

CREATIVE LEARNING RESOURCE

DRAMA / MUSIC

# CHILDREN OF THE SEA

BY JAY EMMANUEL

PERFORMING LINES WA



Image: Cam Campbell

**PERTH  
FESTIVAL**

Founder



Principal Partner



# CONTENTS

2	Synopsis
2	Credits
3	Key Themes
4	Q&A with Designer Bryan Woltjen
6	Before the Show
7	Attending Live Performance
8	After the Show
9	Reflecting on Live Performance
10	Curriculum Links

*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.*

Acknowledgment developed by Associate Artist Kylie Bracknell with support from Perth Festival's Noongar Advisory Circle (Vivienne Binyarn Hansen, Mitchella Waljin Hutchins, Carol Innes, Barry McGuire, Richard Walley OAM & Roma Yibiyung Winmar)

# SYNOPSIS

Follow four unaccompanied children as they embark on a perilous journey. Drifting on Indo-Australian waters towards an uncertain future they confront memories of the lives they have left behind.

The culmination of a two-year research project, *Children of the Sea* is Jay Emmanuel's emotional and epic theatrical piece that shares the journey of young maritime survivors who came to Australia by boat. Inspired by true stories, it brings together a stellar team of five extraordinary young performers onstage with a vocal ensemble led by Green Room Award-winning singer-songwriter, composer, performer and choir-leader, Kavisha Mazzella.

The UN Refugee Agency reports 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced by conflict or persecution at the end of 2018. 52% of those were children. A counter-response to one of the most pressing issues humanity is facing right now, the piece asks: How do children deal with fate and tragedy? What do children do to survive in the face of adversity? What gives them hope? How does loss and displacement morph childhood?

A tribute to hope and a sobering reminder of the stories that float on the horizon, *Children of the Sea* explores the paradoxes and confusions of a world dealing with an unprecedented flux of uprooted lives. Chilling, yet playful and funny, this sensitive and politically-charged show puts children front and centre – their voice, their story – ultimately creating an uplifting theatrical experience.



Images: Cam Campbell

# CREDITS

**Writer, Director & Librettist** Jay Emmanuel

**Script Dramaturg** S. Sivanathan

**Co-Composer & Librettist** Kavisha Mazzella

**Co-Composer & Musician** Pavan Kumar Hari

**Performers/Youth Ensemble** Maniya Amin-Dheghan, Harry Hamzat, Satchen Lucido, Abimanjou Mathivannan, Happyness Yasini

**Vocal Ensemble** Pavan Kumar Hari, Kavisha Mazzella, Jordan Azor, Richard Maganga, Manjula Radha Krishnan

**Set & Costume Designer** Bryan Woltjen

**Acting Coach** Phil Thomson

**Voice Coach** Julia Moody

**Cultural Advisor** Ali Raza

**Script Dramaturg – 1st Stage** Polly Low

**Production Manager** Ben Nelson

**Stage Manager** Rhianna Coffey

**Lighting Designer** Matt Marshall

**Sound Designer** James Luscombe

**Rehearsal Director** Phil Thomson

**Community Engagement Coordinator** Anju Sivarajah

**Co-produced by** Encounter and Performing Lines WA

# KEY THEMES



## DISPLACED CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

The show follows the stories of young people that have been displaced due to political instability.

*Imagine you had to leave your home, your family, your country in order to survive. What three items would you take with you?*



## IDENTITY

*Children of the Sea* also looks at how we identify ourselves and what influences can change our identity.

*What words do you use to describe yourself and your culture?*

*Putting a picture of yourself at the centre, make a mind map to show how these things are interconnected.*



## PHYSICAL THEATRE

Writer and director Jay Emmanuel has used collaborative physical theatre techniques to develop and rehearse *Children of the Sea*.

