



MINNIE & LIRAZ

by Lally Katz

MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

Welcome



At the beginning of every play's rehearsal period we feel a great sense of excitement, but never more so than when it's a world premiere of a new Australian work. In the case of *Minnie & Liraz*, it's both a new Australian play and a truly Melbourne story, and I am thrilled that it's Melbourne's audiences who get to see its first presentation in the world.

Minnie & Liraz has humour, honesty, warmth and imagination in spades, taking its audience on a wild and unpredictable ride. So strap yourselves in for some delicious twists and turns! Written by the inimitable Lally Katz and directed by Anne-Louise Sarks, this production brings together a wonderful team of actors and creative artists along with a little slice of Caulfield to MTC's home in the Arts Centre – the Fairfax Studio.

Throughout May, MTC's stages are filled with three brand new Australian plays – *Three Little Words*, *Melbourne Talam* and *Minnie & Liraz*. They are three very different stories, but each a wonderful example of the work of the unique and talented writers we have in this country.

MTC has a long history of working with and supporting local writers and our commitment remains as steadfast as ever. It fills me with immense pride that Melbourne audiences continue to echo this support by being such great advocates for new works, so thank you and I hope you enjoy this world premiere production. See you at the theatre!

Brett Sheehy AO
Artistic Director

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Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand, and we pay our respects to Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors past and present, and to our shared future.

MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne.

MTC is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria.

MTC is a member of Live Performance Australia and the Australian Major Performing Arts Group.



MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

MINNIE & LIRAZ

by Lally Katz

12 MAY – 24 JUNE

Arts Centre Melbourne, Fairfax Studio

♠ **Cast** ♥

Rachel Virginia Gay

Minnie Cohen Nancye Hayes

Liraz Weinberg Sue Jones

Morris Cohen Rhys McConnochie

Norma Georgina Naidu

Ichabod Peter Paltos

♦ **Creative Team** ♣

Director & Dramaturg Anne-Louise Sarks

Set & Costume Designer Mel Page

Design Assistant Matilda Woodroofe

Lighting Designer Matt Scott

Composer & Sound Designer Stefan Gregory

Directorial Secondment Stephanie Ghajar

Fight Choreographer Lyndall Grant

Flute Teacher Kim Tan

Stage Manager Christine Bennett

Assistant Stage Manager Pippa Wright

Stage Management Secondment Will Barker

Rehearsal Photographer Pia Johnson

Production Photographer Jeff Busby

♠ **About the play** ♥

The Autumn Road Retirement Village in Caulfield has a fiercely competitive bridge club, but with old age doing its inevitable work, no bridge partnership lasts for long. When Minnie loses her playing partner in an unfortunate swimming accident, Liraz is desperate for them to team up. You see, Minnie has a granddaughter and Liraz has a grandson. Both are hopelessly single. Laying all her cards on the table, Minnie is bidding hearts.

For information regarding the performance running time
please see a member of the Front of House team.

Minnie & Liraz was commissioned by the Kim Williams Fellowship

Cover photo: Justin Ridler

Playing to win

Bridge is a highly competitive, trick-taking card game that requires two sets of partners to play.



(From left) Nancye Hayes, Sue Jones, Rhys McConnochie with Director Anne-Louise Sarks; Rhys McConnochie and Nancye Hayes

There is a director, a declarer, a dealer, a defender, a dummy, deals, discards and doubletons. This game is not easy to learn, and even harder to master. Bridge requires an excellent grasp on the game's extensive terminology and an aptitude to master strategy with your bridge-playing partner.

Bridge originated in the late 19th century in Russian and Eastern Mediterranean communities. Its name comes from the Old Russian word for 'announcer' or 'biritch' and combines elements of the English card game whist, and the Russian card game eralash.

The oldest rulebook for biritch dates back to 1886, where in Constantinople (current day Istanbul) biritch was the most commonly played game at the time. By 1898 the game was anglicised to 'bridge' and the craze took off in gentleman's clubs all over London, Paris and New York.

Today, the World Bridge Foundation governs international bridge competitions and conducts annual world championships, which see hundreds of competitive players travel from every corner of the globe to compete for international titles. In Australia,

The Gold Coast Congress hosts the biggest and best pairs' contest in the country.

Like many other card games, bridge is a game of skill and chance due to the nature of randomly dealt cards. Alongside chess, however, it is the only game recognised as a 'mind sport' by the International Olympic Committee.

