

26 JUL—
30 AUG 2025

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

ARTS CENTRE
MELBOURNE



Kimberly A'kimbo

a musical

BOOK & LYRICS BY
**DAVID LINDSAY-
ABAIRE**

MUSIC BY
**JEANINE
TESORI**

BASED ON THE PLAY BY **DAVID LINDSAY-ABAIRE**

DIRECTED BY **MITCHELL BUTEL**

LICENSED EXCLUSIVELY BY MUSIC THEATRE INTERNATIONAL (AUSTRALASIA)

EDUCATION PACK – PART B

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Discuss



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



Department
of Education

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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.

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.

MTC HQ Virtual Tour

Walk the halls of MTC 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: mtc.com.au/eduhub

About the show



Christie Whelan Browne, Marina Prior and Nathan O'Keefe



Watch the
trailer

New Jersey, 1999: from a sea of teen angst, unrequited crushes and popularity contests bursts Kimberly, a musical heroine like no other. Equal parts teen comedy, heist caper and unlikely love story, her rollercoaster journey shows that the tempo of your own song is yours to set. Born with a genetic rarity that means she ages at four times the rate of everyone else, Kimberly is a teen in mid-life form and living on borrowed time. She can cope with her dropkick dad and narcissistic mum – can't spell 'dysfunction' without 'fun', right? But when her criminal aunt Debra shows up with a get-rich-quick scheme too good to be legal, Kimberly decides you're only young once.

Kimberly Akimbo: A Musical is the musical that took Broadway by storm. It won countless hearts and raked in five Tony awards including Best Musical, with music by **Jeanine Tesori**, the brilliant mind behind the critically acclaimed *Fun Home*. This Australian premiere directed by four-time Helpmann Award-winner **Mitchell Butel** and starring **Marina Prior**, **Casey Donovan** and **Christie Whelan Browne** brims with infectious energy and tunes that soar.

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

This production contains coarse language and mature themes. For detailed information about the production's content, visit our production content guide at mtc.com.au/production-content-guide.

DURATION

Approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes, including a 20-minute interval.

CO-PRODUCER



'The challenge is filling our days and our own big hearts with as much life and joy and love for others and ourselves as we can. Kimberly takes on that challenge like a warrior.'

MITCHELL BUTEL
DIRECTOR

Cast and creatives



**Marty Alix
Martin**



**Allycia Angeles
Delia**



**Casey Donovan
Debra**



**Alana Iannace
Teresa**



**Nathan O'Keefe
Buddy Levaco**



**Marina Prior
Kimberly Levaco**



**Jacob Rozario
Aaron**



**Darcy Wain
Seth**



**Christie Whelan Browne
Pattie Levaco**



**Millicent Sarre
Cover**



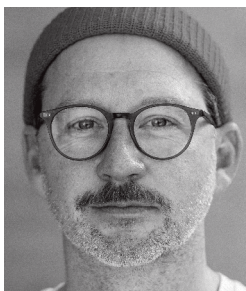
**Mitchell Butel
Director**



**Kym Purling
Musical Director**



**Amy Campbell
Choreographer**



**Jonathon Oxlade
Set Designer**



**Ailsa Paterson
Costume Designer**



Read their bios

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



Matt Scott
Lighting Designer



Andrew Poppleton
Sound Designer



Matt Byrne
Video Content Creator



Jennifer Innes
Accent Coach



Annabel Matheson
Intimacy Coordinator



Luke Carbon
Reed 1



Martin Corcoran
Reed 2



Tom Doublier
Drums



Darcy Gilkerson
Cello



Paul Jenkins
Reed 1



Patrick Schmidli
Bass



Aaron Syrjanen
Guitar

Andrew Patterson
Keys 2

Stage Manager
Bridget Samuel
Deputy Stage Manager
Annah Jacobs
Assistant Stage Manager
Bel Hughes

Acting skills

The cast of *Kimberly Akimbo: A Musical* each play one character by using facial expression, voice, gesture, movement, stillness and silence, focus and verbal and non-verbal language to convey the intended meanings of characters in this story. In these Q&As, learn more about each character from the cast.

KIMBERLY

Played by Marina Prior

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

Kimberly is a sixteen-year-old girl who is trying to find her place in her new community ... at school and basically in the world. What drives her is a voracious desire to live ... to experience every adventure big or small that she can find in life: from finding a good friend to swimming at the bottom of a waterfall and bungee jumping!

How do you embody your character?

I am exploring the physical vocabulary for Kimberly in rehearsal right now. She has the slightly awkward stance of a teenage girl who is self-conscious about her body, combined with the knees and hips of a woman in her sixties. Her movements are often tentative, being an outsider for a lot of her life. She has a wisdom beyond her years born of accelerated mental emotional and physical maturity, which informs the measured, observational way she speaks sometimes. She is often still and quiet compared to the hormone-fuelled exuberance of her peers.

How do design elements like costumes, props and the set impact your performance? What helps and how?

Costume always enhances my portrayal, as it impacts the way I move, sit and walk or dance. The shoes are very important in terms of how I walk. The set gives me a world to inhabit, and I'm aware of how I am filling the space – I try to use my awareness of the geography of the stage to deliver certain parts of dialogue or song from the strongest point, or to affect the story telling.

Do you consciously experiment with/manipulate contrast in your performance? How so?

Contrast is an essential part of performance, especially if you are on stage all night (or a good deal). Stillness after energetic movement or vice versa underlines storytelling very effectively. Vocal dynamic contrast can make a point beautifully. Comedic timing often relies on contrast. There is an old comedic strategy of 'turning on a dime' (i.e. doing 180-degree turn from one thought to another that almost always works to land a laugh).

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

The big idea of the play, in relation to Kimberly, is to seize the day and live audaciously and authentically, despite any challenges thrown upon us, as all we have is 'now'.



Marina Prior

'She has the slightly awkward stance of a teenage girl who is self-conscious about her body, combined with the knees and hips of a woman in her sixties.'

MARINA PRIOR



Marina Prior



Discuss movement

Discuss the actor's comments about embodying their character and reflect on a specific moment in the production where you saw this in their performance.

