Production Details

*Horizon*
by Maxine Mellor

A Playlab Theatre Production presented in partnership with Brisbane Powerhouse.

Wednesday 19 May – Saturday 29 May 2021
Underground Theatre, Brisbane Powerhouse

DIRECTOR/DRAMATURG  Ian Lawson
LIGHTING DESIGNER  David Walters
SOUND DESIGNER  Guy Webster
VIDEO DESIGNER  Nathan Sibthrole
MOVEMENT DIRECTOR  Sam Foster
INTIMACY COORDINATOR  Michelle Miall
STAGE MANAGER  Elise Baker

CAST
COLE  Sam Foster
SKY  Ngoc Phan

A Playlab Theatre production in partnership with Brisbane Powerhouse. This project is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.
Playlab Theatre is an award-winning production company that seeks to challenge perspectives of Australian Culture through Australian Theatre. Uniquely, Playlab Theatre (Playlab) does this through developing, publishing and producing new Australian Theatre with playwrights at the center of the creative process.

Through Playlab’s development program is a pathway to advance a work from inception to rehearsal readiness. The Playwright-in-Residence program supports playwrights to reach their potential through commissioning for production. At any given time Playlab has at least three commissioned works on the slate, undergoing rigorous development to ensure excellence. Playlab’s objective is to tour productions straight after their debut seasons to keep costs low for presenters and improve outcomes for artists.

As a new-writing theatre, Playlab privileges adventurous work that speaks to the diversity and politics of contemporary Australia and appeals to audiences across the country.
Director’s Note

I've been concerned with the direction Australia has been taking as a society for some time now. The policies and subsequent actions of our federal government, in turn reflected in multiple sectors of our society, set the tone for everything, how we view our history and the potential of the future. Malcolm Turnbull in the final period of his leadership, expressed “aspiration”, only in terms of money. This type of reductive vision has since continued and we find ourselves at a critical crossroads, burdened by the denial of the trauma in our nation’s past, frozen by the inequity of the present, and fearful of the change needed to meet the demands of an evolving world.

Fortunately this is fertile dramatic territory. Theatre is an art form that for us at Playlab Theatre is all about the present and challenging existing perspectives. So, I decided to commission a work that spoke about this tension, through the lens of a relationship and set in an Australian made car on a literal journey. Horizon is an allegorical tale, full of symbolism and cracking with currency.

Maxine Mellor was an obvious choice to take on this idea, as she is such a wonderful and powerful storyteller, whose insight into personal politics, technical command and creativity result in theatrical alchemy. In Horizon she perfectly captures many of the conflicting undercurrents of our society and creates a work that is truly multi-dimensional with the result beyond anything that I hoped it would be. Horizon is masterful storytelling, a gothic thriller that riffs off pop culture and actively utilises the tensions in our country to ask, which direction does Australia want to go? Continue to be defined by the historical patterns of our behaviour or change lanes and look for a new destination?

It is clearly time for Australia to embrace new perspectives, a new vision and most importantly, new leadership. Female leadership. We need to strive to get to the Horizon.

Ian Lawson
Playlab Theatre Artistic Director
Introduction

Who are we, and what do we want to be?

When Playlab Theatre commissioned me to write a play as their Writer in Residence for 2019, Ian Lawson and I had many long chats about what it could be about. We wanted to create something that would question the current political and social climate of Australia, and where we are headed as a nation. Aspiration became a key word. What do Cole and Sky aspire to be? What does Australia aspire to be? The set piece of the car became a symbol for this journey — who is driving and to where?

As the piece was shaped throughout late 2018 and 2019, many issues kept reappearing and weaving their way into the characters’ worldviews, including: left versus right politics; the nature of how debate is conducted today (no room for shades of grey); national identity; the environment; the #metoo movement rewriting our perceptions of iconic figures in entertainment; abuse and power; the relationship between men and women; and questions around redressing crimes of the past. They are big, juicy topics that are fun to explore.

With a cast of two available to me, the characters of Cole and Sky naturally emerged; a young couple who seem to have their whole lives stretched out before them, on their first road trip out West together. They’re heading there so Cole can dutifully see his dying father, with Sky playing the role of the supportive girlfriend, taking time off from her high-pressure job as a lawyer. Along the way, they roleplay versions of themselves in film trailers that Cole could maybe make one day. But as the scenery becomes more sparse and exposed, there are fewer places for them to hide their emotional baggage.

While Cole and Sky are careful not to reveal their past traumas, secrets, and desires to one another, the audience is given insight into these inner worlds through a series of stylised monologues that lift us out of the car and into their souls. The rhythm of these monologues is inspired by heartbeats, panic and the hypnotic state of watching white lines on the road in a moving car. Flashes from their past surface and are pushed back down, or grappled with, or transformed into something else. We see them actively trying to confront their pasts and generate their ideal selves — I suppose it’s sort of like a high-speed therapy session atop a moving vehicle!

