

ILBIJERRI
THEATRE COMPANY



GUNAWARRA

Re-creation

by **ISOBEL MORPHY-WALSH**
directed by **ANDREA JAMES**

**WE ACKNOWLEDGE AND PAY RESPECT
TO THE SOVEREIGN PEOPLES OF THE
KULIN NATIONS ON WHOSE UNCEDED
LANDS ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY IS
BASED.**

**WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THE
TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE
LANDS WHOSE COUNTRY WE TRAVEL
THROUGH AND SHARE OUR STORIES ON
AND TO THEIR ELDERS WHO CONTINUE
TO PROTECT AND NURTURE COUNTRY,
COMMUNITY, LANGUAGE AND LORE - AS
THEIR ANCESTORS HAVE FOR
GENERATIONS.**

**WE HONOUR THE RESILIENCE OF OUR
COMMUNITY, OUR KNOWLEDGE, OUR
STRENGTH AND OUR COMMITMENT TO
KEEP THE FIRE BURNING.**

**ALWAYS WAS, ALWAYS WILL BE -
ABORIGINAL LAND.**

A powerful Taun Wurrung (Taungurung) story of culture, memory and healing.

Murrin returns to the waterhole; the same one her Auntie Aggie used to take her to. The sacred one. Where past and present collide. Gunawarra Re-creation by Taun Wurrung woman Isobel Morphy-Walsh is a powerful story of culture, memory and women's healing.

Drawing on the traditional Kulin story of Gunawarra, the black swan and how it came to have black feathers, the play unfolds with spirit, strength and song in a profound work of contemporary theatre, breathing new life into the lifelong stories of the Taungurung people.

This new 2026 season is led by award-winning Artistic Director Andrea James (Yorta Yorta and Gunaikurnai), marking her directorial debut with ILBIJERRI Theatre Company following an incredible opening season at Melbourne Theatre Company in 2024 under the directorship of Dr Rachael Maza AM (Yidinji, Meriam).

This powerful production is more than theatre – it is a transfer of ancestral energy, woven with care, pride and deep cultural memory highlighting the strength, authority and wisdom carried by Blak women, and their extraordinary capacity to heal.

Gunawarra Re-creation was originally co-produced with Melbourne Theatre Company as part of Blak in the Room 2024.

Melbourne

Southbank Theatre, The Lawler
8-11 July 2026

Geelong

Geelong Arts Centre
17-18 July 2026

Brisbane

Queensland Performing Arts Centre
5-8 August 2026

Content Warning

Gunawarra Re-creation references rape, sexual assault, violence, forced removal of children and genocide.

Cast



**Hannah
Morphy-Walsh**
(Taun Wurrung)

Gunawarra



Lisa Maza
(Yidinji, Meriam,
Dutch)

Aunty Aggie



**Melodie
Reynolds-Diarra**
(Wongutha,
Nadju, Mirning)
Roo



Miela Anich
(Badu/Kala
Lagaw Ya)

Murrun

Crew

Writer

Isobel Morphy-Walsh
(Taun Wurrung)

Director - Remounted
Production

Andrea James
(Yorta Yorta, Gunaikurnai)

Director - Premiere Production

Dr Rachael Maza AM
(Yidinji, Meriam, Dutch)

Dramaturg

Amy Sole (Wiradjuri, Worimi)

Set & Costume Designer

Dann Barber

Associate Set & Costume
Designer

Emma Salmon (Nyikina)

Lighting Designer

Katie Sfetkidis

Sound Designer/Composer
James Henry (Yuwaalaraay,
Gamilaraay, Yorta Yorta, Yuin)

Movement Consultant

Zoë Brown-Holten
((Th)Dunghutti and Gomerioi)

Stage Manager

Natasha Marich

Production Manager

Jess Maguire

Production Manager
(Melbourne Season)

Celina Mack

Producer

Phoebe Watson (Gunditjmara)

Photography

Tiffany Garvie (Gunggari)

2024 Cast & Crew

Gunawarra Re-creation was originally co-produced with Melbourne Theatre Company as part of Blak in the Room 2024.

Writer

Isobel Morphy-Walsh (Taun Wurrung)

Director

Rachael Maza (Yidinjji, Meriam, Dutch)

Producer

Joel Te Teira (Māori - Ngāti Maniapoto)

Set Designer

Dann Barber

Set and Costume Design Secondment

Emma Salmon (Nyikina) and **Stone Turner** (Arrernte)

Lighting Designer

Katie Sfetkidis

Sound Designer

James Henry (Yuwaalaraay, Gamilaraay, Yorta Yorta and Yuin)

Sound Design Secondment

Todd J. Bennett

Cast

Melodie Reynolds-Diarra (Wongutha, Nadju, Mirning), **Carly Sheppard** (Wallangamma and Takalaka), **Hannah Morphy-Walsh** (Taun Wurrung), and **Kristel-Lee Kickett** (Nyoongar Whadjuk Ballardong)

Dramaturg

Jules Orcullo and **Jennifer Medway**

Design Associate

Emma Holgate (Mandubarra)

Made and presented in collaboration with Melbourne Theatre Company staff. Production Manager Michele Preshaw, Stage Managers Jess Keepence and Jenny Le, and Blak In The Room Engagement Producer, Laura Harris.

