

**MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY**

# **SHOELACE CHASER**

**BY Madelaine Nunn**

**DIRECTED BY Liv Satchell**

**9 MAY—27 MAY 2026**

**Southbank Theatre, The Lawler**

**29 MAY—12 JUN 2026**

**On Tour**

**EDUCATION PACK PART A**

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



Activity



Discuss



Read



Video

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



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.

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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](https://mtc.com.au/eduhub)

# About the play



Leigh Lule and Elliot Wood



Behind the scenes



Hear from Leigh Lule at [mtc.com.au](https://mtc.com.au)

- How does Leigh Lule describe the main character, Thea?
- What kind of relationship might Thea have with her mother, Fiona?
- What predictions do you have about the set and costume design?
- What are some key themes you see emerging in this play?

## SUMMARY

Being 17 is hard enough – add caring for your mum to the mix, and Thea's juggling act is nothing short of Olympic.

Smart, self-sufficient and secretly just holding it together, she's spent the last two years keeping her life under wraps. No-one knows she's a carer. Not even Syd, her endlessly chatty new running partner who pushes her to pursue a university athletics scholarship and dream of something more. But chasing that future means leaving her mum behind – and the last time Thea tried that, things didn't quite go to plan.

AWGIE Award winner **Madelaine Nunn's** moving new play sensitively explores our responsibilities to those we love, the untold strength of care and the courage to know when to lean on others for help.

## ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

This production contains mature themes, occasional coarse language, theatrical haze effects, occasional loud sound effects and aroma including menthol. For detailed information about the production's content, visit our **production content guide** at [mtc.com.au/production-content-guide](https://mtc.com.au/production-content-guide).

## DURATION

Approximately 65 minutes with no interval.

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

**NEXTSTAGE**

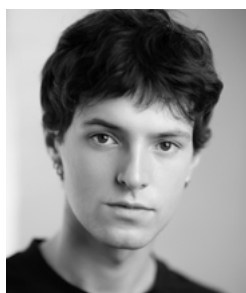
# Cast and creatives



Zoe Boesen  
Fiona



Leigh Lule  
Thea



Elliot Wood  
Syd



## Read their bios

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



Madelaine Nunn  
Writer



Liv Satchell  
Director



Bianca Pardo  
Set & Costume Designer



Thomas Roach  
Lighting Designer



Tom Backhaus  
Composer & Sound Designer



Lucie Sutherland  
Stage Manager



Jenny Le  
Assistant Stage Manager



Narii Hamill Salmon  
Robert McDonald Award

Lisa Dallinger  
Voice & Text Coach

# Context



Zoe Boesen and Leigh Lule

## YOUNG CARERS

In *Shoelace Chaser*, teenage Thea cares for her mother, Fiona, who has a chronic illness. Thea could be described as a young carer. There are 3 million unpaid carers in Australia and at least 391,300 of these are young carers. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, their own child, other relative or friend.

**THEA:** I do the shopping, I cook, clean, make tea. I can't really predict what I'm going to do 'cos it changes. During the rough patches I manage my mum's medications, shave her pits, help her get dressed.

Young carers are people up to 25 years old who provide unpaid care and support to their loved ones that you would often expect an adult to do. The person they care for may need assistance due to a range of reasons, such as disability, mental illness, chronic condition or frail age. Young carers are often unseen in the role of carers. They may think of what they do for the person they care for as part of their normal role, or just what's expected or needed of them as part of a family.

While being a young carer is in many ways a positive experience, the role can also significantly impact the carer's education, social life, employment and mental and physical health. It can be a very stressful, mentally draining, and an isolated position to be in.

In Australia, organisations like Little Dreamers exist to support young carers in VIC, NSW and QLD with programs like mentoring, coaching, counselling, peer support and retreats. There is also the nationally coordinated Young Carers Network (YCN) which raises young carer awareness, assists with navigating the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme – an Australian government program providing funding and support to people with disabilities) and directs young carers to appropriate pathways for support. The NDIS is currently undergoing major, controversial reforms. These reforms, including tighter eligibility, mean approximately 160,000 people could potentially be cut from the scheme over the next few years. Young carers, in their often invisible role, are at risk of being absent from discourse around the systems and structures we have in Australia to support people with disabilities.

