



ENSEMBLE THEATRE PRODUCTION
BY MELANIE TAIT
**THE
APPLETON
LADIES'
POTATO
RACE**

11 MAY, 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.



Australian Government



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Proudly supported by Jenny and Guy Reynolds AO

CAST

BEV ARMSTRONG
VALERIE BADER
BARB LING
MERRIDY EASTMAN
RANIA HAMID
SAPIDAH KIAN
NIKKI ARMSTRONG
AMBER MCMAHON
PENNY ANDERSON
SHARON MILLERCHIP

CREATIVES

DIRECTOR
PRISCILLA JACKMAN
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
FELICITY NICOL
DRAMATURGS
JANE FITZGERALD &
PRISCILLA JACKMAN
SET DESIGNER
MICHAEL SCOTT-MITCHELL
COSTUME DESIGNER
GENEVIEVE GRAHAM

LIGHTING DESIGNER
KAREN NORRIS
COMPOSER &
SOUND DESIGNER
TEGAN NICHOLLS
TOUR LIGHTING REALISER
MATT COX
TOUR SOUND REALISER
MARY RAPP
COSTUME SUPERVISOR
MARGARET GILL

STAGE MANAGER
LAUREN TULLOH
TOURING
PRODUCTION
MANAGER
TIM BURNS
DIALECT COACH
FAYSSAL BAZZI



MELANIE TAIT | PLAYWRIGHT

Melanie Tait is an award-winning playwright, journalist, author and radio-maker. THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE had its world premiere at The Ensemble Theatre in Sydney (2019) and was met with rave reviews and a sold-out season. Melanie's A BROADCAST COUP (2020) was to open at Ensemble this year but was cancelled due to Covid. Melanie's first play, THE VEGEMITE TALES (2001) played for seven years in London, including two years on the West End. Melanie curated the much-lauded live storytelling series NOW HEAR THIS, which she presented on ABC RN for five years.



PRISCILLA JACKMAN | DIRECTOR & DRAMATURG

Priscilla is a director of theatre and opera, whose background in acting has informed her work in both Sydney and the UK. For Ensemble Theatre, Priscilla directed THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE by Melanie Tait. Previously, Priscilla directed the Boatshed's IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST in 2016 and was the inaugural winner of Ensemble's Sandra Bates Directing Award. Priscilla directed the Sydney Theatre Company/National Theatre of Parramatta production of WHITE PEARL by Anchuli Felicia King, which won the Sydney Theatre Award for Best Ensemble. Also for Sydney Theatre Company, Priscilla wrote and directed STILL POINT TURNING: THE CATHERINE MCGREGOR STORY.



FELICITY NICOL | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Felicity Nicol is an award-winning Performance Director and Artistic Director from Sydney, Australia. A directing 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'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 into question.

This has largely influenced her work with young people including Spark Youth Theatre & Australian Theatre for Young People (AUS), Mit Ohne Alles (GER), The Torontonians (CAN) and Company3 (UK).



**VALERIE BADER | BEV ARMSTRONG**

Feature films: WISH YOU WERE HERE, BLACK & WHITE & SEX, RIP TIDE. TV: DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND, DEAD LUCKY, THE LET DOWN, THE CHUCK IN, ALL SAINTS. Valerie was part of the original cast of THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE. Valerie has performed with STC, MTC, Bell Shakespeare, Belvoir, Griffin, Playbox, and Nimrod, garnering Helpmann, Sydney Critics' and Glug award nominations. Theatre includes: CURSED! (Belvoir), JESUS WANTS ME FOR A SUNBEAM (Belvoir & Riverside),

FUNNY GIRL (SSO), THOMAS MURRAY and the UPSIDE DOWN RIVER (Critical Stages), TALK, CHILDREN OF THE SUN (STC), M ROCK (STC/ATYP), AUSTRALIA DAY (MTC), THE FLOATING WORLD (Griffin).

**MERRIDY EASTMAN | BARB LING**

A NIDA graduate, Merridy's television career began with a five-year stint on PLAYSCHOOL, followed by roles on everything from BLUE HEELERS to RAKE, and being a regular cast member on both ALWAYS GREENER and PACKED TO THE RAFTERS for Channel 7. On stage Merridy's worked for all the major theatre companies including Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of SA, Playbox and Ensemble Theatre. Her written work includes plays for ABC Radio, short

stories published by Pan Macmillan and Penguin, and several books published by Allen & Unwin, including national best seller THERE'S A BEAR IN THERE.

**SAPIDAH KIAN | RANIA HAMID**

Sapidah is an actor, director, and dramaturg, working across film, television, theatre and radio. Recent acting credits: THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE (Ensemble Theatre-2019), MERCILESS GODS (Little Ones Theatre/Griffin Theatre Co/Arts Centre Melb) for which she received a Best Performer nomination – Green Room Awards, ALICE FRASER TRILOGY (ABC Radio), THE FIVE PROVOCATIONS (Black Eye Films), TOMORROW WHEN THE WAR BEGAN (ABC TV), PARTISAN (Warp Films), RAKE (ABC

TV). Sapidah is a lecturer in acting and directing at the Victorian College of the Arts/University of Melbourne. She was Director in Residence at Malthouse Theatre in 2017/18 and is currently co-president of the Green Room Awards Association.