Bridge encompasses bidding, stripping, squeezing, finessing, bonuses (including

a grand slam and small slam), major suits, minor suits, trump suits, final contracts and an extremely convoluted scoring system. It is a game that requires commitment and extensive practice to master.

President of the Victorian Bridge Association Ben Thompson says Victoria is the fastest growing bridge state in Australia with around 5,500 active tournament players across 60 clubs. Of the 4,000 bridge players that live in Melbourne, ▶



(From top) Georgina Naidu, Virginia Gay, Peter Paltos, Rhys McConnochie and Nancye Hayes; Sue Jones; Georgina Naidu; Virginia Gay and Peter Paltos

‘Pre WWII, Melbourne was the strongest bridge hub in Australia and our teams won every pre-war interstate championship. In those days, bridge was enormously popular worldwide. [Scores were published] in all the papers and championship matches were broadcast on radio.’

Ben Thompson, Victorian Bridge Association President

2,500 of them live in the South-Eastern suburbs. Two Jewish brothers, Jessel and Nat Rothfield, were responsible for founding the Australian Bridge Federation in the late 1960s, and greatly contributed to the establishment of a bridge community in their home city Melbourne.

‘In Australia and across a lot of the world, female players are in the clear majority,’ Ben says, ‘In Victoria, about 70% of players are female. Amongst elite players (those that win the big national and international championships), that stat is even more skewed, but the other way – well over 80% of elite players are male. Lots of people have theories on why that’s the case, but they’re all just theories.’

Ben says the vast majority of bridge players fit in the social category of playing, however most elite players start playing by the time they are 20 and spend at least a year of their 20s doing almost nothing but playing bridge.


Local bridge expert and Australia’s Mixed Team Champion Laura Ginnan makes a living as a bridge administrator and teacher and has travelled to America and Europe playing what she describes as the ‘world’s most challenging mental sport’. ‘To become a champion, I would generally say most people who win open level national events have been playing for twenty plus years.’

Laura explains that bridge is one of a few card games where a high level of etiquette is demanded from its players, whereby the laws of Contract Bridge demand players to say, ‘Thank you partner’ at regular intervals and players are expected to conduct themselves in a highly civilised manner at all stages of the game.



Go online to see the gallery of *Minnie & Liraz* rehearsal and production images.
mtc.com.au/backstage





27th July - 5th August 2017
Union Theatre, Union House
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Mirror's Edge

a new play by Kim Ho
directed by Petra Kalive

Chinese tourists revive a dying Mallee town,
drawn to an impossible lake at the edge of
everything. With tenderness and humour,
Mirror's Edge explores the complexities of
cross-cultural encounters.

Developed as part of Cybec Electric & Asiatopa at
Melbourne Theatre Company earlier this year.

Photo by Kevin Su



**UNION
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Lally Katz

Playwright



Lally Katz's plays have been dazzling audiences from Melbourne to Mexico for more than a decade. This American-born, Canberra-raised playwright appears to be unafraid of the

characters and narratives she draws, however attests that she is afraid 'all the time' of how her representations are perceived, especially by those she is writing about.

Lally's style of writing, which centres around who and what she knows, has rewarded her with repeat commissions, multiple awards, and allowed her to make a name for herself as one of Australia's most produced playwrights.

After completing her studies at the Victorian College of the Arts in the late-nineties, Lally co-founded a student theatre company, which was responsible for staging more than 20 independent works. Following this, she joined director Chris Kohn to become the resident writer for Stuck Pigs Squealing, the company that produced her first successes. Lally's play *The Black Swan of Trespass* (2005), co-written with Kohn, won Best Play in the Melbourne Fringe Festival Awards before playing at the New York Fringe Festival, as did her 2004 play *Eisteddfod*.

In 2006, *Lally Katz and the Terrible Mysteries of the Volcano* (Theatreworks) introduced the Apocalypse Bear; a character that would appear repeatedly in Lally's later work. *The Apocalypse Bear Trilogy*, an evolution of several productions,

was developed and presented in 2009 as part of the Melbourne International Arts Festival. 2013 saw Lally's one-woman, self-starring show *Stories I Want to Tell You in Person* premiere at Belvoir before being remounted at Malthouse Theatre and off-Broadway in New York. It was later adapted for TV by ABC and premiered at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

One of Lally's most produced and lauded works *Neighbourhood Watch* was written for Australian actor Robyn Nevin and was first produced at Sydney's Belvoir Theatre in 2011. It was remounted at MTC in 2014 and is currently being adapted for film. *The Cat/The Dog* (a double bill show with Brendan Cowell) premiered at Belvoir in 2015 and is having a return season this year, while *Back at the Dojo* had its world premiere at Belvoir last year. Two new works by Lally, *Atlantis* and *Minnie & Liraz*, will have their world premieres in 2017.

