



La Mama  
presents

# B r e e d e r s



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Image by Josie Di Natale

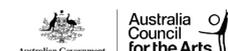


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La Mama Theatre is on traditional land of the people of the Kulin Nation. We give our respect to the Elders of these traditional lands and to all First Nations people past, present and future. We acknowledge all events take place on stolen lands and that sovereignty was never ceded.

We are grateful to all our philanthropic partners and donors, advocates, volunteers, audiences, artists and our entire community as we work towards the La Mama rebuild. Thank you!

La Mama is financially assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council – its arts funding and advisory body, Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund - an Australian Government initiative, the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, and the City of Melbourne through the *Arts and Creative Partnerships Program*.



## Creator's Note

Breeders is dedicated to children with disabilities who had parents who never learnt how to love them properly.

I wrote Breeders to highlight the realities of parents abusing their kids, sensationalised, trite and harmful media reporting, men not going to therapy when they need it and disability filicide.

I wrote about anti-vaxxers in Breeders because I wanted to understand why some parents are more afraid of their children "contracting" autism than leaving them unvaccinated and having them die from measles or whooping cough.

Since Andrew Wakefield's 1996 study where he claimed a link between autism and the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccine there has been a surge in deaths in infants as a result of outbreaks in these diseases.

Vaccine hesitancy is a cause for concern in light of the rollout of the covid-19 vaccine. We are concerned by the revival of claims vaccines cause disability.

Audiences often have many questions about the life of an artist and how much of that artist's life is reflected in their work. As a percentage, I would say this play is 50% autobiographical and 50% non fiction :)

I owe a lot to Dramaturg Mari Lourey who I met through the Writer in Residence at Union House Theatre in 2018. Without Mari, there would be no play.

We would also not be here without our producer and access coordinator, Sarah Houbolt who has taken care of so many different moving parts of this project from funding applications, to marketing, to cast and audience accessibility. I felt I could relax a little knowing there was someone else with a disability involved on my project who knew how to advocate for the needs of the cast and audience.

Big thanks are also owed to CEO Caroline Bowditch as well as Rachel Edwards from Arts Access Victoria (for photographing our beautiful performers for marketing purposes, running the odd movement class, giving us funding and rehearsal space). And thank you to our autism consultant, Prue Stevenson for her

advice to us on echolalia and stimming.

And then there's Emma Hall who has blown me out of the water with her openness, sensitivity, self-reflectiveness, adaptability and resourcefulness as my Director. I never thought I would be able to trust a heterosexual able-bodied white female artist with Breeders but I consider Emma a true ally. I know for a fact that there have been nights where she would lay awake in bed (because she told me so) thinking about the themes and issues raised in Breeders.

Many conversations were had about cultural and linguistic diversity during this production. We acknowledge that Breeders exists within and benefits from a theatre industry and disability community which isn't doing enough to address its glaring absence of people of colour.

If our arts industry continues to look like the real estate industry, then I might as well become a property manager.

During one rehearsal for Breeders, our stage manager, technical manager and ninja, Laura Hook (who's organisational skills an air headed artist like myself desperately needed and for which I'm also very much indebted to her for) showed us a youtube documentary called Unspoken. The documentary was about several non-speaking autistic people who used assisted communication devices.

One of them poignantly stated: "We are excluded and then people think we can't participate or contribute."

I feel very strongly the community that sprung up around Breeders has set a high standard for access and inclusion.

The story of Breeders belongs to the entire production team and cast who have taken it to another level through sharing their own experiences of being neurodivergent and disabled.

The lovely song you have heard in Breeders was written and composed by Artemis Muñoz.

I hope you enjoy the play.

## Director's Note

Ableism is so pervasive that I'm ashamed to admit I'd barely noticed its power before meeting Vanessa, and reading her play Breeders.

More than 4 million Australians (18 per cent of the population) have a disability, and yet, if you'd asked me to describe ableism a year ago, I probably would have mentioned the lack of entrance ramps in pubs and left it at that.

What I hope we can highlight in Breeders is that one's very reality, if unquestioned, will be ableist. How I understand myself and the world around me is calibrated and refracted by a neuro 'typical' perception of the present moment.

I'm an independent theatre artist in advanced-stage-capitalism-post-covid-deep-Morrison-Australia. I do feel a little alone at times. But even so, when I leave my house for the day, the volume dial is set to my preferred level. People speak in codes that make sense. Websites are legible. All tram routes are available to me. No one is publicly debating my right to life as if the question were a curious, existential delight.

