



the **Joan**

An Ensemble Theatre production

BY MELANIE TAIT

**THE
APPLETON
LADIES'
POTATO
RACE**

11 & 12 JUNE 2021

SYNOPSIS

Appleton is a small country town being forced into the present with a recent influx of wealthy city slickers, treechangers and refugees. Simmering tensions come to a head when new GP Penny Anderson discovers that the famous Appleton Potato Race awards \$1000 prize money for the men, and a measly \$200 for the women. When Penny decides to take steps to restore gender parity and coax Appleton into the 21st century, little could she have anticipated the spiralling, hilarious culture war that would follow.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The process of creating new work is an infamously rewarding, exhausting and exhilarating process. However, two unexpectedly rich experiences in developing this play, involved traveling as far from Ensemble as the Tiwi Islands with Guy and Jenny Reynolds, who have generously supported us from the outset – and into the heart of the annual Robertson show, just before our final week of rehearsals. Both experiences left me deeply moved and acutely aware of the importance of sharing our local story of place and people and tradition. **THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE** is about the irreconcilable challenges of change. It is a play that asks, how do we honour the traditions of our past, and still move forward as a society into the future? How do we celebrate with pride and acceptance who we have been, while also collectively deciding the values of who we are to become? It is about small lives that are momentarily disrupted by something bigger. Yet in the midst of inevitable change, it also asks how we find home, celebrating our eternal drive as humans to belong. **Priscilla Jackman**

WRITER'S NOTE

Like my first play, **THE VEGEMITE TALES**, **THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE** arrived in my imagination very clearly and quickly. It's been waiting forever in my bones. After growing up in Robertson (the real life potato capital!) and spending many years travelling around the country with the ABC, I feel like I speak Country Town. I keep returning to them, when the city gets too much for me. I know there's sometimes more grim complexity to the 'close knit communities' portrayed on television shows like **Back Roads**. I also know there's no other feeling quite like when your community lifts you up and feels proud of you. From New South Wales to Queensland to South Australia to Tasmania to the Northern Territory to the ACT, I've known or been women like Bev, Barb, Nikki, Penny and Rania – variously on the out or on the in, each with her own capacity for generosity. It's been an unparalleled honour to bring them to life on the Ensemble stage with our glorious cast and my extraordinary creative partner, director Priscilla Jackman. **Melanie Tait**

RUNNING TIME APPROX 90MIN NO INTERVAL

MELANIE TAIT WOULD LIKE TO THANK: JEANNIE AULD, VAN BADHAM, KATHRYN BENDALL, EBONY BENNETT, KATE BOX, COLETTE BREHON, LEON COMPTON, FELICITY COX, CATHERINE CROWLEY, RAE EARL, RYK GODDARD, GINGER GORMAN, POSIE GRAEME-EVANS, VICTORIA HARALABIDOU, DR TODD HARDY, NICOLA HARRISON, BILL HEIT, JULIA HOLMAN, MADELAINE HOLT, TY KING, ROSE KOKKORIS, CALEB LEWIS, JANE LONGHURST, HAMISH MACDONALD, DR BRAD MCKAY, SALLY McLAUGHLIN, BENYTHON OLDFIELD, ROD QUINN, MARK ROGERSON, EMILY RUSSELL, MEM RYNNE, HELEN SHIELD & THE TAIT FAMILY.

SPECIAL THANKS TO: STEVE FRANCIS FOR SUPPORTING SOUND DESIGN AND COMPOSITION, CLAUDIA BARRIE, ZOE CARIDES, AILEEN HUYNH, MORGAN SNOW, HANNAH TONKS, JEREMY WATERS & BEN WOOD.





MELANIE TAIT | PLAYWRIGHT

Melanie Tait is an award-winning playwright, journalist, author and radio-maker. THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE is her second play. Melanie's first play, THE VEGEMITE TALES played for seven years in London, including two years on the West End. When Melanie returned to Australia, she worked for the ABC and has written for GUARDIAN AUSTRALIA, THE DAILY TELEGRAPH, ISLAND MAGAZINE, WOMEN'S WEEKLY. Melanie curated the much-lauded live storytelling series NOW HEAR THIS, which

she presented on ABC RN for five years. In 2017 Melanie worked with Director Priscilla Jackman on preliminary development concepts of STILL POINT TURNING: THE CATHERINE MCGREGOR STORY, which premiered at Sydney Theatre Company in April 2018.



