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North Melbourne
Town Hall

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The Chat

J R Brennan

Image: Bryony Jackson

Arts House



Season 2

2

Wed 27 — Sun 31 July, 90 mins, no interval
Post-show Q&A: Thu 28 July

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Creative Team

Concept & Lead Artist:

J R Brennan

Co-created by:

J R Brennan & David Woods

Collaborating Artist:

Ashley Dyer

Performers:

Nick Apostilidis, Arthur Bolkas,
J R Brennan, Ashley Dyer, Ty Luke,
Nick Maltzahn, John Tjepkema

& David Woods

Script Editor:

David Woods

Lighting Design:

Jenny Hector

System Design & Custom

Hardware:

Alex Davies

Additional System & Sound

Design & Operation:

Nick Roux

Production & Stage Management:

Emily O'Brien

Sound & Set Design:

J R Brennan

Workshop Facilitation:

Ashley Dyer & J R Brennan

Video Art:

J R Brennan

Production & Costume Assistant:

Yvette Turnbull

Costume & Production Wizard:

Willoh S. Weiland

Consultants & Contributors:

Professor Eileen Baldry, Dr Anna

Eriksson, Peter Barry, Suzanne

Beach, Jessica Borthwith, Sammy

Hoy, Doddy, Danny P Jones and

residents of Judy Lazarus

Transitional Centre.

Image: Kasia Sykus



Artist's Note

Since 2014 Ashley Dyer and myself have been running performance workshops for people convicted of crime. Over thirty people have taken part: male and female, indigenous and non-indigenous, young and old, both in prison and living in the community. It's been an incredible forum for exploring the intersections between criminal justice and art, and enabled us to develop a methodology that reflects the shared concerns and desires between us. Five workshop participants now join us in performance, Nick Maltzahn and John Tjepkema, who have been working with us since 2014 and performed at the premiere of the work at La Boite Theatre, Brisbane. They are joined by Nick Apostilidis, Arthur Bolkas and Ty Luke.

The project is envisaged to keep developing over many years, it is an on-going process that deliberately avoids a therapeutic discourse, while focusing on the necessary care and permission so essential to this type of exchange. Through mutual trusts and a focus on exploring the performance work itself, its form and content, the shared experience continues to challenge both artists and participating ex-offenders. It's also provided for a lot of laughs and friendship. The balance we have strived to achieve between ethics and aesthetics has rested in no small part on the abilities of collaborators David Woods and Ashley Dyer. Ashley introduces participating ex-offenders to the stage with a careful and insightful permission to risk. David brings rare theatrical muscle. His ability to manoeuvre live each night through the complex layering of character and content is nothing short of Olympic.

The Chat explores the comical, dark and abstract aspects of our criminal justice systems. In its layered reality we have aimed for enough fiction to avoid new traumas and enough truth to keep us all close to the edge, pursuing what lies at the heart of our transgressions and our need for redemption.

This unusual balance of forms and fictions is experimental. The risk is fresh each night. It can fail, it might, and that makes it all the more worthy of discussion.

J R Brennan

Criminologist's Notes

All too often in the criminal justice system, offenders are excluded, stigmatised, and dehumanised, making their successful return to society and almost impossible endeavour. Such negative labelling is largely driven by high-profile cases, a generalist and sensational media reporting, and law and order politics.

The Chat takes a major step in the right direction, by humanising ex-offenders in face-to-face meetings, challenging popular stereotypes and invites the audience to see behind the walls, both personal and institutional. *The Chat* also presents an exciting collaboration between the creative arts and criminological research, holding genuine transformative potential for individuals in the criminal justice system and beyond.

Dr Anna Eriksson

*Director of the Imprisonment Observatory
Monash University*

Cast Biographies

J R Brennan

J R Brennan is a director, performer, composer and producer. In recent years his practice has interrogated ideas of crime and virtue. His work is research led and often performed in site-specific locations.

Currently he is producing a series of projects: *The Chat*, a performance created and performed by artists and ex-offenders; *The Virtues*, a documentary music project in partnership with Bialoleka Prison, Warsaw; and *The Mark Of Cain*, a stage production first presented for the European Centre for Theatre Practices Gardzienice, Poland 2011. All three projects draw on the auto-ethnographic research collected and observed by James in his role as a parole officer and work in experimental theatre in Australia and Europe.

Since graduating from VCA School of Drama (Acting) in 2000, he has presented original theatrical and musical works in Australia, Germany, Japan, Poland, The United States and Brasil. In 2007, James gained a Certificate 4 in Corrective Practice, working as a parole officer in Long Bay Gaol, Sydney until 2010. This led him to research socially engaged and experimental theatre practice in Australia, Brasil and Europe, supported by a Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Traveling Fellowship.

