.au.

Moore, J. (2024). *Hall of Fame Bio: Adam Goodes* on sydneyswans.com.au; Andrews, J. (2024). *Respect and disrespect clash throughout 37 – a brilliant new play exploring Australian Rules Football* on theconversation.com

Directing



Director & Co-Choreographer Isaac Drandic and Co-Choreographer Waangenga Blanco in rehearsal



Director & Co-Choreographer Isaac Drandic

'It's about hope and working together to create a story we can all be proud of.'

ISAAC DRANDIC
DIRECTOR & CO-CHOREOGRAPHER

ISAAC DRANDIC

Isaac Drandic is a Noongar/Croatian man from the southwest of Western Australia. He is an award-winning playwright, director, and dramaturg. The 2024 premiere season of *37* was Isaac's directorial debut with Melbourne Theatre Company. He has collaborated with Nathan Maynard over the past eight years making *37* their fourth collaborative instalment. Isaac has held several positions within the theatre industry including Associate Director of ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, Resident Artist at Playwriting Australia and Resident Dramaturg at Queensland Theatre among others. He is a member of Australian Plays Transforms National Advisory Panel and is currently Head of First Nations Theatre at Queensland Theatre. His productions have earned numerous Green Room Awards including Most Outstanding Independent Theatre Production for *Blood on the Dance Floor*, as well as Best New Writing, an individual award for Best Direction and the coveted award for Best Production in the theatre companies' category for *The Season*.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: NEW SONGLINES

By Isaac Drandic

Kaya,

It's a real privilege to bring back *37* to audiences in Melbourne. It's not often a new work gets another life in the following season and I'm grateful to Melbourne Theatre Company and their audiences for this wonderful opportunity.

For generations stories have been told right here on this land and it's a pleasure to be contributing to the rich tapestry of songlines with our production of *37*. I am a Noongar man from the south-west of Western Australia. I come from a long line of storytellers who have travelled this continent time and time again sharing stories, through song, dance and cultural exchange that has shaped our way of life for generations.

The First People continue to share stories, now wielding the powerful medium of theatre for over half a century to communicate ideas and bring attention to what's important to us today. *37* is about the potential we have, to make this country – we now call Australia – a place where everyone feels they can belong.

It's about opportunities and missed opportunities. It's about hope and of working together to create a story we can all be proud of.

We as the First People continue to create new stories, new songlines through practicing theatre and that's why it's exciting to collaborate once again with my palawa brother Nathan Maynard on our fifth production. He writes such rich characters who speak like real people and always have something to say about the world that's worth saying. They are recognisable, they are flawed, and they are human. They are also very funny. To create this work with an exceptional group of humans has been an overwhelmingly positive experience. I'm thrilled to be directing a cast of 10 exceptional men. Men who feel as deeply as Maynard and I about creating a show that speaks to our state of affairs. It's rare to work with such a cohesive and connected cast and equally rare to work with such a large cast for a theatre production. Especially a First Nations lead work.



Director & Co-Choreographer Isaac Drandic in rehearsal

'I think about our process and how respect, deep listening and collaboration have been the foundations of which we've built this show and it's that collaborative spirit that I hope comes through on stage and we as a country might someday harness to create a more connected and cohesive community.'

ISAAC DRANDIC
DIRECTOR & CO-CHOREOGRAPHER

There is an appetite across the board for more large-scale work and the energy on stage that comes from 10 men in football shorts is electric. I can't wait for you to feel it. The passion and enthusiasm from the cast to tell this story inspires me every day. I think about our process and how respect, deep listening and collaboration have been the foundations of which we've built this show and it's that collaborative spirit that I hope comes through on stage and we as a country might someday harness to create a more connected and cohesive community.

There have been so many generous people who have touched this work, from the seed of the idea to the workshops and developments that have taken place over the past four years. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge their contributions. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) graduates of 2021 for helping Maynard and I to develop this work; the VCA creative team – Jacob Boehme, Leon Salom, Olivia Lucia Pimpinella, Stephen Hawker and Riley McCullagh; Chris Mead for believing in this work and supporting its development through the VCA. I'd also like to thank The Vizard Foundation for their financial contribution to develop the play; Kamarra Bell-Wykes, the most concise and insightful dramaturg and assistant director, and Melbourne Theatre Company and Queensland Theatre for backing us in and programming a larger scale First Nations production!

