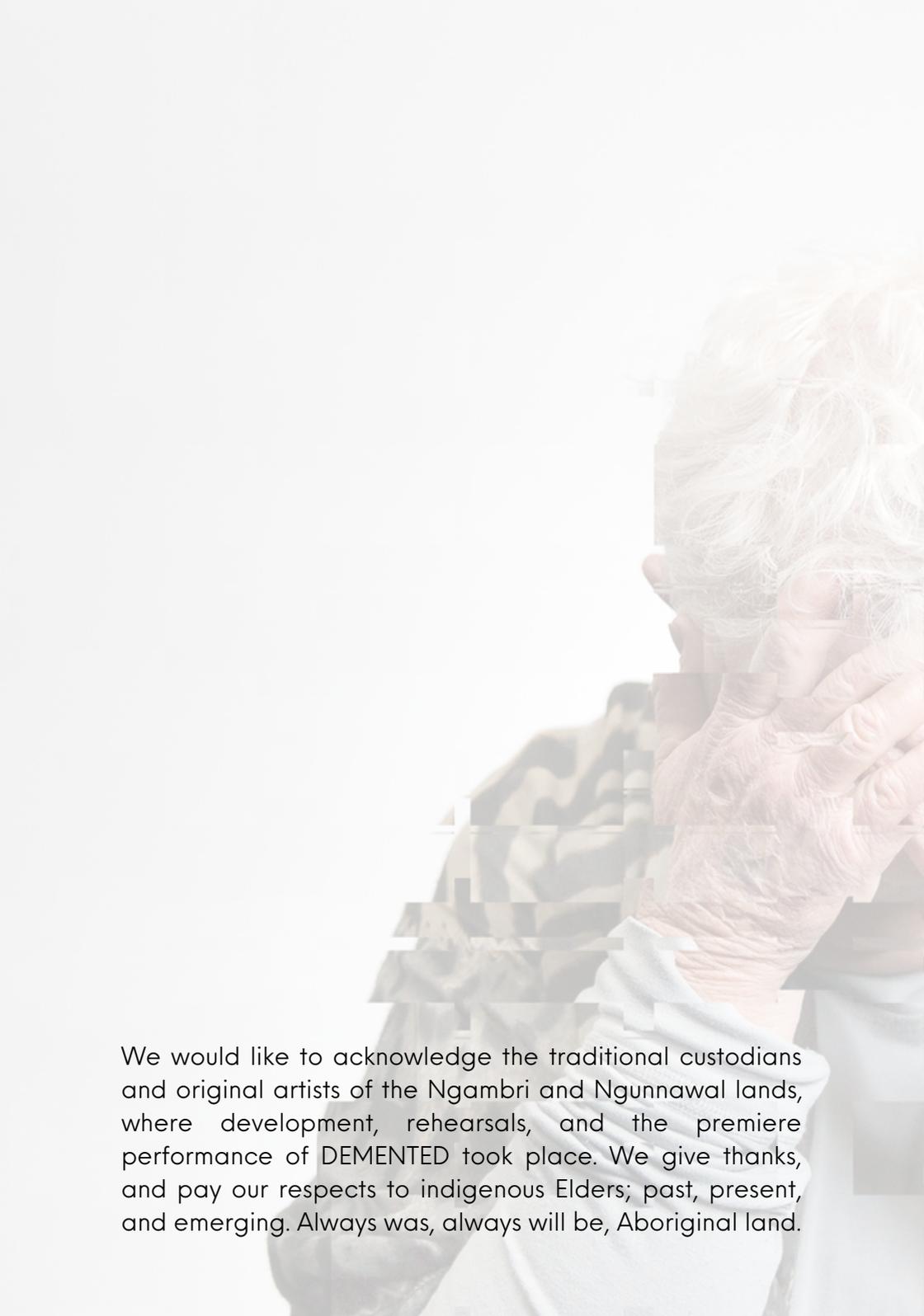




# DEMENTED

by Ruth Pieloor



We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians and original artists of the Ngambri and Ngunnawal lands, where development, rehearsals, and the premiere performance of DEMENTED took place. We give thanks, and pay our respects to indigenous Elders; past, present, and emerging. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

