SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

POWER PLAYS
FIVE NEW SHORT PLAYS BY
MELISSA BUBNIC, MICHELE LEE, NAKKIAH LUI, HANNIE RAYSON AND DEBRA THOMAS

CAST
VANESSA DOWNING
ANTHONY GEE
MICHELLE LIM DAVIDSON
STEVE RODGERS
URSULA YOVICH

DIRECTOR
PAIGE RATTRAY

DESIGNER
DAVID FLEISCHER

LIGHTING DESIGNER
ROSS GRAHAM

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER
STEVE TOULMIN

VOICE COACH
JESS CHAMBERS

PRODUCTION MANAGER
SALLY WITHNELL

STAGE MANAGER
TIM BURNS

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
SHANNYN MILLER

VENUE TECHNICIAN
MAX WILKIE

1 HOUR 40 MINUTES, NO INTERVAL
THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT
WHARF 2 THEATRE ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2016

PRODUCTION PATRON
REBEL PENFOLD-RUSSELL
Who are the five writers of *Power Plays* and what do they each bring?

We chose writers who represent a range of experience and perspectives.

Hannie Rayson, one of Australia's leading playwrights, needs no introduction. We haven't seen her work at STC for a few years, so it's really exciting to be working with her. She's wonderful at tapping into middle class self-loathing. This is about the way intergenerational conflict is fuelled by disagreements over social responsibility and personal entitlement.

I worked with Melissa Bubnic last year when I directed her play *Boys will be boys*. Her writing is fierce in every way and she's played loose with the 'comedy' brief for *Power Plays*, coming up with a very black comedy. I love her dark humour and the different, meaner flavour that it brings to the evening. Her play is a tongue-in-cheek musing on the culture of consumerism that drives us all to acquire more and more beautiful things... because we're worth it.

Nakkiah Lui has been honing her satire in TV-land, where she writes and performs in sketches for the ABC's hilarious show *Black Comedy*. Anyone who has seen her on ABC's *Q&A* will know that Nakkiah is also a political animal. Her play combines these interests – part political satire, part farce. It's a gift to the actors.

Michele Lee is an emerging writer from Melbourne that we wanted to introduce to Sydney audiences. She brings gentle comedy and a touching narrative about sisterhood to our show. She has a great nose for character and an interest in the way political issues impact everyday lives – exploring how camaraderie between women can bridge differences in class and power.

A graduate of Stephen Sewell's Writing for Performance program at NIDA and recipient of STC's Patrick White Playwrights' Award, Debra Thomas is an exciting new talent. Interested in the power inequality between men and women, her writing is full of rage about the harassment of women online and how it clearly stems from a casual devaluing of women in the real world. She's written a revolting male character that Steve Rodgers, who usually plays nice guys, is having a wonderful time bringing to life.

With power as a guiding theme, how do the different parts speak to each other?

The brief for all the writers was to come up with a 20-minute play about power. Their responses are wildly different and as such *Power Plays* is a celebration of the creativity and diversity of Australian writers. Although their plays vary greatly in terms of form and the kind of comedy that they employ, there are common threads that have emerged in them – the ideas of entitlement, disillusionment with politics and a new wave of feminism echo in many of the plays. The plays are tiny capsules written to entertain us, yet, side by side they give us time and space to reflect on the state of the nation.

IN CONVERSATION:
DIRECTOR PAIGE RATTRAY
How do you design one set for five plays?

It’s important to me that the night comes together as one – that we don’t view it as an anthology of short stories, but as chapters in a novel, each building on what has gone before. The design has been crucial to unifying the plays. David Fleischer, who I have worked with many times, is brilliantly inventive and has found ways to transform the space quickly, while keeping a sense that we stay in the same world.

How did you go about casting the actors?

The cast have to play a number of roles so I needed chameleons; actors who could switch between characters and worlds easily. I cast the show before the playwrights had begun writing so that they could create roles specifically for this cast.

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER 1: WHEN VAMPIRES SHOP
BY MELISSA BUBNIC
In this first chapter, written as a stream-of-consciousness monologue, the power of capitalist consumption is in the spotlight. What is the real cost of a designer handbag? What darkness does it obscure? And how can we justify our own good fortune?

CHAPTER 2: THE GREEN ROOM
BY NAKKIAH LUI
Backstage at a TV studio, the executive producer is trying to keep the show on schedule and ratings high. But, on this panel show, everyone else has a different agenda. In the mix are a terrified Treasurer, his horny adviser, a wayward host, and a political activist with a daring plan. What could possibly go wrong?

CHAPTER 3: OFF CENTRE
BY MICHELE LEE
When the embattled Minister for Social Services attends a conference at the Pullman Hotel, 26-year-old Donna – a food and beverage attendant – sees a chance to get square with Centrelink.

