

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 B

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Activity



Discuss



Read



Video

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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

Expressive skills



THEA
Played by Leigh Lule



Leigh Lule

'As the play progresses, Thea's sense of being grounded and in control begins to deteriorate.'

LEIGH LULE



Representing character



Hear from the cast as they discuss their characters at mtc.com.au/edubhub.

How do you embody your character?

Generally, Thea moves with intention and ease. For the majority of the play, she's quite straight-faced (especially in comparison to Syd), but there are moments where I get to tap into her playfulness and competitive streak with heightened movements and expressions. Vocally, Thea's black-and-white thinking is reflected in the way she speaks, which is often in a lower register that conveys certainty. However, when she's gently challenging Fiona or feeling stressed and out of control, her pitch and intonations lift into a higher register. As the play progresses, Thea's sense of being grounded and in control begins to deteriorate. This shift is embodied physically through increasingly rushed, fragmented movements and a more reactive relationship to the other characters and the play's environment.



FIONA
Played by Zoe Boesen



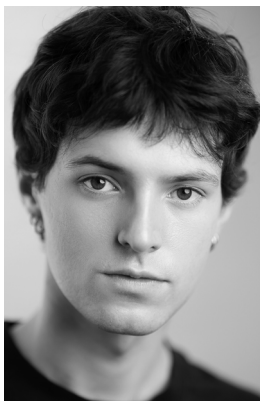
Zoe Boesen

'I think Fiona is naturally a very expressive person but is almost always in some degree of physical pain and/or fatigue.'

ZOE BOESEN

How do you embody your character?

I think Fiona is naturally a very expressive person but is almost always in some degree of physical pain and/or fatigue. On a good day, Fiona uses large sweeping gestures and movement, has dynamic vocal range and often exaggerated facial expressions. When she is in pain, her movements become weighted and slow, her face less expressive and her voice flattened and full of effort.



SYD
Played by Elliot Wood



Elliot Wood and Leigh Lule

How do you embody your character?

Syd's movement and gestures are all very large and theatrical, which is in direct contrast to Thea's more reserved and practical movements. Particularly in the training sequences, Syd is a lot less capable than Thea physically. Exploring the disparity in their capacities is essential for communicating to the audience that Thea is truly extraordinary, and also for tracking Syd's personal development: starting very reluctant and uncommitted to the training and gradually improving their abilities to make it to Nationals. Initially Syd cannot comprehend running for fun – by the end, they relish it.

On top of Syd's theatrical movements, their voice is also very flexible, often doing silly accents, impressions, and general exclamations which are more often than not over the top. This performativity is essential to Syd's characterisation, in part of how Thea is endeared to them through their unwavering sense of play, and also to communicate through contrast how they drop their goofy facade in the more serious scenes with Thea as they grow more comfortable being themselves.

'Their voice is also very flexible, often doing silly accents, impressions, and general exclamations.'

ELLIOT WOOD



Script notes



Hear from Director Liv Satchell, and actors Elliot Wood and Leigh Lule, in our Script Notes video at mtc.com.au/eduhub.



Extended Q&As

Read the extended cast Q&As at mtc.com.au/eduhub.

Costume design



Leigh Lule and Elliot Wood



Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo

***Shoelace Chaser* Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo discusses costumes and symbol.**

What are some practical considerations you have to think about with the costumes?

A lot of the practical considerations for costumes in such a fast-paced show are about time. Particularly, the changing of the bibs. It would take too long to safety pin each bib on the costumes for every race and so we needed to find a method that wouldn't take much time at all. Therefore, we've landed on magnets. Each bib, and the shirt they are stuck to, has hidden magnets to enable them to adhere smoothly in the scene.

What's a big challenge in designing this show that you've enjoyed solving?

The flower choreography has been a big challenge that has been a lot of fun to work on. Over the course of rehearsals Zoe Boesen (Fiona), Liv Satchell (Director) and I have been working on the flower dramaturgy and working out the process of the flowers being revealed, which bouquets are being made, and when certain flowers need to be cleared off the stage.

What's an example of symbolism in your design?

We wanted to explore the mounting of pressure for Fiona and Thea physically, in the piling of boxes and buckets of flowers. As the pressure mounts, so too does the chaos and volume of flowers, which helps symbolise the workload that Fiona and Thea have assumed.

'A lot of the practical considerations for costumes in such a fast-paced show are about time.'