# DEMENTED

**Playwright/Producer** Ruth Pieloor  
**Director** Ali Clinch  
**Dramaturg** Peter Matheson  
**Lighting Designer** Jacob Aquilina  
**Set Designer** Mel Davies  
**Set Construction** Lachlan Davies  
**Costume Designer** Fiona Leach  
**Sound Designer** Damian Ashcroft  
**Sound Assistant** Ruth O'Brien  
**Puppet Designer** Hilary Talbot  
**Clowning Coach** Robin Davidson  
**Puppetry Director** Ruth Pieloor  
**Stage Manager** Mel Davies  
**Assistant Stage Manager** Lachlan Davies  
**Stagehand/Dresser** Chipz Jin  
**Auslan Interpreter** Brett Olzen

**Maggie** Chrissie Shaw  
**Rachel** Heidi Silberman  
**Kat** Rachel Pengilly  
**Emily** Carolyn Eccles

# A WORD FROM THE Q

In 2018 I launched a new theatre company, Echo Theatre, at The Q. We committed to doing a play a year, drawn from the incredible list of plays written by women. During a newspaper interview at the time I was asked- "Why are you only programming plays by women? Aren't you ignoring the classics?" My answer; "I'm not ignoring the classics, I'm finding the new ones." Quite apart from the absurdity of the interview question, when the bulk of the theatre's season was still overwhelmingly written by men, is this really the best we can do? To just continue to program the same plays, tell the same stories, and platform the same lives on our stages? I think we need to give our audiences more credit, as well as acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of our theatre going public. Our patrons want to see themselves on stage, to hear stories that reflect their own experiences, but they are also hungry for difference, to be transported, and to walk in other people's shoes.

When I called for Expressions of Interest for our newly launched 'Q the Locals' season, I hoped that I would get some interesting stories, something new, something to grow our audience, something to move and challenge and engage. I was overwhelmed by the number of submissions I received, and was thrilled with the variety and quality of the work offered. But when 'Demented' came across my desk, I knew I had found something special, a work that would tick every box I had hoped for. Ruth's script is a sensitive, imaginative, and entirely unique handling of difficult subject matter. This disease touches so many people's lives, and is part of so many people's experiences, and yet their stories are not often told, as it can be difficult to convince an audience to engage with such heart-breaking material. Ruth's personal experience with dementia

as well as her training in clowning and puppetry, have given her the ability to approach this story with a lightness and a humour that will make it accessible to audiences.

I believe that it is vital to meaningfully support our local artists at all stages of their careers, and I am passionate about programming work from emerging, mid-career, and established creatives from our region. The importance of telling contemporary, Australian stories cannot be underestimated, and the ability for new writers to take their work from page to stage is essential to the ongoing development of our regions' ecology of artists. The incredible team of creatives involved in 'Demented', all at various stages of their careers, bring so much knowledge, skill, and talent to the production. I am proud to be able to support Ruth and her team and to provide a platform for this remarkable work. After production, and publication, I look forward to seeing where it goes next.