BUDDY

Played by Nathan O'Keefe

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

Buddy is Kim's father. He finds himself stuck in a life where he's barely keeping his head above the water. He self-medicates with gambling and booze, possibly trying to avoid the fact that his wife can't stand him and his daughter's time is running out. The weight of his failures presses down on him like a suffocating blanket, each day blending into the next in a hazy blur of desperation and denial. The local bars know him well, a familiar figure hunched over cheap whiskey, drowning his sorrows and avoiding the harsh realities of his lacklustre existence. His relationship with Kim is distant and strained, marked more by absence than presence. Kim's condition hangs over him like a dark cloud, a constant reminder of his inadequacies as a provider and a father. Each empty bottle becomes another layer of his self-imposed prison, a cycle of destruction he seems unable or unwilling to break. Buddy exists in a state of perpetual survival, moving from one moment of temporary escape to another, never truly confronting the depths of his own despair.

How do you embody your character?

To embody the character of Buddy, a key focus is physicalisation. A full day at work followed by a long drinking session is exhausting, so the weight of tiredness is a constant companion. That, along with frustration, tends to exact a physical toll. The body becomes a landscape of accumulated stress, where each muscle seems to carry the memory of endless hours and unresolved tensions. Every movement is weighted with a sense of resignation, shoulders slightly hunched, steps deliberate but slightly dragging. The physical manifestation of Buddy's inner state is crucial – it's not just about portraying fatigue but embodying a deeper sense of worn-down existence. The slouch isn't merely postural, but a physical expression of an emotional landscape – the cumulative effect of repeated disappointments and unmet expectations. The drinking sessions aren't just about alcohol either, but about momentary escape, a brief respite from the grinding routine. Each gesture, each slight tremor of the hand, each weary blink becomes a narrative element. The body tells a story of endurance, of persistent struggle against a weariness that seems to seep from within, transforming physical exhaustion into something more profound.



Nathan O'Keefe

'Each gesture, each slight tremor of the hand, each weary blink becomes a narrative element.'

NATHAN O'KEEFE



Nathan O'Keefe

How do design elements like costumes, props and the set impact your performance? What helps and how?

It is very important that as a performer you get to have a chance to play with any props that your character might interact with throughout the show. Think about things that we are very comfortable with – phones, keys, devices. In the real world we use these objects unconsciously, the way we might flip a phone, or find the correct key. Muscle memory plays a crucial role in making these interactions believable. Actors need to spend time handling props until their movements become natural and seamless. This doesn't mean performing elaborate tricks but rather developing a sense of comfort and authenticity with the objects. For instance, a character who constantly looks awkward while holding a phone or struggles to unlock a door will immediately break the audience's suspension of disbelief. Rehearsal and repetition are key to achieving this level of unconscious interaction. By practicing with props repeatedly, performers can develop the same level of ease they have with objects in their personal life. The goal is to make these interactions so smooth and automatic that the audience doesn't even notice them, allowing the storytelling and character development to remain the primary focus.

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

For me, the big idea of the play is immediacy – a profound exploration of time's precious fragility when connection becomes paramount. When you have a significantly shorter amount of time with someone you love, how can you not only make the most of that time, but make sure that that time is quality? This concept transcends mere temporal measurement and delves into the essence of human connection, challenging us to consider how we truly inhabit moments with those dear to us.

'For me, the big idea of the play is immediacy – a profound exploration of time's precious fragility when connection becomes paramount.'

NATHAN O'KEEFE



Christie Whelan Browne and Nathan O'Keefe



**Discuss
gesture**

Discuss the actor's comments about gestures in particular and reflect on a specific moment in the production where you saw this in their performance.

PATTIE

Played by Christie Whelan Browne

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

She is a hard woman. She doesn't show a lot of love or kindness to people in her family, but it doesn't mean she doesn't feel it. She is quite stunted emotionally. She is driven by her new baby, really. This new baby is giving her hope that things will be ok.

How do you embody your character?

My character is pregnant, with two wrist casts and a moon boot! Physically there is a lot going on. Luckily, I've been pregnant, I've had wrist issues and ankle issues – so I draw on all those things and try and remember the feelings and what it looked and felt like. The pregnancy thing is a big one, and I'm actually really enjoying going back and remembering what it's like to carry a baby in your belly.

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

Comedy is all about rhythm and timing. So part of that is working it out in the room and a bigger part is letting the audience tell us what they find funny. This show is dark AND funny. So sometimes things will land differently, a funny line may not get a laugh because it's layered with something so dark the audience can't bring themselves to laugh. Or sometimes they laugh because they're uncomfortable. And while you're performing you need to be waiting for the audience's response to create your own rhythm. It's a dance in a way.

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

For me, Pattie is living in HOPE. Hope for a fresh start with a new baby, hope that it will mask the pain of losing Kimberly around her sixteenth birthday. She lives in DENIAL a lot of the time, but deep down she has a lot of FEAR and PAIN for her daughter and the life that she and Kim never got to live.



Christie Whelan Browne

'While you're performing, you need to be waiting for the audience's response to create your own rhythm. It's a dance in a way.'

CHRISTIE WHELAN BROWNE



Christie Whelan Browne



Discuss rhythm

Discuss the actor's comments about comedic timing and reflect on a specific moment in the production where you saw this in their performance.

DEBRA

Played by Casey Donovan

Tell us about your character Debra in a nutshell, what drives them?

Debra is an on-the-run scoundrel – she is not really a scoundrel, but she is always running from something. Running from the law, running from history, but she is just always on the run and always getting herself in trouble. She's a go getter, she will do anything and everything for her family, which is evident throughout the show. Her love for Kim is that beautiful Aunt – you know the fun aunt, who is always doing something mischievous and would let Kimmy get away with anything – and would invite her to wash every check with love. What drives them? I guess what drives her is having a dream of getting out of her life living out of a garbage bag. And wanting a better life, wanting money so that she can have a life of her own and stop having to do all these shitty little gigs that she does. She just wants to be comfortable in life.

How do you embody your character?

I think embodying Deb is almost visually going back to my 16-year-old self in a band tee and some cargo pants and not really giving a f*ck, basically. Voice I am still figuring out, most of my American characters sit quite high in my voice just for vocal safety. So, I am going to play around and have a go at placing my voice a little lower – but I just have to be quite careful that it doesn't fatigue. Also, Debra is quite 'yell-y' she gives back as hard as she gets it. So, I will definitely be keeping an eye on that. I haven't really delved into it too much as of yet, but I am sure she will grow. I love characters that just keep growing through a season. I like to say 'colour inside the box' of the direction you have been given.