*How would you show your favourite place to visit onstage if you were restricted to using only humans to make the set?*

*How could you use bodies to make shapes, movements and noises that depict this place?*



Image: Cam Campbell

# ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES



**WATCH** this short explanation of the difference between a refugee and a migrant here:

[youtube.com/watch?v=3e08v5GN\\_\\_s&feature=youtu.be](https://youtube.com/watch?v=3e08v5GN__s&feature=youtu.be)

*To what extent should countries of the world be asked to take in refugees?*

*What are the pros and cons of doing so?*



**WATCH** some examples of physical theatre performances here:

[youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkIWUE\\_aD1b3PBonZczntc7-AZgcEoQmV](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkIWUE_aD1b3PBonZczntc7-AZgcEoQmV)

*What are the similarities you notice between the excerpts?*

*How does what you are seeing connect to what you are hearing?*



Image: Cam Campbell



Image: Cam Campbell

# Q&A WITH DESIGNER BRYAN WOLTJEN

## THE MAKING OF *CHILDREN OF THE SEA*

### How did you get to work on this project? Was it your idea?

This project was described to me by Jay Emmanuel, the director and writer of the work, in September 2018, after he had already spent some years developing it. I was excited to be given the opportunity to work alongside Jay as set and costume designer. The project has been created by him, although I am aware of the input of Ali, a friend of Jay's and a person who is a former refugee himself. Jay has also crafted the script with the help of young actors and with input from a number of colleagues to advise on script and dramaturgy, as well as input from our excellent producers. I've also given my two cents here and there along the way at various drafts, from my perspective as a designer, particularly in how the audience physically engage with the storytelling.

### What's been your favourite part of the making process so far and why?

My favourite part so far has been meeting and getting to work alongside the excellent young cast members and the support team of costume and scenery makers. I'm always so excited to be working alongside people who are excellent at what they do and who love the act of creation.

### What's been the most difficult part of the making process so far and why?

The hardest part has been in trying to realise how 'immersive' to make this design. We've been exploring how best to bring the audience on THE JOURNEY that the children in the story are taking, but also not have the audience feeling exposed or uncomfortable. As well as this, we've been in many discussions about how best to transform the venue into a living, breathing vessel that can hold us all and also time-travel almost instantly to the central character's childhood in Balochistan, as well as doing this all in a way that is magical and told distinctively and unapologetically from the perspective of the young people.

### Are there any other artists, companies or works that have been an inspiration for this work?

Yes. I have been inspired by many different images and fellow artists. Particularly the beautiful paintings of Pakistani artist Aq Arif, and the incredible traditional clothing of the Balochistani peoples that was introduced to me by our friend Hadia who has been advising us on some of the cultural realities in Balochistan. There have been some other recent productions that have influenced the design, such as *The Jungle*, a theatre piece by London's Young Vic Theatre on the topic of the Calais refugee camp; also the work of Swiss circus performer, violinist, actor and director James Thierrée, who makes theatre performances from a blend of contemporary circus, mime, dance and music.

### What are you hoping the audience will experience when they see and hear this work?

More than anything else, we wish for the audience to be drawn into the adventure and struggle that the characters create and endure. To feel as though they themselves have made an urgent journey a thousand leagues across the ocean and to a mysterious but safer harbour than the one they left. To be beguiled by the cleverness and charm and joy of the cast and the creativity that they deploy in the storytelling process.

### Why did you want to make this work?

I wanted to make this work because I think it is important for children to be empowered to tell stories, but also because the stories of these young migrants who are fleeing dangerous situations and seeking sanctuary are increasingly urgent for our time and this place.

