

## WHALE FALL

Submerge yourself in a poetic reimagining of the classic Australian seaside drama for our troubled times in this slow-burning family drama about second chances and unconditional love.

Nadine returns to her beachside home and the family she abandoned to re-connect with her daughter. Now oceans apart, she must navigate her ex-husband's anger at her departure and learn to accept and support her now son Caleb with his desire to begin medically affirming his gender.

A deeply personal and poetic story, *Whale Fall* charts transition across generations, family dynamics, the human body and our ecological future. Central to the work is the story of a dying whale as it slowly descends to the sea floor and forms a new biodiverse ecosystem known as a 'whale fall'. Inspired by environmental writer Rebecca Giggs' essay of the same name, *Whale Fall* features rich visual language, intimate performances and immersive design to conjure the familiarity of the Australian coast. Created by an exceptional team of WA theatre-makers, this new work brings together people from different backgrounds that identify with and support the trans, gender-diverse and queer communities.

## CREATIVE AND PRODUCTION CREDITS

**Director:** Melissa Cantwell (She/Her)

**Assistant Director** Mossy Johnson (She/Her)

**Writer:** Ian Sinclair (He/Him)

**Performers:** Ashton Brady (He/Him), Caroline Brazier (She/Her), Luke Hewitt (He/Him) & Alexandria Steffenson (She/Her),

**Set and Costume Designer:** Bruce McKinven (He/Him)

**Design Associate (Set & Costume):** Amalia Lambert (She/Her)

**Lighting Designer:** Matthew Marshall (He/Him)

**Sound Designer:** Rebecca Riggs-Bennett (She/Her)

**Sound Mentor:** Kingsley Reeve (He/Him)

**Dramaturg:** Jesse Oliver (He/Him)

**Producers:** Alexandre Egloff (He/Him) for The Kabuki Drop, Tim Carter (He/Him) & Brittany Green (She/Her) for PICA

**Stage Manager:** Stas Julien-Martial (They/Them)

**Community Consultants:** Teddy Loveny (They/Them), Emery Wishart (He/Him) & Brooke Bennett (She/Her) from TransFolk of WA

*Whale Fall* is commissioned by the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) and co-presented with Perth Festival. This project is supported by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, the City of Perth and PICA's Art Commissioners.

## **ABOUT PICA:**

Housed in a large and striking heritage building in the heart of Perth, Western Australia, the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) is the city's focal point for those wishing to experience the best of Australian and international visual, performance and interdisciplinary art.

PICA is both a producing and presenting institution that runs a year round program of changing exhibitions, seasons in contemporary dance, theatre and performance and a range of interdisciplinary projects. It boasts one of the largest and most breath-taking exhibition spaces in Australia and has become known for the leading role it plays in the presentation of significant new work.

PICA's key aim is to promote, support and present contemporary arts and to stimulate critical discussion around the arts and broader cultural issues. Providing a site for experimentation, critical analysis, discussion and debate is fundamental to its charter. PICA is known for the rigour and breadth of its artistic and education programs, high production standards and impeccable presentation.

In many aspects of its operations, PICA might be understood as an incubator: providing resources, mentoring and support for both emerging and mature artists whilst promoting new and emerging ideas, forms and practices to the broader community.

PICA is an icon of contemporary thinking – it is a catalyst for innovative and ground breaking art and culture. Not constrained by convention, PICA gives artists and audiences a glimpse of what is possible.

[www.pica.org.au](http://www.pica.org.au)

## **ABOUT THE KABUKI DROP:**

The Kabuki Drop is an emergent, multiplatform arts company creating work within a variety of spaces and across art forms. They are storytellers who reinterpret theatre forms and present ideas and aesthetics for adventurous audiences. They play with and within their environments, championing artists who create immersive experiences which provoke thought, challenge norms and encourage conversation. Formed by Melissa Cantwell in 2017, the company has presented *The Average Joe* (FRINGE WORLD, 2017); *Blink* (Commissioned by The City of Perth Winter Arts Festival, 2017); *Slap and Tickle* (FRINGE WORLD, 2018; Adelaide Cabaret Festival 2019) and *The Elders Project* (Fremantle Festival 2019).

## TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

Prepared by TransFolk of WA

### Terminology:

**Gender:** this is the important one! Gender is in the brain, it's how you feel inside when you ask the question am I male or female, it is not biology or body parts. It's also important to distinguish between gender and sexuality as they are not the same. Gender is who you are, sexuality is who you love.

**Pronouns:** this is how you like to be referred to. Commonly she/her, he/him, they/them.

**Cisgender:** this is the word for those in the community whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth

**Transgender:** your gender does not match the one you were assigned at birth.

**Gender Non Conforming:** an umbrella term to refer to someone who does not conform to the usual norms of gender in society.

**Non Binary:** an umbrella term for any number of gender identities that sit within, outside of, across or between the spectrum of the male and female binary. A non-binary person might identify as neither male nor female both or other such as terms like gender fluid, trans masculine, trans feminine, agender, bigender or in many other ways on the spectrum.

**Gender Dysphoria:** this is a persistent distress relating to one's physical sex characteristics or assigned sex not aligning with gender. Lots of transgender people experience this but not all.

**AMAB/DMAB:** Assigned Male at Birth/Designated Male at Birth

**AFAB/DFAB:** Assigned Female at Birth/Designated Female at Birth

**Transition/Affirmation:** the process of moving towards living as their true gender. It may involve only a social transition or can extend to medical and legal changes.

**Conversion Therapy:** a harmful process of trying to divert the person back to their gender assigned at birth.

### The Facts:

Transgender and gender diverse people have always existed throughout every society in the world. Due to Transphobia, violence, mistreatment and discrimination many don't feel it's an option to affirm their gender in our society. Transgender people, as a result, are much more likely to experience mental health problems, homelessness and unemployment due to this lack of support and affirmation by the community.

It is reported that the number of school aged young people who identify as trans and gender diverse is currently 1.2% and 2.5%, as cited respectively by the Telethon Kids Institute at the Princess Margaret Hospital in WA and The Royal Children's Hospital Gender Service in Melbourne. This translates into a very large

number of school aged children across Australia.

The Trans Pathways Study conducted by the Telethon Kids Institute in WA found that 4 out of 5 transgender adolescents have self harmed, with almost 1 in 2 rate of respondents having attempted suicide. These rates are much higher than those in the rest of society. Studies have also shown that when transgender children's identity is affirmed by their peers and family their rates of self harm and suicide fall back to similar rates to that of the general population. Medical advice and research indicates that the best course of action is to affirm a child's gender and let them progress at their own rate as they are ready.

Common causes for concern from parents and society, especially when talking about children, are typically that a child might be too young to know. Research has now shown that transgender children and children in general have quite a fixed sense of gender from the earliest ages and there is very little difference in this for transgender children. Think about at what age you knew you were a girl or boy. Given that for young children the only treatment is social transition, there is no medical intervention and no harm in letting a child see what fits them best, whereas the potential harm done by refusing them that opportunity is significant. The outcome for a transgender child however is largely impacted by support they receive around them from family and friends.

This is an individual's journey and there isn't a right or wrong way for them to navigate it, it's about listening to the child and following their lead.

### The Process

It's worth noting that there is nothing wrong with a transgender child, they are not mentally ill just because they are transgender. However they, like anyone else, can still suffer from mental illness; they are in fact at higher risk for this especially where they aren't surrounded by supportive peers and family. It's therefore appropriate to ensure a young person has access to a counsellor or psychologist experienced in gender diversity to help them through any challenges they may face should they need one. Education on gender diversity isn't standard for psychologists and counsellors so advised finding one that has been recommended for gender diverse folk to receive positive and supportive care. There are "conversion therapy" practices, which are destructive to a child's wellbeing.

### Social Affirmation

In young children the process is simply to socially affirm their gender. This means letting the child live as their affirmed gender, using the correct pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them). There will likely be changes to hairstyles, clothing and all that entails affirming their chosen gender. There is nothing medically done.

### Puberty Blockers

When Transgender children progress far enough into puberty, this can be quite distressing when their body changes in ways they don't want it to. The only medical intervention made is to commence puberty blockers after a thorough evaluation and review by a medical team. This is like hitting a pause button on puberty and is completely reversible. If the child stops the blockers, their puberty will recommence like normal. For a transgender child this is an important pause, to stop irreversible unwanted changes to the body and give the child more time to mature and be in a position to make educated decisions on future treatment.