PRISCILLA JACKMAN | DIRECTOR & DRAMATURG

Priscilla was the inaugural winner of Ensemble Theatre's Sandra Bates Directing Award (2016) where she directed the Boatshed reading of IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST (2016) and assistant directed GOOD PEOPLE and BAREFOOT IN THE PARK (2016). In 2018, Priscilla wrote and directed STILL POINT TURNING: THE CATHERINE MCGREGOR STORY, for Sydney Theatre Company where she will direct WHITE PEARL by Anchuli Felicia King in 2019. Also at STC she assistant directed THE FATHER (2017) and THE HANGING (2016). In 2017 Priscilla was awarded the Berlin New Music Opera Award, from The Opera Foundation for Young Australians. For Opera Australia, Priscilla has directed two schools' tours (2018/19) and for Musica Viva, a new Australian production, DA VINCI'S APPRENTICE (2018). She was the Resident Director of Sport for Jove's Winter Season in 2017. Priscilla worked with Complicite (UK) Creative Learning Team in 2014/15, and is a lecturer at NIDA in Creative Practices, where she did her Masters of Directing in 2015.



FELICITY NICOL | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Felicity is an award-winning Performance Director and Artistic Director of Spark Youth Theatre. A graduate of NIDA, she has gone on to work with some of the most prominent artists around the world, including Ontroerend Goed (BEL), Punchdrunk & Gecko Physical Theatre (UK), Illutron (DEN) and Mammalian Diving Reflex (CAN). Felicity holds a particular interest in working with young people, specifically queer young people & young people experiencing mental health issues. This interest has led her to working with

Australian Theatre for Young People (AUS), Mit Ohnes Alles (GER), The Torontonians (CAN) and Company3 (UK). Felicity's mission as an artist is to interrupt people's assumptions about the world and the people we share it with in order to bring these assumptions into question. She does this through humour, debate, gaming, dramaturgy and play. These take their forms through a combination of social media, projection, drag (dress-ups), physical theatre and dialogue. Her favourite career highlights include directing at The Sydney Opera House, creating a one-on-one performance for audiences in a moving car, and directing a non-verbal performative memorial via clowning, beer and a slide-show.





VALERIE BADER | BEV ARMSTRONG

Valerie's extensive career encompasses theatre, film and television. Recent screen appearances include the feature film, WISH YOU WERE HERE, the award-winning BLACK & WHITE & SEX and RIP TIDE. Valerie has worked for just about every main stage theatre company: STC, MTC, Bell Shakespeare, Belvoir, Griffin, Playbox, and Nimrod, garnering Helpmann, Sydney Critics' and Glug award nominations. Recent theatre includes: JESUS WANTS ME FOR A SUNBEAM (Riverside), FUNNY GIRL IN CONCERT (SSO), THOMAS MURRAY AND THE UPSIDE DOWN RIVER (Critical Stages), TALK (STC), CHILDREN OF THE SUN (STC), M ROCK (STC/ATYP), AUSTRALIA DAY (MTC) and THE FLOATING WORLD (Griffin Theatre). Television includes: DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND, DEAD LUCKY, THE LET DOWN, THE CHUCK IN, ALL SAINTS, EAST OF EVERYTHING, COME IN SPINNER, TRUE BELIEVERS, MURDER CALL and GP. Valerie is a proud member of MEAA.



