

Buthalangi and Munya's story.
A mother and daughter's journey back.



QPAC IN ASSOCIATION WITH
OOMBARRA PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

IS THAT YOU, *Ruthie?*

Written and Directed by Leah Purcell

Based on the books *Is That You, Ruthie?* –
first published by the University of Queensland
Press in 1999 – and *Buthalangi: A Maranoa
Woman* written by Dr Ruth Hegarty

6 – 15 March 2025
Cremorne Theatre, QPAC

Qpac
QUEENSLAND
PERFORMING
ARTS CENTRE



A MESSAGE FROM **LEAH PURCELL**

Yowalla Ukaminbiya (Hello & welcome)



Photographer: Lyndon Mechielsen

So happy to be back with this return season! We've found new stuff folks! Always exciting when returning to work, especially with a new actor!

I don't think I (we, cast and crew) have worked so hard on something that I hope will be so right, and that our shared experience in the theatre for this return season of *Is That You, Ruthie?* will be unifying.

Embarking on the extraordinary journey of bringing Dr Ruth Hegarty's 95-year life story to the stage is an unparalleled privilege and a pivotal moment in my career as a writer/director. Navigating the intricate details and assuming the responsibility of conveying her narrative with the utmost respect is a professional milestone. This venture echoes the intensity of my earlier work on *Box The Pony*, marking an unparalleled commitment to ensuring the authenticity and resonance of this production.

Considering the narrative structure of *Is That You, Ruthie?* I chose to mirror the life path dictated by the government policy, The Act, upon Buthalangi and Munya. The narrative unfolds with a rich tapestry of truth-telling, understanding, and celebration. Also, taking a non-linear approach, reminiscent of how Mob recount tales, we embark on a journey that starts at a point, deviates purposefully, returns to the original storyline, and culminates in the purpose for this yarn. This storytelling technique, deeply rooted in our ancient traditions, keeps our cultural practices and protocols alive.

Through tears and laughter, this production invites you to witness a performance and an immersive experience where the essence of Aunty Ruth's life converges with the resilience of our shared history.

A heartfelt thank you to my creative team of exceptionally talented collaborators: Jeanette, Chloe, Carli and Katherine, Ben, Wil, Justin, Alex, Kate and Kylie for your tireless dedication in bringing this play to fruition. Special gratitude to new CE Rachel Healy, Jono Perry and their dedicated QPAC staff for their unwavering support and belief in this return season of *Is That You, Ruthie?* I sincerely appreciate each of you; you're all too deadly, u'fella!

A very special thank you and gratitude to my partner in life and business, Bain Stewart.

We are Gunggarri. We share connection and story to Wakka Wakka Country. A heartfelt appreciation to Aunty Ruthie for your faith and trust in me. Noella nuggera Moira and Becky Bligh for your unwavering dedication and support in bringing this play to the stage. Special thanks are extended to the Hegarty and Duncan families.

To my incredibly talented actors, Melodie Reynolds-Diarra and new cast member Shakira Clanton, you've got this! Big love!

May this theatrical journey resonate as a testament to the strength of truth-telling for understanding in our Country.

Noella nuggera.

Aljteringa yirra Biame!

Yantelour-oo

Leah Purcell

Stage Adaptation/Director

A MESSAGE FROM **DR RUTH HEGARTY**



Aunty Ruth Hegarty – image supplied by UQP*

Writing the *Dormitory Girl* story was always something I had to do and when I finished *Is That You, Ruthie?* I had fulfilled the promise I made to my dormitory sisters and to my children to understand my early life.

To have Leah take that story and adapt and translate it to stage has given it new life and sounds beyond my imagination. I am a storyteller but she is a creative artist and together we have built something that will hopefully resonate and educate the wider community about the rules and regulations that dictated every aspect of mine and my mother's life under the 'Act'.

My legacy is that my people and in particular my dormitory sisters are recognised and rightfully given their place in Australia's history, not as the poor cousins, but as a group of people who endured in a time of oppressive racist policies that tried to break our spirits, and turn us into imitations of the white society.

Aunty Ruth Hegarty

Ruthie?



