

THE
STREET



THE STORY OF THE OARS

BY NIGEL FEATHERSTONE
MUSIC BY JAY CAMERON

Supported by



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19 — 21
SEP '25



THE STORY OF THE OARS

BY NIGEL FEATHERSTONE

MUSIC BY JAY CAMERON

Inspired by song sketches of Nigel Featherstone

WORLD PREMIERE SEASON AT THE STREET THEATRE
CANBERRA 19 – 21 SEPTEMBER 2025
NGUNNAWAL AND NGAMBRI COUNTRY

Something hidden can't remain hidden for ever.

CAST

Craig Alexander
Henry 'Clocker' Bell

Louise Bennet
Gail Goodchild

Sally Marett
Pierra Caproni

Callum Doherty
Tom Bell

Jay Cameron
on piano

CREATIVE TEAM

Playwright
Nigel Featherstone

Composer
Inspired by song sketches
of Nigel Featherstone
Jay Cameron

Music Director
Jay Cameron

Director
Shelly Higgs

Scenic and
Lighting Design
Veronique Benett

Costume Design
Leah Ridley

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Management
Neil Simpson
Caroline Stacey OAM

Lighting Operator
Connor McKay

Sound Engineer
Kimmo Vennonen

Stage Technicians
Emma Burrows
Tim Levy
Connor McKay
Brendan Podger
Neil Simpson

Publicity
Su Hodge

Poster Artwork
Tobi Skerra

Production
Photography
Nathan Smith Photography
Canberrastreet

Videography
Craig Alexander
and **Shelly Higgs**

SYNOPSIS

Somewhere on the east coast of Australia, summer: five teenagers – three brothers and two female friends – go for a sail on a famous disappearing lake but only one comes home; no bodies are found.

Thirty years later, with the lake now dry, Clocker and his son Tom make a visit. But when two lakeside residents appear, they are embroiled in an unimaginable commemoration – and unburden themselves of the truth.

SETTING

Somewhere in eastern Australia: an inland lake many square kilometres in size.



WRITER'S NOTE

I first came up with the idea for *The Story of the Oars* in 2019 while attending a week-long musical theatre masterclass led by New York-based David Sisco at The Street Theatre as organised by Dianna Nixon – I'd written the story and libretto for *The Weight of Light* (commissioned by the Hume Conservatorium and developed and premiered by The Street Theatre) and wanted to again write for the stage.

Specifically, I wanted to continue to explore new ways that narrative and music could be brought together. In terms of theme, I wanted to investigate Australia's propensity to tell untruths about its history, about its current challenges, really about anything at all about the national project. However, I also wanted to explore this theme through living and breathing characters, all of whom have their wants, needs, and yearnings. For Clocker, Tom, Piera and Gail, what are the costs of starting to tell the truth? An element that became critical for this work was making sure the place of the story, especially the lake, became a character with its own agency and desires.

It has taken six years, with incredible support from The Street Theatre, significant funding from artsACT and Create NSW, and much-valued input from a wide range of highly skilled theatre artists through a series of developments, to reach the point where *The Story of the Oars* is ready for the stage. It has been an exhilarating and, at times, challenging process – questioning form and the point of a nation like Australia asks a lot of all those involved. As an artist, I've always wanted to make work that on one level is entertainment, but on another level has political intent. I have also always wanted to make work that moves people. I'm so thrilled with what the team has achieved, and it's been an honour to be a part of such an extraordinary company

Nigel Featherstone
September 2025, Gundangara, Ngannawal and Ngambri Country

COMPOSER'S NOTE

The music for *The Story of the Oars* has been on a journey as transformative as the play itself. The compositional process has been one of exciting exploration, relentlessly searching for how a solo piano can support a play of such complexity.