Cole’s visual motif in these monologues is best described as inkblots — suggesting oil spills and Rorschach images. It’s a combination of his family’s mining background and his failed experience at therapy. It swirls and morphs and becomes threatening at times, just like his thoughts. Sky’s motif is made up of white lines. They could be the hypnotic lines of the road, or the line of light a photocopier makes when copying. She is grappling with boundaries or lines in the sand — her own and those set out by the law or societal expectations. She is worried about patterns of behaviour; worried about treading old paths.
The past is catching up with them. In this case, the past — the weight of their own and the whole country’s — manifests as a pack of wild dingoes, seeking vengeance, hungry to restore the natural order. These dingoes have survived, overcome and adapted to live in this land — they are stronger for their experiences, and stronger together — and when they track down the pair to invoke the terrifying final moments of the play, Cole and Sky are forced to answer: who are we, and what do we want to be? It’s a timely question for them, and for us.

Maxine Mellor
Maxine Mellor — Playwright

Maxine Mellor is an award-winning, Brisbane-based playwright of over twenty works for the stage. Awards include the Queensland Theatre’s Young Playwright’s Award (2001, 2002, 2003); the QTC George Landen Dann Award (2004); and a Matilda Award for best new independent work for Performance (2005) for *Magda’s Fascination with Wax Cats*. In 2012, she won Inscription’s Edward Albee Scholarship to undertake a residency in New York City, and the Queensland Premier’s Drama Award for *Trollop*. Maxine won the Max Afford Playwriting Award for 2014 for *The Silver Alps*, and in 2017, and received the Lord Mayor’s Young & Emerging Artists Fellowship to undertake professional development through Singapore, Iceland and the UK.

Maxine's work has been showcased at the National Play Festival, and throughout the USA as part of Inscription's Playwriting and Screenwriting tour (2014). Recent productions include La Boite's national tour of Maxine's stage adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows*, *Trollop* at Queensland Theatre, *The Wizard of Oz* (in collaboration with The Danger Ensemble, Brisbane Festival and La Boite), and *Anna Robi & The House of Dogs* (Brisbane Festival's Under the Radar). Her plays have been produced throughout Australia, and are published with Playlab Theatre and Australian Plays.

Maxine also regularly teaches and mentors emerging writers throughout schools and universities around Australia. She is a qualified drama and visual art teacher, and often works with gifted and talented students delivering workshops in various creative fields.

Maxine developed *Horizon* while Playwright in Residence at Playlab Theatre throughout 2019.

For more information visit www.maxinemellor.com.
Ian Lawson — Director & Dramaturg

Ian Lawson is a multi award-winning Queensland based Director and Dramaturg who has had a focus on new Australian work for over two decades. As Artistic Director/CEO of Playlab Theatre, Ian has transformed the organisation into a progressive new-writing theatre, developing and directing the critically acclaimed *Blue Bones*, *The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek* and *Magpie*. Ian has also worked for numerous other organisations including: Queensland Music Festival, Brisbane Festival, Queensland Theatre Company, PWA, University of Queensland, JUTE Theatre, Griffith University, Zen Zen Zo and Screen Queensland. Ian was the Associate Director at La Boite (2002 - 2008), where he managed the Creative and Professional Development programs and directed numerous productions including *My Love Had a Black Speed Stripe*, *Urban Dingoes*, *The Pineapple Queen*, *The Danger Age* and *The Narcissist*, which also had a season for the Sydney Theatre Company.

David Walters — Lighting Designer

For the past 40 years David Walters has worked as a professional Lighting Designer in Iceland and Australia. In 1986 David returned to Australia to take up a position as Resident Lighting Designer with the Queensland Theatre Company. Since 1990, as a freelance designer, he has worked extensively throughout Australia and designed for the Melbourne Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Handspan, Playbox, La Boite, Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus, Nimrod, Company B, Expressions, Queensland Ballet, Australian Ballet, Opera Australia, Opera Queensland, The Powerhouse, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, QUT, Zen Zen Zo, Dead Puppet Society, Topology, Insite Arts and Bell Shakespeare Company. His work has toured extensively both in Australia and overseas. Well known to Queensland audiences, David’s lighting has frequently been recognised in the Matilda awards and in 2018 he was honoured with an ABF Lifetime Achievement Award.
Nathan Sibthorpe — Video Designer

Nathan Sibthorpe is a contemporary performance-maker and video designer based in Brisbane, Australia. He is best known as the director of Counterpilot — the award-winning collective of transmedia performance artists responsible for: *Avoidable Perils* (2020); *Truthmachine* (2019); *Statum* (2019); *Crunch Time* (2018) and *Spectate* (2017). Counterpilot works have been staged in major Australian festivals including Sydney, Brisbane and Darwin.

Nathan’s other credits as a performance-maker include: One Bottle Later (The Good Room & Brisbane Festival, 2020); *I’ve Been Meaning to Ask You* (The Good Room & Brisbane Festival, 2018); and *Tyrone & Lesley in a Spot* (Queensland Cabaret Festival, 2015). As an AV Designer, notable credits include: *To Kill a Cassowary* (JUTE, 2020); *Blue Bones* (Playlab Theatre, 2017); *Wireless* (JWCoCA, 2017); *Viral* (Shock Therapy Productions, 2016); and *He Dreamed a Train* (Brisbane Powerhouse, 2014). Nathan has been nominated for nine Matilda Awards, receiving the awards for Best AV Design in 2017 (*Blue Bones*) and the Lord Mayor’s Award for Best New Australian Work in 2018 (*Crunch Time*). In 2017, Nathan was also the recipient of the Dr Don Batchelor Award for Drama Research at QUT.