And of course, a massive heartfelt thank you to my family – Johannah Maza and my children Sofia and Lewis – for allowing me to be away from home to direct 37.

Woolah!

Set design



The set under construction in our workshop.
Photo: Emily Doyle



Set & Costume Designer Dale Ferguson

37 Set & Costume Designer Dale Ferguson and Director Isaac Drandic sat down to discuss designing the world of a football change room, the intersection of Marngrook and AFL and bringing the Cutting Cove Currawongs' mascot to life.

How did you begin collaborating on the set design for 37?

Dale: The first few conversations with Isaac were about finding common ground. Both of us played football, and I'd seen the VCA production [of 37] and loved it and that was a good launching pad. My biggest takeaway was Isaac saying he wanted the fusion between Marngrook and the modern game in the design, so that was a great brief.

Isaac: I always start with concepts and the larger ideas, thinking about characters and how I see the work reaching its audience. A lot of the conversations we had early on were about fishing around to see what we connected with, having yarns about football and our own experiences and how we connected with the text before we even started talking about actual set ideas.

What were the key design strategies?

Dale: We needed to look at the physical space. The thing I loved about the original [VCA] production was that you always knew where you were from the writing. There was no location required. It needed a theatricality to it and a universal playing space. The starting point was to look at Melbourne Theatre Company's venue and [Co-Producer] Queensland Theatre's venue to try and find the common ground between the two. We ended up with a design for Melbourne that is an exact replica of the Brisbane space.

Isaac: I remember talking to Dale about this idea of a crossover between the modern-day game of AFL football and the Marngrook which is the Aboriginal game that was played here for centuries before the game of AFL came out. I really wanted that to be present throughout the work. I wanted to get a sense that there was something here before this football club was here.

Dale: It's a bit of a misnomer that a conversation would start by being visual. I get far more from a director talking about the play, how we feel, the characters and how we interpret what it's like to be in a football club. Not many set designers have played football and it just so happened [Lighting Designer] Ben Hughes was also a footballer, which was unique. We talked about community, the change rooms, the anecdotes, beeping the horn at the football and all that atmospheric stuff which fed into the design so I could have the world in my head.

'Before landing on the idea of the currawong I had to get Country in an architectural space. I did that with hooks on the change room wall to look like a horizon line.'

DALE FERGUSON
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

I remember calling Isaac out of the blue and I said, 'I think it's like an honour roll that's 60,000 years old.' I thought about how football clubs have an honour roll with their 70-year history of secretaries and presidents, and what I was trying to get at is that we're involved in a game that went back 60,000 years. It's about fishing around for the unwritten word. You don't always hit the right idea first. You need a good director to say 'let that go' but it's where it takes you next that is important.

Isaac: If I work for designers who've done three or four shows, it's a bit different to a designer who has done more than 80 shows. I'm a lot less hands-on with experienced designers like Dale.

Can you tell us about the design of the currawong and its use in the set?

Dale: Before landing on the idea of the currawong I had to get Country in an architectural space. I did that with hooks on the change room wall to look like a horizon line. Once I got Country and found an earthy, hessian floor and wall, I then thought, 'I need the mascot'. In mining the play, these two characters [Sonny and Jayma] had such a proud history and I wanted the mascot to be like a mural, larger than life trying to fly out of the space. It was intended to be an analogy of the characters: one was landing, one was flying away.

Isaac: This idea that we've talked about of the crossover and the intersection of Aboriginal cultural practices, celebration, ceremony, corroboree – I feel like the game of AFL is one big dance and one big corroboree. Making that connection visual in this space was important to us and drawing from the totem that's been adopted by this football club as their mascot ... it made a lot of sense to introduce the currawong as the image. We wanted it to be inclusive, so we invited the whole cast and the creatives to use their handprints to form the outline and design of the bird. That speaks to the play and the idea that this is a group of men who need to work together to achieve great things. Them coming together really reflects the spirit of the work.



Discuss space and mood

Discuss the interrelationship between space and mood in the set design. How might the set be used by the performers to vary mood?



Application of symbol

Identify three examples of application of symbol in the set design.



