

SEYMOUR CENTRE & THE
BIG ANXIETY – FESTIVAL OF
ARTS+SCIENCE+PEOPLE
PRESENT

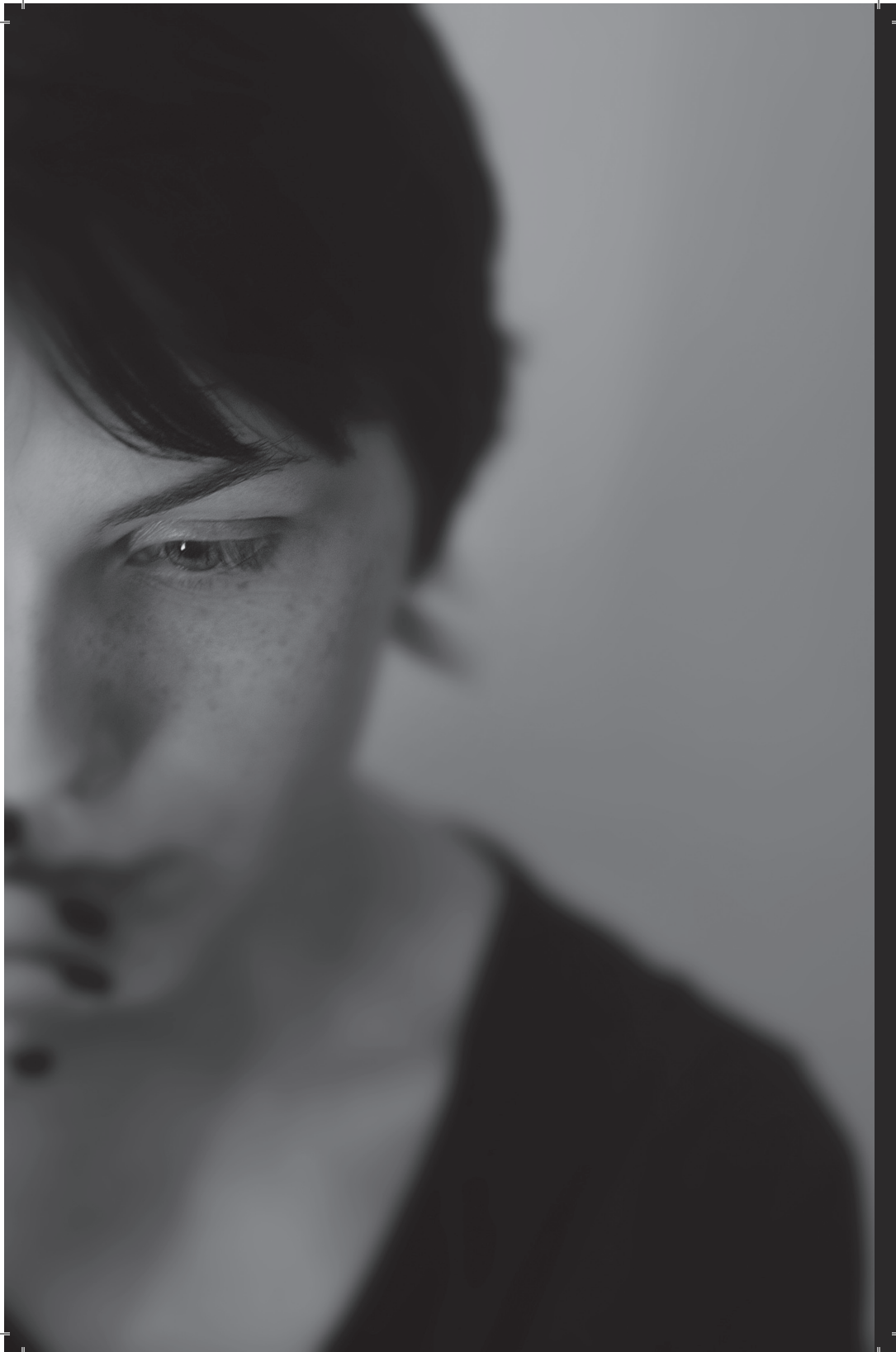
GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

by David Williams & Paul Dwyer
in collaboration with the Sydney Arts & Health Collective