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

I think it all comes into play. I have a photographic memory of things, not so much with words (which is quite annoying in my job). But certainly, sets help to remind you of what scene you're in, what your intention is, how you come into a scene and your surroundings – which are important to portraying your character and making them live in the world that we're living in. Costume – anything that makes it different from Casey. You'll notice that my hair is out, and I am using my own hair, which I haven't done in a very, very long time. But my hair is curly and afro-ish so anything that can make a difference to separating Casey from 'Character' is kind of my main objective when I play a character. I don't wear any of my rings. The only jewellery I keep in will be hopefully my earrings and possibly my nose ring. It's important that when you look in the mirror you are looking at your character. We are the vessels to our characters, but just those little points of difference are a huge help.

Do you consciously experiment with/manipulate with rhythm in your performance?

I am pretty stock standard – I like to do things the same once it's in my body. When you are doing a show, especially long running shows, you can find newness, but it is always about colouring inside that box for me and not going too far out. When you are continuously changing rhythms and where you are standing, it's like a domino effect. It's a team sport and when you are fiddling around with things that possibly you shouldn't, it does get quite interesting. Sometimes it keeps people on their toes, and that is great for newness but for me I find it completely distracting. So, I like to keep things pretty much the same if not the exact same most nights.



Casey Donovan

'She's a go-getter, she will do anything and everything for her family, which is evident throughout the show.'

CASEY DONOVAN



Casey Donovan



**Discuss
voice**

Discuss the actor's comments about their character's voice and reflect on a specific moment in the production where you saw this in their performance.

SETH

Played by Darcy Wain

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

Seth Brett Weetis is a sweet young man who has been brought up in a fairly dysfunctional home life. He has recently lost his mother to illness and now raised solely by his father, although some can argue how much exposure Seth has to his father being a parent – Seth's father works night shifts and Seth is not around during the day so there is not a lot of overlap during their weeks and his relationship with his father isn't that enduring. His father took the loss of his mother very harshly and struggles to provide Seth with a clear parental figure. He brother is an addict who has been to rehab multiple times in an attempt to help him rehabilitate his shortcomings – possibly as a result of the recent loss of his own mother. Seth is someone who knows who he is and isn't ashamed of it, which is very mature mindset for someone of his age. He is not afraid to admit and stand up for what he believes in and as a result he can come off as blunt sometimes.

His relationship with Kimberly is one she has never really experienced. He is not afraid to address her genetic disorder very candidly and I believe that is something she appreciates about him – he doesn't avoid her genetic disorder or tiptoe around it like other people. He is very intrigued by her as a person and her experiences compared to just her external appearance.

He is also a huge geek. He is obsessed with *Lord of the Rings* to the point where he will include it in his everyday vocabulary and is shocked when people don't understand what he's saying or where his elvish is from. He is also an exceptional tuba player, competing in competitions with his band around the state. Further, he is a wickedly smart and intellectual individual. One of his favourite pastimes is puzzles, his specialty being anagrams. To the point where he has joined the 'Junior Wordsmiths of America' and organisation 'dedicated to the puzzlistic arts'. Finally, he is a very caring and kind individual. He tries his hardest to be a 'Good Kid', one he thinks his mother always knew he was. He tries to make up for all the shortcomings of his brother and father.

How do you embody your character?

For me as the performer, I really try and find the joy in a lot of the elements of the show. He is a confident individual who finds the joy all the small minute details that radiate throughout the show. I also naturally play with the sense of youth by slightly raising my larynx ever so faintly as not to venture into an unauthentic reality. His movement is comedic to play with – he moves around the stage in a dorky sort of manner however, it, radiates a sense of unwavering confidence that he believes he has. For any theatre show, compared to film and television, the facial expressions are much larger. And further as he is a sixteen-year-old his facial expressions are much larger and much less nuanced. You can tell exactly what he's thinking purely based of his facial expressions which is something I love about him. He's someone who's not afraid to react in grand manner. His gestures much like any sixteen-year-old are – very awkward and he hasn't yet had the opportunity or time to figure out how to use his arms. Especially when talking to Kimberly one-on-one, his awkward gestures are emphasised and more prevalent. I find that the only real time his gestures and movement is truly calm is when he's fully immersed in something he thoroughly enjoys, such as his anagrams.



Darcy Wain

'His movement is comedic to play with; he moves around the stage in a dorky sort of manner however it radiates a sense of unwavering confidence that he believes he has.'

DARCY WAIN



Darcy Wain



Darcy Wain

'He is not afraid to follow his dreams and follow love, no matter how fleeting it is.'

DARCY WAIN

How do design elements like costumes, props and the set impact your performance? What helps and how?

Design elements play such a supportive role in my performance. In scene six, Seth is placed on a beanbag opposite Kimberly with his notebook and a pencil. These props allow me to ground myself and help transport me into the world of the musical. Furthermore, all the set pieces, backpack, microphone and even beautifully designed lockers that are placed in the school scenes allow for a much more nuanced and fascinating performance due to the number of possibilities and choices you can make with the intricate design elements placed around you.

Do you consciously experiment with/manipulate contrast in your performance? How so?

I feel a huge shift and contrast for Seth between act one and act two. Act 1 finishes with 'This Time,' where the song explores complicated and intricate issues and themes of family life and relationships. It sets a tone of excitement for the possibilities ahead for Seth and the relationships he is yet to build, develop and explore. However, at the start of Act 2 we go straight into the 'How to Wash a Check' scene, where Seth at once is frustrated, hesitant and dissenting towards what is being expected of him by the quartet, Kimberly and Debra. It goes completely against his mantra of always striving to do the right thing. This mantra is observed in his anagram scene with Kimberly where he states that he 'doesn't like to cheat' and this feels like a complete betrayal of his moral code. These themes of disapproval are explored further through his song 'Good Kid', whereby the end of the song he reaches a point where he has convinced himself that sometimes doing the wrong thing can be beneficial for the greater good. Comparing his involvement in the cheque fraud to the journey Frodo the Hobbit takes bringing the One Ring to Mount Doom in the Land of Mordor in *Lord of the Rings*. By the end of the show, we see that he has bent his moral compass because of his love for Kimberly. He does it so she can have the 'Great Adventure' she deserves before she passes away.