**Jordan Best**

Artistic Director/Program Manager  
Queanbeyan Performing Arts Centre

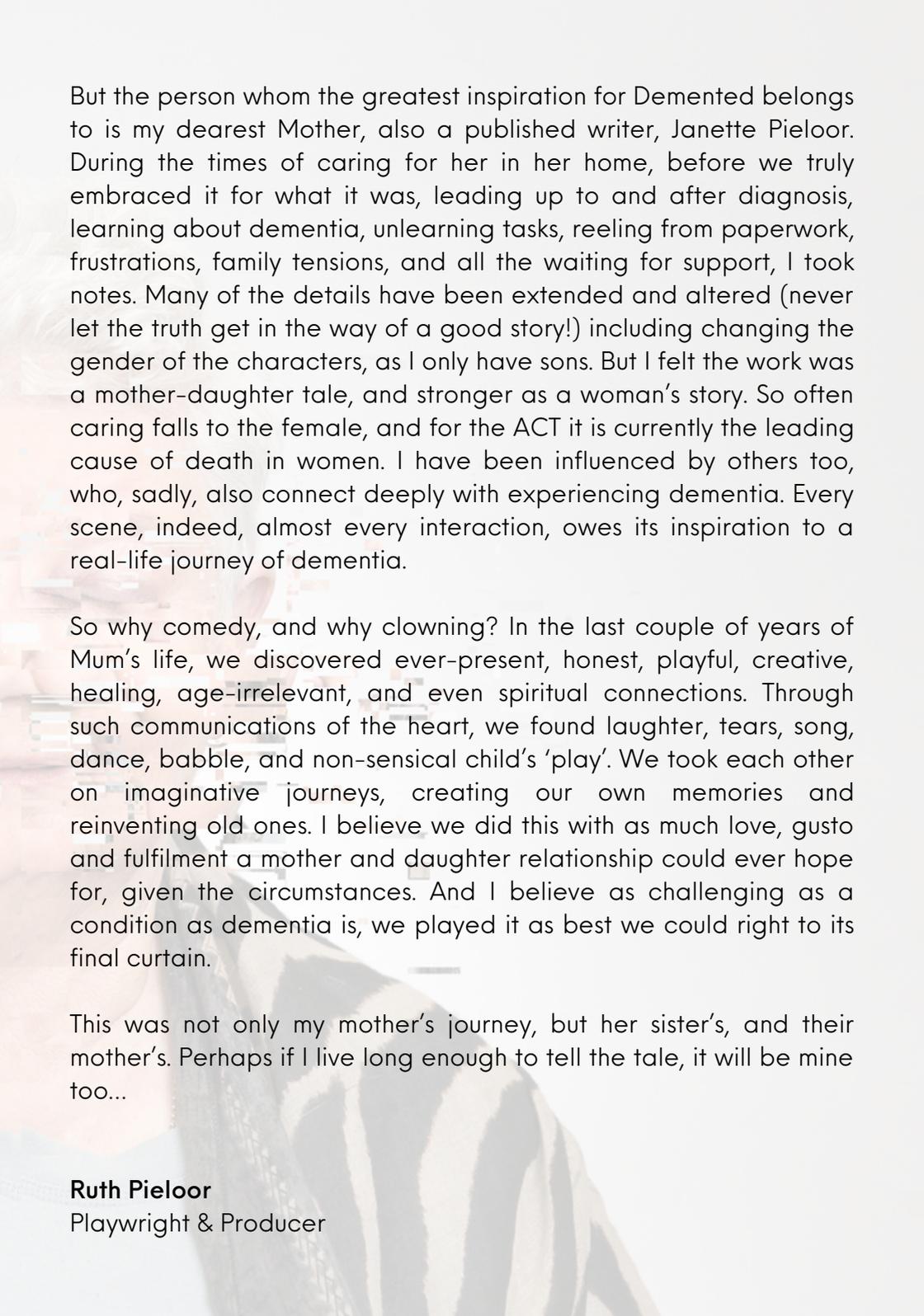


# PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

I am always interested in heart-felt stories that move us to both laughter and tears. Stories that question the human condition and the capacity we have to endure, to love, and to belong to one another – Demented was no exception.

My journey as a writer beyond the short-form, truly began back in 2014 with writer residency development program 'the hive' at The Street Theatre. After creating and developing my first one-act play Under My Bed, published by Australian Plays Transform, I felt more ready to try my hand at a full-length work. Encouraged by Shelly Higgs and Caroline Stacey, I set out to develop the work independently with arguably Australia's leading dramaturg, Peter Matheson. It was surely this connection and undying support, that allowed me to win a local government arts grant to develop the work further. I was on my way.

Much to the surprise and perhaps even reluctance of some, I was keen to explore the theme and nature of dementia, through the unusual use of comedy, via clowning. This was largely influenced by my work as a Clown Doctor in children's wards at the Canberra Hospital, to which I give thanks to my training and engagement with The Humour Foundation. I have immense gratitude for The Clown Institute's Alicia Gonzales for her deeply encouraging endorsement, that humour of this nature can connect with audiences in such a sensitive way. And when Jordan Best, AD of Queanbeyan Performing Arts Centre, understood and celebrated my vision for this play, I felt seen. I felt I had arrived as a producer and a writer. Following my Q Theatre application success, I was accepted to be published by Currency Press, which only now as I write this, makes me feel I can truly call myself a playwright.



But the person whom the greatest inspiration for Demented belongs to is my dearest Mother, also a published writer, Janette Pieloor. During the times of caring for her in her home, before we truly embraced it for what it was, leading up to and after diagnosis, learning about dementia, unlearning tasks, reeling from paperwork, frustrations, family tensions, and all the waiting for support, I took notes. Many of the details have been extended and altered (never let the truth get in the way of a good story!) including changing the gender of the characters, as I only have sons. But I felt the work was a mother-daughter tale, and stronger as a woman's story. So often caring falls to the female, and for the ACT it is currently the leading cause of death in women. I have been influenced by others too, who, sadly, also connect deeply with experiencing dementia. Every scene, indeed, almost every interaction, owes its inspiration to a real-life journey of dementia.