AMBER MCMAHON | NIKKI ARMSTRONG

Amber trained at Flinders University Drama Centre, the Stella Adler Company and SIT Company in New York. Best known for her work in theatre, Amber boasts an extensive list of credits including; **BANGING DENMARK**, **ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST** and **THE POPULAR MECHANICALS** for Sydney Theatre Company. **GIRL ASLEEP** and **SCHOOL DANCE** for Windmill. **SMALL MOUTH SOUNDS** for Darlinghurst. **NORTH BY NORTHWEST** for Kay & McLean Productions. **DANCE NATION**, **BLISS**, **ATLANTIS**, **TWELFTH NIGHT** and **ANGELS IN AMERICA** for Belvoir and **PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK** for Malthouse. Amber's screen credits include the feature film **GIRL ASLEEP**, and the SBS mini-series **THE HUNTING**. She received two Helpmann Awards for Best Female in a Supporting Role, one for **GIRL ASLEEP** for Belvoir/Windmill and one for **SCHOOL DANCE** for Windmill.



SHARON MILLERCHIP | PENNY ANDERSON

One of the original cast of **THE APPLETON LADIES' POTATO RACE**, Sharon's other Ensemble Theatre appearances include leading roles in **SHIRLEY VALENTINE**, **BOMBSHELLS**, **A PICASSO** and **LAST OF THE RED HOT LOVERS**. Other theatre credits include leading roles in **FANGIRLS**, **SMALL MOUTH SOUNDS**, **AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS**, **CHICAGO** (both Velma and Roxie), **LOVE NEVER DIES**, **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**, **WEST SIDE STORY**, **SWEET CHARITY**, **PIPPIN**, **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**, **ROCKY HORROR SHOW**, **THEY'RE PLAYING OUR SONG**, **CATS**, **FALSETTOS** and **INTO THE WOODS**. Sharon's outstanding work has been recognised with a swag of nominations and awards, including three Helpmann Awards.



JANE FITZGERALD | DRAMATURG

Jane is Resident Dramaturg at Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP) and was previously Literary Manager at Ensemble (shared role). Recent productions as Dramaturg include **BLACK COCKATOO** and **FULLY COMMITTED** (Ensemble), **THE BIG DRY** (Ensemble/ATYP), **CUSP**, **APRIL AARDVARK** and **BATHORY BEGINS** (ATYP), **LOST BOYS** (Merrigong) and **MROCK** (ATYP/STC). For STC she has been Literary Manager, Artistic Associate 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 worked for 15 years as a Mentor with Year 12 students on HSC creative writing projects.



MICHAEL SCOTT-MITCHELL | SET DESIGNER

For the past three decades Michael Scott-Mitchell has been a formidable force within the performing arts making a major contribution both within Australia and internationally. He has designed an impressive number of highly acclaimed productions. A highly regarded educator, currently Professor of Practice Art and Design UNSW.



GENEVIEVE GRAHAM | COSTUME DESIGNER

Genevieve graduated from The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in 2016 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Design for Performance) followed by a Masters of Fine Arts (Design for Performance) degree in 2017. Since graduating, Genevieve has worked across theatre, film, television and opera. She has costume designed four plays at Ensemble Theatre; DIPLOMACY, THE APPLETON LADIES POTATO RACE, THE LAST FIVE YEARS and MURDER ON THE WIRELESS. In 2017, Genevieve was costume designer for Channel 7's television series DROP DEAD WEIRD, and Australian Brandenburg Orchestra's BITTERSWEET OBSESSIONS. In 2020 she worked in the costume department for Marvel films SHANG-CHI and THOR.



KAREN NORRIS | LIGHTING DESIGNER

Karen Norris has extensive in Theatre/Dance and Music throughout Australia and Europe. Based in London and Nice - 1998 to 2008. Recent designs: TERRAIN, Lore - Bangarra, NAISDA Francis Rings & Sani Ray, SONGS NOT TO DANCE TO & CHAMPIONS Martin del Amo, ON VIEW Sue Healey, CELLA Germany SF 2018 & DANCE MASSIVE 2019 & HIDDING IN PLAIN SIGHT Narelle Benjamin, KOTAHI Atamira Dance Company NZ, BARBARA AND THE CAMP DOGS Belvoir Street, THE LAST FIVE YEARS Ensemble Theatre, BLAK BOX Barangaroo & SF 2019 Melbourne 2020 Urban Theatre, BROKEN GLASS SF 2018 - THE WEEKEND Liza-mare SF2019 - NZ Festival 2019 & RAINBOWS END Liza-mare Syron, PLENTY SERIOUS TALK TALK Vicky van Hout, BLAK DROP EFFECT Bankstown Arts Centre, RED Liz Lea Dance, SILENCE KARUL PROJECTS BLAKDANCE Brisbane Festival 2020, WINYANBOGA YURRINGA & SUNSHINE SUPER GIRL Griffith Theatre Sydney Festival 2021 Andrea James Performing Lines.