**BIANCA PARDO
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER**



Discuss costume design

- Compare and contrast Thea and Syd's costumes. Think about their running gear and also their interview clothes.
- Where can you identify application of symbol in Fiona's costume?
- What connections can you make between performance style and costume?
- How do costumes help transform time and place?



Extended Q&A

Read the extended Q&A with Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo at mtc.com.au/edubhub.

Lighting design



Leigh Lule and Zoe Boesen



Lighting Designer Thomas Roach

In this Q&A, Lighting Designer Thomas Roach discusses how lighting supports the storytelling by delineating space, manipulating mood and enhancing transitions.

What's the world of this show and your lighting designs?

The play follows Thea moving through different tasks and responsibilities, mainly training for running at the race track and taking care of her mum at home. She's trying her best to keep them separate but as the play progresses, these roles overlap. Thea tries to keep supporting her mum and pursuing her dreams of running, so I'm following that lead by initially keeping those spaces separate and later having them blend.

What's a big challenge in designing this show that you've enjoyed solving?

Some of the challenges include creating a separation between the race track and lounge room and lighting the big curve of the race track, all while keeping my fixture count down.

Lighting curves can be very difficult, due to physics and the beam-shaping features that lighting fixtures have. I can use 'barn doors' or 'shutter cuts' to put straight edges on the circular light output – this is usually more than enough control to cut off the floor or keep the light out of the eyes of the audience – but these are all straight lines. Ideally, I'd have 100 fixtures overlaid to cheat that curve with many small, straight lines, but that's not how the world works! Time, money, touring and contract say "30 lights".

What kinds of lighting fixtures have you used in this show?

For the Melbourne season, I'm using all your classic theatrical lighting fixtures – Profiles and Fresnels – chosen for their beam angle, the size I want the light output, how far away the fixture is from the object it's lighting, as well as how much I need to control the beam shape and edge for that fixture. At some touring venues, I'm using lots of moving lights because that is what the venue has.

I am also using some LED fixtures. The benefit of these fixtures is that they can change colour, and I'm using different colours to represent different race tracks – the local track for training and the away tracks for nationals and university. There is a section of the show when we are at the race track but the lounge stays lit. I'm using green on the race track to mirror the carpet of the lounge and the green grass in the centre of a race track. By using colour, we still can see Fiona in the lounge room, but I'm using that space to extend the world of the race track.

'Mood is the main thing I'm thinking about when designing. Mood indicates intensity, colour, angle – above or below, front or back. Mood also influences how much of the stage is lit.'

**THOMAS ROACH
LIGHTING DESIGNER**



Zoe Boesen and Leigh Lule



Discuss lighting

- Where can you identify application of symbol in the lighting design?
- How does lighting help to transform time and place?
- How is colour used in the lighting design?
- What terminology from this Q&A can you use in your own descriptions of the lighting design?
- How does the lighting design enhance the transitions between scenes to gradually show how overwhelmed Thea becomes?

‘At the start of the show, the scenes have transitional moments between them for practical logistical reasons, but we’re also using them as a storytelling tool.’

**THOMAS ROACH
LIGHTING DESIGNER**

Where have you drawn inspiration from to create your design?

My main influence at the beginning of the process is the script. What does the script call for, for the storytelling? Time of day, time passed, mood, place? The next inspiration is the set design – how would I light this space? I like to start by leaving lots of options open and dreaming big. I draw lots of ideas on a pre-draft plan, making assumptions about how the space might be used. Then we begin rehearsal and I start to see how the cast are actually moving on and using the set, where each scene is set, what we need to see, what we need to hide, as well as the story progression from the previous scene to the next.

Do you consciously think about mood in your work? How so?

Yes! Mood is the main thing I’m thinking about when designing. Mood indicates intensity, colour, angle – above or below, front or back. Mood also influences how much of the stage is lit. When Thea receives good news from the university, she and Syd are running around elated with joy, so I match that big joyous energy with a bright fully-lit stage with warm, sunny light. On the other hand, in a tender moment shared between Thea and Fiona, I narrow that light nice and small, not-too-bright, to represent that this moment you see here now is all that matters to these characters.