So why comedy, and why clowning? In the last couple of years of Mum's life, we discovered ever-present, honest, playful, creative, healing, age-irrelevant, and even spiritual connections. Through such communications of the heart, we found laughter, tears, song, dance, babble, and non-sensical child's 'play'. We took each other on imaginative journeys, creating our own memories and reinventing old ones. I believe we did this with as much love, gusto and fulfilment a mother and daughter relationship could ever hope for, given the circumstances. And I believe as challenging as a condition as dementia is, we played it as best we could right to its final curtain.

This was not only my mother's journey, but her sister's, and their mother's. Perhaps if I live long enough to tell the tale, it will be mine too...

**Ruth Pieloor**

Playwright & Producer

# DIRECTOR'S NOTES

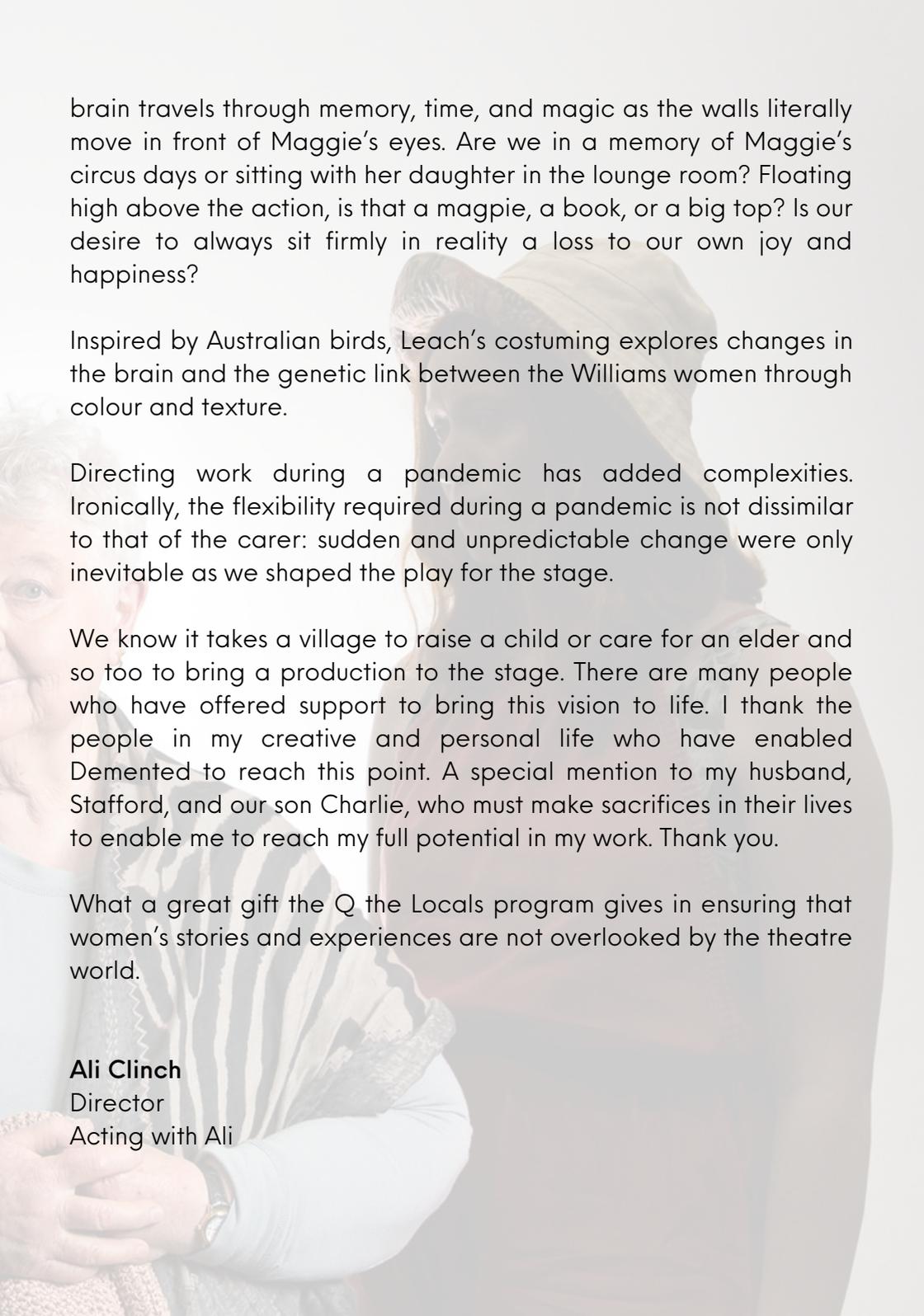
I spent five difficult years caring for my father who became unwell when I was a first-time mum. Caring for my son and father simultaneously was both sublime and heart-breaking. As one brain capacity would develop, the other was destroyed by Alzheimer's Disease. In this experience, which as I write this, is still very raw, I was struck by the many opportunities for play, joy, and the comedy of errors brought about by living with dementia and the many blessings that this dual role gave me.