### **Hormone Replacement Therapy**

At approximately age 16, should the teen wish to proceed with their medical transition, they can then commence Hormones for their affirmed gender. This will have the affect of letting their bodies develop the way they need them to in line with their affirmed gender. Both the hormone stage and blockers stage are only given after exhaustive reviews by a team of specialist doctors. In WA this is handled by the Perth Children's Hospital Gender Diversity Service.

### **Gender Affirmation Surgery**

This is not available as an option until the child is over 18. In some circumstances trans men might be able to be considered for breast reduction surgery (Top Surgery) from age 16 up. It's important to note that not all transgender people need or want surgery.

### **PEER SUPPORT SERVICES:**

#### **Trans Folk of WA**

TransFolk of WA is a support service for all transgender people and their loved ones in Western Australia.

<https://www.transfolkofwa.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/TransFolkofWA>

#### **Living Proud**

Living Proud provides support, information and resources to WA's gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex community.

<https://www.livingproud.org.au/>

#### **PFLAG WA**

PFLAG Perth have been supporting WA families and friends understand and support their LGBTI loved ones with knowledge, acceptance, love and pride. Every PFLAG in Australia strongly believes in "Keeping Families Together".

[www.pflagwa.org.au](http://www.pflagwa.org.au)

<https://www.facebook.com/pflagperth>

#### **Parents of Gender Diverse Children**

PGDC exists to provide peer support to those who are parenting trans and gender diverse children of any age. It is founded and run by a group of mums.

[www.pgdc.org.au](http://www.pgdc.org.au)

<https://www.facebook.com/parentsofgenderdiversechildren>

#### **Transcend**

Transcend was founded by Rebekah Robertson OAM, the proud mum of Georgie Stone OAM. It was the first parent led peer support network for parents and carers of trans, gender diverse and non-binary kids in Australia and has provided information, advocacy, parent support and community networking to this day

<https://transcendaus.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/transcendsupport1>

## **MEDICAL SUPPORT SERVICES:**

### **Perth Children's Hospital Gender Diversity Service**

A specialist outpatient service for the assessment and care of children and adolescents experiencing gender diversity issues.

<https://pch.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Mental-Health/Gender-Diversity-Service>

### **Qlife (Free LGBTI Peer Support Counselling)**

QLife provides Australia-wide anonymous, LGBTI peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about a range of issues including sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships.

<https://www qlife.org.au/>

1800 184 527

### **Lifeline**

Crisis support. Suicide prevention.

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

24 hotline: 13 11 14

### **Suicide Call Back Service**

1300 659 467

### **HeadSpace**

National mental health support service

<https://headspace.org.au/>

### **Minus18**

Champions for LGBTIQIA+ youth

<https://www.minus18.org.au/>

## CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES:

### **Director: Melissa Cantwell (She/her/hers)**

Melissa Cantwell is a director and writer. For The Kabuki Drop: *The Average Joe*; *Blink* (Winter Arts Festival); *Slap and Tickle* (Adelaide Cabaret Festival, FRINGE WORLD); *The Elders Project* (Fremantle Festival). She has a BA (Film, ECU) and BPA (Directing, WAAPA). She has been commissioned by Black Swan; Barking Gecko; Playlab and City of Perth. Her plays have been produced by PF; Barking Gecko; JUTE; PTC; QTC and DTC and others. Previous roles include Artistic Director (Perth Theatre Company); Associate Director (PTC) and Program Manager of The Blue Room. She received an Emerging Leader's fellowship from the International Society for Performing Arts and has been a guest artist for numerous organisations. Her directorial work has been documented in Stephen Curtis' book *Staging Ideas* and her writing has been published by the Australian Script Centre.

### **Assistant Director: Mossy Johnson (She/her/hers)**

Mossy 333 (Mossy Jade Johnson) is a multi-disciplinary artist working in painting, digital media, music production, and performance. Her work explores trans feminine public and private selves and how they to connect to technology and nature through abstraction. Her work seeks to demystify the often essentialized idea of trans women whilst contemplating the future of medical bodies in alternate realities. Mossy has performed and shown work at Arts Centre Melbourne, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Firstdraft Gallery (SYD), Mpavillion and RMIT Gallery & Design Hub (MEL).