SEYMOUR
GREAT IDEAS



**THE
BIG
ANXIETY**
festival of
arts + science
+ people



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Seymour Centre
25 – 28 OCT

Performers RENEE LIM, ROSE MAHER, SAL SHARAH
& WENDY STREHLOW

Director DAVID WILLIAMS

Dramaturg PAUL DWYER

Lighting Designer RICHARD MANNER

Sound Designer GAIL PRIEST

Set & Costume Designer ISABEL HUDSON

Production Manager EMMA BEDFORD

Stage Manager PATRICK HOWARD

Producer DAVID WILLIAMS (for Seymour Centre)

Grace Under Pressure has been co-commissioned by Seymour Centre and The Big Anxiety, and developed with the support of the Department of Performance Studies, University of Sydney. The Big Anxiety has been assisted by the Australian government through the Department of Communication and the Arts' Catalyst—Australian Arts and Culture Fund.

FOREWORD

How did we start a project to counteract bullying in healthcare workplaces and end up with a piece of theatre? I blame the Internet and Augusto Boal.

Medical education can be a very dry place ... a litany of scientific facts and figures that need to be learned by rote and regurgitated on demand. But apart from the so-called 'hard sciences' of physiology, anatomy and clinical studies, there is also the need to acquire knowledge that is all too often given the somewhat derogatory title of 'soft science'. And so I find myself trying to enthuse cohort after cohort of eager young clinicians on the necessity of topics like communication, ethics, cultural diversity and the negative impact of minority stress on health outcomes.

What now seems like an age ago in early 2015, I started writing about my distress at the continuing deaths of young doctors and medical students who succumbed to the stresses of the profession. But that journey for me had really started on the first day of medical school, as it has done for so many other doctors before and since.

"No doctor ever forgets the excruciating fear of that first day, first week, on the job. Tragically, for some, the fear doesn't go away. In the nearly forty years since I started medical school, I have known of a number of suicides of colleagues and friends. [These] are simply the tip of an iceberg buoyed by the many that tried and failed, thought about it and changed their minds, numbed their pain with drugs and alcohol, or walked away from the profession completely in order to keep body and soul together. [...] Simply asking the questions, "So why didn't they get help?" or "why wasn't help provided?" ignores the very significant determinants of psychological distress in the medical community and the barriers to accessing care."

Kimberley Ivory, 'A call for medicine to stop devouring its young', [https://blogs.crikey.com.](https://blogs.crikey.com.au/croakey/2015/02/06/a-call-for-medicine-to-stop-devouring-its-young/)

[au/croakey/2015/02/06/a-call-for-medicine-to-stop-devouring-its-young/](https://blogs.crikey.com.au/croakey/2015/02/06/a-call-for-medicine-to-stop-devouring-its-young/)

We speak colloquially of health as the "caring" professions, yet there is ample evidence of the damage that doctors and nurses do to one another. Bullying, harassment and "teaching by humiliation" (Scott, Caldwell et al. 2015) are a common experience in hospitals, particularly for students and junior staff. Rates of clinical depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviours among this population are twice the national average. (BeyondBlue 2013)

Looking at that data from Beyond Blue, it quickly became clear that the same identities that commonly experience marginalization in the wider community also suffer in medicine: women and the young, Indigenous students of those from a different ethnicity, and students who have a mental health condition. These same groups are also the ones most likely to report experiences of bullying and harassment in medicine. (Fnais, Soobiah et al. 2014) The story is repeated across disciplines. Dentists, nurses, pharmacist and physiotherapists also report similar grievances from similar demographics, suggesting that complex cultural factors contribute to how abuse is perpetuated within the healthcare workplace. (Rees, Monrouxe et al. 2015)

In reality, this should not be surprising. On one level, it merely indicates that health workers are human. Health is not unique. Discrimination, bullying and harassment sadly occur in every workplace. When we started this project we had vets and lawyers keen to sign on. The theory behind why marginalized people have poorer mental health outcomes is that social exclusion – lack of social connectedness – the product of stigma and discrimination, is a negative social determinant of health that leads to mental distress, substance abuse, reduced access to health care and poorer health outcomes.

So the question was not really 'how' this had become a feature of healthcare culture, but rather, 'what' could be done about it? One of the advantages of working in a major

university is the access it provides to experts in just about anything you can imagine. In earlier attempts to find creative ways to get my students to appreciate the role of diversity and minority stress on health, I had searched the university intranet for someone with an interest in using applied theatre in medical education. I struck gold. I found Dr Paul Dwyer, then chair of the department of Performance Studies. Paul had written his PhD on Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed and is an expert in reparative theatre. To top it off he is almost the sole non-health professional in his entire extended family. For a lay person, he has a unique understanding of medical culture and what it means to be a doctor.