Lally has received many awards and nominations for her work. These include *Neighbourhood Watch* which was nominated for four Sydney Theatre Awards, an AWGIE, a Helpmann Award and a NSW Premier's Literary Award. *Golem Story* and *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd* both won Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and her operatic libretto *The Rabbits* won a 2015 Helpmann Award.



Go online to hear from playwright Lally Katz in our MTC Talks podcast series. www.mtc.com.au/backstage

Cast & Creative Team



VIRGINIA GAY

Rachel

Virginia Gay graduated from WAAPA in 2005, and made her MTC debut in *On the Production of Monsters*. Her other appearances with MTC include *The Beast*, and *Gabies*. She has just completed a sold-out run of *Calamity Jane* at The Hayes Theatre, and prior to that, she spent four years pretending to be a nurse in Channel Seven's *All Saints*, six months pretending to be Julia Gillard in STC's *Wharf Revue*, and five years pretending to know a lot about high finance on *Winners & Losers*. She has worked with the Production Company in *The Producers* and *Jerry's Girls*, makes regular appearances on *First Tuesday Book Club*, and has created three solo cabaret shows – *Dirty Pretty Songs*, *Songs to Self-Destruct To*, and *Cautionary Tales for Children* (this last one with Arena Theatre Company) – which she's performed all over the world, most notably headlining the Famous Spiegeltent at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.



NANCYE HAYES AM

Minnie Cohen

Nancye Hayes has enjoyed a long career on the Australian Stage. Some of her past performing credits include *A Little Night Music*, *My Fair Lady* (Opera Australia); *Chicago*, *Summer Rain* (STC); *Funny Girl*, *Jerry's Girls*, *Grey Gardens*, *Follies*, *Oklahoma*, *The Music Man* (The Production Company); *Importance Of Being Earnest*, *Metro Street* (STCSA); *Annie* (The Gordon Frost Organisation); *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks*, *Turns* (CDP); *Sunday in the Park With George* (Victorian Opera). Nancye's most recent appearance on television was on *House Husbands*. Amongst her awards are a 2012 Helpmann Award for her role in *Grey Gardens*, a 2011 Helpmann JCW Lifetime Achievement Award, a 2009 Helpmann Award for her role in *My Fair Lady*, a 2008 Sydney Theatre Awards Lifetime Achievement Award, a 2003 Green Room Awards Lifetime Achievement Award, a 1981 Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) and in 2014, a Member of the Order of Australia Award (AM).



SUE JONES

Liraz Weinberg

Sue Jones has appeared in a number of productions for MTC including *Other Desert Cities*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, *Don Parties On*, *Death of a Salesman* (Green Room nomination), *Kid Stakes* (Green Room Nomination), *Life After George* (Green Room nomination), *Wet and Dry*, *Some Night in Julia Creek*, and *Macbeth*. For Malthouse/Playbox, she was seen in *Butterflies of Kalamatan*, *Ibsen-The Greatest Man on Earth*, *God's Last Acre*, *The Frail Man*, and *Night on Bald Mountain*. At La Mama, *Save Suvla Street*, *Ravages*, *Obsessive Behaviour in Small Spaces*, *No Worries*, *How Are You Feeling*, *Pieties*, and *Shadowlands*. At the Stage Company in Adelaide, *Sorry Sold Out*, *A Night in the Arms of Raeleen*, *The Perfectionist*, and *Travelling North*, and at Monash University, *The Seagull* and *The One Day of the Year*. Most recently on television she was seen in *The Time of our Lives*, and *Upper Middle Bogan*.