While some of the music heard is strictly planned and scored, room has intentionally been left for improvisation and influence from the actors during performance. It is my hope that the music is fully integrated with the world of the play, both sonically and aesthetically. It supports moments of heightened language and ushers the story and characters ever closer to the ultimate revealing of truth. The strong themes of truth telling in the play is the primary motivation for the performance style of the piece. With the front panels removed from the piano, the secret and complex interior is revealed, and the physicality of the performance emulates one's wrestling with truth and falsity. Performance methods used beyond those of traditional piano technique seek to create sounds of atmosphere and intrigue that will draw audiences deeper into the mystery of the play. In essence, the piano inhabits the character of the Lake, releasing sounds of power and chaos that lie dormant inside the instrument.

Jay Cameron
September 2025, Ngannawal and Ngambri Country

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Working with new theatrical work is always such a privilege. You're in the unique position where you can actually converse with the playwright. Nigel especially, brings so much nuance to his work with multiple layers of meaning and subtext – and because it hasn't been performed before, there are no precedents, only possibility. I wanted to lean into abstraction, into a more conceptual approach, allowing *The Story of the Oars* to become what it is, rather than bend it into a more expected form.

Theatre artist Robert Wilson liked to say that the great thing about Conceptual Theatre is that you can get lost in it. There's no need to try to understand why we created the images that we have, or what a tendril of string wrapping around a performer represents, but instead, what it makes you feel and how you're struck by it. What we intend does not have to be what you take away; rather, it's another way to offer resonance and highlight feeling and emotion.

That's the beauty about the ephemeral form of theatre. The impressions you leave with, are informed also by your presence. A play cannot fully be what it is, without you the audience there to witness and experience it, to be in *exchange* with the work.

The music Jay has created from a deconstructed piano and how it speaks as the lake is at the essence of this play. Extending this image has allowed us to create an imaginative world that takes the undercurrents of Nigel's words and grow them. Like a swipe of paint in an abstract painting, you are invited to experience the beautifully intricate dance between text, music, space, light, actor and audience; to feel, imagine, and interpret in your own way.

Shelly Higgs
September 2025, Ngannawal and Ngambri Country



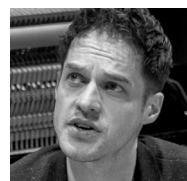


NIGEL FEATHERSTONE

PLAYWRIGHT

Nigel Featherstone is an award-winning Australian writer for the page, stage, and music. Commissioned by the Hume Conservatorium and developed and produced by The Street Theatre in 2018, he wrote the narrative and libretto for *The Weight Of Light*, a highly regarded political song cycle about an Australian soldier's return from Afghanistan.

His novel *Bodies of Men* (Hachette) was longlisted for the 2020 ARA Historical Novel Prize, shortlisted for the 2020 ACT Book of the Year, and shortlisted in the 2019 Queensland Literary Awards. Other works include: the story collection *Joy* (2000), his debut novel *Remnants* (2005), *The Beach Volcano* (2014) and most recent novel, *My Heart is a Little Wild Thing*. Nigel has received five Canberra Critic Circle Awards and was recognised as ACT artist of the year in 2022. He has held residencies at Varuna (Blue Mountains), Bundanon (Shoalhaven River), and UNSW Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy. He is the founder of Hell Herons, a spokenword+music collective that released its debut album, *The Wreck Event*, in 2024 (with Melinda Smith, Stuart Barnes and CJ Bowerbird).



JAY CAMERON

COMPOSER AND PERFORMER

Jay Cameron is a composer, musician and songwriter currently based in Perth, Australia. Since completing his Masters in Composition at The University of Edinburgh, he has created for numerous solo and collaborative projects, focusing mainly on film and theatre. His first complete musical *A Gentleman's Game* (Cameron Mitchell Productions) was performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and showcased to industry leaders. In Australia he has collaborated with companies producing works for theatre, including scores for *Richard III*, *As You Like It*, and *Songs and Sonnets* (Lakespeare); and, *The Deadly Game of Marbles* (Peter Wilkins). Recent film collaborations include: *Venus and Adonis* (Sport For Jove), the black comedy *Snatchers* (Horse Media) which premiered at the Raindance Film Festival in London in 2025. Jay also is working on a new musical titled ZERO, exploring the legacy of journalist John Hersey and the bombing of Hiroshima.