To riff on a David Foster Wallace sound bite, Vanessa can tell you about the colour, current, temperature, density and size of the ableist ocean we share. Before Breeders, I barely knew we were in water.

I've never directed a play before. Thank you Vanessa for giving me a shot at it. I had a ball.

## Thank You...

In addition to the above: Alison Myers for audio description advice, Barnie Duncan for and Caroline Bowditch for audio description vocals, Lara Week for her art work, Ellen Ma and Anthony di Natale for their video questions appearances, Laura Hook for video content and editing (and so much more), Petra Kalive and Xanthe Beasley for early development support, the team at La Mama, Arts Access Victoria, and of course our incredible anonymous donor, who without you this would not have been possible.

Acknowledgement is owed to the late Stella Young for drawing Vanessa's attention to her ABC article on Peter Singer's views on disability infanticide. To the late Jenny Valenzuela for supporting and believing in the abilities of autistic people. And to Laura, Emma and Sarah for being Vanessa's rock, and the cast and crew for their commitment.

## Cast & Crew Credits

### Vanessa Jo Di Natale - Playwright

Vanessa is a writer and journalism student. She is disabled. She has edited for The Conversation and written for SBS The Feed, The Mandarin, Independent Australia, BroadAgenda, ArtsHub, Archer Magazine and Farrago Magazine.

She has worked with AMES Australia, Women with Disabilities Victoria and Equality Rights Alliance's Young Women's Advisory Group. Breeders was written under the mentorship of Dramaturg Mari Lourey, who Vanessa met through the Writer in Residence at Union House Theatre in 2018. In 2019, after a period of script development with Mari Lourey and Director Petra Kalive, the first half of Breeders was shown as part of La Mama Theatre's Explorations Season.

That same year, Vanessa was co-devised and performed in A\_tistic Theatre's production 'Helping Hands' (dir. James Matthews, Hannah Aroni and Jess Gonzalez) which had a season at La Mama Theatre. In 2019, she won Arts Access Victoria's Stella Young Artist Award for her journalism and Breeders script.

More recently, she has been shortlisted for The Melbourne Press Club's 2020 Quill Awards Student Journalist Of The Year Award. Vanessa writes mostly because nothing has ever made as much sense to her as seeing people who are relegated to society's margins and rarely seen or heard from, become active and visible members of the community that springs up around a creative project.

Breeders is her first full length play.

## **Emma Mary Hall - Director**

Emma is a writer, performer, and director. She has created three award-winning solo works: *We May Have to Choose* (2015 Melbourne Fringe/La Mama) and *Ode to Man* (2017, Melbourne Fringe), both directed by Prue Clark, and *World Problems* (2019, fortyfivedownstairs).

In 2020 Emma directed a 12 hour durational zoom performance with VCA theatre making students *Sleep Faster! Show Cat!*, and in 2019 was Union House Theatre Artist-in-Residence at University of Melbourne, where she worked with Xanthe Beesley to devise *The Lonely Crowd* with an ensemble of 14 Melbourne University students. Emma is passionate about supporting younger artists to tell authentic, formally adventurous stories about their experiences and political views.

Emma trained as an actor at the Victorian College of the Arts (graduating in 2012) and holds an Honours degree in political science from the Australian National University in Canberra.

## **Mari Lourey - Dramaturg**

Mari Lourey is a playwright, dramaturge, and facilitator of performance writing workshops. She was awarded the 2014 Rodney Seaborne Award and an Australia Council Literature Board grant to complete a major new performance work *Dirt Cloud* after its development at Playwriting Australia's National Script Workshop. Her independent play *Bare Witness* completed a national tour (*Performing Lines*) in 2012, following a sellout 2010 season in Melbourne presented by La Mama Theatre at fortyfivedownstairs directed by Nadja Kostich.

Mari has worked as a dramaturg for Playwriting Australia, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company and on independent projects for various writers. Projects include: Jacob Boehme's *Blood on the Dance-floor* for ILBIJERRI Theatre Company; 2014 Ross Trust Award winner Dan Lee's *Frogs Cry Wolf* (2015 Cybec Readings, MTC), and Bathurst Performing Arts Centre's Local Stages Program.

She has a particular interest in ongoing skills development – her own and others – alongside her own disciplined practice. She currently divides her time between Broome WA and the east coast. In Broome she co-facilitates a professionally

tailored performance writing program for Goolarri Media, an Indigenous media and arts organisation. Between 2010-2013 she co-facilitated ILBIJERRI Theatre Company's Black Writers Program which seeded several new works.

