

MEDIA RELEASE: 15 November 2021

SADDLE UP FOR THE NEXT BIG BLACK MUSICAL

PANAWATHI GIRL

By David Milroy

Presented by Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company

World Premiere



Image: Daniel Carson

The rollicking 1960s inspired musical ***Panawathi Girl*** is an all-singing, all-dancing night of entertainment for everyone to share.

Written by **David Milroy**, the acclaimed playwright behind 2011 Perth Festival hit musical *Waltzing the Wilarra*, this world-premiere production from **Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company** is brimming with humour, heart and irresistible tunes.

Set in a small town in Western Australia's North-West in 1969, *Panawathi Girl* is a wild joyous rodeo ride as hippies and cowboys, big-noting politicians and protesters kick up the red Pilbara dust at **His Majesty's Theatre**.

Panawathi Girl is set to be Australia's next big Black musical, the latest in a proud line of Western Australian Indigenous-led musical productions, including Milroy's own *Waltzing the Wilarra* and Jimmy Chi's Broome-time musicals *Bran Nue Dae* and *Corrugation Road*.

This Jack and Jillaroo musical follows Molly Chubb as she goes from the big smoke back to the small country town of her birth at a time of great political change. Two years have passed since Indigenous Australians have been granted citizenship and voting rights.

The rodeo has come to town, along with a kombi van of hippies and a pair of noisy politicians sweating in their suits on the 1969 Federal election trail, exposing old and new attitudes to the changing face of Australia.

This bold new production, directed by **Eva Grace Mulally** and featuring an all-star cast of WA performers, will have you questioning if much has changed at all, even as it has you tapping your toes and yearning for more.

Newcomer **Lila McGuire** as Molly joins stage favourites **Maitland Schnaars**, **Peter Docker**, **Geoff Kelso** and **Luke Hewitt** with playwright David Milroy playing in the band led by music director **Wayne Freer** and including Grammy Award-winner **Lucky Oceans**.

Panawathi Girl ('Dream Girl' in Milroy's mother's Palyku language) marks the His Majesty's Theatre debut for Yirra Yaakin, whose recent Perth Festival appearances have included the acclaimed productions *The Sum of Us* and the all-Noongar-language *Hecate*.

'This wondrously evocative large-scale musical thrives inside that space between politics, nostalgia and glorious music, in a similar way to *Bran Nue Dae*,' **Perth Festival Artistic Director Iain Grandage** says. 'It is tremendous to be able to celebrate Yirra Yaakin by welcoming them for the first time onto our largest stage in Western Australia.'

WHAT: Panawathi Girl

WHERE: His Majesty's Theatre / Karboordup / Perth CBD

WHEN: Thur 10, Fri 11 Feb 7.30pm. Sat 12 Feb 2pm & 7.30pm. Sun 13 Feb 6pm.

HOW MUCH: \$29 - \$59

BOOKINGS AND FESTIVAL INFO: perthfestival.com.au

Click [here](#) for images. For further information, interviews or images please contact:

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Perth Festival acknowledges the Noongar people who continue to practise their values, language, beliefs and knowledge on their kwobidak boodjar. They remain the spiritual and cultural birdiyangara of this place and we honour and respect their caretakers and custodians and the vital role Noongar people play for our community and our Festival to flourish.

ABOUT PERTH FESTIVAL

Founded in 1953 by The University of Western Australia, Perth Festival is the longest running international arts festival in Australia and Western Australia's premier cultural event. The Festival has developed a worldwide reputation for excellence in its international program, the presentation of new

works and the highest quality artistic experiences for its audience. For nearly 70 years, the Festival has welcomed to Perth some of the world's greatest living artists and now connects with hundreds of thousands of people each year. Iain Grandage is the Artistic Director 2020–24.

YIRRA YAAKIN

Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company creates, presents and celebrates First Nations' theatre, performance and stories. Local stories inspiring the globe.

With a strong annual program of contemporary First Nations' Performance; collaborating, commissioning and developing new Aboriginal writing; and a dedication to educational inclusion, workshops and First Nations' employment; we continue to mentor and develop the next generation of Aboriginal artists and arts workers. We contribute to cultural leadership and directly add to the diversity within the Australian performing arts sector.

Yirra Yaakin firmly believes that First Nations' theatre plays a major role in promoting cultural resilience and the empowerment of Australia's First Peoples. Through telling authentic First Nations' stories, the Company continues to be at the centre of artistic excellence and is held in the highest regard by the communities it works with and for.

As an Aboriginal-led organisation, Yirra Yaakin's cultural leadership provides an authentic model within the performing arts sector and to the wider community. With a stable and experienced Executive and Board, who implement best practice governance and oversight of the company's operations, the company has the experience and skillsets to enable it to achieve its goals.