CRAIG ALEXANDER

HENRY 'CLOCKER' BELL

Craig Alexander is an award-winning Australian actor, writer, and filmmaker known for his ability to blend comedy and tragedy alongside his diverse range of creative abilities. Armed with a B.A. (Honours) in Acting from CSU, Craig has been a prominent figure in the theatre industry for nearly two decades. However, his recent focus has shifted toward captivating screen content, working both in front of and behind the camera. Recent stage performance credits include: *The Chosen Vessel*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Art*, *St Nicholas*, *Venus in Fur* (The Street Theatre); *Unprecedented* (Hothouse Theatre); *Just Hearing* (REBUS Theatre); and *Wolf Lullaby* (Echo Theatre).

Recent screen performance credits include: *The Silent Service* (Amazon), *Murder In The Outback* (Channel 7/Beyond), *Invited* (Berger-Alexander, Best Actor CSFF 2021), *The Photographer* (thehorse.media), Best Actor CSFF 2019) *Dirt* (Next In Line Films, Best Actor Fleurieue Film Fest 2018). He recently completed his first Feature film *Snatchers*, which premiered London's Raindance Film Festival and is due for release in Australia later this year.



LOUISE BENNET

GAIL GOODCHILD

Louise Bennet's work spans stage, screen, and voice and she returns to The Street Theatre where she last performed as Claire in *Boston Marriage* before moving to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. There she specialised in Shakespeare and performed in productions such as *Twelfth Night* and *Henry VI: Parts 2 & 3*. She has completed masterclasses and mentorships with Maria Aitken, David Morrissey, Derek Jacobi, Joanna Lumley, and Leith McPherson.

After nearly 20 years working and studying in London and Melbourne she returned to Canberra in late 2024, appearing in *August: Osage County* (ACT Hub) and the world premiere of *Baby Jane* (Canberra REP).

Other stage productions include: *Amadeus*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Free-Rain); *On the Razzle*, *Comic Potential*, and *The School for Scandal* (Canberra REP).

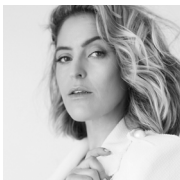
Louise has collaborated on screen and voice projects with Bearcage/WildBear Entertainment, was Associate Impact Producer on the 2021 documentary *Ithaka*, is a published writer and podcast host, and her current work includes a national tour with *Bombshells* (Ecco Theatre).



CALLUM DOHERTY

TOM BELL

Callum Doherty is an emerging actor and director. Active in Canberra's independent theatre scene, *The Story of The Oars* marks his mainstage professional debut. Recent performance credits include: *Present Laughter*, *The Forsaken* (ACT Hub); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *This Changes Everything*, (Echo Theatre); *The Inheritance* (Everyman Theatre); *The Drawer Boy*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Fully Committed* (Mockingbird Theatre Company); *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]* (Canberra REP); and *Rosieville*, *How to Vote!* (Canberra Youth Theatre). Callum won an Ovation Award for Outstanding Lead Performance for *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) (revised)*. He has performed professionally through the Canberra Comedy Festival and Starlight Children's Foundation. Directorial credits include: *Puffs*; *God of Carnage* (Echo Theatre).



SALLY MARETT

PIERI CAPRONI

Sally Marett is an actor, singer, songwriter and writer with an Advanced Diploma of Performing Arts (Acting) from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) and a Bachelor of Contemporary Music (Voice) from Southern Cross University (SCU). She has previously worked with The Street Theatre on new play creative developments for *The Story of The Oars*, and the Early Phase project *The Biggest Hit*.

Theatre credits include: *Twelfth Night*; *The Marriage of Figaro*; *The Woman in the Window* (WAAPA); and, upon graduating *The Wind in the Willows* (Australian Shakespeare Company). Sally started her career as a lead cast member in the role of Tiegán Brook on TV program *Home and Away*. As a lead vocalist and songwriter, she has performed with Shinola!, The Nightcap Orchestra, and Poly, as well as her solo project Marét. Music TV credits include Sunrise, The NRL Footy Show and Rage. She has performed at Tropfest, The Manly Jazz and Blues Festival, The Canberra Theatre and Art, Not Apart Festival.