Mari holds a MA Performance Writing at the VCA, University of Melbourne, studied performance writing at RMIT, and has undertaken various modes of theatre training. In the 90s she sang and played in various bands and performed widely around Victoria and NSW with shadow puppet theatre company *Beyond A Shadow of a Doubt*. She is a proud member of the Australian Writers Guild.

## **Sarah Houbolt - Producer**

Sarah Houbolt is a producer and arts manager working nationally and internationally running arts and disability theatre and film projects, community arts programs, access consultancy, arts and disability festivals, theatre shows, and conference events for governments and not for profits for the past 15 years. After graduating from a double degree in Social Work and Arts (Politics and Sociology) from University of Queensland, and swimming at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games, she worked for several years in disability advocacy, policy and lobbying before turning to the arts. Sarah managed *Arts Activated 2016* at Carriageworks, is a VIPI mentor for Theatre Network Australia and also produces for Jess Kapuscinski-Evans' *The Waiting Room Arts Company*. She has delivered access training and tailor-made consultancy to numerous major arts organisations across Australia, has worked for *Cirque du Soleil*, and has toured her self-produced *Green Room* award winning show '*Koo Koo the Bird Girl*' internationally. In 2018, Sarah received the inaugural Australian Disability Leadership Institute's Arts Award for her services as an artist and arts manager with disability. Sarah is a Creative Producer at Arts Access Victoria.

## **Prue Stevenson - Autistic Consultant**

Prue uses repetitive and tactile processes to allow for experiences of sensory play, and creates spaces and opportunities for downtime. Working with oil, ceramics, textiles, sculpture, installation and performance, Prue advocates for the identity, empowerment and sensory awareness of the autistic community. Prue intersects and collides against preconditioned stigmas and resultant systematic oppression. Prue aims to celebrate and progress autistic culture for autistics, while creating

experiences that are more broadly accessible.

Prue has exhibited and performed artworks nationally, most notably at the Australian Museum of Contemporary Art in 2018 and 2019. Her work is held in significant national collections.

Prue is a practicing fine artist, having completed both her Bachelor of Fine Art (Expanded Studio Practice) and Master of Fine Art (by Practice) at RMIT. Prue is an autistic consultant with AMAZE. Prue is also an ensemble member of Rawcus Theatre Group, 3rd Dan Black Belt in Taekwondo, singer of Ice Cream in a Mug and founder of Stim Your Heart Out.

### **Laura Hook - Production and Stage Manager**

Laura Hook worked in the Dance and Theatre industry in the UK for over 10 years. Working all over the country as a touring technician and as a venue technician at the Birmingham Hippodrome and 6 years as a Senior Technician at the Peacock Theatre for Sadler's Wells in London.

Laura has also worked internationally, as a Production Manager and Technician with artists such as Caroline Bowditch, Joan Cleville Dance, Claire Cunningham and the British Paraorchestra.

In 2016 Laura began collaborating with Caroline Bowditch and co-created, designed and production managed two works for children, The Adventures of Snigel and Snigel and Friends, which toured to festivals and venues around the UK, Europe and Singapore. In it's 2017 Run at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival it was Nominated for a Total Theatre Award.

<https://www.mandy.com/uk/theatre-professional/laura-hook-wareham>

### **Benjamin Oakes - Actor**

Benjamin is an actor and sound artist. He is based in Geelong and is a member of Back to Back Theatre's Theatre of Speed and sound art group Noise Scavengers. He has most recently appeared in Malthouse and Black Swan State Theatres' co-production of Tim Winton's Cloudstreet in Melbourne in 2019 and Perth in 2020.

He appeared on television in Matchbox Pictures' and Back to Back Theatre's co-production, Oddlands. Ben also featured in the recent short film Friend for Life and a number of training videos for the NDS. He has also performed in many Theatre of Speed live productions since 2015. He was a founding member of Noise Scavengers in 2008 and has performed with artists such as The Amplified Elephants, Adam Simmons, Belinda Woods, James Hullick and Dave Brown. Ben was diagnosed with autism at the age of four.