### Sources

Carers Australia (2026) *Young Carers* on [carersaustralia.com.au](http://carersaustralia.com.au); Little Dreamers (2026) *About us and Our programs* on [littedreamers.org.au](http://littedreamers.org.au); Young Carers Network (2026) *How can I help?* on [youngcarersnetwork.com.au](http://youngcarersnetwork.com.au); Ironmonger, L. (2025) 'A privilege': What 15-year-old Charlie and other young carers want you to know on [smh.com.au](http://smh.com.au); Yasa, D. (2025) 'You never stop feeling guilty': Heidi, 21, counts the cost of being a young carer on [smh.com.au](http://smh.com.au); Campenella, N. & Young, E. (2026) *NDIS cuts leave participants concerned about what lies ahead* on [abc.net.au](http://abc.net.au)



## Creative development



Hear from members of the cast and creative team about discoveries they made during the creative development week at [mtc.com.au/eduhub](http://mtc.com.au/eduhub)

- What ideas and themes do the team discuss?
- What are some playmaking techniques the team are using?
- What discoveries are they making about the rehearsal process and creating character?
- Make predictions about how two production areas could be manipulated for application of symbol.
- What expressive skills might the performers use to help tell their character's stories?
- What predictions can you make about the actor-audience relationship in this production?

# Characters



Leigh Lule



Leigh Lule

## THEA Played by Leigh Lule

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

Thea is a very grounded, Type-A character. Others might read her as intimidating, when really, it's just a shield for her shyness and the weight she carries being her mother's primary carer. She prides herself on being hyper-independent and reliable. She's the friend you go to when you need a good listener but also a reality check.

Thea is driven by an internal conflict of duty versus desire. Her love for her mother, Fiona, has given her a strong sense of responsibility, and her world has been defined by care, routine and staying put. But Thea is actually a fiercely competitive and deeply ambitious runner who wants more than she allows her to admit. Meeting Syd and constantly being pushed by them, forces Thea to confront the possibility of a bigger future and all the risks that come with it.

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

Throughout the play, Thea travels between three primary spaces; training, work and home. Initially, these spaces are separate and delineated through the use of set, lighting and sound. In the first half of the play, transitions between these spaces are controlled, allowing Thea to shift between them at her own pace. However, as her responsibilities grow, these boundaries begin to blur. As a performer, it starts to feel like I need to be everywhere at once, mirroring Thea's actual reality. The costume changes also signify the multiple hats (or in this case, shirts) that Thea wears. The repetitive action of changing, and having less and less time to do so, physicalises Thea's struggle to balance the different areas of her life.

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

A central idea in the play is Thea's complicated relationship with ambition. Before meeting Syd, she hasn't allowed herself to think much about the future – she's content with staying in her small regional town and caring for her mother. But when Syd signs her up for a running scholarship, that sense of certainty is disrupted and a different future suddenly becomes possible. At her core, Thea is deeply competitive and ambitious; I have a headcanon that she dreams of becoming the next Faith Kipyegon or Eliud Kipchoge. But fear is holding her back from admitting how badly she wants to pursue running. She's scared of failing and she's scared of leaving Fiona behind. Thea's journey, and the play overall, is about learning how to face one's fears and step into the unknown, rather than running away from it.



## Meet the team



Hear from the cast and creative team about the big ideas in the play at [mtc.com.au/eduhub](https://mtc.com.au/eduhub)

- What are some key words the team use to describe the play's themes?
- How would you describe the big ideas in this play?
- Which characters do you identify with and why?

**'Thea is driven by an internal conflict of duty versus desire.'**

LEIGH LULE



Zoe Boesen



Zoe Boesen

**‘She wants nothing short of the universe for Thea, including for her to develop and chase her own dreams.’**

ZOE BOESEN

## **FIONA** Played by Zoe Boesen

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

Fiona is an enthusiastic, spiritual optimist and adoring mother to Thea. Once the owner of a thriving flower shop, the past few years of Fiona’s life have been dominated by medical appointments, debilitating chronic pain and frustrating government systems.

We meet Fiona at a point when her chronic illness is responding well to a new treatment, and her capacity is the best that it has been in years. She is thrilled by the possibility of being able to go back to doing what she loves but now must grapple with the uncertainty of whether her support pension will be cut off.

While she is eccentric and a little kooky, she is also highly driven and pragmatic. She wants nothing short of the universe for Thea, including for her to develop and chase her own dreams.

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

Props in particular play a huge part in shaping the character and trajectory of Fiona. There is a tightly choreographed “flower track” which we have developed throughout rehearsal which adds another layer of storytelling and gradually becomes part of the set.