ARTISTIC CREDITS

Playwright David Milroy

Director Eve Grace Mullaley

Musical Director & Band Wayne Freer

Choreographer Janine Oxenham

Set Designer Bruce McKinven

Costume Designer Lynn Ferguson

Sound Designer Jeremy Turner

Dramaturg Sally Richardson

Dresser Qi Cao

Cast Grace Chow, Peter Docker, Luke Hewitt, Chris Isaacs, Geoff Kelso, Angelica Lockyer, Nadia Martich, Lila McGuire, Teresa Rose, Maitland Schnaars, Manuao TeAotonga, Wimiya Woodley

Band Adam Gare, Lucky Oceans

DAVID MILROY

David Milroy is one of Australia's leading Aboriginal Playwrights, Dramaturges and Directors. A multi-award-winning artist, David's work has toured successfully across Australia and the World. Born in Perth Western Australia in 1957 his family links are with the Yindjibarndi and Palku people of the Pilbara.

David was a founding member of AbMusic, formed in 1986 to support and nurture Aboriginal musicians in Western Australia and was the first Artistic Director of Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company from 1995–2003. David's writing and directing credits include *Waltzing the Wilarra*, *Windmill Baby*, *King Hit*, *Runumuk*, Sally Morgan's *Cruel Wild Woman*. His recent works *Rodeo Moon*, *Crowbones* and *Carnivores*, *Swine River* and *Killer Kane* have been presented at WAAPA.

David's music has featured in films *Blackfellas*, *Exile and the Kingdom*. In *Waltzing the Wilarra*, *Aliwa*, *Solid*, *Windmill Baby*, *King Hit*, *Alice*, Sally Morgan's *Cruel Wild Woman* for Yirra Yaakin, *Sistergirl* and *Dead Heart* for Black Swan Theatre Company and Perth Theatre Company's production of *Wild Cat Falling* he provided the musical direction.

David received two Equity Guild Awards in 2011 for his play *Waltzing the Wilarra*. His play *Windmill Baby* made history in 2005 by being the first ever single script to win the prestigious Patrick White Award. David received a Sidney Myer Award in 2002 for his contribution to the development of indigenous theatre.

EVA GRACE MULLALEY

Eva Grace Mullaley is a Widi woman from the Yamatji Nation in the Midwest Region of Western Australia. She graduated from the Certificate IV in Aboriginal Theatre Course at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) in 2003 and began her directing career in 2005 as an assistant to David Milroy for the first creative development of *Windmill Baby*, produced by Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company.

In her 18+ year career Eva has worn many hats in the theatre industry including Director, Arts Administrator, Stage Manager, Tour Manager—internationally and nationally, Producer, Event Manager, Actor, Dramaturg, Lecturer in Character and Script Analysis, Collaborating Director, Workshops Coordinator and many more.

She has worked as a director and dramaturg for Moogahlin Performing Arts, Yellamundie Indigenous Playwrights Festival, Ilbijerri Theatre Company, Te Rehia Theatre Company, WAAPA and Yirramboi Festival. Eva was also working as the Development Producer for the Australian Blackfulla Performing Arts Alliance (BPAA), a national peak body for Indigenous theatre and performers.

She is currently Artistic Director of Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company in Perth, Western Australia.

WAYNE FREER

Freer is a multi-instrumentalist, MD and composer active in Australia since the early 1980's.

In theatre he has worked with: Belvoir Company B, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Melbourne Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre Company, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, Perth Festival, Darwin Festival, Sydney Festival, Force Majeure, Etcetera Theatre

Company, Magpie Theatre in Education, NIDA, WAAPA, Club Swizzle, Snuff Puppets, Back to Back Theatre, Circus Monoxide.

In music - John Rodgers, Jackie Orszaczky, David Milroy, Alan John, Lucky Oceans, Dave Hole, Dave Mason, Mia Dyson, Dave Brewer, Paul Kelly, Tim Finn, Dave Brewer, David Lane, Robyn Archer, Greg Sheehan, Matt Taylor, Ricky May, and many others.

JANINE OXENHAM

Janine Oxenham is a Malgana Yamatji woman from the Shark Bay area in WA. She has studied dance at both NAISDA college, NSW and WAAPA, WA.

She has choreographed and performed as a freelance contemporary Indigenous dancer for numerous festivals including recent work for Houtman 400 Bullay – Open your Eyes Festival Geraldton 2019 and the Shark Bay Rendezvous Festival 2018. In 2015 she mounted the work *Willy Willy* as part of the Carnarvon Future Landings project. She has facilitated community dance groups and performed as part of the core crew for Gascoyne In May for the past 9 years. In 2020 Janine worked as Movement Director for the Yirra Yaakin and Perth Festival production of *Hecate* and has worked on several other projects with Yirra Yaakin since including *The Solidarity Project Series*, *Ngalaka Daaand* more recently (2021) the emerging producer program with Yirra Yaakin, Performing Lines and Circuitwest.