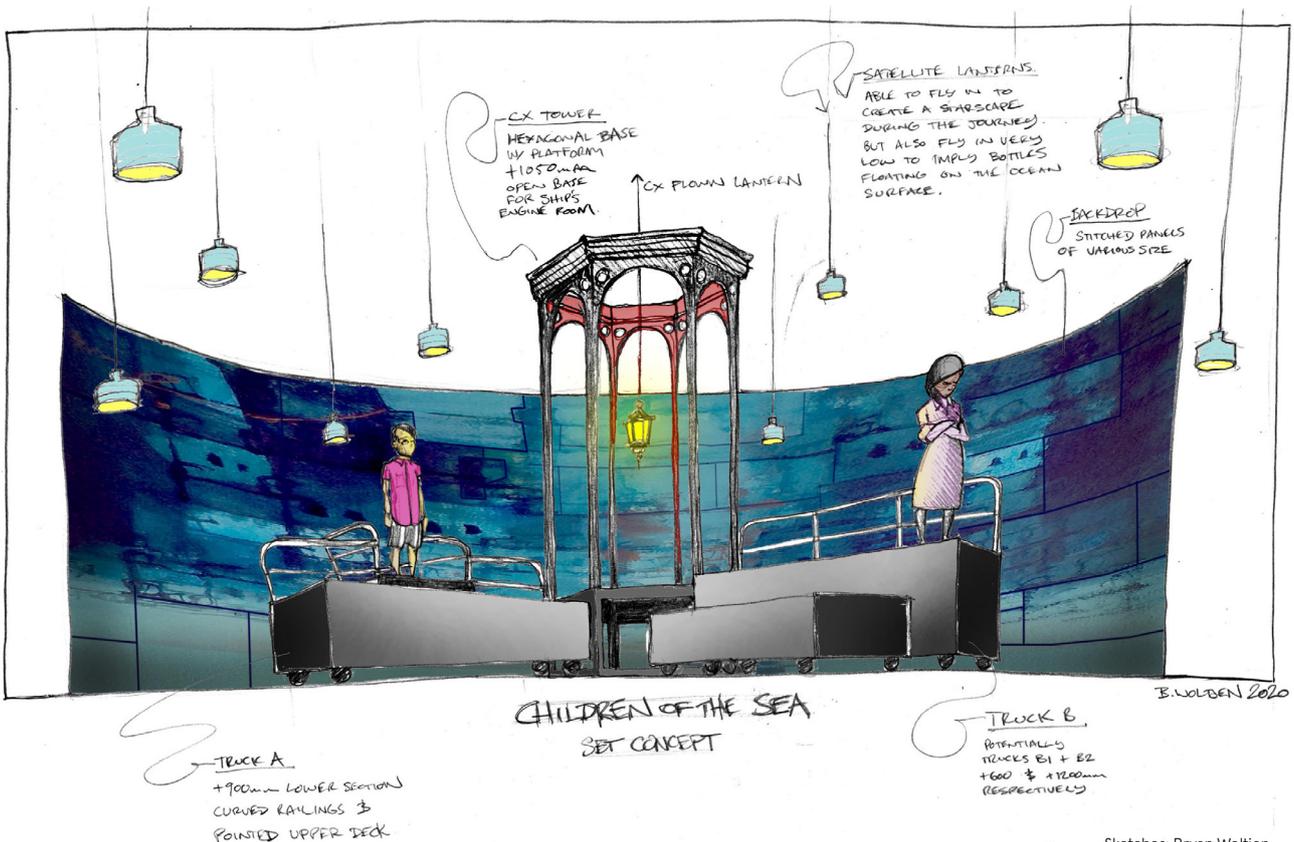
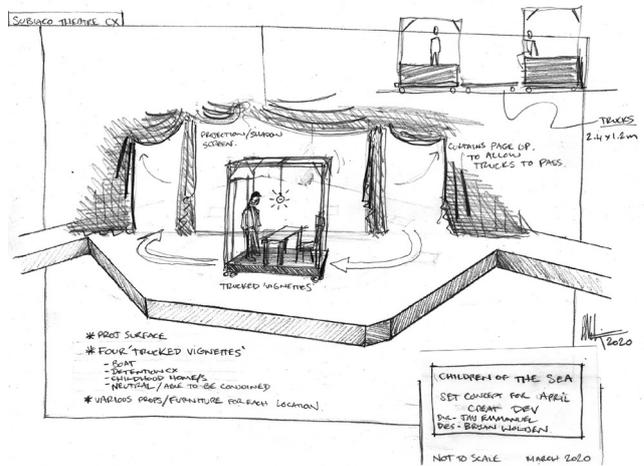
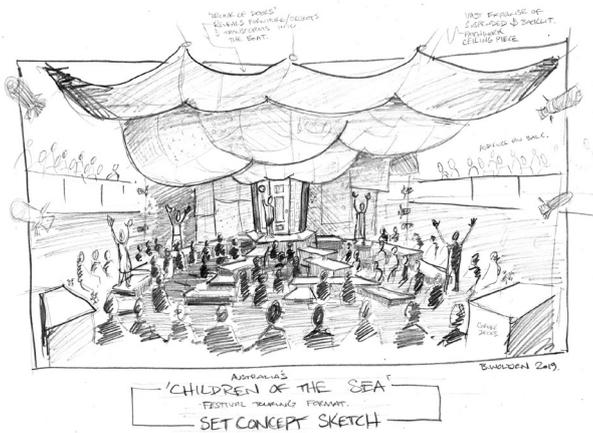
**How has the work changed from the first idea to where it is now? Why did those changes happen?**

The story of how much this story has changed, and its design, is as knotty and perilous as the story itself!