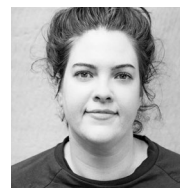


SHELLY HIGGS

DIRECTOR

Shelly Higgs is a professional theatre director, dramaturg, producer, children's author, photographer and film director. Shelly trained as an actor (BA Acting CSU 2002), (RADA 2004) and co-founded regional theatre company Gearstick Theatre in 2002. Always fascinated by people, Shelly recently returned to study, completing a GradDipPsych in 2024 (Monash). Through her time with Gearstick, Shelly produced and directed over 20 shows, touring them nationally.

Recent directing credits include: *Art* by Yasmina Reza, cinematic/theatre hybrid *St Nicholas* by Conor McPherson (streamed 2020) and *Fragments* by Maura Pierlot (The Street Theatre). In 2024 Shelly produced and co-directed her first Feature Film, *Snatchers*, by Craig Alexander which premiered at the Raindance Film Festival London this year. She is currently working on Documentary Film Project, *Ripples*, about giving in Australia.



VERONIQUE BENETT

SCENIC AND LIGHTING DESIGN

Véronique Benett is a lighting, set, and costume designer. Véronique completed a Master of Fine Art (Design for Performance) majoring in lighting. She also holds a Bachelor of Fine Art (Technical Theatre and Stage Management) from NIDA. Her last work with The Street Theatre was set, lighting and costume designer for *Waiting for Godot*.

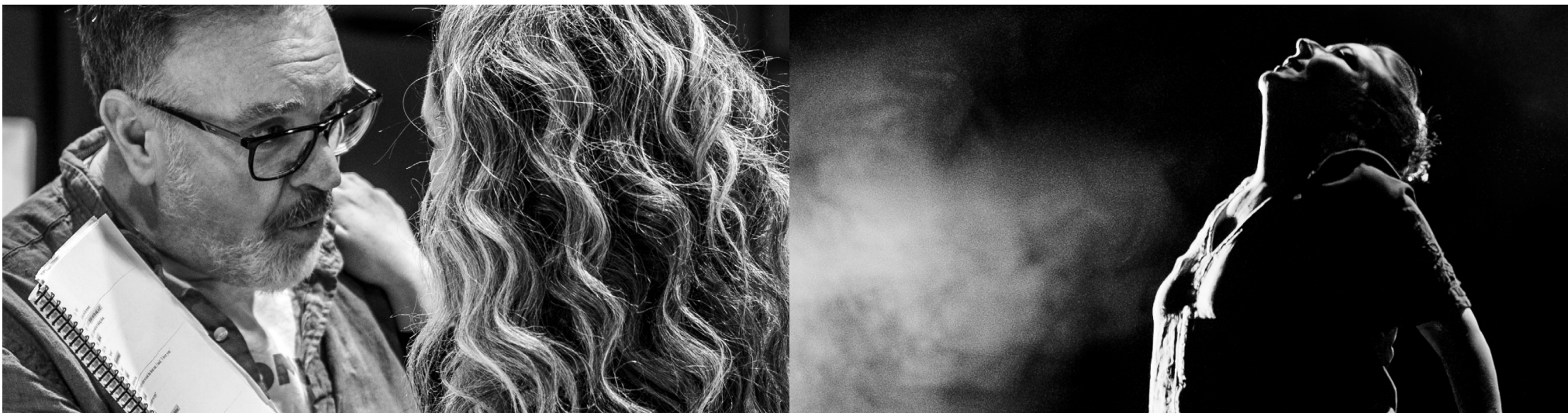
Credits include: *Ulster American*; *Switzerland*; set and costumes for *The Memory of Water*; *Rhinestone Rex* and *Miss Monica*; *A Broadcast Coup*, *The Caretaker*; and, *A Doll's House* (Ensemble); costumes for *Museum of Modern Love* (Seymour Centre/Sydney Festival); set and lighting for *Exit the King* (Red Line Productions); set and lighting for *A Case for the Existence Of God*; *Ulster American* (Outhouse Theatre Co); costume design for *As You Like It* (Sport for Jove); set and costume design for *Our Blood Runs in the Street* (Red Line Productions); lighting for *The Jungle* and *The Sea* (Belvoir); and, lighting for *Banging Denmark* (Sydney Theatre Company). She has received four Sydney Theatre Award nominations for: *Exit The King*; *Ulster American*; *Happy Days*; and *John*.