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

To me the overarching theme of the play is – no one gets a second time around. Seth has a complicated relationship with this Big Idea. He experienced the passing of his mother at an early age and learned that everything and everybody has their time. He experiences daily the grief and opportunities wasted by his father and brother and comes to the realisation at an early age that we all only have one life to live and we don't know how long it's going to last or where the 'road will bend' so you just have to 'enjoy the ride' while you can. That is why Seth as a character is not afraid to admit that yeah, he is a dork who loves puzzles, *Lord of the Rings* and Jazz Band. He is not afraid to follow his dreams and follow love, no matter how fleeting it is. Most in the show go through the journey of stages of embracing this mantra. However, Seth is someone who throughout the entire show radiates this overarching theme through everything he does and believes in.



Discuss motivation

Discuss the actor's comments about their character's motivations and reflect on how you saw this demonstrated in their performance.



Discuss contrast

Discuss the actor's comments about contrast and reflect on the moments they describe from the performance.

AARON

Played by Jacob Rozario

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

Aaron is an awkward sophomore living in Bergen County, New Jersey. His friends making up the Teen Quartet throughout the play navigate their complicated crushes on each other without being too conspicuous – if Delia is on board with a plan, so is Aaron.

How do you embody your character?

I have chosen to give Aaron a bit of a slouch in the shoulders and he resorts to hands in pockets most of the time which keeps him grounded and more laidback than the rest of the quartet, however, this is juxtaposed when Aaron has his skates on – when Aaron is in the rink it's like a kid in a candy store. I have lowered his voice more than my natural voice which allows me to lock into a character and make choices that aren't coming from me, but from him.

How do design elements like costumes, props and the set impact your performance? What helps and how?

The chunky shoes, baggy jeans and layered tops/shirts give Aaron a cool 90s teen aesthetic which helps me with the grounded physical choices I've made (slouch in shoulders, hands in pockets). The skates are an element that isn't a natural skill utilised in theatre so I wanted to make a clear choice with how he feels at school compared to how he feels on skates with his friends.

Do you consciously experiment with/manipulate emphasis in your performance? How so?

A cool this about storytelling through song is using emphasis when there is important text that an audience needs to understand the story and when a character is explaining something that the audience hasn't seen on stage.

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

Aaron, as well as the Teen Quartet serve as a contrast to Kimberly's world and what her life would look like without her disease.



Jacob Rozario

'I have chosen to give Aaron a bit of a slouch in the shoulders and he resorts to hands in pockets most of the time which keeps him grounded.'

JACOB ROZARIO



Jacob Rozario and Allycia Angeles



Discuss emphasis

Discuss the actor's comments about emphasis and reflect on a specific moment in the production where you saw this in their performance.

DELIA

Played by Allycia Angeles

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

Delia is a very fiery and fierce teenager who is passionate about her success in show choir and school. She is kind but strong and stubborn, always wanting the best for everyone, even if that ethically compromises them sometimes. She has bit of crush on Teresa, which are the underneath layers of vulnerability and tension to her outwardly assertive personality. Delia loves to skate with her friends, and she loves to sing and dance. She's incredibly sassy and could be considered a teacher's pet, but not in a suck-up way, more in the sense that she is an overachiever. If she's going to do something, she's going to focus on doing it right and exceptionally well. She is often over-managing and very detail-oriented, driven by an intense need to succeed and be the best at what she does. That's Delia.

How do you embody your character?

Delia has a very strong personality, and each of the Teen Quartet characters contrasts with the others. What stands out most about Delia is her relentless determination and her ambitious personality. Once she's set on something, there's no changing her mind.

Voice: I play with a more youthful sound by raising my larynx to sound younger. Nothing about her is laidback, so I try to deliver her lines like I'm playing darts competitively – sharp, clear, precise, and focused. Her voice is commanding and confident. Another difference to her voice from my own is the obvious mix of a New Jersey accent and General American accent.

Movement: Delia's physicality is best captured by a sassy hair flick over the shoulder. Not that I do any of those, but if you had to describe her in a movement, that would be it. I intentionally stand upright, feet planted firmly into the ground, knees straight, shoulders down, sometimes slanted though when she's trying to figure out her environment or take control of a situation she's unfamiliar with. She is unapologetic in her movements. A simple step or head turn from her carries power, she would look directly at someone without shame or hesitation – almost trying to make the movement scream "I'm gonna look at you right now, and I don't care that you can see me looking at"

Facial Expression: I like to think she often carries a proud chin-up look or stares directly through the frames of her glasses when she's in observation mode.

Gestures: Delia claps and points at people to command attention and direct action. This was a choice developed in collaboration with Director Mitchell Butel, and it reflects a more dominant presence in the Teen Quartet. She's constantly thinking of new things to work on, rehearse, or plan.

Stillness/Silence: I like to make her stand with her feet slightly turned in – yes, she's strong, but she's still a self-conscious theatre nerd striving for perfection. Crossing her arms is also a frequent stance I like to use – she's guarded, upright, and sure of herself even when hiding insecurity.

How do design elements like costumes, props and the set impact your performance? What helps and how?

I have the absolute honour of working on the set that's always being added to and built during rehearsals, and it truly helps bring the world of the play to life – there's less work for the imagination. Given that it's a small cast working in close proximity, having a real set and props helps us stay on the same page visually and spatially, rather than each of us imagining a slightly different version of our environment. For me specifically, tapping into Delia becomes easier with costume elements that are so different from my own style. Wardrobe has given her bright red Doc Martens and red framed glasses, things I don't normally wear. Putting on her outfit helps me step into a completely different person and quite literally into someone else's shoes.

Every time I catch sight of those red glasses in the corner of my vision during a scene, it reminds me to prioritise Delia's feelings, not my own. It's a very small but powerful cue that keeps me grounded in her character. Also, because the show explores heavy emotional themes, the strong visual and physical separation created by costumes and set pieces helps me 'de-role' more easily, which really supports my mental and emotional well-being.

Do you consciously experiment with/manipulate motion in your performance? How so?

It's not my first priority but it's still important. I always find myself workshopping in the room or rereading the script at home, especially in collaboration with and under the direction of Mitchell Butel, we've established



Allycia Angeles

'Crossing her arms is also a frequent stance I like to use, she's guarded, upright, and sure of herself even when hiding insecurity.'

ALLYCIA ANGELES



Discuss acting skills

For each of the acting skills the actor describes, reflect on moments in the performance that might demonstrate each of these best.

that Delia as a very headstrong and sassy character. She is stubborn but also nuanced (becoming more and more nuanced with each day in this rehearsal process). One example of her very rarely shown vulnerability and insecurity is when she asks Teresa, her crush, to skate with her alone at Skater Planet. When Teresa says she wants to invite Martin, Delia doesn't feel to push back, which is not common. This shows her desire to maintain her image and stay cool with people she cares about. Even though it fights against her instincts.