Without going into too much detail or intrigue, we have had a number of wildly different design concepts that have reflected the struggle to find the best venue to house the production. We have designed various versions to suit small blackbox theatres, vast shipping warehouses as well as more standardised theatres, before finding sanctuary at the excellent and unique Subiaco Arts Centre under the jolly flag of Perth Festival. This difficulty in finding a home happened alongside the script being refined from draft to draft, and this refinement slowly trimmed it down from a more complicated tale with multiple locations, to a singular and more developed storyline, punctuated by memories of the central character's childhood. It feels very satisfying, and auspicious, that the work has had this at-times protracted, but ever joyous journey.



Image: Bryan Woltjen



Sketches: Bryan Woltjen

# BEFORE THE SHOW

## DISPLACED YOUNG PEOPLE

Around half of the world's refugees are children under 18 years of age. They often miss school for long periods, in some cases years, which puts them at risk of missing out on education. This can affect them for the rest of their lives. Refugee children often flee with their families but sometimes children get separated from their parents and in some cases, sadly, they even lose their parents. In 2018, about 111,000 refugee children were living alone without their parents or families.

(taken from UN Refugee Agency, [unhcr.org/en-au/5d53d02b7](https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/5d53d02b7))



Image: Cam Campbell



**EXPLORE** more about refugees, displaced people and their stories here (there's some great short animations that explain things really clearly):

[unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees.html](https://www.unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees.html)



**PLAY** this simulation Asylum: Exit Australia game here:

[sbs.com.au/asylumexitaustralia/](https://www.sbs.com.au/asylumexitaustralia/)



**LISTEN** to actor Mandy Patinkin talk about his work with refugees here, in the excellent *Displaced* podcast:

[rescue.org/displaced-podcast/mandy-patinkin-homeland-actor-refugee-advocate](https://www.rescue.org/displaced-podcast/mandy-patinkin-homeland-actor-refugee-advocate)

And also this great story from Kevin Sieff about two young displaced people hiding in an attic on the similarly excellent *This American Life* podcast:

[thisamericanlife.org/721/the-walls-close-in/act-one-7](https://www.thisamericanlife.org/721/the-walls-close-in/act-one-7)



**CREATE:** After exploring these podcasts activities, draw a table with two headings:

'I used to think ...' and 'Now I think ...'

Fill in the table with how your ideas have changed.

# ATTENDING LIVE PERFORMANCE



Image: Cam Campbell

## BE ON TIME

The show will start promptly, so leave heaps of time to find the venue and go to the toilet. Latecomers will not be admitted until an appropriate break in the show, and for many shows you won't be let in if you arrive late or leave the theatre during the show.

## THINGS WE WANT TO HEAR ...



Live performance is energised by positive audience reactions – laugh when it's funny, cry when it's sad and applaud at the end.

## ... AND THINGS WE DON'T



Food wrappers and plastic packets make a lot of noise. It is generally accepted that the audience does not eat during a performance.



Mobile phones must be switched off (not on vibrate). If your phone rings during a performance, it can be very embarrassing for you and very distracting for the performers. Even silently messaging is not cool, because the glow of the screen is off-putting for performers and audiences.



Chatting and whispering during the show is annoying for other audience members and can be very distracting for performers.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

We love seeing you at Festival events. Take photos in the foyer when you arrive or after the show, and tag us using [@PerthFest](#) and [#PerthFest](#), or re-post our stories with your hot takes, we love it!

Taking photos, videos or audio recordings is not allowed in the shows though. This is because of copyright issues of the designs and because of the whole distraction thing.

# AFTER THE SHOW

## PHYSICAL THEATRE

Did you notice any sections of *Children of the Sea* in which the cast performed in a more symbolic physical way? Have a chat with someone about your observations.