Cast & Creative Team



RHYS McCONNOCHIE

Morris Cohen

Rhys McConnochie last appeared with Melbourne Theatre Company in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and before that in *The History Boys*, *King Lear*, *Inheritance*, *The Seagull* (for which he won a Green Room Award), *Death of a Salesman*, *Life After George*, *Misalliance*, and *Molly Sweeney*. For STC he played in *Dance of Death*, *Heartbreak*, *House*, *Amadeus*, *Measure For Measure*, and *A Dream Play*. Other credits include: *My Fair Lady* (Opera Australia); *Camelot* and *Kismet* (Production Company); *Therese Raquin* (Theatreworks); and *Spring Awakening*, *Do Not Go Gentle* and recently *Wit* at 45 Downstairs. He worked for a number of companies in England including Royal Shakespeare Company, The Old Vic, and many more. He appeared in an early episode of *Doctor Who* and was seen twice in *Coronation St*. His Australian TV credits include *Bodyline*, *Brides of Christ*, *Come in Spinner*, *Mother and Son*, *Stingers*, *City Homicide*, and *Magazine Wars*. He has been involved in actor training for many years and has worked at NIDA, VCA and WAAPA where he was Head of the Acting Course for several years.



GEORGINA NAIDU

Norma

Georgina Naidu is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts and was most recently seen in the Cybec Electric readings for MTC. Other theatre credits include *Ganesh Versus the Third Reich*, *Yet to Ascertain the Nature of the Crime*, *Attract Repel*, *Fearless N*, *The Habib Show*, *Macbeth*, *Run Rabbit Run*, *The Book Keeper* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In 2005 Georgina's play *Yellowfeather* had its world premiere at the Sydney Opera House before touring nationally and internationally. Georgina has most recently been seen on the ABC's new drama *Newton's Law* playing the role of Helena Chatterjee. She has appeared on numerous television series including *Offspring*, *At Home with Julia*, *Please Like Me*, *Wentworth*, *The Beautiful Lie*, *Winners & Losers*, *Mr & Mrs Murder*, *Time of Our Lives*, *City Homicide*, *Satisfaction*, *Tripping Over* and *Seachange*. Her film credits include *Ali's Wedding*, *Vessel*, *The Boys are Back in Town*, *Playing for Charlie*, *Mall Boy*, *Dead Letter Office* and *Road to Nhill*. Georgina dedicates her performance to her mother Josephine Naidu.



PETER PALTOS

Ichabod

Peter Paltos makes his mainstage Melbourne Theatre Company debut playing Ichabod in *Minnie & Liraz*. Peter's prior theatre credits include *The Sovereign Wife* (Sisters Grimm – Melbourne Theatre Company NEON); *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (TheatreWorks); *Calpurnia Descending* (Malthouse Theatre/Sydney Theatre Company); *Psycho Beach Party* (Little Ones Theatre); *Summertime in the Garden of Eden* (Sisters Grimm/Griffin Theatre/TheatreWorks); *Salomé* (Little Ones Theatre – Malthouse HELIUM). Peter is a graduate of 16th Street Actors Studios and the Victorian College of the Arts.

Cast & Creative Team



ANNE-LOUISE SARKS

Director

Anne-Louise Sarks returns to Melbourne Theatre Company to direct *Minnie & Liraz* after her debut role with the company in Lally Katz's 2011 play *Return to Earth*, and her production of *The Seed* by Kate Mulvany in 2011. For Belvoir, Anne-Louise has directed *Jasper Jones*, *Seventeen* and *Stories I Want To Tell You In Person*; she directed and co-wrote *Elektra/Orestes*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Nora* and *Medea*. In 2015 Anne-Louise directed a new production of hers and co-writer Kate Mulvany's modern day imagining of *Medea* at The Gate Theatre in London to critical acclaim. *Medea* won five 2013 Sydney Theatre Awards including Best Direction, Best Mainstage Production and Best New Australian Work. It was also awarded an AWGIE for Best Stage Play and nominated for four 2013 Helpmann Awards. Earlier this year Anne-Louise directed *Seventeen* for The Lyric Hammersmith in London, 2017 will also see her directing *The Merchant of Venice* for Bell Shakespeare and *The Testament of Mary* for Malthouse Theatre.



