



# PRISONER AT THE WORLD'S END



**NOVEMBER 15 - 26, 2023**

# PRISONER AT THE WORLD'S END

Playwright: R. Johns

Three women work as volunteers in a tea bar at HMP Belmarsh, Category A prison, London.

**Co-Directors:** Elnaz Sheshgelani & Rosemary Johns

**Production Design and Graphics:** Peter Mumford

**Sound Design and Music Composition:** Robert Vincs

**Lighting Design and Projection:** Simon Bowland

**Stage Manager / Lighting Operator:** Cat Baud,

**Assistant Stage Manager /Sound Operator:** Jade Hibbert

## **Actors:**

Volunteer (Gen X): Joanne Davis

Volunteer (Baby Boomer): Maureen Hartley

Volunteer (Gen Z): Romy McIlroy

Mosul story : Sepideh Karimi

**Google song lyrics:** R. Johns & Robert Vincs (based on Assange's observations about Google)

**The Mosul monologue** is based on recollections of a Christian refugee from Mosul, shared with the playwright.

**Thank you to:** Actor, Ursula Searle who performed in the first reading. Dr Elizabeth Jones for her dramaturgical insights, Gabriel Shipton. Christine McKenzie, President PEN Melbourne, Adrian Mulraney, Nahla and Adrian Prosen , staff and FOH at La Mama.

## Notes:

The inspiration to write the work came after hearing Assange's counsel - Jennifer Robinson, human rights lawyer and barrister - speak at a PEN event (promoting literature and freedom of expression) 2019 at La Mama Courthouse, with Barrie Cassidy interviewing her and fielding questions from the audience. The lecture was about Julian Assange's incarceration, free speech and democracy. After the talk, when I spoke to her, she told me how on her way to see Assange inside HMP Belmarsh, she stops at a tea bar run by a few Samaritan volunteers in the prison. This inspired the play.

Assange is locked away in prison as a journalist and publisher awaiting extradition to the USA, yet America's First Amendment protects the free speech of journalistic activity (but not for Australian journalists it seems). Hence as Julian Assange's contemporary reality is Kafkaesque, I have used that notion in some of the theatrical devices in this work.

Assange is isolated in high security (a prison within the prison), so his voice is stifled. I read Assange's favourite moment in Tolstoy's Anna Karenina is when two dogs talk to each other, revealing the irrationality of their owners. Franz Kafka fused the real, with the surreal and the absurd. The cat scene in this play, based on the actual 10 Downing St cat Larry @Number10cat with 688,500 followers on X, Whitehall cat, Gladstone (@treasury\_cat 22.5 k+followers and Foreign Office cat (retired, still an ambassador) Palmerston, reveals the irrationality of politics.

Rather than being documentary, all events and characters, which may correspond with reality, are transformed into fiction in (take out context of) this Kafkaesque work (add) which is a meditation on truth and the imprisonment of Assange.

This project was first supported at La Mama's Warrak Banksia Festival. Thank you to La Mama CEO and Director Caitlin Dullard, for resolutely supporting the idea and creation of the play.

## R.Johns

Rosemary has a First Class Honours degree in Drama from Manchester University UK and an MFA from UCR. She gained her actors equity card in USA repertory theatre. She began her career in Australia with the MRPG as a performer/ writer. She is six times published by Currency Press. Works include, "As told by the boys who fed me apples" supported by the Anzac Centenary Arts and Culture fund grant and nominated for an AWGIE. "Black Box 149" premiered at La Mama and played in repertoire at the State Theatre Nuremberg, their first production by an Australian playwright, also part of DFAT's 2017 Australia now Focus Germany. Her work has been presented at curated conferences in Athens, Stockholm, Mumbai, Manila and Cape Town. " Birthday Book of Storms" ( with a CoPP development grant and premiering at La Mama) toured to Hannah Playhouse, Wellington 2023.

## Dr Elnaz Sheshgelani

Elnaz Sheshgelani is a storyteller, theatre maker, puppeteer and educator. She holds a PhD in Performing Arts where she explored pre-Islamic Naghali (a lost form of Persian dramatic storytelling) and reconstructed a Naghali gestural vocabulary. Elnaz is deeply interested in the performative aspects of communication and has focused on the design and creation of body forms, developing body movement vocabularies for storytelling. She has applied/ workshoped vocabularies in her various performances and workshops at La Mama Theatre (Melbourne, Australia) and at international festivals in Armenia, Malaysia, Indonesia and Greece. Elnaz is a member of UNESCO's International Dance Council (CID). She teaches Creativity and the Arts in Education at Victoria University, and is a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Postcolonial Studies (2022).

## **Peter Mumford**

Peter graduated from Flinders University with a BA (Hons). He ran away from an MA at Adelaide University to join the theatre. His first stage design was for The Stage Company, "Nijinsky, Le Sacrifice du Faune", which featured dancers from the Australian Dance Theatre. He also designed Jonathan Taylor's ballet "For Ever and Ever" for The Adelaide Festival. He was a founding member of The Torch Projects . Peter was resident designer with Red Stitch Actors Theatre 2005-2013 and gained Best Production Green Room Award with his production design for "Harvest", he received a Green Room Award nomination for his design of "Red Sky Morning". In 2014, he received the Green Room Award for best design for "Foxfinder".

Peter has had a long association with Rodney Hall, including the 2018 the world premiere of "Dry River Run", (composer Paul Dean) at the Queensland Conservatorium.