As we see her mostly in her home, subtle changes in costume and the way she interacts with the set, give direct clues as to how she is feeling physically and emotionally. The evolution of both the flowers and costume throughout the show have given me wonderful opportunity to find detail and specificity in Fiona’s physicality.

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

Absolutely! Within scenes we use extended space to highlight moments of tension between characters, and closeness to highlight moments of intimacy. The way we orient our bodies towards or away from one another as the characters interact holds a lot of meaning as well.

A key spatial feature of this show is how the stage is effectively split into two static areas of set – Fiona and Thea’s home, and a racetrack which is endowed to become multiple other locations.

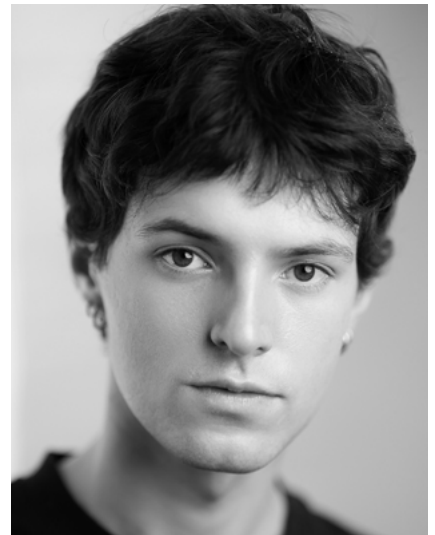
The interior of Fiona and Thea’s house is always present in the space, even when no action is taking place there. As the play progresses, multiple spaces are activated at once, with considered timing and proximity to the main scene unfolding at the time.

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

The show explores the dynamics of care and our responsibility to one another – both real and assumed. Through Fiona in particular, we are invited to consider the interplay of autonomy and interdependence as it relates to both personal relationships and broader systems in our society.



Leigh Lule and Elliot Wood



Elliot Wood

## **SYD** Played by Elliot Wood

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

Syd is a vibrant and effervescent young person in the throes of Year 12, who can't help but be anyone other than themselves – sometimes to their detriment. Flamboyant, curious, empathetic, loyal, and they speak before thinking and almost always think out loud. They are very much guided by the people around them.

At the very beginning of the play, their life path is set by their three siblings before them: go to training, achieve at the highest level, get an athletics scholarship and go straight to university. It isn't until they meet Thea that they begin to envision a life outside of preset accomplishments, parental expectations, and what is deemed normal for budding young adults. Across the play their naivete is challenged and their friendship with Thea becomes their main driving force. Running and friendship become enmeshed, and Syd feels able to drop their theatrical mask to really be vulnerable with Thea. By the end of the play, we see Syd take the reins of their life, demonstrating the courage to be loyal to their friends even when their friends aren't being loyal to themselves.

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

Syd's costume helps immensely with understanding Syd's class. They are decked out in all branded and matching gear, with colourful pops of neon orange, rainbow, blue and green – a smorgasbord of colour! Despite being uncommitted to running, they have the newest, fanciest gear – these costume and prop elements are exceedingly helpful in exploring Syd's family wealth and also their opinions on the path laid out in front of them. Even their rainbow socks, which you could argue are Syd's choice to wear, are echoed in Syd's parents showing up to regionals in rainbow scarves. This performativity of queerness is so much fun to play with – how comfortable Syd is being openly queer and non-binary in a regional town, and the complexities of having parents that are supportive but almost competitive in their allyship. It's a lot to glean from socks, but having such loud pieces allows Syd to expand into the theatricalities of their personality, and their defiant sense of self.

Additionally, Syd only ever interacts with the track portion of the set, which is immensely helpful for Thea to have her two worlds separated – when the lighting and set begin to betray Thea, the characters' lives bleed and blend in to one another's, adding a huge amount of pressure in Thea's world.

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

Syd is someone who lets other people choose for them. They come from a privileged, albeit claustrophobic, family unit of high achievers and overly supportive parents. They don't have a part-time job, nor do they have to be responsible for any chores around the house like cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc. Despite their class, they aren't entitled – just naïve. When we meet Syd, they are ignorant to the weight of Thea's burden, but as the play progresses and Syd and Thea's relationship deepens, Syd for the very first time has their worldview of what success is, challenged. Both Thea and Syd teach each other a lot about the power of choice, with Syd making multiple choices on Thea's behalf when she is holding herself back. Through being in Thea's orbit, Syd learns that given their privilege they have a life that is bountiful with choice, and they are allowed to decide for themselves what they want their path forward to look like. As Fiona tells them: "There are no wrong choices. Only choices. But you do have to decide for yourself."