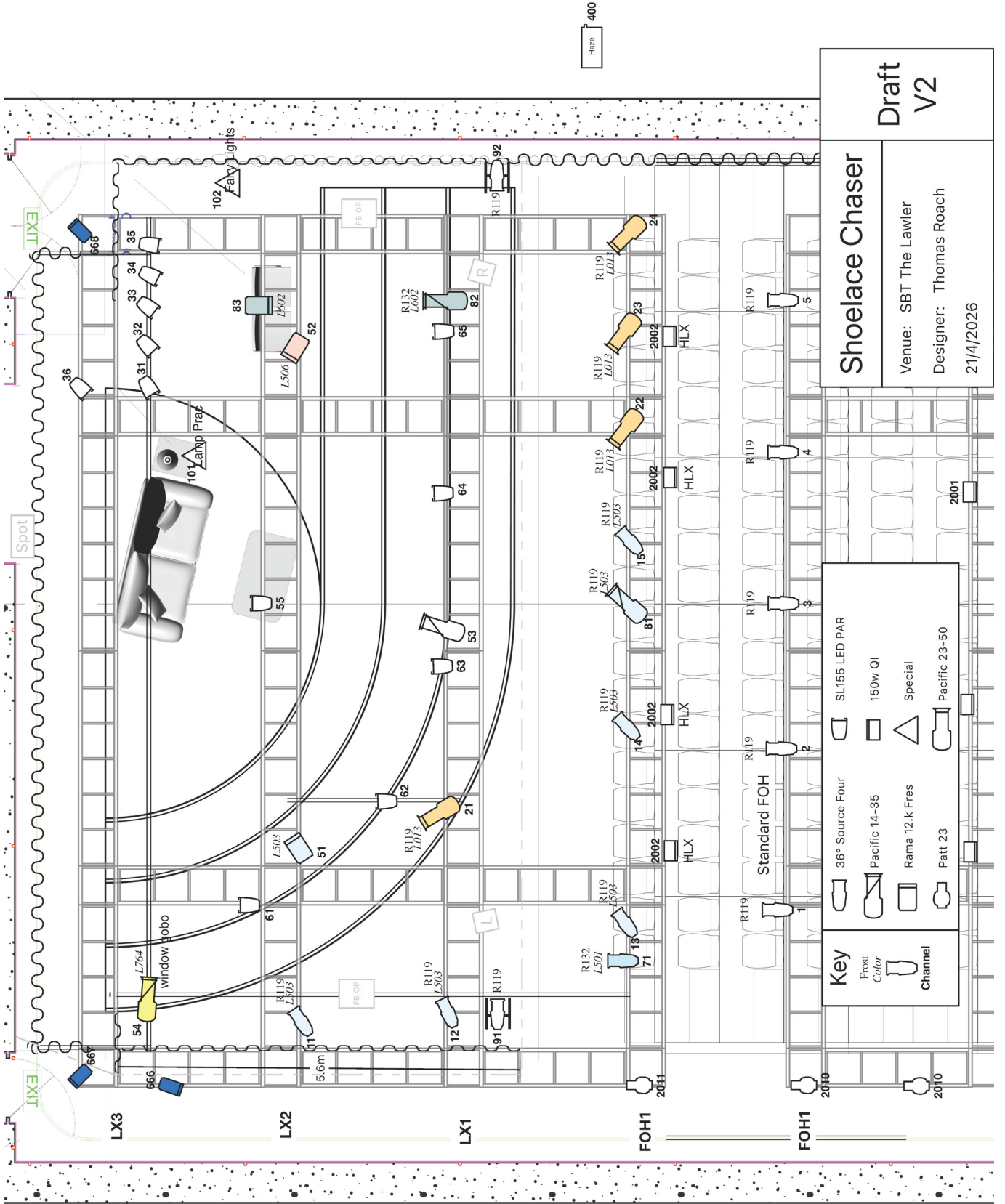


Leigh Lule and Elliot Wood

What’s an example of symbolism in your design?

The speed and style of the early transitions, versus the lack of transitions later representing the freneticism of Thea’s life.

At the start of the show, the scenes have transitional moments between them for practical logistical reasons, but we’re also using them as a storytelling tool – the transitions give Thea a moment to prepare for her next task. As we progress, and Thea has less control of her life, the transitions speed up or go away completely. Lights come up in the next location before she is ready, showing the struggle to juggle all her responsibilities.