Ruth and her mother Ruby – family collection**

A MESSAGE FROM **RACHEL HEALY**



This is a story that every Australian should know. It is a story of heartbreak and love, of inexplicable loss and the gift of reunion, of the harshest cruelty and the strongest of friendships. It is our true history: one to understand and acknowledge so we can move forward with empathy and reconciliation.

Is That You, Ruthie? is a story that we at QPAC are proud to welcome back to our stage. The land that QPAC sits on has always been a place of storytelling, long before this building was here, and it's exactly this kind of story

that deserves to be shared with our audiences. It's truth-telling at its finest, courtesy of Aunty Ruth Hegarty and the eminent Leah Purcell.

The beauty of this production is in the authenticity of its telling: the way it reflects First Nations narrative cultural practices and in its complete, sometimes brutal, honesty. Its effectiveness is in the harsh truth it reveals, a stark comparison to the grace and humour with which the central characters navigate their lives.

Is That You, Ruthie? is one of those productions that stays with you well beyond the theatre and it is our privilege to co-present this work with Oombarra Productions. We're grateful to them, and the remarkable Aunty Ruth, for bringing their story to our stage. We are confident that this production will have a long lifespan of touring and will impact audiences for many years to come.

Rachel Healy
QPAC Chief Executive

IS THAT YOU, *Ruthie?*

Is That You, Ruthie? is a poignant exploration of a mother and daughter's enduring connection; a deeply moving play that delves into the complex aftermath of a government removal policy that separated a mother (Ruby) and daughter (Ruthie) from 1930 to 1957, leaving scars that could never fully heal.

The adaptation of Dr Ruth Hegarty's David Unaipon award-winning novel *Is That You, Ruthie?* for the stage by Leah Purcell shares a personal and profound chapter of Australia's truth-telling history. We witness a relationship forever altered by the dormitory system's cruel legacy. Though they tried to rebuild what was lost, the bond between mother and daughter would never be the same.

CAST AND CREATIVES LIST

Stage Adaptation/Director Leah Purcell

Cast Melodie Reynolds-Diarra and Shakira Clanton

Choreographer Jeanette Fabila

Lighting Designer Ben Hughes

Composer & Sound Designer Wil Hughes

Video Designer Justin Harrison

Video Technicians Steven Brodie and Joshua Braithwaite,
Buck Outdoor

Set & Costume Designer Chloe Greaves

Dramaturg Alexander Bayliss

Executive Producer Bain Stewart, Oombarra Productions

Head of First Nations Programming Bradley Chatfield

Producer Kate Driscoll-Wilson

Production Manager Kylie Mitchell

Stage Manager Carli Griffin

CREATIVES & CAST



Leah Purcell AM

Actor/Director/Producer/Writer

Leah Purcell AM is an internationally acclaimed Actor, Director, Producer and Writer on stage and screen and a proud GoA-Gunggari-Wakka Wakka Murri woman from Queensland.

Leah stars opposite Sigourney Weaver in the recent Amazon Prime Video limited series *The Lost Flowers of Alice Hart* (Amazon Studios/Endeavor Content/Made Up Stories). She also stars in both the drama series *High Country* (Curio Pictures/Foxtel/Binge), and the feature film *Shayda* (Executive Producer, Cate Blanchett) which had its world premiere at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival. As one of Australia's most in demand actors, Leah has appeared in films such as *The Last Cab to Darwin*, *Lantana*, *Jindabyne* and *The Proposition* and in TV series such as *Wentworth*, *Police Rescue*, *Redfern Now* and *Janet King*.

Leah's debut feature film, *The Drover's Wife The Legend of Molly Johnson*, had its world premiere screening in competition at SxSW 2021 and was released theatrically in the US by Samuel Goldwyn Films. Based on her multi-award winning play *The Drover's Wife*, Leah produced, directed, wrote and starred in the film, winning the 2022 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) Award for Best Lead Actress in Film, 2022 Australian Directors' Guild Award for Best Direction in a Feature Film, 2023 Film Critics Circle of Australia Award (FCCA) for Best Actress, 2021 Asia Pacific Screen Award Grand Jury Prize and 2021 Australian Screen Industry Network Award (ASIN) for Best Writer/Screenplay.