**EXPLORE** this handy bitesize reference from the BBC about physical theatre here:

[bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/ztfk6sg/revision/1](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/ztfk6sg/revision/1)



**CREATE:** Improvise a scene in which you are a real estate agent showing a client through a house for sale. Have two other people become all the features of the house as you walk through the property.



**CREATE** a short physical theatre sequence that shows the transition of time from present to past and back again. Consider a play, book or poem you have read recently that you want to represent. Check out this clip from Frantic Assembly's *Lovesong* for inspiration:

[youtube.com/watch?v=NoWKWeYY8o8&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoWKWeYY8o8&feature=youtu.be)

## IDENTITY

The characters in *Children of the Sea* wrestle with their sense of identity as they change locations and examine their existence through the lenses of others.



**TAKE A SELFIE** and write a 250-character bio. Add text to your selfie that lists:

- what you would like to know or do but can't yet
- someone/something you adore and want to know everything about
- a country you want to visit desperately



**CREATE** a collage of images that represent how you see your identity. You could use cut out pictures from magazines, make a word cloud, use [milanote.com](https://www.milanote.com) to create a digital visual board ...



**WATCH** this short film of two young people exploring their community and identities here:

[pbs.org/pov/watch/wheniwriteit/](https://www.pbs.org/pov/watch/wheniwriteit/)

*How do aspects such as race, class, ethnicity, gender identity and/or expression, sexuality, religion and heritage shape Ajai and Leila's identities?*

*How do these aspects of identity intersect with the city they live in and their relationships to it?*



**DISCOVER** another local artist in an artform you like. This might be a musician, visual artist, writer, theatre maker ... check out the Perth Festival program for ideas!

*What is it about their work that you are drawn to?*

*What's relatable about it?*

*Did the connection between you and the artist have anything to do with shared identities or experiences?*

# REFLECTING ON LIVE PERFORMANCE

There are many different ways to write a review, as reviews express an individual's thoughts and feelings about a show.

Reviews should reflect how you felt about a show, not what you think you should have felt.

Here's a link to a handy template for you to WRITE a review of *Children of the Sea*:

[perthfestival.com.au/media/lz3hwgdz/cl-resources-reviewing-live-performance-instructions-doc\\_20210111.pdf](http://perthfestival.com.au/media/lz3hwgdz/cl-resources-reviewing-live-performance-instructions-doc_20210111.pdf)

You don't have to be published in a newspaper to write a review. In the digital age, the act of reviewing has changed immensely. You can blog, Tweet, TikTok, Instagram, run a Facebook page ... it has enabled platforms for a broad range of voices to participate in the reviewing process that previously would not have been heard.



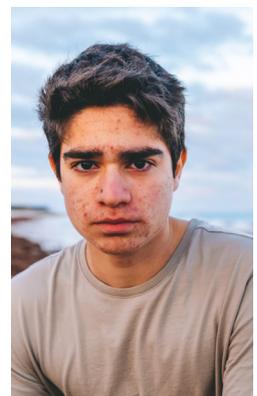
**WRITE** a 140-character Twitter review of the work



**WRITE:** Use sticky notes to write down reflections or observations from watching the show. Attach them to yourself (or a partner) on the body part that they relate to – the hands for gestures, the feet for movement across the stage, the head for things that made you think ...



**EXPLORE** the paintings of Pakistani artist Aq Arif, the traditional clothing of the Balochistani peoples, Balochistan, or the work of Swiss circus performer, violinist, actor and director James Thierrée (who makes theatre performances from a blend of contemporary circus, mime, dance, and music) to extend your ideas.



Images: Cam Campbell

# CURRICULUM LINKS

SUBJECT AREA	YEAR LEVEL	CONNECTIONS
Drama	Year 11 & 12	Presentational and contemporary theatre (particularly Unit 4), including the development of new/experimental approaches in the context of contemporary social and cultural values, and dramaturgical processes related to contemporary and devised drama including structuring drama for character journey
Drama	Year 11 & 12	The collaboration of director and scenographer with the actors, dramaturge and designers in contemporary and devised drama
Music	Year 11 & 12	Contemporary music: how social, cultural and historical factors shape music

## NOTES TO TEACHERS:

Please be advised that *Children of the Sea* contains adult themes and disturbing stories