Contemporary drama practices

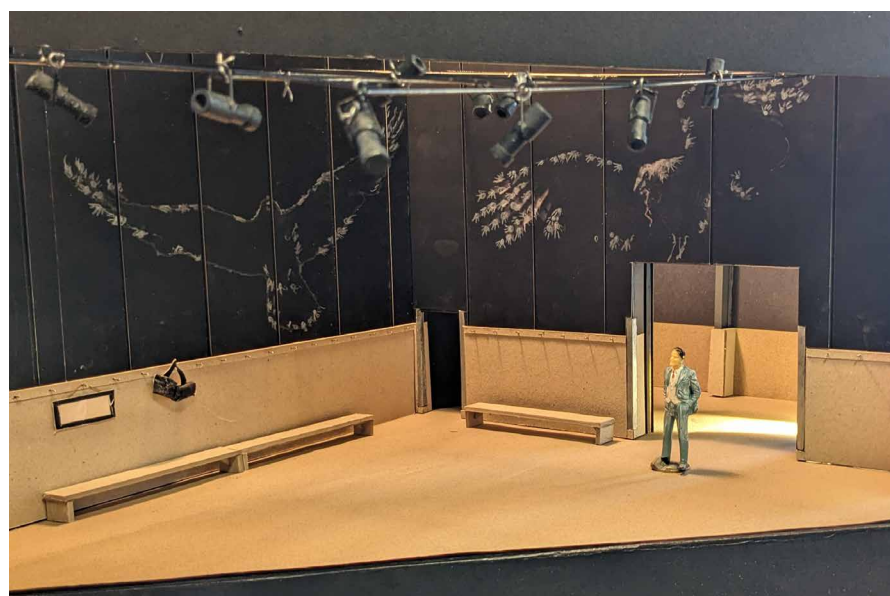
Discuss how the design and execution of the set is demonstrates contemporary drama practices.



Director & Co-Choreographer Isaac Drandic preparing to add his handprint to the set (left) and Set & Costume Designer Dale Ferguson adding his handprint to the 37 set (right).
Photo: Emily Doyle

'I feel like the game of AFL is one big dance and one big corroboree. Making that connection visual in this space was important to us...'

ISAAC DRANDIC
DIRECTOR & CO-CHOREOGRAPHER



Set model by Dale Ferguson

Expressive skills



Tibian Wyles and Ngali Shaw

Hear from members of the creative team about how they work with actors to explore expressive skills in rehearsal.

VOICE

Matt Furlani is a voice & dialect coach and actor, holding a Postgraduate Diploma in Voice Studies and Bachelor of Dramatic Art from the Victorian College of the Arts. Matt has worked as voice and dialect coach on productions including *My Brilliant Career*, *Cost of Living*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *37*, *The Almighty Sometimes*, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, *My Sister Jill*, *Bloom*, *Jacky*, *Come Rain or Come Shine*, *Admissions*, *The Truth* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *& Juliet* (Michael Cassel Group); *Looking for Alibrandi* (Malthouse); *Your Name Means Dream*, *A Case for the Existence of God*, *Wolf Play*, *Heroes of the Fourth Turning*, *Iphigenia in Splott*, *The Cane*, *Pomona and Ulster American* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *Death of a Salesman* (Hearth Theatre) and feature film *Daliland* (Magnolia Pictures). In 2016 he was a recipient of the Mike Walsh Fellowship, enabling him to travel to Scotland and work with Kristin Linklater. He has taught at 16th St Actors Studio since 2017.

In this Q&A, Voice & Text Coach Matt Furlani discusses vocal exercises the 37 team used in rehearsal for physical engagement, activating breath and finding energised resonance.

What's your role as Voice & Text Coach? What is your goal when working with actors?

My role as a Voice & Text Coach varies greatly with each project. The demands change with each unique combination of text, artists and directorial vision. Ultimately, I'm an advocate for the spoken voice and the text, helping performers unite (and ignite) these fundamental ingredients in order to reveal the full potential of both. The goal, always, is to equip a performer with the technical skills that serve their unique imaginative connection and vocal release. How we achieve that involves a robust selection of physical and vocal exercises, unpeeling the layers of the text and creative problem-solving. The priorities are supporting sustainable vocal choices, serving the text and a profound commitment to the act of standing in front of an audience and telling the truth.