I do find motion deeply connected to intention, especially when I feel fuzzy and unsure in of all the nuance in teenage emotions. Before speaking a line, I explore what Delia wants and where she feels that drive in her body. I often focus on just one goal per scene to maintain clarity and purpose. For example, in a scene where Delia throws a mini tantrum about the complete budget cut for show choir costumes, I use movement to drive her frustration. I dig my heels into the ground, clench my fists, and imagine her eyes as lasers that could burn anything she looks at. These imaginative physical cues give authenticity to the emotion and allow it to emerge organically, when I am not in the mood to access anger performatively.

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

The central theme explored through Delia is perfectionism and the pursuit of success for external validation as teenager. She is passionately dedicated to show choir, and it's a defining aspect of her character. Throughout Act 1, she talks about show choir constantly, whether with her friends (Teresa, Aaron, and Martin) or while focused on preparing for competitions. Her passion, however, leads her down an ethically questionable path. She pushes her group of friends to commit a crime, participating in a 'washing checks' scheme, to fund costumes for what appears to be a one-off performance at the state competition. Delia represents the classic teenage struggle: the desperate need to be perfect, hyper fixation on small things, and an exaggerated sense of importance placed on high school events. Often failing to see the big picture or what really matters beyond the school environment. Still, she's also just a theatre kid who loves to sing and dance and she wants to be brilliant at it. Her drive, while flawed, comes from a place of love, ambition, and deep commitment.

'I often focus on just one goal per scene to maintain clarity and purpose.'

ALLYCIA ANGELES



Allycia Angeles (right) with Darcy Wain and Alana Iannace



Discuss costume

Discuss the actor's comments about how costume enhances their character and reflect on a specific moment in the production where you saw this in their performance.

TERESA

Played by Alana Iannace

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

Teresa is an ambitious teenager who is facing adolescence in the 1990s. At Teresa's core, she is a yearner. She yearns for the excitement of her future and a place where she can truly belong. She has a deep acceptance of others and their differences, often finding beauty in what makes someone unique. This trait stems from desiring others to mirror this, though she is aware that is not always the case, and therefore the self-consciousness creeps in. While Teresa can be shy at times, especially when her anxiety creeps in, she carries a large, infectious spirit that can light up a room when she feels safe and supported. What drives her is a deep desire for connection, for acceptance, and for something bigger than the ordinary. She's joyful, curious, and deeply empathetic, always ready to uplift those around her, even as she quietly navigates her own inner challenges. Teresa dreams big, feels deeply, and brings an open heart into everything she does. Her journey is one of courage — stepping into her own power while creating space for others to shine alongside her.

How do you embody your character?

Teresa is sixteen and therefore, I have to adjust my physicality to replicate a teenager. They are usually more slouched, and less confident/secure within themselves and therefore, that translates into their physicality. Teresa is not the most confident within her body and overall appearance, and has nervous 'ticks', such as hair twirling or a pigeon-toed stance to represent her insecurity. However, when she is performing with her friends that she admires and adores, or talking about things she feels passionately about, she becomes much more open physically and that confidence is translated within her body, for example, her posture improves, stance widens. Facially, Teresa uses a default 'gritted teeth smile', that she uses when trying to come across as 'polite'. This however, could be interpreted as a nervous gesture and Teresa is aware of this, she strives to become confident enough within herself to not have to act from fear of being 'rude'/'disliked'.



Alana Iannace

'What drives her is a deep desire for connection, for acceptance, and for something bigger than the ordinary.'

ALANNA IANNACE



Alana Iannace, Allycia Angeles and Marty Alix



Alana Iannace (far left) with the cast of *Kimberly Akimbo*

How do design elements like costumes, props and the set impact your performance? What helps and how?

Personally, as an actor, when I step into my characters clothing, and am surrounded with physical objects that make up their world, the interpretations of how I approach the character become so much more diverse and wider, while still paying homage to their true nature. 'Teresa' dresses by incorporating 'feminine' elements to her wardrobe (skirts and stockings), and experiments with different textures and patterns. She is a lover of all things fashion, and what's 'in style', and by stepping into these outfits, I believe it will broaden the scope of attributes and personality traits I will bring to my character 'Teresa'.

Do you consciously experiment with/manipulate cohesion in your performance? How so?

The groundwork is most important in my process of building a character, I first discover my characters overall objective and from that I map out some attributes my character will hold (physically and mentally). After I have a rough sense of who my character is, I then discover the scene objectives (the script really aids in this process as it gives clues). I use this background work to then help the more detailed traits of my character, and this then allows me to live actively in the world of the show, for example, using a level of truth to deliver my lines and non-verbal reactions. This background work helps cohesion of my character, without consciously making the effort too, ensuring everything is supporting the same emotion/idea, and that all the deliveries or actions are consistent and remain truthful.

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

While the overarching theme of the story focuses on mortality and time, Teresa's character introduces a very human desire for connection, longing and validation, which can really be applied to all the characters. The want to belong is a basic human nature, and this is reflected in each character's journey, in their own unique ways.



Discuss cohesion

Discuss the actor's comments about how cohesion and non-verbal reactions and reflect on a specific moment in the production where you saw this in their performance.

MARTIN

Played by Marty Alix

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

Martin is driven by the promise of a future outside of high school, he's excited to get out of New Jersey, where he believes his life will begin. In the meantime, he loves his friends, show choir, Dream Girls, and harbours a deep infatuation for his friend, Aaron.

How do you embody your character?

There's a youthful exuberance, and excitability, that I'm trying to tap into. I think Martin lives from his heart and moves through life with a spring in his step, especially when he's with his friends and the people he cares about.

How do design elements like costumes, props and the set impact your performance? What helps and how?

Ailsa Paterson, our costume designer, tapped into the 90s elements of the show, which really helps to embody the demeanour of the characters. Martin wears colourful cable knits and shirts, which I love, I think it reflects his personality.

Do you consciously experiment with/manipulate variation in your performance? How so?

Variation isn't a conscious part of my process but happens as a natural process of being receptive and present with the other actors in the room.

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

The show is filled with characters who are marginalised because of their differences, but find connection, and meaning in the everyday. Martin is gay, and he feels that he sticks out of the crowd and is 'weird in every way'. But despite that he's still able to find belonging with his show choir friends.



Marty Alix

'Martin is driven by the promise of a future outside of high school.'