Leah also directed two chapters of the recent anthology feature film *Here Out West* which premiered at the Sydney Film Festival in 2021.

The Drover's Wife play premiered at Belvoir in 2016 and swept the awards season winning Best New Australian Work, Best Play, Best Direction and Best Sound Design at the 2016 Sydney Theatre Awards and Best New Australian Work, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Play at the 2017 Helpmann Awards. The script was awarded Best Stage Play, the David Williamson Prize for Excellence in Writing and the Major Award at the 2017 Australian Writers' Guild Awards. Leah has also adapted the story into a novel of the same name which was published by Penguin Random House in 2019 and has recently been translated and released in China.

Leah has also worked extensively as a TV director and writer, setting up *My Life Is Murder* (Network Ten/CJZ) starring Lucy Lawless. She was also the set-up director on the hit series *Secret Daughter* (Seven Network/Screentime) and directed five episodes of the critically acclaimed genre series *Cleaverman* (ABC/Goalpost) which was broadcast in the US on Sundance TV and in the UK on BBC3 and directed two episodes of the critically acclaimed series *Redfern Now* for ABC and has written two episodes on the AACTA Award winning series, *The Twelve* (Warner Bros International Television), *Redfern Now*, *Love Child* and *Ready For This*.

CREATIVES & CAST



Melodie Reynolds-Diarra

Melodie is a Wongutha, Nadju/Mirning woman from Western Australia. She made her acting debut at the age of 16 in *No Sugar* at Belvoir St and went on to graduate from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) in 1996.

Melodie has performed in several ABC radio plays and recorded the audio book of *My Place* by Sally Morgan. Some of her theatre credits include *Coranderrk* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company/Sydney Opera House), *The Dirty Mile*, *Chopped Liver* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company), *Black Sheep*, *Glorious Baastards* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company/Melbourne International Comedy Festival), *Headhunter* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company/Polyglot), *Gunawarra* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company/Melbourne Theatre Company), *Wild Cat Falling*, *Honey Spot*, *King For This Place*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Dreaming Festival/STC), *Actors at Work* (Bell Shakespeare), *Holy Day* (Playbox), *Stolen*, *Shrunken Iris*, *MasterBuilder*, *Quilting the Armour*, *Yandy* (Black Swan State Theatre Company), *Yibiyung* (Company B), *The Man from Mukinupin* (Melbourne Theatre Company), and *Jackie* by Elfriede Jelinek (Red Stitch Theatre).

Melodie's television credits include *Natural Justice*, *Broken Shore*, *Hard Rock Medical*, and *Redfern Now* (series 2).

In 2013 Melodie made her debut in an associate directing role in *The Shadow King* at Malthouse Theatre.

Melodie has recently appeared in the successful 2017, 2018, and 2019 seasons of *Black is the New White* for Sydney Theatre Company.

In 2015, Melodie's first play *Skylab* was picked up by the Yellamundie Festival and in 2016 was selected for the National Play Festival at Malthouse Theatre. In 2018 *Skylab* made its world premiere in Perth, as a co-production with Black Swan Theatre and Yirra Yarkin Theatre.



Shakira Clanton

Shakira is a NIDA graduate who has worked consistently across film, television and theatre for the last ten years. She has graced our stages in some of the country's most successful productions in recent years. These include *Don't Ask What The Bird Look Like* – playing Pattie (Queensland Theatre), *Long Forgotten Dream* (STC dir. Neil Armfield), *Barbara and the Camp Dogs* (Queensland Theatre/Belvoir), *I'm With Her* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company), *York* (Black Swan Theatre Company) and scored herself a Best Actress nomination at the Sydney Theatre Awards for the critically acclaimed production *The Weekend* (Moogahlin Performing Arts/Carriageworks).

Shakira has also enjoyed a sold out season of her self-written, one women cabaret *Still I Rise* for the Darlinghurst Theatre Company.

Recent screen credits include *Scoby* (Contra Stories), *Wellmania* (Netflix), *Summer Love* (ABC), *Frayed* (ABC), *Preppers* (ABC), *Eden* (Stan), *Diary of an Uber Driver* (ABC), *Doctor Doctor* (Nine Network) and *Hyde and Seek* (Matchbox Pictures).