LEAH RIDLEY

COSTUME DESIGNER

Leah Ridley is a costume designer and textile artist based in Canberra. Costume design credits include: *The Chosen Vessel* (The Street Theatre) *Utopiate* (Rebus Theatre); and *Eurydice* (Mill Theatre). In 2023 she designed and created the robot costume for the roving performer 'Wheely Wonky'. Completing a Diploma of Fashion Design and a Diploma of Costume for Performance at Wollongbar TAFE in 2022, she returned to Canberra after her studies.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Supported by



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We thank our Street Supporters for their generous donations, ensuring employment for Canberra artists to bring their excellence to the stage.

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FROM THE STREET

The Street Company thanks the following people for their generous creative contribution to the development of *The Story of the Oars*: actors Craig Alexander, Tracy Bourne, Tom Bryson, Andrea Close, Christina Falsone, Andre Le, Sally Marett, and PJ Williams; composer Jess Green; directors and dramaturgs Tracy Bourne, Shelly Higgs, Anne-Louise Rentell, and Zsuzsi Soboslay.

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

Many thanks to the actors who helped develop *The Story of the Oars* over the last six years – Andre, Andrea, Craig, Christina, PJ, Sally, Tom and Tracy – as well as all those who attended the various showings and provided feedback. Special thanks to Tracy Bourne, Anne-Louise Rentell and Zsuzsi Soboslay for directing the creative developments, and to Jess Green for early music input. Massive thanks to the premiere cast: Craig Alexander, Louise Bennet, Callum Doherty, and Sally Marett, along with composer/arranger/performer Jay Cameron and creatives Veronique Bennett and Leah Ridley.

Endless gratitude for director Shelly Higgs, and The Street Theatre, especially Artistic Director and CEO Caroline Stacey OAM as well as Dean Ellis, Su Hodge, and all at Front of House. *The Story of the Oars* would never have reached the stage without the funding support from artsACT and Create NSW. Thanks to fellow scribes Stuart Barnes, CJ Bowerbird, Robyn Cadwallader, Julie Keys, Karen Middleton, Melinda Smith, and Karen Viggers. Heartfelt thanks to agent extraordinaire Gaby Naher for steering the ship, and to Tim Phillips for yet another year of Ngunnawal/Ngambri Country adventures (and more).

ABOUT THE STREET

Inquiry and Imagination

The Street Theatre is Canberra's creative powerhouse of inquiry, ideas and imagination, currently led by acclaimed stage director Caroline Stacey OAM. An award-winning home of live performance in the ACT and a major investor in new theatre, music work and artists in Canberra over the last decade. The Street commissions, develops, produces and presents live performance that help us talk to who we are and the world around us.

Just as Canberra is considered a petri-dish for new policies, ideas and cultural products within the broader national landscape, The Street serves a vital role as a key creative generator of new work and regenerator of place and community within the nation's political heart.

The Street believes in the remarkable capacity of Canberra artists to speak to our time, and the need for them to be given creative space to make work of vision, ambition, and courage that talks to diverse audiences across Australia. The Street was the recipient of a 2020 Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award for outstanding achievement and is an essential contributor to the well-being of residents and artistic vibrancy in the region.