Pieloor approached me to direct a creative development of *Demented* in 2021, several months after my father's death and I was immediately drawn to bringing this story to life.

The shape of the play has evolved considerably since our first script read back in July this year. As is the nature of producing new work, the work has evolved. During creative development in 2021 we made many great discoveries with the playwright and now, as we transform the script from page to stage at The Q, the skills, experience, and compassion of the revised cast brings more magic and discoveries for the audience to enjoy. A humble thank you to Pieloor for entrusting this work to me and the creative team. A work so personal and close to your heart.

Is the play about Dementia? Yes, of course but it is about so much more. This is the story of women in contemporary Australia. This is an exploration of the world of the brain and moments of divine clarity, sublime connection and building new relationships within established bonds.

The set pays tribute to the smooth and effortless way the dementia



brain travels through memory, time, and magic as the walls literally move in front of Maggie's eyes. Are we in a memory of Maggie's circus days or sitting with her daughter in the lounge room? Floating high above the action, is that a magpie, a book, or a big top? Is our desire to always sit firmly in reality a loss to our own joy and happiness?

Inspired by Australian birds, Leach's costuming explores changes in the brain and the genetic link between the Williams women through colour and texture.

Directing work during a pandemic has added complexities. Ironically, the flexibility required during a pandemic is not dissimilar to that of the carer: sudden and unpredictable change were only inevitable as we shaped the play for the stage.

We know it takes a village to raise a child or care for an elder and so too to bring a production to the stage. There are many people who have offered support to bring this vision to life. I thank the people in my creative and personal life who have enabled Demented to reach this point. A special mention to my husband, Stafford, and our son Charlie, who must make sacrifices in their lives to enable me to reach my full potential in my work. Thank you.

What a great gift the Q the Locals program gives in ensuring that women's stories and experiences are not overlooked by the theatre world.

**Ali Clinch**  
Director  
Acting with Ali

# CREATIVE TEAM



## **Ruth Pieloor**

Playwright, Producer & Puppetry Director

Grateful to be a 'Q the Locals' recipient as producer to premiere her first full length play *Demented*, Ruth Pieloor's first love was in performance, having trained and worked with Terrapin Puppet Theatre, BA in Acting at Theatre Nepean (UWS), and now an established local actor, improv artist, puppeteer, director, and tutor in theatre-devising and performance skills workshops in communities, corporate settings, schools, and for adults with disabilities. Ruth has conceptualized, directed, and scripted countless performances, including for ATYP, Canberra Youth Theatre, ricochet working productions, Short and Sweet, Rebus Theatre, ImproACT, and with a multitude of private and public schools and colleges in Sydney, Canberra and regional NSW. Ruth has performed in various theatre productions at The Street Theatre, in local short films, is a current Playback ensemble member with Rebus Theatre, resident Clown Doctor with The Humour Foundation at The Canberra Hospital, tutor with ImproACT, and proud MEAA Ambassador.

As an emerging playwright and producer, Ruth has received numerous awards for her short plays with Short and Sweet, and in 2017 her one-act play *Under My Bed*, developed and supported by ArtsACT and Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres, went on to be published with Australian Plays Transform in 2020. Ruth was resident writer-producer with The Street Theatre's 'Hive' & 'Expand' programs, and in 2021 was ArtsACT recipient as writer-producer to develop *'Demented'* with Dramaturg Peter Matheson, supported by Ainslie & Gorman Arts Centres. Ruth is a Canberra local, passionate about inspiring and encouraging artists to support one another, to strengthen and diversify arts practices.