TEGAN NICHOLLS | COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Tegan is an award-winning sound designer 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, image-rich soundscapes. Tegan is an Associate Lecturer at the University of Sydney teaching Audio. She has also acted as mentor in Sound Design with NIDA. Tegan has worked with Bell Shakespeare, Darlinghurst Theatre Company, Hayes, NORPA, Redline Productions, Ensemble Theatre, Q Theatre and Sport for Jove. She enjoys making podcasts with Audiocraft.





MARGARET GILL | COSTUME SUPERVISOR

Margaret works in film, theatre and TV as a costume cutter/maker and theatre milliner. Her film credits include THE GREAT GATSBY, LADIES IN BLACK, PETER RABBIT and the recently released I AM WOMAN. Her stage shows include ALADDIN and MY FAIR LADY. Margaret was ladies cutter on OPERATION BUFFALO, ABC 2020 which has recently been nominated for several AACTA awards. Margaret is currently head of headwear on George Miller's new film THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF LONGING starring

Idris Elba and Tilda Swinton. Margaret's most recent play with the Ensemble was MURDER ON THE WIRELESS in 2019 directed by Mark Kilmurry.



LAUREN TULLOH | TOUR STAGE MANAGER

Lauren Tulloh completed a Bachelor of Dramatic Art (Production) NIDA. Ensemble Theatre: OUTDATED, THE LAST WIFE, THE LAST FIVE YEARS, MARJORIE PRIME, THE PLANT, BETRAYAL. Hayes Theatre Company: AMERICAN PSYCHO, HIGH FIDELITY, ASSASSINS, THE FANTASTICKS, VIOLET, CALAMITY JANE also toured to the Comedy Theatre Melbourne, Belvoir St & Regional NSW. National Theatre Of Parramatta: QUEEN FATIMA, THE THINGS I COULD NEVER TELL STEVEN, JESUS WANTS ME FOR A SUNBEAM at Belvoir St. Sydney Opera House: CHARLIE AND LOLA'S EXTREMELY NEW PLAY. Christine Dunstan Productions: THE GRUFFALO, THE GRUFFALO'S CHILD toured Australia & New Zealand. Tall Stories UK: THE GRUFFALO: SONGS FROM THE SHOW in Singapore.



TIM BURNS | TOURING PRODUCTION MANAGER

As a Stage Manager Tim worked on DANCE BETTER AT PARTIES, BOYS WILL BE BOYS, HAMLET: PRINCE OF SKIDMARK, AUSTRALIAN GRAFFITI and numerous WHARF REVUE seasons for STC and THE REMOVALISTS for Critical Stages. As Production Manager Tim worked on HIS MUSIC BURNS and AN INDEX OF METALS for SCO. In addition to working as Production Manager he also served as Tour Manager on national tours for STONES IN HIS POCKETS, HOOTING AND HOWLING and THOMAS MURRAY for

Critical Stages. Tim was Production Supervisor for Critical Stages from 2016 to 2018 and oversaw national tours for numerous shows.



FAYSSAL BAZZI | DIALECT COACH

Fayssal Bazzi is an accomplished Australian actor and dialect coach with extensive acting credits in TV, film and theatre. His tv acting credits include STATELESS, THE COMMONS, CHOSEN, MR INBETWEEN, RAKE, WAKE IN FRIGHT, THE LET DOWN, TOP OF THE LAKE: CHINA GIRL, EAST WEST 101, STUPID STUPID MAN and ALL SAINTS. Fayssal's feature film acting credits include MEASURE FOR MEASURE, the voice role of Mr Todd in the animated feature film PETER RABBIT, THE MERGER, DOWN UNDER, 6 DAYS, EMULSION, WE'RE NOT HERE TO F**K SPIDERS and CEDAR BOYS. Fayssal has also performed extensively with many of the national theatre companies.



2021 TOUR

Riverside Theatres, Parramatta | 5 – 8 May

Dubbo Regional Theatre | 11 May

Glen St Theatre, Belrose | 13 – 16 May

Lighthouse Theatre, Warrnambool | 22 May

Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre | 25 May

Orange Civic Centre | 27 May

Wagga Wagga Civic Centre | 29 May

Tamworth Entertainment Venue | 1 June

Canberra Theatre Centre | 3 – 5 June

Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre | 8 – 9 June

Joan Sutherland PAC, Penrith | 11 – 12 June

Mackay Entertainment & Convention Centre | 17 June

Riverway Arts Centre, Townsville | 19 June



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DRTCC: 155 Darling Street, Dubbo, (02) 6801 4378

Box Office hours Monday - Friday, 9.30am - 4.30pm and one hour prior to the show.