Shakira is a proud Wongatha, Yamatji and Noongar, Gitja yorga (woman) from Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar (Perth) on her mother's side, as well as being African American with First Nation ancestry on her father's side.

CREATIVES

Bain Stewart Executive Producer – Oombarra Productions

Bain Stewart is a Ngugi-Goenpul-Noonuccal man and a Traditional Owner of Quandamooka, that includes Minjerribah and Mulgumpin (North Stradbroke and Moreton Islands), Queensland. Bain is also the Managing Director and Executive Producer of Oombarra Productions and a leading producer of creative content across film, TV, theatre, and a mentor to First Nation artists across the creative industries.

His producing credits include the IF Award winning documentary *Black Chicks Talking*, the Helpmann Award winning play *The Drover's Wife*, the play *Box the Pony*, and the short films *She. Say* as well as *Auntie Maggie* and the *Womba Wakgun*. In 2023 he was Executive Producer for the AACTA award winning comedy, *All My Friends Are Racist* and Producer for the award winning feature film *The Drover's Wife The Legend of Molly Johnson*.

Bain is currently producing *Is That You, Ruthie?* the stage adaptation of the award-winning novel by Dr Ruthie Hegarty for the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) season in March. He also has numerous projects in-development, more notably; *I am Molly* (Premium Limited Series), *Koa Kid* (Feature Film), *Netball* and *Moxie Girls* (series) and the screen adaptation of the *Is That You, Ruthie?* play.

Bain is also a Producer with Oombarra Taxi, a new strategic alliance between Oombarra Productions and Taxi Film Production, created to bridge the gap in narratives and content for the inclusion of First Nation talent, especially in commercial production. Credits include the recently filmed, *Grooming Hides Behind Harmless* for a national media campaign on behalf of the Bravehearts Foundation.

Jeanette Fabila Choreographer

Specialising in Indigenous contemporary dance Jeanette is a teacher, choreographer, cultural consultant and performing artist. Her experience spans over 35 years of performing and teaching audiences locally, nationally and internationally about her Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island, Papua New Guinean and SE Asian heritage.

Career highlights include: 2008 Welcome to Country Ceremony at the 42nd Parliament House in preparation for the National Apology, then later 5th Anniversary of the National Apology in 2013, 2016 - choreographed the Indigenous Contemporary section for the NRL Indigenous All Stars Opening Ceremony with Nunukul Yuggera Dance Group and local Indigenous school. 2021 – 2024 Cultural Residency representing Moa Island under the guidance of Dujon Niue at NAISDA College of Dance, Kariiong NSW.

Jeanette continues developing Indigenous contemporary dance groups in schools across Brisbane for their NAIDOC celebrations and awards nights, in between her own performances and major tours.

CREATIVES

Ben Hughes Lighting Designer

Ben Hughes' lighting design spans theatre, dance, opera, concerts and events, including: for Brisbane Festival, *Bananaland* (with QPAC), *Salamander*; for Queensland Theatre, *Othello*, *The Almighty Sometimes*, *The Sunshine Club*, *Return To The Dirt*, *Boy Swallows Universe* (with QPAC), *Triple X* (with STC), *Mouthpiece*, *Antigone*, *L'appartement*, *Twelfth Night*, *Good Muslim Boy* (with Malthouse), *Scenes From A Marriage*, *An Octoroon*, *Noises Off!* (with MTC); for QPAC, *Singin' In The Rain* (with Prospero Arts), *Breaking The Castle* (with Oombarra Productions); for Sydney Theatre Company, *Poison Of Polygamy* (with La Boite), *Black Is The New White*, *The Effect* (with QT); for Australasian Dance Collective, *Three 2.0*, *Forgery*, *Aftermath*, *Converge*, *Mozart Airborne* (with OQ), *The Dinner Party*, *Carmen Sweet*, *Propel*; for Queensland Ballet, *Strictly Gershwin*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Peter And The Wolf*, *The Masters Series*, *Flourish*, *Giselle*, *A Classical Celebration*; for Opera Queensland, *Don Giovanni*, *Snow White*; for La Boite, *IRL*, *The Last Five Years*, *Away*, *The Time Is Now*, *Naked & Screaming*, *The Neighbourhood*, *From Darkness*; for Adelaide Festival, *Two Feet*; for Dead Puppet Society / Legs on the Wall / QPAC / Brisbane Festival / Sydney Festival, *Holding Achilles*. Ben lectures in lighting design at Queensland University of Technology.