Voice & Text Coach Matt Furlani

'Everything is rhythm in the human body: our heartbeat, the cycle of breathing air in and out of our lungs – it's why a crowd of people at a concert, clapping along, easily fall into time with each other.'

MATT FURLANI
VOICE & TEXT COACH

Can you give us an example of a vocal exercise you've done with the cast during rehearsal?

Oh, go on then: Get two chairs, spaced about three meters apart, facing each other. With your text in hand, sitting on one chair, launch yourself up to standing and moving forward, towards the empty chair while speaking a line. Your goal is to fuel the first word with the energy of movement. Next, continue to walk and speak the line towards the other chair, sitting heavily so that the last word of the line is bounced up and out as your glutes hit the chair. A few inches of freefall between you and the chair is all that's required to get the benefits. You'll find the free physical energy created from launching and landing helps to enhance the voice's resonance and energy, allowing you to release your intention/line without strain.

Our vocal sessions in 37 were full of stuff like this, the more we trained the voice like a real AFL team trains their skills, the better the results were. The focus was physical engagement, intensely activating breath and finding the energised resonance required to reach a teammate on the other side of the field. The voice needed to be extremely robust and heightened while retaining clarity of intention and being safely repeatable, night after night.

How does your work help actors manipulate rhythm in their performance?

Think of the most engaging speaker you've ever heard. A speaker who instantly draws you in and keeps you there, captivating you completely, whether they're telling an old joke or sharing the secrets of the Universe. I would be so bold to claim that rhythm and rhythmic variety in that speaker's voice is a big part of why their words resonate. Everything is rhythm in the human body: our heartbeat, the cycle of breathing air in and out of our lungs – it's why a crowd of people at a concert, clapping along, easily fall into time with each other. Exploring the musical aspects of the spoken voice (rhythm, melody, colour etc.) allows our breath, emotions and sound to be moved by the text, and they, in turn, move us.



The cast of 37 in rehearsal

How does your work help actors manipulate contrast in their performance?

The more choices you have access to, the more you can offer. The deeper your craft, the more effectively you can be directed. A performance with contrast is, to me, nothing more than a truthful representation of a human being – in all their contradictions and absurdity. In our real lives we never feel the exact same way for long, and even in the context of, say, an argument, our voices and feelings morph and evolve moment to moment as the thing unfolds. By exploring the nooks and crannies of the text and our voice, by giving ourselves permission to be as complex and contradictory in our choices onstage as we are in our lives, we can arrive at a performance that springs from within and resonates deeply without. Self editing, the need to eradicate anything that can't be easily categorised, wanting to demonstrate how clever or diligent we are – these are all examples of standing in our own way. Children in a playground don't suffer from these blockages in their play and unleash an enormous amount of vocal colour and variety as a result. In short: free yourself of vocal habits, grow your artistic potential.



Discuss voice

How did Matt Furlani work with the cast to develop their vocal fitness?



Vocal exercises

Try the vocal exercise Matt Furlani describes with two chairs. How does it enhance your vocal resonance and energy?

'The focus was physical engagement, intensely activating breath and finding the energised resonance required to reach a teammate on the other side of the field.'

MATT FURLANI
VOICE & TEXT COACH



Co-Choreographer Waangenga Blanco in rehearsal



Co-Choreographer Waangenga Blanco

MOVEMENT

Waangenga Blanco is a proud Indigenous man who descends from the Pajinka Wik in Cape York and Meriam Mer, the furthest eastern island in the Torres Strait. He is an award-winning, globally touring performing artist, specialising in contemporary dance, choreography and acting. Waangenga began his professional career in 2005 with Bangarra Dance Theatre and became a senior foundational influencer to a new generation of traditionally informed contemporary dance, where he remained until 2018. He is now a freelance artist. Waangenga's unwavering passion for his craft lead him to choreograph the award nominated *I.B.I.S* for Bangarra's 2015 national tour. In the same year he won the Australian Dance Awards prize for Outstanding Performance by a Male Dancer. He also took home a Green Room Award for Outstanding Male Dancer for his work in Bangarra's 2014 production *Patyegarang*. In 2019 he won a Helpman Award for Australia's Best Male Dancer.

Waangenga Blanco worked with the 37 cast to devise movement sequences through the production, such as the opening moments, football training and AFL games.