### **Extended Q&As**

Read the extended cast Q&As  
at [mtc.com.au/eduhub](https://mtc.com.au/eduhub)

**'Despite being uncommitted to running, they have the newest, fanciest gear – these costume and prop elements are exceedingly helpful in exploring Syd's family wealth and also their opinions on the path laid out in front of them.'**

ELLIOT WOOD

# Playwriting



Writer Madelaine Nunn



Writer Madelaine Nunn

## WRITER'S NOTE BY MADELAINE NUNN

As a writer, I always begin with character. My characters are the beating heart of all my work, and often, they are the inspiration for a new idea.

The creative spark for *Shoelace Chaser* started with Thea, my main character. She is seventeen; wry, witty and resilient. I have a not-so-secret obsession with championing young, complex female characters who are prematurely thrust into roles beyond their years.

Although, this is not an autobiographical work. Thea's role as a carer is partly inspired by moments in my own life. When I was 8 years old, on a family holiday up to the Gold Coast to visit the theme parks and ride the Scooby Doo ride (arguably the best ride at Movie World), my dad suffered a life-altering stroke and our family dynamic changed forever. I found myself stepping up into new responsibilities to help my mum and care for my younger brother. All this invisible to my friends.

A few years later, a few days before Easter, my mum was in a motorbike accident. Another life altering moment and by the time we went to the shops to buy chocolate, the shelves had been ransacked and all that was left was fruit and nut (arguably the worst chocolate egg flavour). Once again, I was thrust back into the 'role of a carer', not a secret but not advertised either.

In *Shoelace Chaser*, we watch Thea try to balance different versions of herself, navigating competing priorities as both a daughter and a friend, all the while trying to get through her last year of high school. It's a work that honours the strength, grit and resilience of people, particularly young people. All the characters experience the push and pull of dependence and independence on their plight for autonomy.

At its heart, *Shoelace Chaser* is about the different ways we take care of each other. We never know what's going on in people's lives unless we ask. I hope audiences will leave the theatre hopeful and inspired to offer and ask for help when they need it. Oh, and I hope they have a good time because this is a comedy after all! Comedies are what we need in the world right now, plus I don't know how to write a tragedy, they seem awfully sad, so I'll leave that to Shakespeare.

*Shoelace Chaser* is a reminder that there is power in vulnerability, there is power in being your real self and it's OK not to have everything figured out.



## Discuss playwriting

- What are the big ideas being explored in this play? How might you describe the intended meaning of the script?
- How is the story rooted in the playwright's own lived experience?
- What connections can you make between the big ideas in this play and the current context of disability support in Australia?
- Make predictions about where the comedy will come from in the script.

**'*Shoelace Chaser* is a reminder that there is power in vulnerability, there is power in being your real self and it's ok not to have everything figured out.'**

MADELAINE NUNN  
WRITER

## Q&A

### What does writing a play look like for you?

Chaotic! My writing process is different for every play, which is both exciting and nerve-wracking. There are many times in the process when I think, I don't know how to do this! But the way through that inevitable self-doubt is to break the process down into small scenes and achievable goals. Little by little, if you keep writing, scene after scene, you will have a play.

The genesis of most of my plays starts with character. I think this is probably related to the fact that I'm also an actor. I'm often thinking about story through the eyes of the person on stage, their "given circumstances" – who they are, and what they want.

When I say I start with character, I mean that I'm interested in a dilemma or problem a character might face. I like to put myself in their shoes and think, okay, if that's what they are struggling with, what would that story look like? What are things that could happen that would complicate or ease this dilemma? What could be theatrical about this story?



Writer Madelaine Nunn

That said, there are many ways into starting a play. I've also begun plays inspired by place. A specific location can be useful, particularly if you want the action to remain in one setting for the entire play.

For *Shoelace Chaser*, I used a combination of character and location as my initial inspiration. I knew I wanted to write about the experience of a young carer, and while thinking about Thea, who she was, the image of a running track came to me. Suddenly, I knew she had to be a runner. Thematically, it also aligned with ideas of movement, momentum, and stasis – and the rest is history.