CHAPTER 4: HESTER BECKENBAUER’S GOOD FORTUNE
BY HANNE RAYSON
Famous children’s book author Hester Beckenbauer has just been awarded a prestigious prize. It won’t make her rich, but she has means, and she wants to leave a legacy. Unfortunately for her adult children, it’s not the legacy they had in mind – Hester has bought a wind farm. What follows is a comic take on that classic trinity: family, inheritance and renewable energy.

CHAPTER 5: FEMINAZI
BY DEBRA THOMAS
The wine is flowing, the night is young, The Minister for Women is hoping he might get lucky. Meanwhile, on Twitter, someone is trolling female journalists and commentators. Is the Minister being set up? Or is he hiding his misogyny behind an avatar?

Warning:
*Power Plays* contains frequent strong language, sex scenes and adult themes.
CAST & CREATIVES

MELISSA BUBNIC
WRITER

Melissa is a writer for stage and screen. Melissa’s play Boys will be boys, directed by Paige Rattray and starring Danielle Cormack, was commissioned and premièred by STC in 2015 and has since been performed in London at The Bush Theatre. Her play Beached won STC’s 2010 Patrick White Playwrights’ Award and was nominated for a 2013 Green Room Award. Beached premièred at Melbourne Theatre Company and was staged at Griffin Theatre in 2013. Melissa adapted Mariage Blanc by Tadeusz Rózewicz (dir. Sarah Giles) for STC, co-wrote Hazel Curtis: Fear Doctor with Petra Kalive (dir. Jason Geary), wrote Shedding (dir. Sam Strong) for La Mama, and Citizen Corps (dir. Clare Watson) for Platform Youth Theatre. Her play, Stop. Rewind (dir. Anne Browning) premièred at Red Stitch Theatre in Melbourne in 2010 and toured Australia in 2012. In 2011, Melissa completed a Masters in Writing for Performance at Goldsmiths, University of London. Melissa has written for TV series Shameless and is developing numerous TV projects. She is currently writing her first feature film screenplay, an adaptation of Jamaica by Malcolm Knox for Black Milk Productions and director Robert Connolly.

MICHELE LEE
WRITER

Michele is an Asian-Australian playwright and theatre-maker working across stage and audio, based in Melbourne. Her works are about female identity, otherness, intimacy and chaotic worlds, usually through a non-Anglo perspective. Apart from STC, she has also been commissioned by Malthouse Theatre, Griffin Theatre, Platform Youth Theatre, Next Wave Festival, Radio National, Darwin Festival, Arts House, Westside Circus and St Martin’s Youth Arts Centre. Michele’s digital theatre work, The Naked Self, co-created with Tanya Dickson, was presented at the 2016 Festival of Live Arts. She is the 2015 recipient of the Malcolm Robertson Prize for her new play Going Down and the winner of the 2016–17 Queensland Premier’s Drama Award for her play Rice. Michele’s play Moths was the inaugural recipient of the Betty Burstall Commission. She was the 2016 WrICE Early Career Fellow and a resident at The Playwrights Centre, Minneapolis in 2016, supported through the UNESCO City of Literature Travel Fund and the Australia Council. Her radio play See how the leaf people run won an Australian Writers’ Guild Award in 2013. Michele’s audio theatre work Talon Salon was presented in Next Wave Festival 2012 and re-mounted by invitation for You Are
NAKKIAH LUI
WRITER

Nakkiah is a writer/actor and Gamilaroi/Torres Strait Islander woman. She is a co-writer/star of Black Comedy (ABC) and is a monthly columnist for The Australian Women’s Weekly online. She has been an artist-in-residence at Griffin Theatre (2013) and was playwright-in-residence at Belvoir 2012–14. In 2012, Nakkiah was the first recipient of The Dreaming Award from The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Arts Board of the Australia Council. The same year, she was the inaugural recipient of the Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright award. In 2014, Nakkiah was the recipient of the Malcolm Robertson Prize and a Green Room Award for Best Independent Production. Nakkiah’s previous works include: As Writer: This Heaven, Belvoir 2013 and Finborough Theatre 2015; I Should Have Told You Before We Made Love (That I’m Black), You Are Here Festival 2012; Stho Sthexy, MKA 2013; Blackie Blackie Brown: The Traditional Owners of Death, Bondi Feast, Tamarama Rock Surfers 2013; Blak Cabaret, Sydney Festival/ Malthouse Theatre 2015; Kill the Messenger (also as Actor), Belvoir 2015. As Dramaturg: The Sovereign Wife, MTC Neon 2013. As a broadcaster with ABC, Nakkiah has hosted Radio National’s Awaye and NAIDOC Evenings for ABC Local Radio, broadcast nationally. She is also a young leader in the Australian Aboriginal community and has contributed to The Guardian and Junkee. She has appeared on Q&A and The Drum on ABC.