MARTY ALIX



Discuss themes

Discuss the actor's comments about the big ideas in the play that connect to their character and reflect on how this is demonstrated in the performance.



Marty Alix

Lighting design

Learn more about lighting in *Kimberly Akimbo* in this Q&A with Lighting Designer Matt Scott.

What's the world of the show and your lighting design?

Kimberly Akimbo is a musical set in small-town New Jersey in 1999. The space that Jonathon Oxlade has designed for our version of the show is based around the look of the ice-skating rink that bookends Act 1 as a location – Skater Planet. The shapes that comprise the set also serve as an abstract version of the many landscapes that the lead character, Kimberly, dreams of exploring – and the places they eventually visit. The lighting design takes its cue from these two notions in the way it is constructed, and all the other locations of the piece are presented through this lens.

The lighting rig is exposed and visible like the 'disco' lighting rig of an ice-skating rink – the shapes in the background are treated as both architectural elements but also as a canvas representing a wider natural landscape.

The large circular light box on the back wall that we called the 'sun disc' represents a multitude of things including the moon, the sun, an architectural feature and an emotional portal variously throughout the show.

The lighting design is very much connected to Kimberly's viewpoint of her world – the small details in her bedroom set in Act 1 serve as cues for many of the ideas expressed in the lighting design. The idea of small worlds contained in snowdomes being a metaphor for dreams and aspirations is riffed upon using light at several points along the way. The set upstage is treated a little like a map for the emotional journey of the show.



Matt Scott

'The lighting design is very much connected to Kimberly's viewpoint of her world.'

LIGHTING DESIGNER
MATT SCOTT



**Discuss
emphasis**

Discuss how lighting manipulates emphasis in a specific moment from the performance with reference to Matt Scott's comments.



Marina Prior and Darcy Wain

Finding a way for the abstract nature of the space to work meaningfully for the narrative has been a challenge. Using colour to identify each location without leaning too heavily into the naturalistic. There are suggestions of naturalism throughout, but I tried to make these moments not too overt. This was a challenge that I enjoyed exploring. I wanted the world to be as pictorial as we could get away with.

The main ‘workhorses’ of the rig are the Martin Encore Performance CLD moving profiles and the Martin Mac Aura XIP wash lights – they do a lot of work in lighting the main space – providing highlights, colour and texture throughout. The upstage area is lit predominantly with Prolights ECLCyc LED units and custom LED strips. There is a small rig of LED profiles (Prolights ECL CT+ and ETC Lustr Series 2 profiles) that provide the low and high sidelight. The rest of the rig comprises of conventional profiles and fresnels. The LED fixtures really helped with the varied colour palette required.

The main inspirations for the lighting were the set and costume designs with the goal of enhancing both as much as possible. Beyond that, other influences were as varied as: the interior of the ice-skating rink that was near the rehearsal room in Adelaide; 1990s U.S. animation TV series (e.g. *The Simpsons*, *Daria*, *South Park*, *Beavis & Butthead*); the paintings of Piet Mondrian, David Hockney and Wassily Kandinsky.

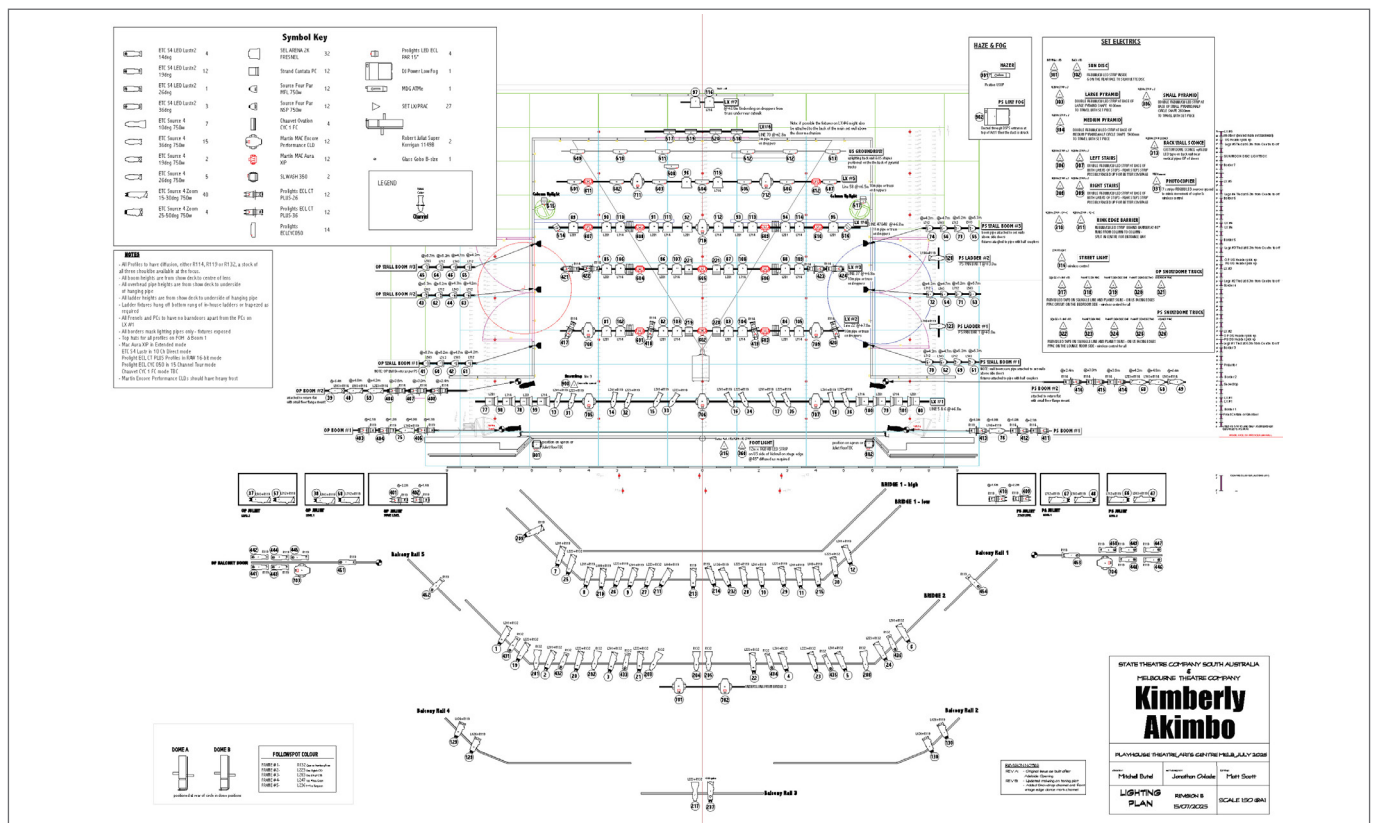
If you mean by emphasis – drawing an audiences' point of view to a particular moment or emotion – I do think about this in my work, especially when lighting a musical. In rehearsals, I am always looking at how the story will be perceived by the audience and how to frame the visual aspects of the show to highlight the moments of the story that the director wants to emphasise. This is an ongoing conversation that continues right up until opening night and sometimes beyond.