'I see this whole process of this production as ceremony,' says Co-Choreographer Waangenga Blanco. 'A lot of the stuff I do with actors in the morning is really sort of simple, repetitive movement, but it's really allowing them [the actors] to find their connection with the space and each other.' Blanco describes the choreography as storytelling. 'It's always drawing the story out of this vessel that each of us hold... Through that connection to their own body and the space around them becoming more aware of Country and the country we live on, that we're all custodians.'



**Community,
corroboree
and dance**



The cast of 37 in rehearsal

Watch Co-Choreographer Waangenga Blanco and Director & Co-Choreographer Isaac Drandic discuss the movement work and choreographed football sequences at mtc.com.au/eduhub

**'I see this whole process
of this production as
ceremony.'**

**WAANGENGA BLANCO
CO-CHOREOGRAPHER**



Thomas Larkin in rehearsal



Lyndall Grant

FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER

Lyndall Grant researched on-field fights during AFL matches online and took these to the rehearsal room. 'The on-field violence is almost like part of the pact of the AFL world, where there seems to be a level of violence that's permissible in a game that we wouldn't accept in most other contexts,' she says. 'For the on-field violence in 37, we picked out key moves from real on-field fights we thought would be useful and creatively interesting to further the story. In contrast, the off-field violence in 37 is emotional and character-driven. Elsewhere in the play, the beautiful movement choreography by Isaac Drandic and Waangenga Blanco is stylised and, at times, abstract. We had a choice to lean the fights into or away from that quality of movement. We decided to lean away and make the fights look real, visceral and gritty.'

Learn more about Lyndall Grant's work on 37 in this Q&A:

What's your role as Fight Choreographer?

My role as Fight Choreographer is to ensure that any moments of staged violence or physical action on stage are performed both safely and in a way that tells the story that we want to tell. Staged violence and action can include moments of combat, such as a slap or a push, a full fight, but also less obvious moments such as a fall, lifting people or heavy objects, a grab or performing on or around difficult pieces of set.

My job involves drawing on my knowledge of stage combat techniques, movement and biomechanics, and using this to collaborate with the ideas of the director and the actors, as well as with other creatives, the technical team, the crew and the production team. My goal is to translate the action that's written in stage directions in the script into physical stories that are believable, engaging and repeatable so that they can have the desired impact on the audience while making sure the actors can perform them over multiple shows with no injuries.

What is your goal when working with actors?

When I am working with actors, my goal is to ensure that they have autonomy over their own safety and actions, and that they are empowered to drive discussions on key aspects such as their creative choices and ideas, and their concerns and boundaries. It's really important to recognise that safety is subjective to the actor and is context specific, and that safety includes not just physical safety, but also emotional safety, mental safety and vocal safety.

'For the on-field violence in 37, we picked out key moves from real on-field fights we thought would be useful and creatively interesting to further the story.'

LYNDALL GRANT
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER

Fight scenes also often occur at times of heightened emotion in a play, and they can be pivotal storytelling moments. My goal is to make sure I create choreography that aligns with the actors' chosen character intentions, and also the actor's physical range.

Stage combat techniques should support the story that the actors want to tell rather than inhibit it, and should allow the actors to fully commit to the performance they want to deliver without fear of injury to themselves or others. A fight scene that is not choreographed to help the actors can jolt them out of the performance, or can even be a source of anxiety throughout the whole show.

Fight scenes can be incredibly exciting to perform, so it is my goal to help the actors to find the fun, the enjoyment, and the playfulness in the work, because I want everyone to enjoy the job that we decide to do.

Can you give us an example of an exercise you've done with the cast during rehearsal?

The cast of 37 are an incredibly playful ensemble of actors. We worked with a number of exercises for the fight scenes, both in preparations for learning stage combat technique and also in developing the performance of the scenes themselves. My favourite exercise is a game of mine that I call *The Rising Dead*. The task with this game is to perform the fight sequence with full performance energy, but at the very slow-motion pace – around 30% of the normal pace.

While doing this, the actors are asked to talk through their character's internal monologue out loud and in slow-motion. This results in a scene that looks and sounds like it's being performed by a group of zombies – hence the name, *The Rising Dead*. The outcome is that the slow motion gives the actors time to notice, and to react to everything that's going on around them, and the externalised internal monologue helps them to add detail and texture to this storytelling.