### **Writer: Ian Sinclair (He/him/his)**

Ian Sinclair is an experimental artist, playwright and curator exploring immersive and participatory installation, Live Art and world-building. His projects consider fragility, queerness and the ecological uncanny. Sinclair's creative partnership Pony Express create alternate realities reflecting adaptation, global weirding and the slow apocalypse. Sinclair exhibits and tours, nationally and internationally, from contemporary art to non-traditional venues and cooperates with communities at the forefront of queer and environmental futures. Sinclair has a BA (Contemporary Performance) from Edith Cowan University and is a seasonal lecturer at the Iceland University of the Arts. In 2021, he will premiere large-scale artwork *Epoch Wars* (Performing Lines) and plays *Whale Fall* and *Nocturna*, exhibit *Ecosexual Bathhouse* and develop commissions *Crisis Actor*, *To A God Unknown* and *The Animals In That Country*.

### **Actor: Luke Hewitt (He/him/his)**

Nominated for BEST ACTOR 2003, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2014 and winner of the Perth Theatre Trust/Equity Guild Award for Best Actor in both 2008 and 2009, Luke has been acting professionally in Perth for more than 20 years. He has performed on main stages in Perth, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane as well as in TV and film. Luke is also a well-known voice over artist and Narrator having recorded countless advertising spots since 1987 and is the voice of *Outback Truckers* (8 Seasons), *Railroad Australia* (2 Seasons), *Outback Pilots* and *Outback Opal Hunters* (3 Seasons) for Prospero/7Mate/Discovery. He is a proud Equity member since 1987.

### **Actor: Alexandria Steffenson (She/Her/Hers)**

Alexandria is an award-winning acting graduate from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts where she was the recipient of the Leslie Anderson Award for Acting Excellence. She was nominated for a Performing Arts WA Award for Best Supporting Actress in Black Swan State Theatre Company's production of *Medea* whereby she played the titular character. Next year, she will bring the iconic Australian gothic horror classic, *Wake in Fright* to life playing nine different characters in the one-person national touring show for Malthouse Theatre. Theatre credits include; *A View of Concrete* (Belvoir) and *The Crucible*, *X-Stacy* and *Live Acts on Stage* for Black Swan State Theatre Co. Her film and television credits include; *Happy Feet*, *Neighbours*, *FB Holden* (short), *CNNNN* and *Life Support*. She is an educator and sessional lecturer teaching Acting and Performance for children and adults at WAAPA. Alex is currently shooting season 1 of the new Stan Series *EDEN*, which will air in 2021.

### **Actor: Caroline Brazier (She/Her/Hers)**

Caroline Brazier is one of Australia's most outstanding actors from her starring roles as Wendy Greene in 5 seasons of ABC's *Rake* to Chrissy Merchant on *Packed to The Rafters*. Caroline's credits include *Water Rats*, *City Homicide*, *Legend of the Seeker*, *Parallax*, *Wild Boys*, *Terra Nova*, *Miss Fishers Murder Mysteries*, *Deep Water*, *Home & Away* and *Offspring*. Caroline's feature film work includes the Sci Fi fantasy *Pulse*, Director Greg McLean's *Rogue* and Ben Elton's *Three Summers*. Caroline's extensive theatre credits include main stage lead roles in productions such as *Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* for Bell Shakespeare Company, *Ray's Tempest*, *Enlightenment* and *Jumpy* for Melbourne Theatre Company, *Don's Party* for Sydney Theatre Company, *Gasp!* for Queensland Theatre Company/Black Swan Theatre Company, *Speed the Plow* for the Perth Theatre Company, *Europe* for La Mama Theatre, *The Incredible Here and Now* for the National Theatre of Parramatta and *The Literati* for Griffin Theatre Company. Caroline's Sydney Theatre Company credits include the lead role of Paige in the black comedy *Dinner*, the SuperIntendent in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* and Mary in the critically acclaimed production of *Mary Stuart*.