## **Ali Clinch**

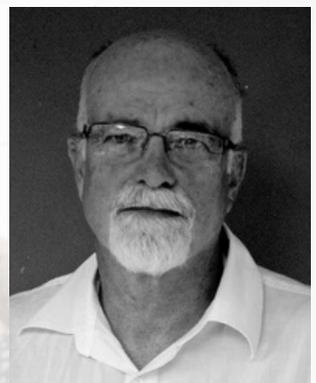
Director

Ali Clinch is an award-winning actor & director, winning the ReLink 'Spirit Award' for her work as Artistic Director of Acting Crazy Theatre in 2010, and most recently the 'Canberra Critics Circle Award' for her work on What if Scientists Ruled the World, commissioned by The Australian Academy of Science. Ali specialises in 'applied theatre', working with people to help them explore their stories theatrically. An honours graduate of Griffith University's Bachelor of Applied Theatre, Ali's most recent directorial projects include Titanic 2020 - a play by and for senior Canberrans Pandemic Players, exploring their experience with Covid 19, funded by ACT Health in collaboration with COTA ACT & Rebus Theatre, Chemical Reaction, commissioned by Questacon, Mothering Father a play exploring the personal experience of being a carer to a parent with dementia - National Film & Sound Archives and Smith's Alternative, and she also co-wrote and co-directed Rebus Theatre's A Tender Thing. Ali is programs manager, drama tutor, actor, and 'Playback Theatre' ensemble member with Rebus Theatre. She runs 'Acting with Ali' to empower and upskill local talent in Queanbeyan and ACT.

## **Peter Matheson**

Dramaturg

Since becoming a freelance dramaturg in 2002, Peter Matheson has assessed scripts and/or worked dramaturgically with most of the major main stage (as well as many smaller) theatre companies and all the assessment agencies in Australia. He has taught playwriting, handled residencies, facilitated development programs and tutored in organisations from tertiary institutions through to enthusiastic amateurs. His most recent work has been with TasPerforms, Playlab's 'Incubator' series, Blue Cow's 'Cowshed' program, and Yirra Yaakin Theatre in Perth.





## **Jacob Aquilina**

### Lighting Designer

Jacob Aquilina is an up and coming lighting designer, who has a theatrical lighting background working on plays and musical theatre in our region. Jacob is proud to be Eclipse Lighting and Sound's Technical Manager for The Q Theatre. Some of Jacob's recent favourite theatrical credits include Echo Theatre's Wolf Lullaby, Supa Productions' Full Monty, and Queanbeyan Players' Oliver. He is always wanting to upskill himself and work on a wide range of events.

## **Mel Davies**

### Set Designer & Stage Manager

Mel Davies commenced her theatrical career in the early 1990s, working with Canberra Philharmonic and Canberra Rep doing backstage crew, lighting, and sound, while spending her days at WIN Television as a news camera assistant. Mel has developed her career in theatre through Canberra Opera doing set design and stage management for Die Fledermaus, Cosi Fan Tutte, Gianni Schicchi, Cavalleria Rusticana (2019), and with The National Opera's La Clemenza di Tito (2021).



## **Lachlan Davies**

### Set Construction & Assistant Stage Manager

Lachlan Davies graduated Year 12 last year with a Certificate II in woodwork and furniture-making and is developing a career in set design and construction. Lachlan spent his teenage years learning the ropes of theatre in lighting operation and assistant set construction for Canberra Opera's Die Fledermaus, Cosi Fan Tutte, Gianni Schicchi, Cavalleria Rusticana, and was lead set builder on The National Opera's La Clemenza di Tito in 2021.



**Fiona Leach**  
Costume Designer



Fiona Leach has worked as a costume designer for over 20 years with many Canberra theatre companies. Her most recent design was for Free-Rain Theatre's production of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert. In the last 5 years local productions include: Mamma Mia, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Absurd Person Singular, The Little Mermaid, To Kill a Mockingbird, Kinky Boots, The World Goes Round, Once Upon a Mattress, 42nd Street, 12 Angry Men, Shrek, Alice in Wonderland, Radio on Repertory, Les Misérables, The History Boys, The 39 Steps, and The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll. Fiona has received multiple CAT (Canberra Area Theatre) Awards for costume design in various musicals and in 2017 Fiona was awarded the prestigious 'Silver CAT' (Canberra Area Theatre) Award in recognition of her achievements in costume design.