In the song 'Make a Wish', the backdrop and stage burst into bright neon colour on the line '*we'll end with cherry cheesecake*' – this underlines the peak build in the song but also symbolises Kimberly's aspirations for a perfect life. The moment is completely over the top, non-naturalistic and fleeting, but it symbolises the classic music theatre 'I want' moment

**LIGHTING DESIGNER
MATT SCOTT**



Discuss how lighting is used to contrast different settings within the performance. How are colour, intensity, direction and movement used in different ways?



KIMBERLY AKIMBO EDUCATION PACK PART B

Musical direction

In this Q&A, *Kimberly Akimbo* Musical Director, Kym Purling, discusses the musical styles and instruments in the show, as well as how contrast and cohesion are manipulated through music.

What is the world of *Kimberly Akimbo*?

Kimberly Akimbo tells the story of a young high school girl living with a rare genetic disease similar to Progeria, a disease which affects just one in 18 million people and where Kimberly ages 5–6 times faster than other people. Her life in New Jersey is one of struggle, largely due to a dysfunctional family life, while Kimberly herself is someone with an ambitious, positive and mature outlook on life, despite her knowing she does not have long to live. It's a story of family, love, life and making the most out of every day.

What role does the music play in the storytelling?

The music is pivotal in the storytelling because it brings the stories, themes and characters of the show to life. The music adds depth and dimension to these stories told by each character and allows the audience to feel the emotions expressed by each character.



Kym Purling

‘The music is pivotal in the storytelling because it brings the stories, themes and characters of the show to life.’

**MUSICAL DIRECTOR
KYM PURLING**



Marina Prior, Darcy Wain and Nathan O'Keefe



Cast of Kimberly Akimbo

How do you collaborate with the director?

I work closely with the director for many reasons, the most important being to ensure that we stay true to the intentions of the writers (book and score) of the show. During the rehearsal period, the director and I stay finely tuned to one another to shape the cast in their respective roles, allowing them some freedom to interpret the material in their own way, while offering direction to best tell the stories of the songs. This direction from us both focus on everything from subtle changes in tempo, timing, pitch and expression to what works physically and vocally for the actors' own vocal ability. The director and I also navigate together through every aspect of the show musically, from the cast songs to the movement of set pieces moving on and offstage. We have to marry every aspect of the show together seamlessly.

How would you describe the musical style? What kinds of instruments are used?

The score is a real cross-section of music from poignant ballads to bluesy upbeat numbers and everything in between. There are a number of solo songs that allow the audience to understand what's going on 'inside the heads' of the characters and there are also a number of rousing numbers featuring the full cast. The score has no brass but two demanding woodwind chairs where two musicians need to cover flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, alto sax, tenor sax, soprano sax, baritone sax, oboe and even bassoon. The guitarist also doubles a lot having to cover electric guitar, steel guitar, acoustic guitar, nylon string guitar, dobro, ukulele and banjo. We also have two keyboardists (I conduct the show and play 1st Keyboard), and between the keyboard scores we have a total of almost 300 sound patch changes throughout the show. The drummer plays full drum kit and also doubles on various percussion instruments from triangle to shakers and from eastern finger cymbals, crotales and glockenspiel to African djembe. The other musicians are a cellist and bassist who plays upright and electric.

What's an example of contrast within the music in this show?

The best two songs that show contrast in the score are probably 'Father Time' and 'Better'. 'Father Time' is the softest and prettiest song in the show sung by Pattie on her own with minimal orchestration. 'Better' is the biggest number in the show with Debra belting out a bluesy rock number with the cast singing gospel choir type backing vocals throughout.

What's an example of cohesion within the music?

The opening number of the show 'Skater Planet' contains a very distinctive and memorable musical theme sung by a quartet of teens that reoccurs a handful of times throughout the show during scenes, some scene changes and musical transitions. The ukulele also features a groove that at times provokes more relaxed and light-hearted moments in the show.

'The score is a real cross-section of music from poignant ballads to bluesy upbeat numbers and everything in between.'

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
KYM PURLING



Discuss contrast

Reflect on the two songs that Musical Director Kym Purling describes as an example of contrast. How do other production roles work with the music to enhance contrast in these songs?

Choreography

Learn more about Amy Campbell's text-based choreography, 90s influences and the movement language of this musical.

How do you collaborate with the Director and Musical Director?

My first point of call is to get very familiar with the Director's vision for the piece and make sure I am building a world which supports the narrative of the show. When it comes to creating a number, I will have chatted to both our Director and Musical Director (MD) about initial staging ideas and then I will have prepped a vocabulary and a vision before hitting the floor with the cast. Once I have a draft, I constantly check in with both the MD and Director to make sure it's reading and aligns with what they both need. I always like to try and surprise them a bit, too! On a show like *Kimberly Akimbo*, it's super important that the choreography lifts the storytelling and not distracts from it. It was also important to make sure that not only each number had a strong physical point of view, but that across the entire show there was consistent and evolving movement language.

Where do you draw inspiration from when choreographing this show?

Fortunately, I grew up in the 90s, so it wasn't a big stretch to remember what influences were prolific at the time! I drew inspiration from the pop culture of New York and New Jersey in the 90s, TV shows, researching show choir competitions and of course what icons and music were born of this time. I created a visual diary of videos and images that caught my eye and felt like they could provoke movement ideas. It's not always 'dance steps' that inspires the vocabulary at first.

Are there any movement motifs we should keep an eye out for?

There are a lot of subtle music theatre 90s references that the Teen Quartet get to perform. It was so fun creating their mash-up of a vocabulary, even on rollerblades.

How would you describe the movement style/language of this show?

I would say it's all 'text-based choreography' as actor Marty Alix likes to say. It's joyous, buoyant and subtly detailed to let each scene and song really shine.