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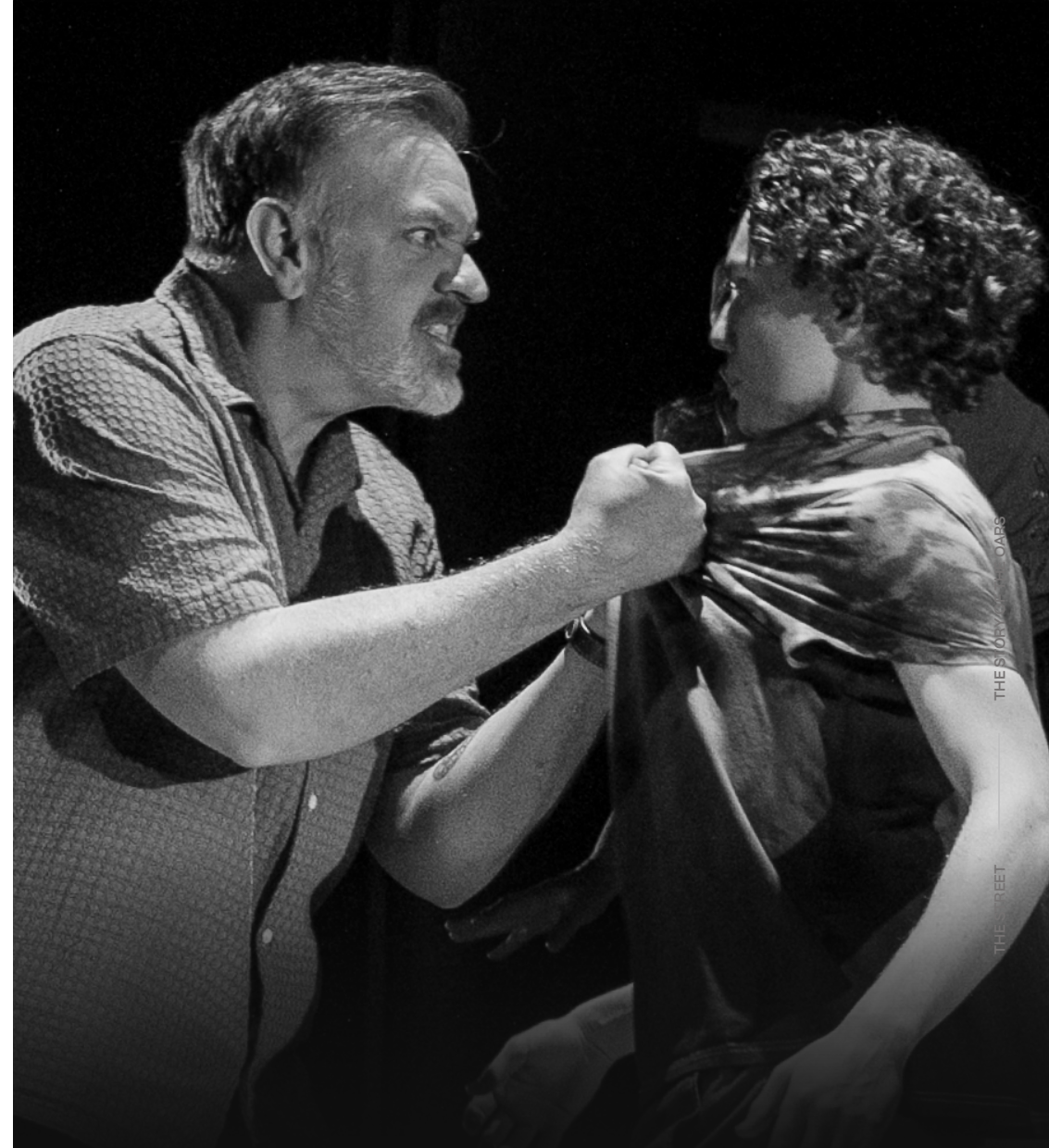
THE STREET COMPANY

CEO and Artistic Director	Caroline Stacey OAM
Executive Producer	Dean Ellis
Technical Manager	Neil Simpson
Customer Service & Ticketing	Pierce Craswell
Communications/Publicity	Su Hodge
Front of House	Pierce Craswell, Lauren Crean, Eloise Kenny, Elio Robertson
Design and Artwork	Tobi Skerra
Video	Craig Alexander
Photography	Novel Photographic, Nathan Smith Photography

THE STREET BOARD

Susan Blain, Joanna Hall, Christina Graves, Igor Kochovski, Megan Malcom, Adam Stankevicius

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples as the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands on which The Street Theatre stands and where we live and create. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, knowledge and culture, and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.



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