Nathan was previously Queensland Theatre Company’s Geek-In-Residence in 2012-14; the Festival Director of Short+Sweet Queensland from 2013-16; and the Creative Director for Markwell Presents Cinematic Theatre Company from 2016-18. He is currently a produced artist represented by Metro Arts. Nathan sometimes teaches performance studies at QUT, where he holds a Masters Degree in contemporary performance.
Guy Webster — Sound Designer

Guy Webster works across the mediums of theatre, dance, circus, sound art, installation and new media. During his early career as a dancer & choreographer Guy developed his practice as a composer and musician. His work has since featured in theatres, festivals and galleries throughout Australia, Japan, Europe, UK, USA and China and his live performances have shared the stage with the likes of Beth Orton, Ed Harcourt, Powderfinger, The Cruel Sea, Mad Professor and Sarah Blasko. Guy has created music and sound for many theatre & dance works with Qld Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre Company, La Boite Theatre Company, Shake & Stir Theatre, The Brisbane Festival, Bleach Festival, Dance North, Backbone Youth Arts, State Library of Qld, Out of the Box Festival, Shock Therapy, Gogi Dance Collective, Circus Corridor, Jute Theatre Co, Lisa O’Neill, Goat Track Theatre, Stella Electrika, Wilde Applause & Red Shoes. Guy is also a founding member of new media performance and installation group, The Transmute Collective.

Elise Baker — Stage Manager

Elise is a Brisbane Stage Manager with experience both nationally and internationally. She has toured with the Pop-Up Globe, stage managing full scale productions of Midsummer Night’s Dream & Merchant of Venice (Sydney 2018), and Hamlet & Measure for Measure (New Zealand, Perth 2019). She also has extensive Musical Theatre experience including The Producers (Altitude Theatre 2021), Mamma Mia! (Empire Theatre 2020), and Yank! The WWII Musical (Understudy Productions 2019). Elise is excited to be working with Playlab Theatre on Horizon.
Sam Foster — Cast [Cole] & Movement Director

Sam is an Actor, Director, Writer, Producer, Stunt Performer, Stunt Rigger, Physical Theatre Performer, Movement Director and workshop facilitator who has worked across theatre, film, TV and large scale events around the world. He is the co-founder and co-owner of Shock Therapy Productions.

Awards include: Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Award for his work as a Stunt Performer in Mad Max - Fury Road (2015). Best Director, 2015 Matilda Awards for Shock Therapy’s production of Martin McDonagh’s The Pillowman. Sam has been nominated twice for Best Actor in a Leading Role Matilda Awards.

As a writer, Sam has co-written and created a number of original works with his company Shock Therapy Productions, including Viral and Undertow which are both published by Playlab Theatre.


Sam has worked extensively touring secondary schools throughout Australia both performing and facilitating workshops and residencies. He has worked and taught for Zeal Theatre, Queensland Theatre, Queensland Arts Council, Grin and Tonic, Backbone Youth Theatre, The Young Company, Goat Track Theatre, ATYP, NORPA, Empire Theatre and Qld Shakespeare Ensemble. He has also taught for a number of universities and private acting schools including; Griffith University, QUT, Queensland Conservatorium and The Warehouse Workshop Screen Acting Studio.

Sam continues to perform and create work that is meaningful and thought provoking and he enjoys exploring cross art forms collaborations.
Ngoc Phan — Cast [Sky]

Ngoc is an actor and playwright. Her theatre performances include A Streetcar Named Desire, The Mathematics of Longing and The Village (La Boite Theatre), What I’m Here For, The Motion of Light in Water and After All This (Elbow Room), Dolores (Anywhere Festival), Splendour (Now Look Here), That’s what she said (The Good Room) and Hedonism’s Second Album (La Boite indie).

Her screen performances include Kidnapped (Steve Jaggi/Sepia), Tidelands (2Netflix Australia/Hoodlum), Freudian Slip Web series & The Men That Come (Broken Head Productions), NRMA (TV Commercial), QLD Government Road Safety Speeding Commercial (Two little Indians), Australia Day (Hoodlum/Foxtel), Pawno (Toothless pictures); Schapelle (Fremantle Media); At World’s End (New Holland Pictures); Sea Patrol (Nine Network); Terra Nova (Terra Nova Production), Secrets and Lies (Network Ten) and the AFI award-winning film The Black Balloon.

As a playwright, she was one of the participants in the Lotus Program supported by Playwriting Australia (PWA) and Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP). She was an Artist-in-residence at La Boite Theatre Company where she worked on her play My Father who slept in a Zoo, her writing was featured in their production of The Village and was also a creative assistant in it’s companion piece, The Neighbourhood.

Ngoc Phan is also a tutor for the NIDA Open program and has been a teaching artist for La Boite and Queensland Theatre’s Youth Ensemble.

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