Do you consciously think about variation in your work? If so, how?

I do think of variation constantly in my process! Formations and unison are not usually within my early drafts. But music, tempo and text largely influence the styles I will pull from initially. I always like to have a world built with many stylistic influences and I always leave space for a sense of collaboration and personalisation with each actor I get to work with.



Amy Campbell

'I created a visual diary of videos and images that caught my eye and felt like they could provoke movement ideas.'

CHOREOGRAPHER
AMY CAMPBELL



Cast of *Kimberly Akimbo*



**Discuss
movement**

Reflect on Amy's comments about movement and variation. Think about how the dynamics of the performance changed during the show, and how closely this is tied to music.

Props

Consumable props

There are several moments in the show where actors eat real food. Kimberly feeds Pattie cereal, and the cast eat some potato and green beans during 'The Inevitable Turn'. The actors were eating peas in rehearsal, but they rolled off the plate – green beans were chosen instead as they're easier to control.

Fake food

Not all the food on stage is real – most of what is served at dinner during 'The Inevitable Turn' is fake. The birthday cake Buddy brings to the ice rink in 'This Time' is also fake and includes electric candles.

Set dressing

Props have been included in parts of the set to add life and detail to the world of the show. The Levaco family room has many knickknacks on shelves, while Kimberly's bedroom is adorned with snow domes, posters and 90s paraphernalia. Each character's locker at school is filled with books and items that reflect their interests – like a dictionary and Scrabble board game in Seth's locker.

Hand props

There are many scripted items that appear in the show, including a Game Boy, thermos, *Medea* and anagrams books, index cards, UNO cards, Seth's wallet, beer bottles, theme park passes, a tuba, video camera, Make-A-Wish application form, cans of chemicals a giant pinecone and many more.



Props list

Using the script, the production photos in this pack and your memory of the performance, make a list of as many props as you can recall. Think of one example where a prop was integral to the storytelling and the intended meaning of the scene.



Christie Whelan Browne, Nathan O'Keefe, Casey Donovan and Marina Prior

Theatre technologies

Several theatre technologies are used to tell this story on stage. Some of these use modern technology, while others are examples of theatre machinery that has been used since pre-modern theatre.

Low fog

When the curtain rises, low fog can be seen on stage to evoke the feeling of an ice rink. Low fog is a type of atmospheric effect. Low fog is created by cooling a special type of fluid, so it stays low to the ground rather than lifting into the air.

Snow roller

While Kimberly is waiting for her father to pick her up from the ice rink, snow falls from above. A snow roller is a machine that creates the illusion of falling snow onstage. A pipe with holes along it is filled with theatrical snow flutter and hung from the grid above the stage. When the pipe rotates, pieces of flutter gradually escape through the holes and gently fall to the floor. The snow is made of lightweight paper.

Trucks

The Skater Planet desk and skate hire window are trucks (rostra, or platforms, on wheels) that are manually pushed by mechanists (stagehands, people behind the scenes). These trucks are double-sided, with Kimberly's bedroom and the Levaco living room on the reverse. The trucks have automated brakes that are operated remotely once they're in position to prevent them moving during a scene.



Nathan O'Keefe, Marina Prior, Casey Donovan and Christie Whelan Browne

Video projection

The video footage at the end of the performance shines from a projector located in the auditorium. The video content was created by Matt Byrne.

Flown set pieces

The circular light box, nicknamed the 'moon' by the creative team, is a flown set piece. At the end of the show, a flyperson hoists it up into the fly tower using the fly system. This allows for the AV projection to fill the rear wall uninterrupted.

A fly system is a theatre technology consisting of ropes, pulleys, counterweights and bars arranged in lines above the stage, which allows scenery to be 'flown' from the fly tower (a void above the stage) into view of the audience. Traditional fly systems were hand-drawn, like the one in the Playhouse at Arts Centre Melbourne. The red house curtain is also operated by using the fly system.

Gobo

The '1999' lighting projected onto the red house curtain at the top of the show uses a gobo. A gobo is an etched plate that is placed inside a light fixture so that a pattern (in this case, 1999) is cast onstage. Gobos are also used in the show to project patterns onto the trucks, giving the appearance of snowflakes inside a snow dome.

Learn more



Analysis questions

Explore our post-show resource in the Education Hub and analyse key scenes from the performance through the lens of VCE Theatre Studies

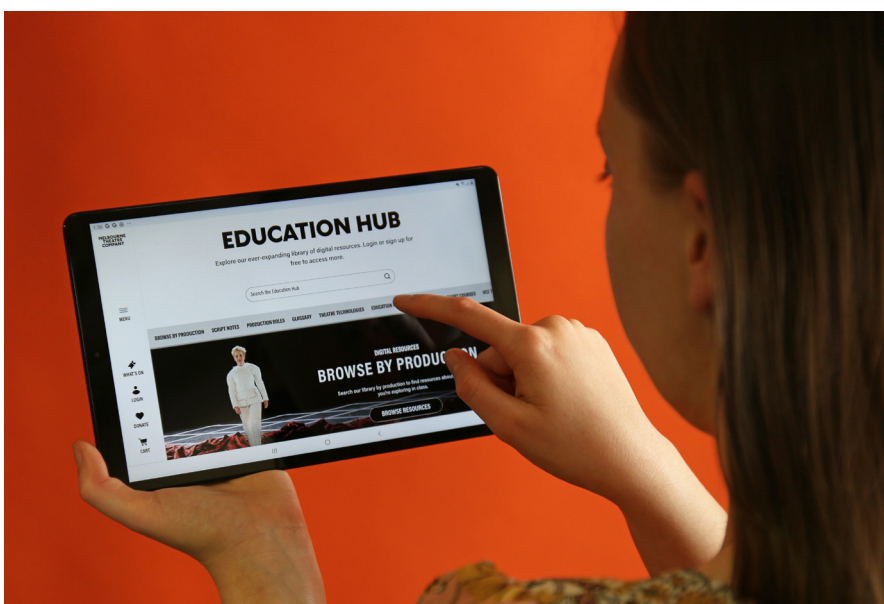
Explore the resource at mtc.com.au/eduhub



Watch the trailer

Watch the video trailer for *Kimberly Akimbo* and refresh your memory of the production.

Watch the video at mtc.com.au



Explore the Education Hub

Explore a glossary of theatre terminology, VCE flash cards, short courses and much more in our online library of digital resources.

Learn more at mtc.com.au/eduhub