James' current partnerships include Monash University's Criminology Department and Judy Lazarus Transitional Centre.

Image: Kasia Sykus



David Woods

David was born in Perth. He graduated from Sheffield University in 1990 and studied acting at The Poor School in London. He subsequently trained with Antonio Fava (Commedia dell'arte), Phillippe Gaulier (Clown and Bouffons) and Dominique Dupuy (Contemporary Dance). He completed a practice based MA and PhD (*How To Be Funny*) at the University of Kent in 2006.

Since 1992, he has been the joint Artistic Director of the UK based performance group Ridiculusmus who are a National portfolio organisation of the Arts Council Of England. He has co-created and performed in all their productions to date: *The Third Policeman*; *Three Men In A Boat*; *At Swim-Two-Birds*; *Yes, Yes, Yes*; *The Exhibitionists*; *Say Nothing*; *Paranoid Household*; *Broken*; *Community Conscious Folk*; *Ideas Men*, *How To Be Funny*; *Dada*; *The Importance Of Being Earnest*; *Tough Time*, *Nice Time*; *Goodbye Princess*; *Total Football*; and *The Eradication of Schizophrenia in Western Lapland*.

David has performed for Malthouse Theatre; Company B Belvoir; Sydney Theatre Company; and Melbourne Festival.

As an academic, David has worked as a visiting lecturer at universities throughout the UK, regularly contributes to the Centre of Performance Research Masterclass Programme and is currently a Honorary Research Fellow and mentor for graduates at the Victorian College of the Arts.

Ashley Dyer

Ashley Dyer is a performance maker, producer and workshop facilitator based in Melbourne.

Ashley has presented or performed in numerous works nationally and internationally. He has strong experience facilitating artistic processes and workshops with artists, non-artists and different marginal communities. This includes ongoing work with ex-offenders, mixed ability ensembles, and victims of human trafficking in Malaysia.

He was Associate Producer at Next Wave Festival 2012, founded and program managed the first two Tiny Stadiums Festivals in Erskineville NSW (2009 and 2010) and co-facilitated the National Dance Forum in 2015.

He has an Honours Degree in Performance Studies (USYD), a degree that equips graduates with skills in anthropological analysis of a myriad of different types of performances from theatre to sporting matches, parades and board room meetings. In 2013, he was awarded a two year Creative Australia Fellowship by the Australian government's peak organisation the Australia Council for the Arts.

Nick Apostilidis

Nick is a devout follower of the Western Bulldogs football club, loves the novels of James Hadley Chase and seeing his kids prosper and grow. He is partial to a round of golf, has written a collection of poems, several of which feature in *The Chat*.

Arthur Bolkas

Arthur is a motivational speaker, thinker, poet and mentor of Greek heritage. He loves the movie *No Country for Old Men*, fitness, souvlaki, good relationships and watching his kids play footy. Seriously, he is into healing, the process of healing, self healing and the inner journey.

Ty Luke

Ty has two beautiful kids, loves tattooing and drawing. He is inspired by Japanese art and wants to go to Japan for a tattoo by Harioshi.

Nick Maltzahn

Nick is an aspiring cyclist and farmer, Nick starred in the Brisbane season of *The Chat* in 2015. He loves camping and hiking, particularly at Wilson's Promontory in Eastern Victoria.

John Tjepkema

John is the best looking bloke in Footscray – his mirror doesn't lie. He appeared in the Brisbane performances of *The Chat* at La Boite and has been involved in the project since June of last year. He is a professional back yard tattooist, has a small lawn mowing round in the western suburbs and is a single parent with two beautiful boys. John has cleared all of the wreckage of his criminal past and on the 30th of July 2016 will be ten years clean of alcohol and drugs.

Thank You

Dr Anna Eriksson; James Gilbert; Professor Eileen Baldry; Robert Brennan; Angharad Wynne-Jones; Jackie Johnston; Tony MacDonald and all the staff at Arts House; Leah Sanderson; Robert Pensalfini; Helen Herbertson; Australian Community Support Organisation; Alex Cano; Taryn Escreet; Jackie Bernardi and and the staff and residents of JLTC (special shout out to Paul and Marty who have been great allies in lighting and production); Carol Nikakis from Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders; Uncle Jack Charles; Patrice Capogreco; Bryony Jackson; Rosemary Joy; and for everything, everything, everything, to our art wizard and wrangler of love, Willow S Weiland.

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Arts House

Arts House is a program of the City of Melbourne and our home is North Melbourne Town Hall. We support new and diverse ways to make and experience art providing a nexus for cultural expression and social connection in a city environment.

Arts House develops work that is contemporary, experimental and participatory.

For more information, please contact us on the details below.

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