HANNIE RAYSON
WRITER

Hannie is a graduate of the University of Melbourne and the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). She holds an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from La Trobe University. Hannie was a co-founder of TheatreWorks and has served as writer-in-residence at the Mill Theatre, Playbox Theatre, La Trobe University, Monash University, VCA and New Writing North (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK). Her plays have been performed extensively around Australia and several have been produced overseas. They include Please Return to Sender, Mary, Leave it till Monday, Room to Move, Hotel Sorrento, Falling from Grace, Scenes from a Separation (co-written with Andrew Bovell), Competitive Tenderness, Life After George, Inheritance, Two Brothers, The Glass Soldier and The Swimming Club.
Hannie’s most recent play, *Extinction*, was commissioned by The Manhattan Theatre Club in New York through the Alfred P Sloan Foundation. Hannie’s plays have won AWGIE, Green Room, Helpmann, NSW Premier’s Literary, Victorian Premier’s Literary and The Age Performing Arts Awards. *Life After George* was the first play ever to be nominated for the prestigious Miles Franklin Award. Hannie’s memoir, *Hello, Beautiful!* was published in February 2015, and adapted as a one-woman show, which opened at Malthouse Theatre in May 2016. She is touring the show nationally in 2017/18. Hannie also writes for newspapers and magazines and, in 1999, won the Magazine Publishers’ Society of Australia Columnist of the Year Award for her column in HQ Magazine. Her television scripts include *Sloth* (ABC) and she co-wrote two episodes of the award-winning series *SeaChange* (ABC). A feature film of *Hotel Sorrento* (1995) was nominated for ten AFI Awards, winning two, including Best Screenplay adaptation.

Debra completed her BA (Honours) in Drama & Theatre Studies and Creative Writing at Monash University in 2009, before going on to complete her Postgraduate Diploma in Publishing and Editing at RMIT. Debra has since worked in publishing for six years with Australian and international authors and completed her MFA (Writing for Performance) at NIDA in 2014, under the tutelage of Stephen Sewell. At NIDA, Debra completed her first full-length work, *The Man’s Bitch* – which won STC’s 2014 Patrick White Playwrights’ Award.

CAST & CREATIVES

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independent theatre company Arthur; 2011 Resident Director at Griffin Theatre; 2010 Affiliate Director at Griffin Theatre. 

**Awards:** Best Production 2013 VCE Drama Awards, 2011 Melbourne Fringe Festival Best Emerging Writer (*Cut Snake* with Amelia Evans and Dan Giovannoni). 

**Training:** NIDA.

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VANESSA DOWNING
PERFORMER


**Film:** Stationery, Mary, The Boy Who Had Everything, TwoHands, Hey Hey It’s Esther Blueberger.

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ANTHONY GEE
PERFORMER

Sydney Theatre Company: *debut.* 

**Other Theatre:** Ensemble: *A Conversation.* Griffin Theatre: *The Boys, Strangers in Between.* Griffin Independent: *Music, The Distance From Here.* TRS: *Empire: Terror On The High Seas, Rope, Capture The Flag.* 


**Film:** *Around The Block, X-Men Origins: Wolverine.* 

**Training:** NIDA.
MICHELLE LIM DAVIDSON
PERFORMER

Sydney Theatre Company: The Laramie Project (Education).
Other Theatre: ABC: Play School Live.
Ensemble: Seminar.
Black Swan: Far Away.
Other: Performed together with John Cleese in the Just for Laughs Comedy Festival.
Awards: Recipient of 2013 Mike Walsh Fellowship, 2016 Equity Award for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series (Utopia).
Training: WAAPA.

STEVE RODGERS
PERFORMER

Other Theatre: Belvoir: Jasper Jones, A Christmas Carol, The Kiss, Measure for Measure, Twelfth Night, Cloudstreet (national/international tours) Night on Bald Mountain, The Blind Giant is Dancing.
Bell Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Macbeth.
Griffin Theatre: A Rabbit for Kim Jong Il, 8 Gigabytes of Hardcore Pornography, Dreams in White.

URSULA YOVICH
PERFORMER

Other Theatre: Belvoir: A Christmas Carol, The Sapphires (with MTC), The Threepenny Opera, The Dreamers, The

Awards: The Lysicrates Prize for Jesus Wants Me For a Sunbeam.
Training: Theatre Nepean.

David Fleischer
Designer


Ross Graham
Lighting Designer


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