This is more difficult to do when you are performing a fight at full pace, with so many other things to focus on, so it is a good technique to expand the storytelling detail of a scene while keeping everyone safe. It is also highly amusing for everyone to perform and for us to watch, which helps to unlock playfulness and create a positive feedback loop with the scene.

'Creating an impactful scene of stage violence is closely reliant on how we manipulate space.'

LYNDALL GRANT
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER



The cast of 37 in rehearsal

How does your work help actors manipulate conflict in their performance?

The Fight Choreographer's work helps actors manipulate conflict on a number of levels. In the first instance, the moves that a character chooses to use in violence each tell a different story. For example, the script may say that one character slaps the other. However, an open handed forehand slap tells a different story to a backhanded slap. A quick slap on the wrist has a different story impact than a slap delivered with a full swipe from the shoulder. In this way, choosing the appropriate choreography for the character and their intentions gives us the base framework for telling the story we want to tell. In exactly the same way that choosing certain words will alter the meaning of a sentence.

Secondly, the choreography itself will be textured by the performance choices that we make. This includes technical choices such as pacing and rhythm, and creative choices such as the character's vocal, physical, and emotional reactions before, during and after the violence. For example, we tell a different story if a character is slapped and then cries, versus if they're slapped and they laugh. We say that the audience doesn't care so much about the move itself, but they care about how the characters feel about the move. Linking with this, then we can manipulate the conflict by the soundscape that we create around the conflict, including vocal sounds, breath, body impact sounds, weapons and sounds from other actors on stage – and of course, the entire scene is manipulated by the choices of the sound and lighting designers.

How does your work help actors manipulate space in their performance?

Creating an impactful scene of stage violence is closely reliant on how we manipulate space. On a technical level, the distance between actors is one of the key safety aspects we use when we are performing the illusion of hits and strikes. On a creative level, we can manipulate the tension – the perceived danger – between two characters by changing where they are standing in relationship to each other and where they are standing on stage.

For example, by slowly bringing two characters closely together until they are just out of reach, we will increase the dramatic tension, and we can use this to wind up the characters and the audience so that they are ready for the fight when it begins. However, if the characters step too close to each other, or too far away from each other, we break this tension and we lose some of the impact of the scene.



Discuss space

Thinking about the dramatic element of space, discuss Lyndall Grant's comments about performing the illusion of hits and strikes.



Discuss conflict

How does the fight choreographer's work enhance the dramatic element of conflict? Refer to Lyndall Grant's response.



Ngali Shaw in rehearsal

In terms of positioning on stage, in general terms, a character who is standing upstage and centre will appear to be in a dominant position, while a character who is standing downstage and, on the periphery, will appear to be in the weaker position. We can use this to help describe the relationship between the character's status, which influences how we feel about the characters, who we think is winning or losing, who we think is stronger or weaker, and it can increase the dramatic tension the audience feels throughout the fight scene. We can also use spacing to highlight key moves or moments in the choreography and arrange the choreography in a way that is more aesthetically interesting to the audience.

Performance styles



The cast of 37 in rehearsal

PHYSICAL THEATRE

This production incorporates aspects of physical theatre and dance in its storytelling. Physical theatre emphasises the movement of the body in telling a story, combining drama and dance. There are some sequences in this play that don't contain much text but are instead told through movement.

Dance has been an important part of First Nations culture for thousands of years. In this production, Director & Co-Choreographer Isaac Drandic and Co-Choreographer Waangenga Blanco worked with the cast to experiment and explore ways of incorporating dance and storytelling into the performance.

Physical theatre conventions you may identify include heightened use of gesture and mime (slow-motion montage in scene 12) and the AFL/dance sequences throughout. Waangenga Blanco has also worked with Bangarra Dance Theatre, a company of professional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers who draw on 65,000 years of culture to create works of theatre with dance, music, poetry and design.

NATURALISM

This production includes aspects of naturalism but it is not a naturalistic play. Naturalism attempts to create the experience of real life on stage. Using all available theatrical elements, it aims to create an empathetic and emotional response in the audience. Naturalistic theatre makes use of the fourth wall, inviting the audience to observe the action unfold on stage.