### **Michael Chan - Actor**

Michael is an up-and-coming, multi-talented actor and performer. Originally born in Swan Hill, north-western Victorian town and now lived in Geelong to traditional Chinese family. Besides working within the hospitality industry, performing with local-based community choirs at community and corporate events and attending disability-related committees he got involved in acting (Film/TV), theatre and performing arts. He started with making his theatrical debut in the GSODA's production of Chess: The Musical in 2016. Michael joined Back-to-Back Theatre through Writing & Acting for Film & TV Project. As an Artist in Residence through training workshops with a focus on writing and acting for screen and television alongside respected industry professionals and work on creative development include improvisation and experimentation sessions. In June 2019 Michael was appointed as a guest artist with the Ensemble to act as an understudy before landed a leading role for the work The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes. Michael also been recognised through ABC's TV 'The Mix' where he interviewed about the show and his Member Profile appeared on the Arts Access Australia (AAA) website whilst applied for Travel Grant to attend 2019 Meeting Place held in Canberra. Michael recently completed the 'My Story' project through City of Greater Geelong which he wrote personal story entails the challenges and/or barriers of living my own world brought by my diagnosis of High-functioning Autism. He also discuss about how to deal with trauma and expectations of being grown up and living with 'tiger parents' under one roof; continually pursue my dreams and aspirations.

### **Jess Cook - Actor**

Jess Cook is an up and coming actress gone rogue from a musical theatre degree. She is currently trying to pave her own path in the industry, and has begun to do so

through various theatre productions and performances. Her most recent venture was as the sultry cabaret emcee Davinia in *The Rest is Drag* (Darwent and Gray), which premiered at The Butterfly Club for Melbourne Fringe 2018 and transferred to Chapel off Chapel for Midsumma 2019. She hopes to continue down this path of debauchery and student debt in 2021, and hopes in vain that you'll join her for the ride. Who knows, she might thank you in her future Tony's speech!

### **Cecilia Low - Actor**

Cecilia is an actor of the stage and screen, and a producer of independent film and theatre. Her background is in dance and music working on international musicals such as *Chicago*, *The Lion King*, *RENT* and *Miss Saigon* in Australia and around the world. Her latest film credits include the 2020 MIFF success independent comedy feature *Paper Champions*, acclaimed TV series *Wentworth* (seasons 6-8), *Harrow*, *Jack Irish*, Netflix's *Clickbait*, and award-winning shorts *This We Have Now* and *I Don't Speak*. Cecilia's theatre debut as creator saw her produce the Immersive Cinematic experience *They Say She's Different* for the 2014 Adelaide Cabaret Festival and the 2015 Melbourne Fringe. She is currently producing independent TV comedy series *SugarHope Records* by Melbourne comedian Jude Perl.

### **Summer Metcalf - Actor**

Summer Metcalf is an emerging actor, writer and visual artist from Melbourne who trained at St Martins Youth Theatre from 2015-2020. In her training at St Martins she participated in improvisation, physical theatre, monologues and collaborative devising processes. She also undertook classes in circus skills at Little Devils Circus and Trapeze at Skylark. Summer performed in *Genius* directed by Amelia Ducker, which premiered at the Festival of Live Art in 2016. She is passionate about devising performances individually and with others. Summer is an autistic actor interested in theatre, film and TV work.

### **Artemis Muñoz - Actor**

Artemis is a multidisciplinary artist known for their work in Independent Theatre and Cabaret. Recent credits include 'Campfire Stories' (Host/Producer/Performer - Online), 'People of Cabaret' (Contributing Artist - Melbourne Fringe 2020 Best

Cabaret Nominee), 'First Stage 2020' (Playwright - MTC and Emerging Writers Festival) and 'ACEtravaganza' (Host/Producer/Performer - Midsumma Festival 2020) They hold a BA (Acting) from Federation University and are working towards their Masters in Theatre Writing at the VCA. For more Artemis, you can catch them on their YouTube channel or onstage in 'Unsorted' (Midsumma Festival 2021). Artemis is proud to be a working queer and neurodivergent artist.

### **Rosalind Silver - Actor**

Rosalind Silver is a queer performer and dramaturg based in Melbourne that has been involved with Breeders for over a year. Since graduating Federation University's acting course in 2017 she has performed in shows such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Think of Me On Thursdays*, as well as both interning and working as a script consultant. She has also worked with the MEAA on developing resources to assist with the casting of trans or gender diverse performers and their committee drafting intimacy guidelines for stage and screen. She seeks to participate in theatre development and bring a queer methodology to the work.

### **Oliver Ross - Lighting design**

Oliver Ross is designer, dramaturg and developer with work across over 70 projects in theatre, film and advocacy. He was recently selected for Screen Australia's Developing the Developer program, and has worked across Arenamedia, the MEAA, Union House Theatre, Transgender Victoria, University of Melbourne, the Equity Diversity Committee, tilde film festival, Melbourne Fringe and Melbourne International Comedy Festival. He is passionate about developing stories with trans and autistic communities, and is currently working as a writer in the upcoming queer webseries *Wicked Women*.