As a writer, I don't work in a linear fashion, which means I don't start at the beginning and write to the end. Instead, I write out of order as ideas come to me. At the beginning of the process, when I'm excited, I have a burst of ideas, images, moments, and dialogue. I write to discover the work, and I rarely plan. In fact, I loathe planning or structuring at the start, I always try but then get bored or distracted halfway through and abandon the plan to write the scene that has my attention.

This is chaotic, but it's also freeing. Chaotic because I sometimes don't know where I'm going; freeing because it allows me to be surprised by what comes to me. It lets the subconscious do some of the work. Later, I need to become the playwright, creating logical tethers and story beats between scenes. I have to make sense of the subconscious and shape a satisfying narrative arc.

I'd love to write in a café, it feels very Parisian but I often write at home because I can use a second screen and set up an ergonomic workspace. Posture matters if you're sitting at a computer all day.

Fun fact: I started running for this play so I could tap into the experience – the mindset and the physical feeling. Hopefully, that has informed the pace and rhythm of the work, mimicking what it feels like to be on the track and in a race.



## Prelude

Read the Prelude in the script and think about how this could be staged. How many actors might be on stage? What lighting and sound might be used? How might this moment set up the rest of the play?

**'I started running for this play so I could tap into the experience: the mindset and the physical feeling. Hopefully, that has informed the pace and rhythm of the work, mimicking what it feels like to be on the track and in a race.'**

MADELAINE NUNN  
WRITER

Once the first draft is complete, I begin to “distil” the play into its core idea, interrogating what it’s really about. What is the strongest dramatic question or arc emerging? Then I strip away anything superfluous and dig deeper into that core. This stage requires rigour and patience. It’s often less fun than the initial creative burst, but it’s essential, and deeply satisfying from a dramaturgical perspective.

It requires you to justify everything on the page – why it’s there and how it serves the story. Even though it’s difficult, it leads to a better play and deeper insight into your own writing. There’s the age-old saying: writing is rewriting. As you redraft, you must “kill your darlings” even strong ideas may need to go to serve the core story.

**‘In terms of tone, I knew it had to be a dramedy. Comedy is essential to me, if an audience finds characters funny, they can relate to them; if they relate, they can care about them and invest emotionally in their story.’**

**MADELAINE NUNN**  
WRITER



Writer Madelaine Nunn in rehearsal

But they’re never truly lost; they often resurface in future work.

#### **Did you imagine a particular performance style when you wrote the play?**

When writing *Shoelace Chaser*, I always imagined it in a naturalistic setting. It’s an in-depth character study, interrogating each character’s journey as they grapple with autonomy and independence.

Early on, I made a few gestures toward magic realism, like flowers falling from the sky while Thea was on the running track but as the drafting process progressed, we realised it wasn’t necessary. The story, unfolding in a naturalistic timeline, was doing the work. So, I had to “kill a few darlings.”

In terms of tone, I knew it had to be a dramedy. Comedy is essential to me, if an audience finds characters funny, they can relate to them; if they relate, they can care about them and invest emotionally in their story. A director I worked with once said that political theatre needs to strike the heart as much as the head. I try to carry that into all my work – it must have heart, head, and humour. *Shoelace Chaser* is political theatre.

#### **How do you write voice for your characters?**

I write and speak at the same time. Writing voice is a layered process.

Because I start with character, I usually have a clear sense of who these people are, which means I’m writing from their given circumstances. What do they want? Where did they come from? How did they grow up? Who do they spend time with? What do they believe about the world? What comes easily to them? What doesn’t?

I often draw on people from my own life, borrowing actions and mannerisms. This was especially helpful in *Shoelace Chaser*. I knew Thea was hiding the fact that she’s a young carer, which meant she needed to be stoic, someone who doesn’t like asking for help. Reflecting on stoic people I know, I noticed they often use wry humour to deflect their feelings. That’s why Thea uses sarcasm and humour to avoid emotional vulnerability.

Syd, on the other hand, is well-supported and comfortable receiving help. Thinking about people in similar circumstances, I realised that this often leads to someone being more open, processing their feelings out



Writer Madelaine Nunn in rehearsal

**'I often think about the audience experience: if I were watching this, what would I want to see and feel? What do I want the audience to take away?'**

**MADELAINE NUNN**  
WRITER

loud. Syd has also grown up in a higher socioeconomic environment and is more accustomed to taking up space, often without realising it.

The more you understand your characters, the clearer it becomes what they would and wouldn't say. The more contrast there is between them, the more dynamic their interactions become.