It seemed like a kind of victim blaming to try to tackle the culture of bullying and harassment in healthcare, simply by teaching our students to be more resilient, as many earlier programs had attempted. Instead, we sought an approach that would encourage and reinforce positive behaviours from all involved and ultimately result in generational change. Having successfully collaborated with Paul in 2012 (Ivory, Dwyer et al. 2016) and having witnessed the impact of forum theatre on medical student's ability to better hear and understand the patient's story, it seemed only logical to call on him and Augusto again to see what theatre could offer those distressed and wounded by a brutal system.

The result was the pilot series of interactive theatre skills workshops given the working title, *Grace under Pressure*, and the birth of the Sydney Arts and Health Collective (SAHC) with founding members from different schools across Sydney University: Dr Claire Hooker and Associate Professor Paul MacNeill (Sydney Health Ethics), Dr Jo River (Nursing), Dr Karen Scott (Medical Education), Dr Paul Dwyer (Performance Studies), Associate Professor Louise Nash (Brain and Mind Centre) and Dr Kimberley Ivory (Sydney Public Health). The workshops' theatre techniques included Boal's image theatre exercises in which theatrical debate allows participants to

observe, comment on and intervene in scenarios that dramatize oppressive social situations, examining the scope for individual or collective action. Boal's intent for his theatre of the oppressed was to free the audience from the traditional constraints or oppression of the theatre itself and turn them into spect-actors, employing the pedagogical theories of Paulo Freire that see education as a means of consciously shaping the person and the society. The initial workshops were trialed on medical students, (Scott, Berlec et al. 2016) then rolled out to hospital doctors and other staff in urban and rural settings, eventually being taken up interstate and showcased at a range of local and international conferences.

Since the first days of this project, we received stories from students, doctors, nurses and their families about terrible experiences in healthcare settings. We felt an over-riding need to do justice to these stories, the trust their authors showed in us and their hopes that things would improve for others. "Verbatim theatre" grew in our thinking as our next step for a catalyst to promote culture change.

A chat with theatre director David Williams and a small grant round allowed us to propose an entirely new project investigating the challenges that clinical students, junior staff face in their training and professional identity formation using verbatim theatre. Further grants came from The Big Anxiety Festival (UNSW), Sydney Public Health, an Education Innovation grant from Sydney University and support from the Seymour Centre.

Verbatim theatre is a research and performance methodology that uses phenomenological, observational and interview data to create a play, often in collaboration with its research subjects. The performance then prompts discussion and engagement with its various audiences. Building on the stories we already had, we interviewed almost 30 people working across the breadth of health care: eg students, junior and senior doctors,

junior and senior nurses, paramedic and administration in order to explore in depth questions about how healthcare workers experience, survive, challenge, disrupt, build resilience to and survive the bullying, harassment and discrimination that our earlier research identified as rife within the hierarchical work cultures of health.

David and Paul wrestled those transcribed interviews into a very powerful, engaging piece of theatre about health workplace training and culture. They spent hours pouring over press clippings, articles and blogs about the experiences of both nurses and doctors to also discover the internecine violence in healthcare extended to violence from patients and patients' families towards nurses and doctors. Who cares for the carers?

The resulting performance is also part of a larger, continuing research project further exploring positive ways to counter many of the negative impacts on the health and well-being of trainees. Transforming interview data into a theatre piece adds a new level of analysis, one that explores how people *enact* their roles and *perform* their identities, modulating performance and presentation to those they 'play' to and against. By re-presenting and exploring the dimensions of the data, the play and its performance, too, constitute new modes of analysis.

Our interviewees shared accounts of behaviours and situations that were experienced as disturbing, disquieting, unprofessional, upsetting, abusive and the like. Every interviewee had their share of "war stories" to tell, so we tried to select those we hoped would connect most immediately with a general public audience and make clear the broader systemic issues highlighted by these individual stories. And, yes, we also included some of the many expressions of joy and humour that percolated through the interviews. As much as the interviews highlighted problems in the culture of health workplaces, they also revealed, over and over again, the satisfaction that health workers find when they are supported to provide quality care for their patients — and for their peers.