**MELBOURNE
THEATRE COMPANY**

Original Co-Producer as part of
Blak in the Room 2024

Director's Note

I knew Uncle Larry Walsh, before I met his two daughters, Isobel and Hannah. I was working at the Koorie Heritage Trust as a Community Arts Worker and I remember vividly Uncle Larry's storytelling prowess, sometimes accompanied by one or two of his daughters. Occasionally Hannah would sign in language (Auslan) as Uncle Larry waxed lyrically from the wealthy bank of stories that sprang forth, connecting him and his family to Taungurung country and the Kulin Nations.

It is not at all surprising then, that this story *Gunawarra Re-creation* has flowed so brilliantly from Isobel's heart and soul; and that Hannah has valiantly stepped up to the plate to represent the Gunawarra for her older sister.

This is the axis of this remounted play. The healing power of family and story.

Gunawarra Re-creation was originally directed by Dr Rachael Maza AM and had its premiere in 2024 as part of the Blak in the Room new plays program, conceived and driven by our Head of Artistic Development Amy Sole and produced in partnership with Melbourne Theatre Company.

It is a wonderful and rare gift to be able to remount a new work and I am grateful for the powerful theatrical footprint that Rachael, James, Dann, Katie and the original cast, Kristel Kickett, Hannah Morphy-Walsh, Melodie Reynolds-Diarra and Carly Sheppard gave us to work with.

Now joined by Miela Anich and Lisa Maza with the expertise of our Movement Consultant Zoe Brown-Holten, Design Associate and BlakStage alumni Emma Salmon, and with the gift of more time, we have been able to dive deeper into this play. To wrestle with it's complexity, awesome symbolism and cultural connections and to let the generations of women's lived experience take flight.

Special thanks to Melbourne Theatre Company for your continued support, to the University of Melbourne for our ongoing partnership and to The City of Melbourne who enabled us to remount this play and give it an expanded and returning audience in Naarm.

If this remounted production is anything to go by (and with a new collective of emerging writers coming through our BlackWrights program, alongside the works of the original Blak In the Room writers - Phoebe Grainer, Maurial Spearim and Isobel) - the future of Blak Theatre is looking very bright.

— Andrea James (Yorta Yorta, Gunaikurnai)

Writer's Note

Telling this story has been a gift. Weaving creation stories with narratives of today are vital in understanding who I am and the culture I come from.

I was blessed to be told Gunawarra's (Black Swan) story since I was born. I'm blessed to be a swan woman. I'm blessed to work with all the creatives who have helped me bring this vision to life.

The story speaks for itself. And I only have one thing left to share and that is to speak directly to whom I wrote this play for:

Gunawarra Re-creation dedication

For those whom know the pain and path to healing. May you be seen, heard, held, protected and embraced.

For country, community and culture three things which have saved my life.

For the ancestors and the storytellers before me. I only hope I've done justice to our story and language.

For the Kulin – it is ultimately and always for you. This story has been a gift given to me – real and raw and true. From bedtime story, to festival, to camp, to fireside learning, to life lesson, to an offering of what remains very present and very alive – story, tradition, contemporary practise, dreaming.

The reclamation of body, spirit, mind, country, culture and skin are not just for Gunawarra and Murrumbidgee.

— Isobel Morphy-Walsh (Taun Wurrung)

Support Services

13 YARN

13 92 76

Djirra

Aboriginal Family Violence Response & Support Service
1800 105 303 (9am - 9pm, Monday to Friday)

1800RESPECT

1800 737 732 (24 hours a day, seven days a week)

Online Chat: www.1800respect.org.au

Men's Referral Service

1300 766 491 (9am - 9pm, seven days a week)

QLife

1800 184 527 (3pm - midnight, seven days)

Online Chat: qlife.org.au/resources/chat

Lifeline

13 11 14 (24 hours, seven days a week)

Online Chat: www.lifeline.org.au

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THEATRE COMPANY**

Original Co-Producer as part of
Blak in the Room 2024



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In | Place

ILBIJERRI thanks the generous supporters of the BlackWrights and BlackStage programs.
ILBIJERRI also thanks Linda Herd for her support of this project.

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