For dialogue, I always say the lines out loud. If it doesn't sound natural, I keep adjusting until it does. Strong dialogue is active, and less is usually more.

A useful piece of advice I was given: if an actor trips over the same line twice, there's something wrong with the line, so edit it.

#### **How much do you think about the audience when you're writing a play?**

The audience plays a huge role in my work. I initially pitched *Shoelace Chaser* to Melbourne Theatre Company with the hope it would be part of their education program, so I wrote it with young people at the forefront. I wanted to authentically represent what it's like to be a young person in Australia, knowing the audience would largely be teenagers.

At the same time, I wanted adults to connect with Fiona and her dilemma.

I often think about the audience experience: if I were watching this, what would I want to see and feel? What do I want the audience to take away? With *Shoelace Chaser*, it was important to shine a light on the hidden responsibilities and emotional burdens young carers carry. I also wanted to centre strong, supportive relationships, particularly friendship and a loving mother-daughter dynamic, offering something positive to be reflected and emulated.

Ultimately, I want audiences of all ages to leave with a renewed sense of hope and empathy.

While the play centres on a coming-of-age experience, I believe it's for everyone. We never stop coming of age. It's such a formative period, and I hope audiences can reflect on their younger selves with compassion and understanding.

# Set design



Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo



Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo

## In this Q&A, *Shoelace Chaser* Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo discusses bringing the athletics track inside the theatre.

### What's the world of this show and your set design?

Thea's world is the world of this show. Director Liv Satchell and I were really interested in utilising the familiar elements of a race track with the running track surrounding a grassy area to represent both of Thea's "worlds": her home life and the athletics track. By using the green carpet with a shaggy pile in the lounge, we are able to blur the lines between the race track and Thea's home life, especially as Thea is juggling all of her responsibilities and her different worlds are colliding.

### How do you think about space when designing the set, with regard to the storytelling?

Responding to the script, it was important to leave negative space for our pop-out spaces in the show that are outside of the home and track environments. For example, Thea's work and the hospital occupy different spaces in Thea's reality and on the set. This is important for storytelling, so that it is clear that we are no longer in the race track and/or lounge, and we can allow the audience to imagine what those alternate spaces look like. We further locate the scenes through minimal props, costume, sound and light.

### Where have you drawn inspiration from to create your design?

Athletics tracks! Centring the set on an athletics track, I drew from my memories of the athletics carnivals from when I was at school and various images of athletics tracks, as well as visiting a few.



Set model by Bianca Pardo



### Discuss set design

- How is space being manipulated in this set design?
- What terminology does Bianca Pardo use to describe the design?
- What materials are being used in this design?
- What predictions do you have about how the space will be used by the actors during the play?



### Extended Q&A

Read the extended Q&A with Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo at [mtc.com.au/eduhub](https://mtc.com.au/eduhub)

**'Responding to the script, it was important to leave negative space for our pop-out spaces in the show that are outside of the home and track environments.'**

**BIANCA PARDO  
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER**

# Directing



Elliot Wood and Director Liv Satchell in rehearsal



Director Liv Satchell

## Learn more about how the team are exploring the play's themes in this Q&A with Director Liv Satchell.

### What's a big idea you're exploring in this play?

The big underlying question of the work is – how do you take responsibility for the choices that you make?

There's a version of Thea's life where she doesn't have a lot of agency or control because of the care work that she does for her mum and helping set up the floristry business – a world where she has had to put away her love of running. However, underneath that is the question of how do you reclaim power in the face of adversity and how do you take responsibility for the work that all of us need to do, how difficult it is just to live a meaningful life. That's what all three characters are wrangling with – how do they take responsibility for the decisions they make, and how do we make those decisions active rather than passive?

We have been talking a lot about the relationship between choice and purpose, and that actually it's in the choices that we make about the circumstances that we are working within, that define who we are. It's about your attitude to the situation that you're in, rather than the situation itself, that allows you to have agency. The thing that you can exert power on is how you feel about it.

### What's an example of a rehearsal technique you use with the actors?

To create the heightened realism that we're going for, I find it comes from the contrast between the actors' performance and what we're doing with the design. What that means from an acting perspective is that we're really focusing on the real-world stakes of each scene. Each scene plays out as it would in everyday life, and the saturation, or dialling up, comes from the pressures exerted by the design morphing across the show. The shifts in design act as a pressure cooker for what the characters are going through, which creates more tension for the characters.