### **Olivia McKenna - Sound designer**

Olivia McKenna is an audio designer and artist, originally from Sydney and now based in Melbourne. She is currently studying a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Design and Production) at the Victorian College of the Arts. Olivia is interested in the adaptation of traditional theatre techniques and pieces to meet the expectations of modern audiences and the role of audio in visual and installation art. She is also interested in the psychological impact of sound in performance and how

she can manipulate everyday sounds in order to heighten the reactions of the audience. She has recently worked as an audio designer for the Victorian College of the Arts productions of 'Snore' (dir. John Kachoyan) and 'pool (no water)' (dir. Leticia Cáceres). Her other professional credits include audio designer for Hedda Gabler (dir. Mary Angley) and The Campaign (dir. Peter Blackburn).

### **Arielle Vlahiotis - Set and Costume Design**

Arielle is a zestful designer, having completed Production and Design at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) in 2020. She is determined to make visually engaging designs that entice audiences. In 2020 Arielle designed the sets and costumes for VCA dance pieces 'Nut' & 'Return To Normal', and was the set designer for 'Our House' the musical. Arielle has worked in the set, prop and costume workshop at the VCA, with credits including 'Dance Four Seasons' (2019), 'On the Town' (2019), 'DFTLX (Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights)' (2019), 'Fucking A' (2019) & 'Peter Pan' (2018). Arielle hopes that you enjoy the production and learn as much from the story as she has.

### **Ellen Ma Rudin - Assistant set designer**

Ellen was trained as an actor by Bridget Balodis in Monash Uni Student Theatre in 2017. She was also trained in NIDA Open Actors' studio 2018 by Shaun Goss, Heath Ivey-Law and John Kachoyan. She was an ensemble member in Antony // Cleopatra (2018, Fringe Festival), The Bacchae (2019, la Mama Courthouse, directed by Robert Reid) and Macbeth (2019, Monash Shakespeare Company). This is her first time helping with set design.

Ellen plays piano and dances Argentine Tango. She also speaks fluent Mandarin. She likes writing, knitting, playing guitar and learning martial arts and different languages in her spare time.

Ellen is training to be a singer while studying law at the moment.

### **Rachel Edward - Videographer**

Rachel is a highly skilled community arts and cultural development practitioner with a passion for supporting inclusion in community life for people who have a

marginalized experience. She has been involved in Community Arts and Cultural Development for 20 years in various roles, including project manager, producer, production manager, mentor, performer, director, access officer, audio describer, documenter, photographer, filmmaker and support worker.

Rachel spent 10 years as the Artistic Director for One Voice Theatre and has worked as an Artistic Mentor (St Martins Youth Theatre-Catapult Cultural Leadership Program and Arts Access Victoria's Pathways) and Interim Access Officer for St Martins Youth Theatre. Recent years have found her focusing on her photography and film work, collaborating and making work with a variety of companies, including Rawcus, Inclusion Melbourne, RMIT, City of Port Phillip, SPARC Theatre, Barking Spider Visual Theatre and Arts Access Victoria, as well as many independent artists. She has been a performer with Rawcus since 2002, is currently a support artist with Fog Theatre and City of Voices and co-creator and performer with Dearly Departed and Peppermint Patties. Rachel spent 3 years as the Events and Marketing Coordinator for South Port Community Centre and has most recently joined Arts Access Victoria as a Creative Producer, coordinating an arts program for artists living in Supported Residential Services across Melbourne and Brunswick based Studio, Artstop.

## CREW



**Vanessa Jo Di Natale**  
(she/her/they) - Playwright



**Emma Mary Hall** (she/her)  
- Director



**Sarah Houbolt** (she/her)  
- Producer



**Laura Hook** (she/her)  
- Production and Stage  
Manager



**Olivia McKenna** (she/her)  
- Sound designer



**Oliver Ross** (he/him)  
- Lighting design



**Arielle Vlahiotis** (she/her)  
- Set and Costume Design



**Ellen Ma Rudin** (she/her)  
- Assistant set designer

## CAST



**Benjamin Oakes** (he/him)  
- Actor



**Michael Chan** (he/him)  
- Actor



**Jess Cook** (she/her)  
- Actor



**Cecilia Low** (she/her)  
- Actor



**Summer Metcalf** (any  
pronouns) - Actor



**Artemis Muñoz** (they/  
them) - Actor



**Rosalind Silver** (she/her)  
- Actor

Images by Laura Hook & Camilla Greenwell