Lighting plan by Thomas Roach

Composition and sound design



Director Liv Satchell, Composer & Sound Designer Tom Backhaus and Writer Madelaine Nunn. Photo: Emily Doyle



Composer & Sound Designer Tom Backhaus

‘The training montages draw on a very specific reference point: the frenetic energy of HIIT gyms.’

**TOM BACKHAUS
COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER**

The script called for ‘Bangerz please’. In this Q&A, Composer & Sound Designer Tom Backhaus discusses Jersey Club, lo-fi fusion jazz and big 80s synths in *Shoelace Chaser*.

What’s your role as Composer & Sound Designer? How do you explain the difference between the two aspects of the role?

In short, the roles of composer and sound designer are responsible for everything you hear that isn’t the text. I think the key difference is that the sound designer sets the time and place and the composer sets the tone and mood. There’s a pretty thin line between the two and both roles work hand-in-hand to enhance the storytelling of the play.

To design a scene set in a café, the sound designer might imagine what one could hear if they were sitting in that café – perhaps some general chatter, a dishwasher humming and the clatter of crockery and cutlery. The sound designer will combine all of these sounds into a single source, called “atmos” (short for atmosphere), to signal to the audience where the scene is taking place. Conversely, the composer might imagine what the characters in the scene are feeling and compose music to enhance or subvert those feelings.

How does music/sound design help build the world of this show?

The set remains static in *Shoelace Chaser*, so sound plays a crucial role in establishing a sense of place. Subtle variations in the atmospheric tracks distinguish between Thea training at her local track and racing at the more polished university venue.

The music operates in a subjective space, reflecting Thea’s internal world. I think of the soundtrack as a kind of Greek chorus, underscoring and echoing her key thoughts and emotions throughout the show. One clear example is the gradual increase in tempo as the show progresses, which mirrors Thea’s racing mind as she struggles to keep up with her commitments.



Zoe Boesen and Leigh Lule

Thinking about a specific moment, could you explain the intention behind your music/sound?

The training montages draw on a very specific reference point: the frenetic energy of HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training) gyms. Loud electronic beats pulse beneath trainers yelling encouragement (and occasional admonishment), all within a room full of people jumping, running and lifting weights. The environment is sensorily overwhelming, creating a powerful sense of momentum and urgency that pushes you to work harder. This makes it an ideal soundscape for an intense workout montage.

As the show progresses and Thea's commitments begin to outweigh her capacity, the music intensifies and the phrases become shorter. This shift reflects her growing inability to keep up with the competing demands of school, work, running, and her mother's floristry business, Fifi's Flowers.

What kinds of sounds/instruments/effects should we listen for in your design?

Three main genres: Jersey Club, lo-fi fusion jazz and big 80s synths (yes, that is a genre). There's also a cheeky quote from a well-known video game soundtrack, which I will be very impressed if you identify.

How do you collaborate with the director and other creatives?

I collaborate primarily with the Director and Lighting Designer. In pre-production, I work closely with the Director to align with their vision, and in rehearsals, I focus on enhancing the storytelling through sound and music. Developing ideas quickly and testing them in the room with the cast is an effective way to discover what will translate successfully to the final production.

During production week, I collaborate closely with the Lighting Designer. Together, we refine timing to ensure shifts in mood are seamless and the pacing of the work remains uninterrupted.



Discuss music and sound

- How does sound design help to transform place?
- How does music help to manipulate tension?
- Do you remember any repeated sounds? How does sound design manipulate rhythm?
- Tom Backhaus composed original 'bangerz' for the production. How do these manipulate mood?

'The music operates in a subjective space, reflecting Thea's internal world. I think of the soundtrack as a kind of Greek chorus, underscoring and echoing her key thoughts and emotions throughout the show.'

**TOM BACKHAUS
COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER**



Leigh Lule, Elliot Wood and Zoe Boesen

Props



Leigh Lule and Zoe Boesen

There are many props in this production of *Shoelace Chaser* that help to tell the story. Many of these are real items (such as the medals, phones and floristry tools), and some are fake (such as the flowers and the ‘apology donuts’).