In terms of rehearsal technique, we've been focusing on how the tone of each scene is different from the previous one. We've been doing a lot of detailed work around being very clear and specific about what the domino effect is from scene to scene. Asking ourselves what are the stakes that the characters had from the previous scene that they're taking into this new one. What's the new information they have and how does that effect the flavour or feeling?



### Discuss directing

- How would you describe the big ideas being explored in this production?
- What hints about performance style can you gather from Liv's discussion?
- What predictions do you have about how conflict and space will be manipulated on stage?
- Try exploring a scene from the script using the directorial approach Liv describes above. Focus on how you manipulate rhythm to explore the scene.

**'The big underlying question of the work is: how do you take responsibility for the choices that you make?'**

LIV SATCHELL  
DIRECTOR

### How do you explore the conflict in the script in rehearsal?

The way that I've been approaching scripted conflict is to talk through what happens in the scene first. We approach it from a technical perspective to start with, so we talk through what happens and then I get the actors to do a line read of the scene. One of the best ways to create tension is through rhythm, so a line read allows us to work out how the scene escalates and at which points that escalation happens. If we've clocked that technically, then the actors aren't having to pull that from within themselves. We can follow a shape rather than having to rely upon an emotional resource, which is what is dangerous.

Once we've agreed on what that structure of the scene is, we give it a go in the space. I'll then talk to them about what I've seen from the outside, about the relationship between that technique and what it's doing emotionally for us as an audience. Then we'll make adjustments to the rhythm, for example, as a way to boost or reduce the tension.

There are fundamental rhythms in our lives, like breathing. When someone's in trouble and their breathing gets out of sync, you know that something's wrong. Attending to what those core rhythms are, and disrupting those rhythms, is a really easy way to create tension without relying upon actors having to do all of that work themselves.

**'In terms of rehearsal technique, we've been focusing on how the tone of each scene is different from the previous one. We've been doing a lot of detailed work around being very clear and specific about what the domino effect is from scene to scene.'**

LIV SATCHELL  
DIRECTOR



Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo and Director Liv Satchell in rehearsal

# Performance style



Director Liv Satchell, Elliot Wood and Leigh Lule.

**Director Liv Satchell describes the major performance style of *Shoelace Chaser* as heightened realism. In these notes from Liv, find out more about how the team uses performance to bring Thea's internal world out into the external world.**

The best way that I can describe the major performance style in the show is heightened realism – it's real life, but with the saturation dial turned up. It's how we live day-to-day but we're putting it in a pressure cooker, like when you're on Instagram and you turn the brightness up. I'm focussing on how we can use performance to bring this internal world – what Thea's experiencing emotionally and psychologically through trying to juggle two separate parts of her life – out into the external world.

## Delineating space

One of the ways we're doing that, and a rule that we've set up in the show, is through the two different ways that we use the stage. We've got the living room where Fiona (Thea's mother) exists and functions, and we've got the running track where Syd exists and functions. Neither of them is allowed to cross over into the other space, but Thea can live in both. That's one way we're signifying that she's the one who's having to code-switch and move between these two different roles that she inhabits in these two different worlds.

From the turning point of the show, the rules then start to break down. The differences between the two worlds start to collapse – the boundary of the living room and the running track becomes porous. Syd starts to exist in the living room world, and Fiona starts to exist in the running track world, and Thea loses her ability to know which space she's in.

## Manipulating transitions

Another way we're exploring this idea is with transitions in the show. I'm really interested in finding somewhere in the play that Thea is totally in control, and we've landed on that being in the transitions because that's when she's holding both spaces alive. It's in the in-between where she is making her choices.

In the first half of the play, where she's still in control, Thea is in charge of when scene changes happen. Usually a transition is just functional, to get from one scene to the next, but we're dramatising the transitions as a space where Thea can do the code-switching of what role she's going to be playing next. We watch her shift into that role physically – she's putting on her running shirt or a work shirt – so it's really clear that she's inhabiting the work that is going to be required of her. When we hit the turning point in the play, where Thea starts to lose control, we lose the transitions themselves. Each new scene is going to start from the scene that we've just lived, so the structure of the show is replicating Thea losing her sense of balance, and the events that she's triggered in these different parts of her life are getting away from her.



## Discuss performance styles

- How might aspects of this style be evident in the work of different production areas?
- What are the 'rules' of how the space will be used by different characters?
- How will the transitions be used demonstrate Thea's character development in the play?
- How might the director manipulate this performance style to convey the intended meaning of the script?