MEL PAGE

Set & Costume Designer

Mel Page is a set and costume designer for theatre and film. Her designs for *Minnie & Liraz* follow her work on the acclaimed productions of *Jasper Jones* and *Back at the Dojo*, both for Belvoir. Mel has just returned from Europe where she designed costumes for *Pelleas and Melisande* at the Norwegian National Opera, *Die Tote Stadt* for Basel Opera, and *Three Sisters* and *Angels in America* for Basel Theatre. In 2015, Mel designed the costumes for Belvoir's productions of *Ivanov*, *Kill the Messenger*, *Seventeen* and *Elektra/Orestes*. Mel also designed the costumes for *Glass Menagerie*, at Malthouse and Belvoir, and *Depth of Field* for Chunky Move. Mel designed the set and costumes for *Night Maybe*, at Theatreworks, *Small & Tired* and the highly acclaimed production of *Medea* at Belvoir, as well as costumes for *Complexity of Belonging* Chunky Move, *The Government Inspector*, *Pompeii L.A.* and *Baal* for Malthouse Theatre and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Pygmalion* and *Vs. Macbeth* for STC. In 2016 Mel was the proud recipient of the George Fairfax Memorial Award.



MATT SCOTT

Lighting Designer

Matt has lit more than fifty MTC productions, including *Born Yesterday*, *The Odd Couple*, *Jasper Jones*, *Skylight*, *The Last Man Standing*, *The Weir*, *Jumpy*, *The Mountaintop*, *Elling*, *His Girl Friday*, *Red*, *The Seed*, *Tribes*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Clybourne Park*, *Next to Normal*, *A Behanding in Spokane*, *Life Without Me*, *Boston Marriage*, *The Ugly One*, *The Grenade*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Blackbird*, *The Birthday Party*, *August: Osage County*, and *Realism*. His most recent other work includes *Once in Royal David's City* for Queensland Theatre/Black Swan; *Angels in America Pt 1* for Black Swan; *The Pearlfishers*, and *The Marriage of Figaro* for Opera Australia; *Aida* for Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour/Opera Australia; *Jasper Jones* for Belvoir; and *The Riders* for West Australian Opera. Matt has received and been nominated for numerous awards, including a 2016 Green Room Award for *The Pearlfishers* (Opera Australia), 2005 Helpmann Award for his lighting on *Urinetown* (MTC), and a 2003 Helpmann Award for *The Blue Room* (MTC).



STEFAN GREGORY

Composer & Sound Designer

Stefan returns to MTC having previously worked on *The Cherry Orchard*. Other theatre credits include *Ibsen Huis*, *Husbands and Wives*, *Medea* (Toneelgroep Amsterdam), *Yerma* (The Young Vic), *Drei Schwestern*, *Engel in Amerika* (Theater Basel), *The Present* (Broadway/STC), *The Wild Duck*, *Thyestes*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Elektra/Orestes*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Government Inspector*, *Hamlet*, *Forget Me Not*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Peter Pan*, *Private Lives*, *Medea*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Old Man*, *Strange Interlude*, *B Street*, *As You Like It*, *The Seagull*, *Measure for Measure* and *That Face* (Belvoir); *King Lear*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Face to Face*, *Dance Better at Parties*, *Baal*, *The War of the Roses* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Rocco und Seine Brüder* (Münchner Kammerspiel). His other compositions include *Puncture* (Sydney Philharmonia Choirs/Legs On The Wall), *Symphony* (Sydney Festival/Legs on the Wall); *L'Chaim!* (Sydney Dance Company); *There Is Definitely a Prince Involved* (The Australian Ballet). Stefan was a band member of Faker until 2008 and was awarded a Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship in 2014.

— A Glossary of Bridge Terms —

Bid: An action taken in the auction including pass, double, redouble and no trump or suit bids.

Dealer: The person who is marked as dealer on a board, or the person who shuffled and dealt a hand.

Defender: A player in the partnership who did not win the contract.

Declarer: Of the partnership that won the auction the person who bid the suit or no trumps first that was the final contract.

Discard: Playing a card of a different suit to the one that is lead because you do not have any left to follow with.

Doubleton: A suit in which you are dealt two cards after the lead.

Dummy: The partner of declarer that places their hand face up on the table.

Finesse: A card play technique which will enable a player to win an additional trick or tricks should there be a favourable position of one or more cards in the hands of the opponents.

Honours: Cards that are aces, kings, queens or jacks (knaves).

Major Suit: Spades and Hearts.

Minor Suit: Clubs and Diamonds.

Trick: When every player at the table has contributed one card face up in a clockwise direction from the leader.

Unbalanced hand: A hand that contains a void, singleton or more than one doubleton.

MTC would like to acknowledge the help of the following bridge consultants: Laura Ginnan, and Ian and Sandra Mansell. Bridge terms and historical references come from the Victorian Bridge Association www.vba.asn.au



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