## **Dr Robert Vincs**

Rob Vincs is a musician, composer and academic specialising in improvised, interactive and electro-acoustic music making. He is well known for his high velocity and textural approach drawn from Afro-American Jazz, ECM, experimental, electronic and world genres. Rob has collaborated with many leading Australian and international contemporary artists including: Barney McAll, Polymorphic Orchestra, David Jones, Simon DeHaan, Judy Jacques, Chloë Sobeck, Vijay Thillaimuthu, Ronny Ferella, Sunny Kim, Varden Ovsepien (US), Kenneth Nash (US) Raff Sudan (Swiss) Hyun Suk Lee (Sth Korea), Melbourne Ballet Company, Seoul Contemporary Dance Theatre, Kim Vincs, and Dianne Reid to name a few. Rob holds the position of Principal Fellow of the University of Melbourne and has an extremely active musical life with eight releases of his music in the past two years and a special new vinyl release entitled Chaomorphic released through the Extreme Label in 2023.

## **Simon Bowland**

Simon is a visual artist/designer who initially graduated from a Bachelor of Arts (Industrial Design) at Newcastle University, NSW. During the final year of his undergraduate degree he was nominated for a City of Newcastle Drama Award (CONDA) for Set design. More recently, Simon graduated from an MFA in Production at VCA/University of Melbourne. Where he expanded his practice to explore the benefits of using digital projection as scenery for low budget theatrical performance. Investigating how the relationship between dramatic text and digital technology influences the creative process. Simon has maintained a strong connection with the performing arts, focusing on the opportunities being offered by accessible digital technology.

## **Joanne Davis**

Joanne is excited to be back at La Mama. Previous work includes Melbourne's Fringe, Comedy, & International Arts Festivals; 45downstairs, The Australian National Playwrights' Centre, Public Art Melbourne Biennial Lab, Melbourne FOLA, MONA FOMA, Edinburgh Fringe (Gilded Balloon) and Camden People's Theatre. She co-adapted, performed, and toured Dorothy Porter's 'The Monkey's Mask' extensively with Dorothy's enthusiastic endorsement.

Joanne is a Champion Tea Drinker, co-artistic director of Anvil Productions & occasional Hi Viz Liz Diva.

## Maureen Hartley

Maureen's most recent performances include "Where There's A Will" (La Mama, 2023), "Kovid Rat Kabarett "(Butterfly Club 2022 & La Mama Courthouse 2023), "Trees...Lest We Forget" (La Mama 2023), "Radial" (a Melb Fringe Festival film with Back-to-Back Theatre, 2022) and a 4-state tour of "Foxholes of the Mind" by Bernard Clancy (2021). She is a regular member of the Lloyd Jones' Ensemble (La Mama), and is currently La Mama Learning Producer. For many years Maureen has co-written and performed as one half of the comedy duo "Violet and Rose", in Melbourne's 'Little Lon' laneways, on trams, at St Kilda Cemetery, at International Conferences in Canberra, Melbourne and Belfast, at Brisbane's Anywhere Festival and at the Old Treasury Building.

## Romy McIlroy

Romy is trained in singing, dancing and acting. Having completed her American Way Acting Post-Graduate course at 16th Street under the tutelage of a multitude of mentors including, Iain Sinclair, Paul Currie, Les Chantery, Michael Gracey and more, she has recently taken part in Atlantic's Summer Intensive based in New York. Romy has extensive dance training across all genres, as well as being a technically trained singer, having trained for many years with Angela Wasley, and more recently with Chris Nolan. Romy's most recent credits are the American TV series "LaBrea" as a bit part with NBC Network, "Whatshername" by Theatrical, an extra on Robbie Williams film "Better Man" and singing the national anthem at Hisense Arena for NBL Basketball.

## Sepideh Karimi

Sepideh Karimi is an Iranian architecture graduate who immigrated to Australia in 2013. She further pursued her studies in interior design at Melbourne RMIT and currently practices in this field. While in Melbourne, she continued her artistic pursuits, engaging in painting, sculpture, pottery, dance, and theatre. Her paintings have been featured in various exhibitions, with a notable presence at the Victorian Artist Society exhibition in 2021. Art remains an integral part of her identity, and her soul passionately craves theatre in addition to her other artistic endeavors. Notably, she has successfully completed Dr Mamad Aidani's master class and performed in "I said this to the bird," at La Mama Courthouse, director Dr Mammad Aidani.

## Cat Baud

Cat is an emerging Stage Manager about to finish a Diploma of Performing Arts (Stage Management) at Collarts. She has always been a theatre lover, but developed a desire to pursue Stage Management as a career while working as the Department Head of the theatre program at an American summer camp. She has previously worked, also with Jade, as an ASM for a Melbourne Fringe show called "Broke[n]."

Cat is very excited to be debuting as a Stage Manager with such an incredible team at such an iconic Melbourne theatre, and is especially honoured to working on this wonderful piece of political activism. She would like to thank her mentors at Collarts for their support and guidance, Rosemary and Elnaz for taking us onto their show, and her family and friends for supporting her even though they barely get to see her these days.



## Jade Hibbert

I am a performing arts student currently studying a degree in Stage Management at Collarts. I have been involved in various parts of the performing arts industry in South Africa for the past 10 years, stage managing and acting in independent theatre pieces in Johannesburg, "Bloed-Nyl", "Boksie", "Prins van die Towefluit", and "Krop". I was also a member of the Simfonia Juventi youth orchestra, playing first violin in concert halls across South Africa. Since moving to Melbourne I have stage managed "A Fleeting Glimpse" for Mudfest, as well as "Broke[n]" for Fringe.



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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.

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