**'The best way that I can describe the major performance style in the show is heightened realism – it's real life, but with the saturation dial turned up. It's how we live day-to-day but we're putting it in a pressure cooker, like when you're on Instagram and you turn the brightness up.'**

LIV SATCHELL  
DIRECTOR

# Dramatic elements



Stage Manager Lucie Sutherland with the cast and creatives in rehearsal.

The following questions are intended to help you consider how *Shoelace Chaser* might be interpreted onstage through the lens of VCE Drama.

## CLIMAX

- Based on your knowledge of the story, what might be the climax of the play?
- How might the performance style, and the way transitions are being staged, help to build momentum to the climax?

## CONFLICT

- How is the director rehearsing scenes with conflict?
- What does each character want and what are the obstacles in their way?

## CONTRAST

- Where can you identify contrast in the set design?
- How might you see contrast between the characters?
- How might Leigh Lule use contrasting expressive skills as Thea code-switches between interactions with Fiona and Syd?

## MOOD

- Make predictions about the overall feeling this play will evoke. What might you see and hear to make you feel this way?
- How might sound and music be used to enhance mood?

## RHYTHM

- Describe the rhythm of each character – what predictions do you have about the pattern of words, sounds or actions that may be created by each actor?
- Thinking about the transitions as discussed by Director Liv Satchell, how will the rhythm evolve during the show?

## SOUND

- What sounds might be created by the actors on stage? Look at the set design and think about the materials on stage.

## SPACE

- How is space being manipulated to delineate different parts of Thea's world? When might these rules be broken?

## TENSION

- How might tension and intensity be manipulated in the lead-up to the climax?



## Elements of theatre composition

Refresh your memory of the definitions with our dramatic elements flashcards at [mtc.com.au/eduhub](http://mtc.com.au/eduhub)



## Download Part B

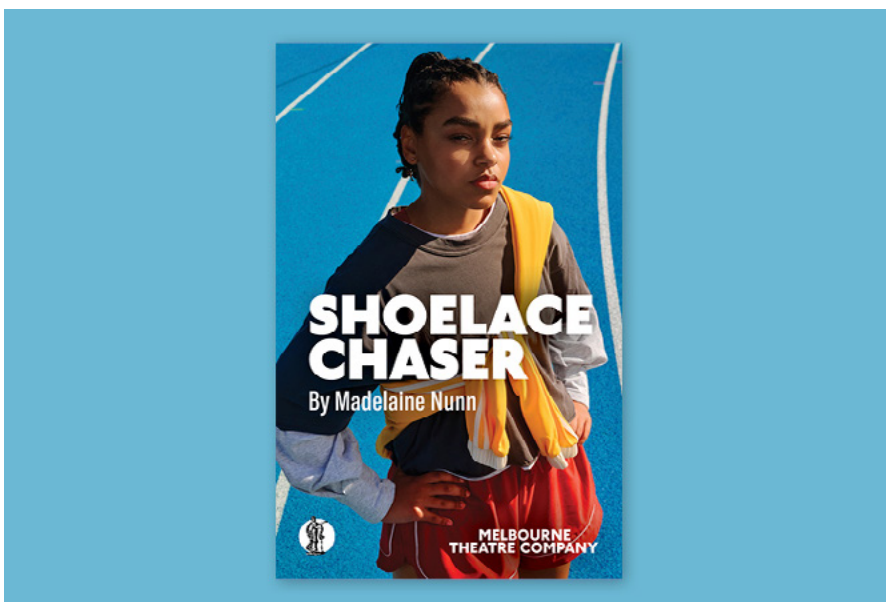
After you've seen *Shoelace Chaser*, download Part B of this Education Pack to read more from the cast and creative team about expressive skills, costume design, and lighting and sound. Visit [mtc.com.au/eduhub](http://mtc.com.au/eduhub).

# Learn more



## Explore the Education Hub

Explore the full suite of digital resources for *Shoelace Chaser* in the Melbourne Theatre Company Education Hub. Learn more at [mtc.com.au/eduhub](https://mtc.com.au/eduhub)



## Buy the script

Purchase the script to this new Australian play by **Madelaine Nunn**. A moving comedy drama about chasing your dreams when the odds are stacked against you.

Buy the script at [mtc.com.au/scripts](https://mtc.com.au/scripts)



## Script notes

In this video, Director Liv Satchell and actors Elliot Wood and Leigh Lule discuss their script notes for Madelaine Nunn's new Australian play.

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