MERRIDY EASTMAN | BARB LING

After graduating from NIDA in the early eighties, Merridy's career began with a five-year stint as a PLAYSCHOOL presenter. Since then she's performed on stage in a swag of productions for the Melbourne Theatre Company, the Sydney Theatre Company, the State Theatre of South Australia and for Playbox/Malthouse. And when it wasn't raining, Merridy leapt about the Botanical Gardens in both Sydney and Melbourne playing Helena in A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM for the Australian Shakespeare Company. On television she's appeared on all the usual television comedy and drama series from BLUE HEELERS to RAKE, and for several years was a regular cast member in both Channel Seven's ALWAYS GREENER and more recently, PACKED TO THE RAFTERS. In 2002 Merridy wrote her first book, a humorous memoir based on her experience working as a nervous receptionist in a Sydney brothel. THERE'S A BEAR IN THERE was an Australian best seller and has since been published in the UK and Germany. Merridy's other books published by Allen and Unwin include RIDICULOUS EXPECTATIONS in 2007 and HOW NOW BROWN FRAU in 2012 (based on her five years living in Munich, Bavaria.) She's also written short stories for anthologies including Penguin's THANKS OR THE MAMMARIES, Pan MacMillan's JUST BETWEEN US, and was a regular columnist for the Wentworth Courier. Merridy is currently writing her fifth book, I KNEW WE WEREN'T SPANISH! about discovering her indigenous ancestry, and for the stage - a comedy set in an Aged Care facility. She was last seen at Ensemble in 2016 in A HISTORY OF FALLING THINGS.





SAPIDAH KIAN | RANIA HAMID

Sapidah is an actor, director, theatre maker and dramaturg, working extensively across film, television, theatre and radio. Recent acting credits include: *MERCILESS GODS* (Little Ones Theatre/Griffin Theatre Co/Arts Centre Melbourne) for which she was nominated Best Performer at the Green Room Awards 2018, *ALICE FRASER TRILOGY* (ABC Radio), *THE FIVE PROVOCATIONS* (Black Eye Films), *IN-FIDELITY* (Complete Smut Live Art Auction-FOLA 16), *TOMORROW WHEN THE WAR BEGAN* (ABC TV), *PARTISAN* (Warp Films), *GALLIPOLI* (Endemol-Southern Star/Ch 9), *RAKE* (ABC TV).

Sapidah is a lecturer in acting and directing at the Victorian College of the Arts/University of Melbourne, teaching across graduate and undergraduate programmes. She was Director in Residence at Malthouse Theatre in 2017/18.



AMBER MCMAHON | NIKKI ARMSTRONG

Amber trained at Flinders University Drama Centre and was a recipient of the Adele Koh Scholarship to study at the Stella Adler Company & SITI Company in New York. Amber recently completed her third run of *NORTH BY NORTHWEST* for Kay & McLean Productions. Prior to that she performed the lead role in STC's *ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST*, returned as Snug in the STC/STCSA remount of *THE POPULAR MECHANICALS*, played the Belvoir stage in *BLISS* (Malthouse), *ATLANTIS* (Windmill), *TWELFTH NIGHT*, and *ANGELS IN AMERICA*, and played two seasons of Malthouse's *PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK* at Royal Lyceum Edinburgh and Barbican London. She was also a part of STC's Actors Company. Amber's screen credits include the award winning feature film *GIRL ASLEEP*, for which she was nominated for Australian Film Critics Association's 2017 Best Supporting Actress Award. Amber has won two Helpmann Awards for Best Supporting Actress for work in *SCHOOL DANCE* (Windmill) and *GIRL ASLEEP*.



SHARON MILLERCHIP | PENNY ANDERSON

Sharon is one of the busiest actors on the Australian stage with a swag of awards including three Helpmanns. Last seen treading the Ensemble boards in *SHIRLEY VALENTINE*, and prior to that *BOMBSHELLS*, *A PICASSO* and *LAST OF THE RED HOT LOVERS*. Other stage roles include: Roxie Hart in *CHICAGO*, Meg Giry in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *LOVE NEVER DIES*, Belle in *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*, Anita in *WEST SIDE STORY*, Charity in *SWEET CHARITY*, Catherine in *PIPPIN*, Meg Giry in *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*, Velma Kelly in *CHICAGO*, Columbia in *ROCKY HORROR SHOW*, Sonia Walsk in *THEY'RE PLAYING OUR SONG*, Demeter in *CATS*, and Cordelia in *FALSETTOS* and Little Red Riding Hood in *INTO THE WOODS* for STC.