Wil Hughes Composer & Sound Designer

Wil is a composer, songwriter and sound designer for stage and screen. Recent theatre credits include *Yoga Play* (National Theatre of Parramatta/La Boite); *Closer*, *IRL*, *Capricorn*, *Tiddas*, *Single Asian Female*, *The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek*, *The Village*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Wind in the Willows* (La Boite Theatre Company); *Dear Brother*, *37*, *Rice*, *The Scene Project* (Queensland Theatre); *Straight from the Strait* (Opera Queensland and QPAC); *Is That You, Ruthie?* (Queensland Performing Arts Centre); *Blue* (Belvoir St); *Face to Face* (Playlab); *Lucie In The Sky*, *Arc*, *Still Life* (Australasian Dance Collective); *Cinderella*, *Mind Your Head*, *From Within*, *Sonder*, *B- Sides* (Queensland Ballet); *Every Brilliant Thing* and *Kill Climate Deniers* (That Production Company).

Wil is also an internationally acclaimed composer for film, television and other media, being the recipient of Best Music accolades from the Australian Screen Music Awards; California Independent Film Festival (USA); Festival du Film Marveilleux (France), amongst many others. Recent film credits include *Made It With My Hands* (SBS); *Still Life* (ADC, Kiosk); and *Bird Drone* (ScreenWest) – an official selection of nearly 300 festivals in 54 countries. He is a proud member of the Australian Guild of Screen Composers and the Australian Theatre Composers Guild.



Girls' dormitory building at Cherbourg, 1933
– State Library of Queensland***

CREATIVES

Justin Harrison Video Designer

Justin is a sound and video creative working across theatre, film and television, and video games. He has previously created video and sound design for Queensland Theatre, Melbourne Theatre Company, Belvoir St Theatre, La Boite Theatre Company, and has been the resident designer and technical manager of The Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe for 14 years. His most recent credits include *Is That You, Ruthie?* world premiere in 2023 for QPAC and Oombarra Productions, *Vietgone* (programming and mapping) for Queensland Theatre; *PodSquad* for QPAC and Dept. Health and Wellbeing; *The Lucky Country* for Hayes Theatre Company; *Lucky and the Flight of the Sky Puppies* for Grin & Tonic & The Simoni (2023 Brisbane Powerhouse, 2022 Cairns Children's Festival); *Ishmael* (2023 Tour, 2021 Brisbane Festival), *The Wider Earth* (2022 National Tour, Natural History Museum, London and Sydney Festival 2018, Brisbane 2016) and *Laser Beak Man* (National Tour 2019/20, Brisbane Festival 2017) for Dead Puppet Society; *An Ideal Husband* and *Caesar* for La Boite; *Fangirls* (2022 Sydney Opera House, 2021 National Tour, 2019 for Belvoir St Theatre and Queensland Theatre), *Storm Boy* for Melbourne Theatre Company; and *Death of a Salesman* (2019), *My Name is Jimi* (2018 Sydney Festival, Cairns, Brisbane and Thursday Island 2017) and *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Los Angeles 2019, Montreal 2018, National Tour 2016-17, Brisbane 2016) for The Grin & Tonic Theatre Troupe and Queensland Theatre. In 2016, his work on *The Wider Earth* was awarded the inaugural Matilda Award for Projection Design, and he has since been nominated for Helpmann, Olivier, APDG and BADC awards.

Chloe Greaves Set & Costume Designer

Chloe Greaves is a costume and set designer working in film and theatre across Australia and internationally. She was born and trained on the land of the Wurundjeri of the Kulin nation and is now based on the land of Turrbal people. Chloe acknowledges all elders past, present and emerging and the strong tradition of storytelling on this land. She studied at Victorian College of the Arts completing a bachelor of theatre production in 2008. Her theatre work has seen her design for companies including Belvoir, Malthouse, Chunky Move, Melbourne Theatre Company, Red Stitch, La Boite, Dance North, Queensland Theatre and The Juilliard School. In the film industry, she has worked with companies including Madman Productions, The Directors Group, Pixel Kitchen, Otto Empire, Pancho and Guilty. She has designed music videos for artists including Guy Sebastian, Alison Wonderland, DZ Deathrays, MONTAIGNE and San Sisco. From 2017-2019 she was a panellist for the Green Room Awards theatre companies panel. In 2021-2022 Chloe was the designer in residence at La Boite Theatre. She is a member of the Australian Production Design Guild.