## **Damian Ashcroft**

### Sound Designer

Damian has been involved with Canberra's arts scene for over a decade. He earned an A.Dip (Music) from CIT in 2014, winning Student of the Year. After graduating, he began performing regularly with Ruth O'Brien, collaborating on her debut EP, *Invaluable* (2018). In 2016 he rekindled his interest in theatre at ImproACT. Damian began teaching improvised theatre in 2019 and directed the show *Adventures* at Canberra Unscripted in the same year. These days Damian weaves his love of fantasy, improvised theatre and music production into the *Surrealia* Podcast, which is currently in production on its fourth season.

## **Ruth O'Brien**

### Sound Assistant

Ruth O'Brien is a singer, songwriter, and multi-passionate creative. Founder of *Upbeat*, a newsletter promoting and creating opportunities for Canberra musicians and industry workers, Ruth regularly interviews and writes for *BMA Magazine*, is on the advisory group for *Rebus Theatre*, is on the board of the *National Live Music Awards*, and works as a creative freelancer, lending her skills and voice to many initiatives and projects across the ACT arts scene. Ruth has worked in many disability arts projects over the last 5 years including as a sound designer and actor for *Rebus Theatre*, as an accessibility advisor for *Accessible Arts NSW*, and consultant on a range of *Disability Inclusion Action Plans (DIAPs)* and projects for many local cultural institutions. Ruth is developing her second album, and is delighted to work on this project with this amazing group of Canberra-based artists.



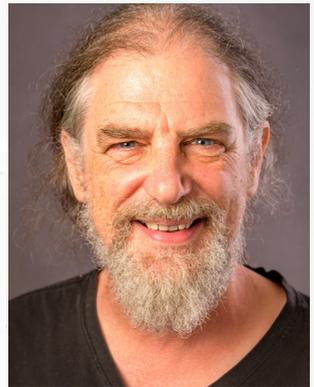


**Hilary Talbot**  
Puppet Designer

Hilary Talbot is a Canberra based artist and sculptor working with a diverse range of materials to create three-dimensional works. She has a special interest in puppetry and visual theatre, having designed and made a wide variety of puppets and props for local and national theatre productions, performance artists, and cultural institutions. Hilary also has her own art practice, with two recent solo exhibitions: 'Glimpses of a Seagull Flying Blind' at The Pinnacles Gallery, Townsville (2018), and 'The Piano Creatures: A Ragged Shore' at the Canberra Museum and Gallery, Canberra (2021).

**Robin Davidson**  
Clown Coach

Robin Davidson is an actor, clown, director, teacher, and writer. He is the founding Artistic Director of Rebus Theatre. A graduate of Charles Sturt University in Theatre/Media, with First Class Honours, Robin has taught in East Timor, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. Robin was co-awarded the 2005 Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance ACT 'Green Room Award'. In 2019 he studied for three months full-time in the Pedagogy of Movement Theatre in Italy with Giovanni Fusetti. Robin has also appeared as an unusually large bogong moth, a giant mango, and a seal.





## **Chipz Jin**

### Stagehand & Dresser

Chipz is a budding young theatre-maker, who has big dreams to be under the bright stage lights, putting on show after show! Chipz has been seen previously on stage in various musical productions of *Fly By Night* (2022), *The Addams Family* (2019), *City of Angels* (2018), *Lenin: A Rock Opera* (2017), and *Grease* (2016). Chipz is a Playback Theatre ensemble member with Rebus Theatre. Chipz believes being a part of *Demented* will be a brilliant addition to their experience, and they ask you to sit back and enjoy the brilliance of Ruth Pieloor, brought to life by Ali Clinch!

## **Brett Olzen**

### Auslan Interpreter

Brett Olzen is a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults) who grew up in a Deaf Family and is the only native-speaking Auslan interpreter in Canberra. Brett has worked as an Auslan Interpreter for 25 years in as education, community, and the arts. His work has included conferences, performances, theatre productions (including with Rebus Theatre), computer access programs, guided tours at the National Gallery of Australia. He is a founding member of the Deaf Dance Group with Belconnen Arts Centre. Brett's work has seen him interpret with Territory and Federal Government, with various Prime Ministers, the Dalai Lama, and at multiple ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards, including when he himself was as a finalist for the 'Life-Time Achievement in Supporting People with Disability Award' in 2019, for the highly acclaimed ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards. Brett is passionate about supporting events and programs to be more accessible and inclusive.