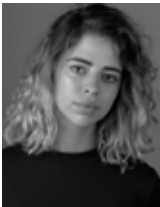
JANE FITZGERALD | DRAMATURG

Jane is Resident Dramaturg at ATYP and a Literary Manager at Ensemble Theatre (shared role). Recent productions include NEVILLE'S ISLAND (Ensemble), THE BIG DRY (co-production Ensemble/ATYP), INTERSECTION 2019: ARRIVAL, CHARLIE PILGRIM and IMPENDING EVERYONE (ATYP), LOST BOYS (Merrigong) and MROCK (co-production ATYP/STC). Previously for ATYP Jane has been a mentor on the Fresh Ink writers' program and at the National Studio, and has been a dramaturg on workshops for Playwriting Australia. For STC she has been Literary Manager, Artistic Associate and administrator of the Patrick White Playwrights' Award as well as a dramaturg on new writers' programs and on mainstage productions. She has worked as a script reader for the Royal Court London and has worked extensively as a Mentor with Year 12 students on HSC creative writing projects.



MICHAEL SCOTT-MITCHEL | SET DESIGNER

Michael Scott-Mitchell is one of the most outstanding designers in Australia. Recognising his contribution to design he was recently appointed the first Professor of Practice, Art and Design UNSW. His extensive credits in opera, theatre and special events, include the set design of State Opera of South Australia's production of Wagner's RING CYCLE and the Cauldron & Ceremonial Stage for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Recent designs include DR ZHIVAGO on Broadway for which he won the 2015 APDG Award, STILL POINT TURNING for Sydney Theatre Company; THE MERRY WIDOW, TOSCA and CARMEN for Opera Australia; and FREEZE FRAME for Debbie Allen Dance Academy in Los Angeles and Washington DC. At NIDA, he was Deputy Director/CEO and Head of Design.



GENEVIEVE GRAHAM | COSTUME DESIGNER

Genevieve graduated from NIDA in 2016 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Design for Performance), and went on to complete her Masters of Fine Arts (Design for Performance) degree in 2017. In 2016, she undertook a placement on the set of ALIEN: COVENANT by renowned director Ridley Scott, assisting in both the art and wardrobe department, and that same year was awarded the William Fletcher Foundation Grant for the development and advancement of talented young Australian artists. In 2017 Genevieve was costume designer on The Australian Brandenburg Orchestra's BITTERSWEET OBSESSIONS, a new Opera combining the works of Monteverdi and Bach. That year Genevieve was also the production designer for two new Australian works: EURYDIKE and ORPHEUS, directed by Priscilla Jackman, and FRATERNAL directed by Benjamin Sheen. In 2017, and went on to win the APDG award for 'Best Emerging Designer' for EURYDIKE and ORPHEUS. In 2018, Genevieve was the costume designer for The Ensemble Theatre's DIPLOMACY Directed by and starring John Bell, before working as the costume designer on series 2 of channel seven's television program DROP DEAD WEIRD. Genevieve was the costume designer on The Theatre of Image's Sydney Festival show BRETT AND WENDY written and directed by Kim Carpenter.





KAREN NORRIS | LIGHTING DESIGNER

Karen has extensive experience as a lighting designer for theatre, dance and music throughout Australia and Europe. Karen was based in London and Nice from 1998 to 2008. Credits: THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS - Timecode The Royal Ballet, WAITING FOR THE MOON The Tindersticks Royal Court - Glastonbury; THE DREAMING and SKIN Bangarra, JAZZ EXCHANGE SHERON WRAY, Liz Lea Dance - Irvin Lewis Company. Recent designs: LOVE ME TENDER, BARBARA AND THE CAMP DOGS Belvoir

Street, TERRAIN - LORE I.B.I.S and SHEOAK Bangarra, ON VIEW Sue Healey, SONGS NOT TO DANCE TO and CHAMPIONS Martin Del Armo Sydney Festival 2017, CELLA Narelle Benjamin Colours Dance Festival Stuttgart Germany - Sydney Festival 2018 Dance Massive 2019, KOTAHI Atamira NZ, Broken Glass Sydney Festival 2018 and The Weekend Sydney Festival 2019 Moogahlin. BLAK BOX Urban Theatre Barangaroo and Blacktown Sydney Festival 2019. Nominations for lighting design: SKIN Bangarra Dance Theatre 2001 Helpmann Awards, LORE Bangarra Dance Theatre 2016 The Green Room Award.