Try as we might to come up with a new, dynamic title for this unique work, *Grace Under Pressure* stuck, and the show premiered at the Seymour Centre in Sydney as part of the Big Anxiety Festival in October 2017. But the title was fitting because we not only came away from these interviews with a sense of urgency about the need for culture reform, but also a sense of wonder for the skills and, yes, grace that health workers bring to their job. We think that is what our audiences experienced too. *Grace Under Pressure* helped to open a critical space for conversation about these often-taboo issues, and is an important public intervention into medical culture, as well as a compelling, confronting, hopeful and deeply moving work of theatre.

Kimberley Ivory
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE: THE POWER OF CREATIVE ARTS IN HEALTH

The creative arts are beginning to change, not just the face, but the soul of health care. Improving wellbeing through creativity is not new, but it has newly become prominent. Australians are beginning to see the transformations that taking dancing and community art-making into nursing homes, music into rehabilitation centres, drumming into schools, and experimental performance into the public arena can bring.

It's not hard to see why. Artwork of all genres give us so much more insight into the multiple, fragile and frangible dimensions of people's experience; and these understandings generate processes of compassion and empathy. For this reason, visual and expressive works produced by patients have long been valued as a way for doctors to see beyond the breakdown of body parts, and get a sense of the patient's experience of illness.

In *Grace Under Pressure*, the tables are turned. The public is, for once, invited to understand the experiences of doctors and nurses. And this takes some courage. Culturally, we do not want nurses and doctors to be imperfect. Patients, suddenly vulnerable and frightened, carers bewildered and angered by opaque health care systems, want their clinicians to be invincible. As the play reveals, the culture of medicine (not always nursing) can enforce standards of perfection with harsh and punitive norms and practices. *Grace Under Pressure* asks the public to 'hold space' for nurses and doctors and look with empathy at their suffering and stumbling.

Art makes ethical demands of its audiences – and does not foreclose their responses, an absence of didacticism that gives moral issues more poignancy. *Grace Under Pressure* does not merely invite sympathy over the demands that clinical training places on student doctors or the humiliations that result from loud and public criticism by senior clinicians. It begs uncomfortable questions about what price the public is happy to pay for pressures placed on health care systems that are intended to care for them. It asks us to consider what emotional generosity the act – and we mean *act* – of caring demands, and what caring for our carers might require. It presses upon us the questions, where is the pressure in this system? And where and how is there grace – by which we mean graciousness, compassion, the enacting of care – that is the core of health care?

Verbatim theatre quite explicitly belongs to theatre traditions that have the ethics of witnessing and the aim of engendering social change at their core. *Grace Under Pressure* was conceived in part as a means of starting public conversations about our precious, fragile, costly, and too often taken-for-granted health system. Public services are as critical to civil society, just as conversations are critical to democratic ones. *Grace Under Pressure* is inflected with hope and disappointment and pain, just as so many illness journeys also are. But those are reasons to change and treat and heal, and for communal discussions about the kinds of health care systems and cultures that we want, to take place for the sake of us all.

Claire Hooker

Sydney Arts and Health Collective

BIOGRAPHIES



DAVID WILLIAMS Co-Writer/Director/Producer

David is a leading Australian theatre artist whose productions open spaces for public conversation about political and social issues. He was the Curator of ATF 2015: MAKING IT, and has worked for 20 years as a director, writer, producer, dramaturg, and performer with companies across Australia. David was the founder and artistic leader of the performance group version 1.0, and co-created and produced all of the company's work from 1998-2012. He holds a PhD from UNSW, and is currently the Producer/Programmer at the Seymour Centre.

Under the banner DW Projects, David Williams creates theatre works of social relevance, aesthetic rigour and emotional impact from research, interviews, transcripts and public documents. Current and upcoming DW Projects include: *Quiet Faith* (national tour April-July 2018), *Smurf In Wonderland* (National Theatre of Parramatta & Griffin Theatre Company) and *Grace Under Pressure* (Seymour Centre & The Big Anxiety).



PAUL DWYER Co-Writer/ Dramaturg

Paul is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney. He has published widely on applied theatre, in particular the work of Augusto Boal, and is currently completing a monograph on discourse and performance in restorative justice conferencing. Paul is also a performance maker with extensive professional experience in documentary theatre, including THE BOUGAINVILLE PHOTOPLAY PROJECT, which toured throughout Australia and won a Melbourne Green Room Award, and BEAUTIFUL ONE DAY, a collaboration with Ilbijerri Theatre, Belvoir St Theatre, version 1.0 and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Palm Island.