# CAST



**Chrissie Shaw**  
Maggie

Chrissie Shaw has performed in Sydney Revues, children's theatre, and folksinging since the 1960s. She toured Australia with TIE company Pipi Storm, co-created shows, and ran workshops with children and young people, toured The Dresses, The Not Too Late Show, and performed with TAU Theatre, Women on a Shoestring, Jigsaw Theatre, and The Street Theatre to name a few. She co-created, and performed in About Face, Footprints on the Wind, A Sweeter Fern - That's Red!, Drumming on Water, The Keeper, and touring children's shows Flotsam and Jetsam, and Gran's Bag. The Street Theatre productions include Violine, Lawrie and Shirley, and Bijou, which toured Nationally to sell-out audiences. Children's shows The Man Whose Mother was a Pirate, and Arborio appeared at the Sydney Opera House. Chrissie conducts choirs, performs role-plays for ANU Medical Students, has won many awards including Canberra Critics' Circle and Green Room Awards. Chrissie is a proud member of MEAA Actors Equity.

**Carolyn Eccles**  
Emily

Carolyn Eccles is a multi-disciplinary artist and arts educator working across movement and performance, visual arts and the written word. She is one half of the collaborative visual arts practice, darkroom, a member of performance group Luca's Daughters and an associate artist for the performance company, Lingua Franca.

Carolyn has been performing for over 15 years and has trained in Suzuki, Viewpoints, Butoh and Contact Improvisation. She toured 7 shows nationally as an ensemble and solo Theatre in Education performer for 5 years, and has appeared at folk festivals across the country. She holds a Graduate Certificate in Arts & Community Engagement from VCA.





## **Heidi Silberman**

Rachel

Heidi Silberman is an award-winning Canberra based performer, director, writer, and educator. Scripted performances include in Lakespeare's As You Like It, Richard III, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Crouching Giraffe's The Penelopiad, Limbo Theatre's The Good Doctor, and Moral Panic's Love/Chamberlain. Heidi created and directed Lightbulb Improv's productions Under the Bonnet and Shakespeare off the Ruff. She has created, directed and performed in improvised shows: Bridesquad, Shakespeare with Zombies, Femme Noire, and The Home Front, which had successful seasons in Canberra, Adelaide Fringe Festival and in regional NSW. She also co-wrote and co-directed Rebus Theatre's A Tender Thing. Heidi is co-founder of Chrysalis Theatre, co-producer of the Canberra Unscripted Festival, and her alter ego is Dr Peek-a-boo, a Clown Doctor with The Humour Foundation.

## **Rachel Pengilly**

Kat

Rachel Pengilly is an award-winning actor and a UC graduate (BA) in Acting (Chancellor's Award). Rachel has worked extensively across film and theatre. She made her professional stage debut in 2021 as Lizzie in Echo Theatre's Wolf Lullaby. Screen credits include Comments, Bullying is a Crime, and The Melody, awarding her Best Supporting Actress. Rachel was a resident artist at Belco Arts Centre in 2021 for her play Legacies and is one of the Q Theatre's Young Ambassadors in 2022. Rachel will feature later this year in Bare Witness' I Have No Enemies. A wearer of many hats, Rachel is also a playwright, stage manager, high-school Drama teacher, scenic artist, surfer, and proud dog-mum. Rachel has been a proud MEAA member since 2021.



# SPECIAL THANKS

Karla Conway, Shelly Higgs, Caroline Stacey, Craig Alexander, Pete Pieloor, Alicia Gonzales, Ben Drysdale, Liz Drysdale, Anne Murn, Ariana Odermatt, Ceilidh Dalton, Rochelle Whyte, Stefanie Lekkas, Adelaide Rief, Goldele Rayment, Suzanne Rogers, Goran Srejjic, Greg Lee, Mike Hennessey, Brad McCusker, Jordan Best, Natasha Vickery, Joel Horwood, Michael Shilling, Ylaria Rogers, Kit Berry, Lynn Petersen, Jane Duong, Bill Stephens, Helen Musa, Claire Grady, Jodine Muir, Katie Pollock, Victoria Jackson, Chris Stanilewicz, Femke Withag, Yolande Norris, Richard Hale, Ethan Lewis, Ash Gray, James Ashley, Stafford Budd, Charlie Budd, Poppy, Kangara Waters, IRT, & Free-Rain Theatre.

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