TEGAN NICHOLLS | COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Tegan is an award-winning sound designer and composer who works primarily in theatre and podcasting. Her work explores sensory immersion through spatial audio, and blends musical and concrete sound elements to create evocative soundscapes that are image-rich. Tegan's work has been heard in productions by companies such as Darlinghurst Theatre Company, NOPRA, Redline Productions, Ensemble Theatre, Q Theatre and Sport for Jove. She enjoys teaching in sound design with NIDA,

Western Sydney University and the Bankstown Youth Development service.



HANNAH LOBELSON | COSTUME SUPERVISOR

Hannah gained her wealth of knowledge and experience through a 20 year international career that has spanned over a hundred productions. In the UK, Hannah was Head of Wardrobe at Shakespeare's Globe for 8 years. In addition to this Hannah worked as assistant costume supervisor for The Royal Ballet, The Royal Opera, the National Theatre and designed costumes for LA BOHEME in Palestine. She worked as costume supervisor with the Royal Shakespeare Company and on several opera productions

at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Hannah has worked with City of Sydney as costume supervisor for the Sydney Lunar Festival, with Sydney Theatre Company and has held the role of Head of Costume for several years with Bell Shakespeare. Hannah was recently costume designer for Pop Up Globe's HAMLET in New Zealand.





LAUREN TULLOH | TOUR STAGE MANAGER

Lauren's passion is to create the magic of theatre for the audience; as a young girl she was enthralled by many theatrical and musical productions. However, it wasn't until her final year in high school that she discovered her local musical societies. This led to three years of skills development in Stage Management before attending NIDA, completing a Bachelor of Dramatic Art (Production) in 2009.

Lauren has worked as a Stage Manager for many theatre companies on many different productions. These include for Ensemble Theatre THE LAST FIVE YEARS, MARJORIE PRIME which also toured to Noosa Alive! Festival, THE PLANT and BETRAYAL. For the Hayes Theatre Company: AMERICAN PSYCHO, HIGH FIDELITY, ASSASSINS, THE FANTASTICKS, VIOLET and CALAMITY JANE which also toured to Belvoir St Theatre, Comedy Theatre Melbourne, Canberra Civic Centre, Arts Centre Melbourne, IPAC Wollongong, Orange Civic Centre and Parramatta Riverside Theatres. For Griffin Theatre: LIGHTEN UP. For Chapel off Chapel: SONGS FOR A NEW WORLD and VIOLET. For Sydney Opera House: CHARLIE AND LOLA'S EXTREMELY NEW PLAY. Lauren also stage managed THE GRUFFALO and THE GRUFFALO'S CHILD for Christine Dunstan Productions which toured extensively in Australia and New Zealand, and THE GRUFFALO: SONGS FROM THE SHOW for Tall Stories UK which toured to Singapore.



ALIRA MCKENZIE- WILLIAMS | ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Alira Mckenzie-Williams was the Production Trainee for The State Theatre Company of South Australia from January 2016-July 2018 while studying at Adelaide College of the Arts. Alira Mckenzie-Williams has worked in a range of disciplines for the State Theatre Company of South Australia as an Assistant Stage Manager for the productions of THAT EYE, THE SKY, BROTHERS WRECK, SISTAGIRL, TARTUFFE, THE 39 STEPS; Assistant Directed AFTER DINNER, Australian Symphony

Orchestra co-production ROMEO AND JULIET; Directorial Secondment VALE and Chaperone credits Co-production Sydney theatre company & Adelaide Festival THE SECRET RIVER. Her additional theatre credits at other theatre company's include Stage Manager LINES (TheatreRepublic), Stage-management Secondments LETHAL INDIFFERENCE (Sydney Theatre Company), MEMORIAL (Brink Productions). And various productions at The Adelaide College of the Arts.

Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre
597 High Street Penrith
thejoan.com.au