While this production has many naturalistic costumes and props, the overall set design is more symbolic than realistic. This is to heighten the audiences' focus on the characters and their relationships to each other. The contrast of naturalistic dialogue and choreographed fights that look realistic, with dance and movement that is highly stylised, create tension within the performance.

'I think of AFL as like a corroboree. I see it as a big dance. The games sort of take us into this much more stylised and sort of dreamy state, that I think reflects this intersection or crossover between the game of Marngrook and the modern-day game of AFL football.'

ISAAC DRANDIC
DIRECTOR & CO-CHOREOGRAPHER

Dramatic elements

The following questions are intended to help you consider how 37 might be interpreted onstage through the lens of VCE Drama. Refresh your memory of the definitions with our dramatic elements flashcards at mtc.com.au/eduhub.

CLIMAX

Make predictions for how climax might be manipulated in the moment when Sonny punches Woodsy.

Which moments in the script do you identify as potential moments of climax? How might various production areas enhance these moments?

CONFLICT

Between which characters do you expect to see conflict?

Which characters might also demonstrate internal conflict?

CONTRAST

Identify two characters with contrasting values and make predictions about how these might be embodied with expressive skills.

What are some examples of contrast within the design aspects of the production that you're already expecting to see?

MOOD

Identify two moments in the script where you expect to see different moods.

How might design production areas enhance mood in these moments?

RHYTHM

When you read the dialogue, can you identify a rhythm in the pattern of speech for different characters?

Annotate your script with predictions about rhythm based on the length of sentences or paragraphs.

SOUND

What might this set design sound like when the performer interacts with it?

How might the sounds of playing AFL be applied in this performance by the actors?

SPACE

What opportunities does the set offer for the performer to vary levels, proximity and depth?

In what ways is the set design symbolic?

TENSION

How might tension be created through stillness and silence?

Identify one moment in the script where tension will be broken for comic effect.



**Download
Part B**

After you've seen 37, 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: mtc.com.au/eduhub



Ben O'Toole in rehearsal

Learn more



Watch the trailer

Watch the video trailer for 37 and make predictions about how the team will bring this story to life onstage.

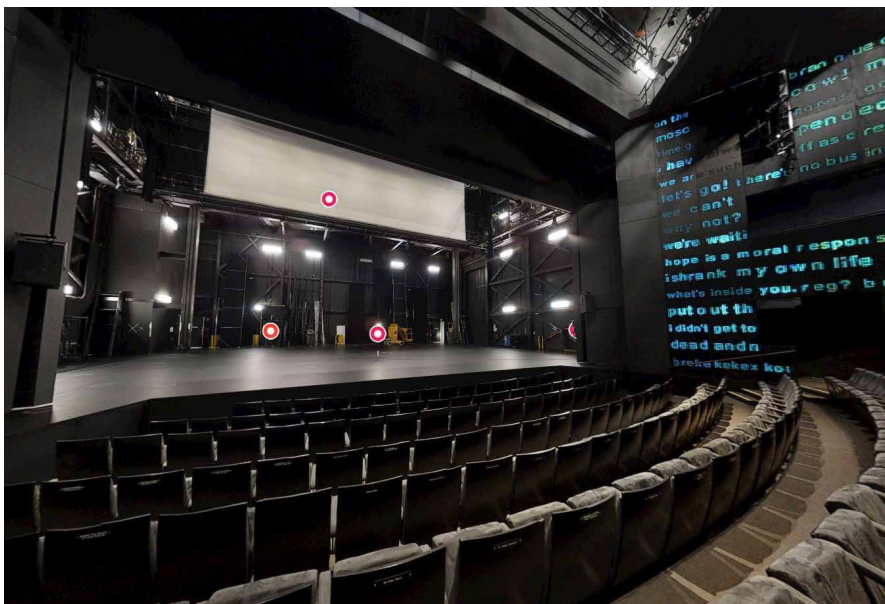
Watch the video at mtc.com.au/eduhub



Hear from the cast

Hear the cast discuss their characters, themes in the play and how they use expressive skills.

Read the interviews at mtc.com.au/eduhub



The Sumner Virtual Tour

Explore the Sumner at Southbank Theatre, where 37 will be performed in Melbourne, in this interactive virtual tour.

Go backstage at mtc.com.au/eduhub