

Melting Pot Melbourne in the Spotlight

Melburnalia No. 2 Plays On the City's Diversity

Live theatre may be predominantly the playground of white middle-class Australia but a unique show premiering at fortyfivedownstairs on **22 May 2009** seeks to provide a platform for alternative voices. In commissioning and presenting the five short works that comprise *Melburnalia No. 2* White Whale Theatre has brought together a fascinatingly diverse mix of theatre makers.

Each *Melburnalia No. 2* play takes as its subject a different suburb – ‘Birrarung’ (by **Andrea James**), Maribyrnong (by **Hoa Pham**), Caulfield (by **Danny Katz**), Preston (by **Kit Lazaroo**) and Mentone (by **Aidan Fennessy**). In bringing these localities to life the writers, actors, designers and crew have drawn on their varied personal experiences and cultural backgrounds including Malaysian, Vietnamese, Yorta Yorta, Polish, Canadian-Jewish, Irish, Indian, Chinese-Indonesian, Chinese and Scottish.

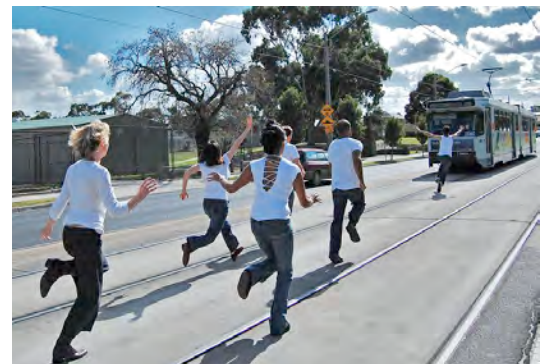


The best-known Melbourne narrative is that it is a city of great creativity and culture, boasting a stylish lifestyle crammed with great coffee, food, shopping and art. While this may be true, the playwrights in *Melburnalia No. 2* have highlighted less recognised civic characteristics that reveal a different city with each telling.

Koori writer /director **Andrea James** wrote against the grain of the brief by naming her locality ‘Birrarung’ (in Wurundjeri *river of mists*). “We don’t have ‘suburbs’ in Aboriginal Melbourne. That’s a colonial construct. In Aboriginal Melbourne there are tribal, clan and language groups often defined by natural land features and waterways”. Having set her piece on a tram near the Yarra with a

warrior from the Forever Zone wearing a traditional possum skin cloak, she explains that “I’ve been looking at old photographs of Koori warriors and people. I’m interested in using theatre to empower these objects again, to bring them back to life, to animate them”.

One of the six talented actors in *Melburnalia* is **Bryan Andy**, a young Yorta Yorta man who finds that theatre is a “perfectly suited forum for maintaining the oral traditions of Aboriginal culture”. Bryan moved to Melbourne at 18 from an indigenous community of 200 at Cummeragunja (near Echuca). In Melbourne his politically engaged, artistic and homosexual identity is less restricted than it was in non-indigenous country Victoria. Though he has greatly enjoyed playing Aboriginal characters in other productions including the internationally toured *Yanagai! Yanagai!* he relishes this new opportunity: “it’s nice to play a cynical writer from Caulfield South and a range of characters from Mentone...three cheers for colour-blind casting!”



LISTING DETAILS

fortyfivedownstairs, 45 Flinders Lane
Bookings: 9662 9966 or www.fortyfivedownstairs.com
8.00pm: 20-23, 27-30 May, 3-6 June
5.30pm: 24, 31 May, 7 June
\$26 (full) \$20 (concession) \$15 (previews 20-21 May)
www.whitewhaletheatre.com



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