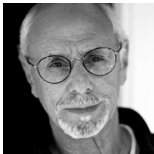
RENEE LIM Performer

Renee Lim is a performer, educator and medical doctor. In addition to her appearances on Australian TV shows like *Pulse*, *Ask The Doctors*, *East West 101* and *Please Like Me*, and theatre works like *His Mothers Voice* and *Coup De'Tat*, Renee works as the Director of Program Development at the Pam McLean Centre (a centre designed to improve communication in the medical sector) as well as the University of Sydney and UNSW. She is also a locum doctor in Emergency and Geriatrics Departments across NSW, and works in Educational technology and research. She is very excited to be a part of such an important project, as she is focused on well-being and mental health in all her work, including the platform, nayinthelife.com, a collaboration with writer, Clare Hennessy



ROSE MAHER Performer

Rose Maher is a graduate of the University of Wollongong with Honours in Creative Arts, Performance (2013). Rose has also trained with the Shakespeare & Company in Lennox, Massachusetts and will return to complete teacher training in January 2018. Currently a teaching artist with the Faculty of the Arts, English and Media at the University of Wollongong, Rose also works as a children's entertainer with the Starlight Children's Foundation. Her theatre credits include *thirty-three*, *Cathode Ray Tube* 2016; *GodFace*, Matriark Puppet Theatre 2015; *Erase*, Shopfront Theatre, *Electra*, No White Elephant, both 2013; and with the University of Wollongong *Far Away*, *Loveplay*, *The Love of a Nightgale*, *Pre-paradise Sorry Now*, *As I Lay Dreaming*, *Attempts on Her Life* and *The Country*. Film credits include *thirty-three* and *Red Slumber* both with Cathode Ray Tube. Rose is a mean recycler, a mother of succulents and member of the MEAA.



SAL SHARAH Performer

Sal was most recently seen in *Where the Streets Had a Name* for Monkey Baa, *The Incredible Here and Now* for National Theatre of Parramatta and *Hakawati* for National Theatre of Parramatta/Sydney Festival. Other theatre credits include *Jump for Jordan* (Griffin); *Miss Julie*, *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Belvoir); *Felliniada* (Belvoir/Auto de Fe); *Salome* (Crossroads); *My Son the Lawyer is Drowning* (Ensemble Theatre); *Alex & Eve* (Bulldog Theatre Company); His musical theatre highlights include the original Australian productions of *Grease*, *Godspell*, *The Rocky Horror Show* and Reg Livermore's *Ned Kelly* as well as roles in *My Fair Lady*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Great Expectations* and *The Gambler*. Television includes *The Code*, *Rake*, *East West 101*, *All Saints*, *Wild Side*, *GP*, *Heartbreak High* and *Restless Years*. Films include *The River*, *Alex & Eve*, *The Boys*, *Chain Reaction*, *Hostage* and *The Custodian*.



WENDY STREHLOW Performer

Since graduating from NIDA, Wendy gained the role of 'Sister Judy Loveday' in *A Country Practice*, for which she also won a Logie Award for Best Supporting Actress. Wendy has extensive television credits, including *McLeod's Daughters*, *All Saints*, *Blue Heelers*, *Halifax f.p.*, *The Saddle Club* and *Home and Away*. Her screen credits include *Dalkeith*, *Dead End*, *Act of Necessity* and *Hoodwink*. Her theatre credits include: *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Crucible* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Sport for Jove; *Machinal* for Sydney Theatre Company; *Travesties*, *Broken Glass*, *The Norman Conquests* and *Clyborne Park* for the Ensemble Theatre; *Henry IV* and *Taming of the Shrew* for Bell Shakespeare; *Bang for B Sharp*, *Hysteria* for Darlinghurst Theatre Company. Wendy's performance with Tamarama Rock Surfer's *I Want to Sleep With Tom Stoppard* garnered nominations for a Sydney Theatre Award and a Glug Award.



RICHARD MANNER Lighting Designer

Richard is a lighting and AV designer, production manager and IT specialist. He is a past student of the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW (1991), and since then has worked with a range of independent artists and companies. He has held roles at PACT Centre for Emerging Artists, and was Performance Space's Technical Manager from 1999-2011. He is presently the Technical Director at the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at Sydney University, a position he has held since 2012. At Performance Space, Richard managed the technical aspects over 400 events across visual arts, performance, dance and technology-based practice. He was AV Designer and Operator for version 1.0's national Mobile States tour *The Bougainville Photoplay Project* which was presented at PICA, Brisbane Powerhouse, and Artshouse in 2010, and was also lighting designer for *The Piper* by My Darling Patricia for Sydney Festival (2014).