### **Actor: Ashton Brady (He/Him/His)**

Although just 12, Ashton Brady already has a wealth of experience in Performing Arts. Ash made his theatrical debut in *Oliver* for Laughing Horse Productions at Koorliny Arts Centre in 2019 and most recently played the role of Maui in West Byford Primary School's production of *Moana Jr*. The role of Caleb is a significant one for Ash, having come out as transgender in January of 2020. He is honoured to have the chance to be involved in this production.

### **Set/Costume Designer: Bruce McKinven (He/him/his)**

Bruce has a 30-year career designing for theatre, festivals, events, and dance across Australia, working with some of the nation's leading practitioners in the performing arts in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. He is the Senior Production Designer for DARK MOFO Festival in Hobart since 2016, the Site Designer for Adelaide Festival's ADELAIDE WRITERS' WEEK since 2012 and Festival Designer for Perth Festival 2020 and 2021, designing many of their featured events spaces. Bruce has worked with Director Mel Cantwell previously for Perth Theatre Company on *A Number*,

*Alienation* and *The Song Was Wrong*, and for The Kabuki Drop on *Blink*. He graduated from QUT's Visual Arts course in 1994 and NIDA's Production Design course in 1997.

### **Design Associate – Costume and Set: Amalia Lambert (She/her/hers)**

Amalia Lambert is an emerging Australian Set and Costume Designer. In 2019, Amalia graduated from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) with a Bachelor of Performing Arts majoring in Design. On completion of the course, Amalia proudly received The David Hough Award for Outstanding Achievement in Design. Since graduating, Amalia has designed the set and costumes for the West Australian Ballet's production of *The Adventures of Snugglepoot and Cuddlepie*, Awesome Arts Festival 2020. Amalia has also designed the costumes for Strut and Frets brand new alt-circus production *BoomBoom in the House of Casa BlahBlah* (2019) at The Rechabite. Amalia is a passionate and dedicated young creative, who becomes immensely invested in all of her projects.

### **Lighting Designer: Matthew Marshall (He/him/his)**

Born and raised in Perth Western Australia, Matthew Marshall is a graduate of the WAAPA Production and Design course in 2000. Matt has been nominated for his work twice by The Helpmann Awards for Best Lighting Design (2012, 2017) and has received multiple nominations for Best Lighting Design from the Australian Production Design Guild. Recent designs include *Two Crews* (Sydney and Adelaide Festivals), *Cinderella* (Seattle Opera), *Turn Of The Screw* (New Zealand Opera), *Tchaikovsky* (Tulsa Ballet), *LA BOHÉME Opera On Sydney Harbour* (Opera Australia), *American Idiot* (Shake & Stir/QPAC), *Askungen* (Royal Swedish Opera), *The Barber Of Seville* (Seattle Opera), *CARMEN* (Oper Leipzig), *Club Swizzle* (Roundhouse London), and *La Cenerentola* (Oper Leipzig, San Diego Opera). Matt is also a mentor to Lighting Design students at both NIDA and WAAPA as well as a judge for the Australian Production & Design Guild Awards from 2017 - 2019.

### **Sound Designer: Rebecca Riggs-Bennett (She/her/hers)**

Rebecca Riggs-Bennett (or Elsewhere/Rebecca), is a Boorloo-based sound artist and electronic music producer. Her practice is interdisciplinary, branching across and between performance and installation. She works with sound as a dramaturgical tool that drives narratives, using interviews, field recordings, archival audio and composed electronica, and is commencing research into sound design as immersive theatre. Rebecca has presented work, worked on projects and taken up residencies/labs with the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth Festival, The Blue Room Theatre, pvi collective, Cool Change Contemporary, Awesome Festival, Arts House (VIC), SIGNAL (VIC), Crack Theatre Festival (NSW) and Glastonbury Festival (UK).

### **Stage Manager: Stas Julien-Martial (They/them/theirs)**

Stas Julien-Martial is multidisciplinary artist and stage manager based in Boorloo (Perth). They have worked within the stage management team on various productions including but not limited to *Xenides*, *Our Town*, *Medea*, and *The Torrents* (Black Swan State Theatre Company); *Bite The Hand* (The Last Great Hunt); *Layla Majnun* (Performing Lines); and *Body Rights* (Western Australian Youth Theatre Company).