Carli Griffin Stage Manager

Carli Griffin is a highly experienced stage manager and arts professional holding a Bachelor Degree of Fine Arts in Technical Production from QUT. Based in Brisbane, Carli has spent over 10 years working extensively in opera, musical theatre and live events across Australia and internationally.

Her impressive career includes work with Opera Queensland (OQ), State Opera South Australia, Victorian Opera, Opera Australia (OA) and various touring productions.

Throughout her career, Carli has contributed to a diverse range of productions, from large-scale operatic works such as *La Traviata* (OQ) and *Carmen on the Sydney Harbour* (OA), to providing professional stage management for the Queensland Academy of Excellence in Musical Theatre productions and producing festivals in the outback with Opera Queensland. A career highlight for Carli was working at World Expo 2020 Dubai in the United Arab Emirates for six months during the pandemic.

Carli is honoured to be part of the return season of *Is That You, Ruthie?* and looks forward to bringing this powerful production to QPAC audiences.

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Ruthie?

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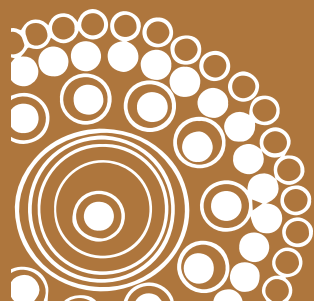
QPAC rests on the lands of the Jagera and Turrbal peoples. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this country and recognise their rich cultural heritage and enduring connection to the land, waters and skies. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are this country's original storytellers, and it is our privilege to continue to share stories and be a place of gathering on this land that has been a meeting place for millennia.

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

QPAC warmly thanks our key donors who help us engage broadly across the state and continue enriching lives through performing arts.

Tim Fairfax AC and Gina Fairfax AC, Dr Lee and Professor Peter Coaldrake AO, Leigh Tabrett PSM, Susan Rix AM, Julian Myers, Dr Sally Pitkin AO, Dare Power, Dr Cathryn Mittelheuser AM, Sandi Hoskins, Lance and Suzanne Hockridge, Leigh Wheeler, Judith Musgrave Family Foundation, Queensland Community Foundation, de Groot's Charitable Fund, Joachim and Paula Erpf, Dr Colin and Mrs Noela Kratzing, Barbara Snelling, Frank and Karen Alpert, Dr Ailbhe and Dr Frank Cunningham, Jenny Morton, Klaus Beckmann and several donors who wish to remain anonymous.

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OOMBARRA PRODUCTIONS

Oombarra meaning 'Ironbark Tree' in Gunggari language began as the producing entity for the creative content of Leah Purcell. Oombarra Productions has grown to become a leading Australian First Nation production company, producing, and collaborating with industry

leaders including Roadshow Films, Memento Films International FR, Samuel Goldwyn Films USA, Modern Films UK, Foxtel, Fremantle Media, Curio Pictures, ABC TV, SBS/NITV, Screen Australia, Create NSW, Screenwest and Screen Queensland.

With a priority of developing First Nation talent, Oombarra also partners across the creative industries with companies such as QPAC, Belvoir Street Theatre, Bunya Productions, Hoodlum Entertainment, Melbourne Theatre Company and others.

Oombarra Productions is an innovator in collaborations to champion inclusion and cultural diversity, establishing new development and investment partnerships with Taxi Film Production, Indigenous Business Australia, Artology, Balnaves Foundation, and the Kirby Foundation.

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Two hearts breaking
Silently waiting to touch
No one hearing the sounds
Unable to see the tears
Across the large rooms
Their silence pounds
A message of love breaks
Their hearts – explode
Not hearing
Yet knowing
I am here.