GAIL PRIEST Sound Designer

Gail is a Sydney-based artist with a multi-faceted practice in which sound is the key material of communication and investigation. Originally trained in theatre she has worked as a sound designer/composer for performance collaborating with independent directors and choreographers such as Martin del Amo, Jane McKernan, David Williams and Andrea James. She has exhibited her own sound-based installation work nationally and internationally, most recently as part of *Experimenta Make Sense*, Melbourne and national tour, ISEA2016 Hong Kong, Werkleitz Festival Germany and at UTS Gallery, Sydney in an exhibition she also curated. She has released several albums of exploratory music through her own label Metal Bitch as well as Flaming Pines and Endgame records. She writes extensively about sound and media arts, in particular for *RealTime* magazine, as well as being the editor of *Experimental Music: audio explorations in Australia* through UNSW Press (2009). She was the 2015/2016 Australia Council Emerging and Experimental Arts Fellow.



ISABEL HUDSON Set & Costume Designer

Isabel is a Sydney-based production designer and graduate of the NIDA design course (2015) and holds a Bachelor of Arts (Screen and Sound) from UNSW (2012). Isabel was awarded the William Fletcher Foundation Tertiary Grant for emerging artists in 2015. Recently, Isabel has designed Set and Costumes for: *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Sport for Jove),

I love you now (Darlinghurst Theatre Company), *The Plant* (Ensemble Theatre Company), *The Merry Widow* (Opera Australia – Assistant Set Designer to Michael Scott Mitchell), *Intersections* (ATYP), *The Shadowbox*, *Hurt* and *Blackrock* (White Box Productions), *The Block Universe* and *Journeys End* (Cross Pollinate), *The Chamber Pot Opera* (Bontom; Sydney, Adelaide and Edinburgh seasons), *Slut* (Festival Fatale), and worked as an associate on Opera Australia's *My Fair Lady*. In 2015 Isabel designed *A Dream Play* directed by Kim Carpenter, *Top Girls* directed by Susanna Dowling, *Love and Honour* and *Pride and Pity and Compassion and Sacrifice*, directed by Priscilla Jackman.

EMMA BEDFORD Production Manager

Emma Bedford is committed to the diverse, eclectic world of live entertainment. Emma has extensive experience in production management and as a professional audio describer. In recent years Emma has worked for Performance Space, Sydney Festival, version 1.0, WOMADelaide, Vitalstatistix and Adelaide Fringe. She currently works as the Operations Manager for Erth Visual and Physical.



PATRICK HOWARD Stage Manager

Patrick is a freelance theatre artist with a passion for political, devised, queer and documentary theatre. Graduating from AIM Dramatic Arts (formerly AADA) in 2014, he has directed, dramaturged, production and stage managed and sound designed for a number of companies. Notable production credits include *Tribunal* (PYT Fairfield); *Jump First, Ask Later* (PYT

Fairfield & Force Majeure); *Business Unfinished* (Tom Christophersen Creates); *Blonde Poison* (Strange Duck Productions, Sydney Opera House, Melbourne Theatre Company); *5 Guys Chillin'*, *That Eye The Sky*, *When the Rain Stops Falling*, *The School for Scandal* (New Theatre); *Babes in the Woods*, *Low Level Panic*, *The Whale*, *Masterclass 2*, *Debris* (Red Line Productions) and *Blink* (Stories Like These). His credits as an actor include *Marat/Sade*, *Mother Clap's Molly House* (New Theatre); *Tender Indifference*, *Götterdämmerung* (Arrive. Devise. Repeat.) and *Blackrock* (Pilgrim Theatre). Patrick is a founding member of theatre collective Arrive. Devise. Repeat., a play assessor for New Theatre, holds an Honours degree from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and is a proud member of MEAA Equity.

***Grace Under Pressure*
is a verbatim theatre
project about the
workplace and training
cultures that are
making young health
professionals sick**

Acclaimed verbatim theatre makers David Williams and Paul Dwyer, in collaboration with the Sydney Arts and Health Collective, have developed *Grace Under Pressure* from interviews with doctors and nurses at various stages of their careers. *Grace Under Pressure* will open a critical space for conversation about these often taboo issues, and will be an important public intervention into medical culture, as well as a compelling, confronting, hopeful and deeply moving work of theatre.

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