Props include:

- Throw blanket
- Centrelink letter in envelope
- Mobile phones
- Floristry tools including scissors, clippers, sticky tape dispenser, ribbons, paper
- Pill box
- Buckets with fake flowers
- Medals (gold and silver)
- Thea’s bag
- Grocery bags
- Towels
- Water bottles
- Tiger’s eye stone (Thea’s reminder that she’s not alone)
- Lipstick
- Syd’s cue cards (for the scholarship interview)
- Fiona’s purse

Consumable props

While most props in the show can be reused for every performance, the actors consume real food and drink. The **sandwiches** are prepared by the stage manager ahead of every show (crusts removed, as scripted) and the **sports drink** Thea consumes is a Gatorade bottle filled with water and red food dye. Fiona also uses a ‘**sage spray**’ that is filled with water.



Spot the props

Look closely at the production photos in this pack and identify moments when props were used. How do the props relate to the performance style? How do props help communicate aspects of each character?



Application of symbol

Thinking about the list of props here, are any used symbolically? Remember the moment you saw these items on stage and think about how they enhanced the storytelling.

Analysis questions

These questions are designed to help you make connections between the performance and the VCE Drama study design. Remember to always consult VCAA documents when preparing for assessment tasks and exams.

PRELUDE

- How does the actor use two expressive skills to portray their character in this moment?
- How do lighting and sound design manipulate tension in this moment?
- How would you describe the actor-audience relationship in this moment?



Leigh Lule

SCENE 1

- How is space being manipulated to show the relationship between these characters in this early scene?
- What does costume design tell us about each of these characters?
- Discuss the interrelationship between set design and performance style here.



Leigh Lule and Elliot Wood

SCENE 10

- How is conflict being manipulated here?
- How does the lighting design tell us this location is different to other scenes that have taken place in this area of the stage?
- Analyse how one actor uses two expressive skills to portray their character.



Elliot Wood and Leigh Lule

SCENE 11

- Discuss the application of symbol in this scene with reference to the flower props and what Fiona says about one of the flowers she picks up.
- Discuss how one dramatic element and one expressive skill are used in this moment to communicate the characters' relationship.
- Discuss how lighting design is being used to establish place and mood in this moment.



Zoe Boesen and Leigh Lule

SCENE 21

- What is the effect of seeing Syd in this part of the set for the first time? Discuss how a dramatic element is being manipulated here.
- Discuss how one actor uses gesture and focus in this moment.
- Compare and contrast the actor-audience relationship in this moment with another scene.



Elliot Wood and Zoe Boesen



VCE Drama flashcards

Refresh your memory of the definitions with our dramatic elements flashcards at mtc.com.au/eduhub.



Production photos

Visit our Education Hub to see photos of key moments throughout the show at mtc.com.au/eduhub.

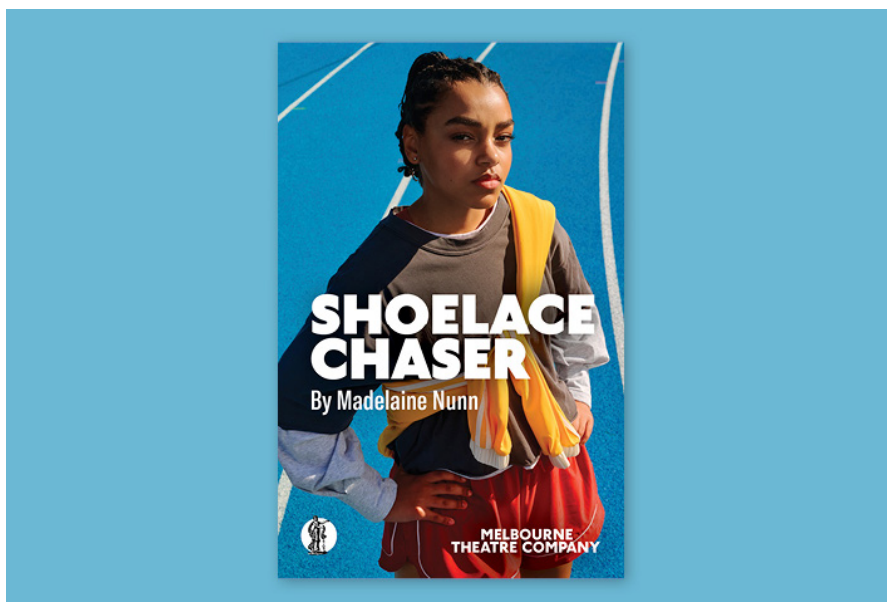
Learn more



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



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



Design and symbolism

In this video, hear from the creative team about the ideas behind their artistic choices.

Watch the video at mtc.com.au/eduhub