

THANK YOU

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THE CHAT

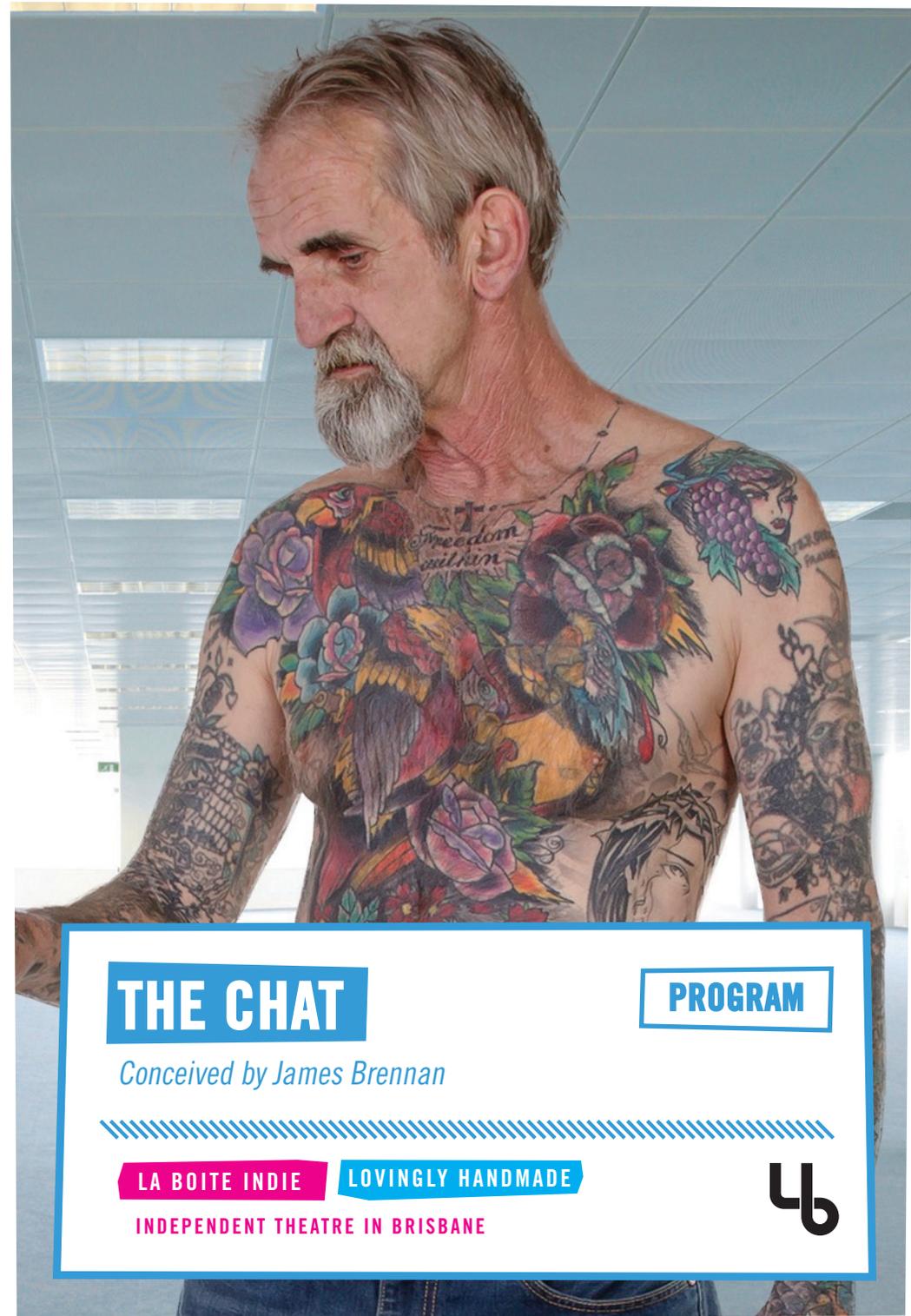
PROGRAM

Conceived by James Brennan

LA BOITE INDIE

LOVINGLY HANDMADE

INDEPENDENT THEATRE IN BRISBANE



PROGRAM NOTES

As a parole officer, interviews with offenders often left very strong impressions on me.

There is something absurd and wonderful about a parole interview. Two relative strangers sitting down to chat – one is required to share so much sensitive material, the other is part-psychologist, part-policeman/woman. The officer already knows something of the offender. They have been provided details of the offender's life, organised in a manila folder. It is the officer's job to fill in the gaps, to understand motivations, contexts and influences that will paint as clear a picture as possible of how this person ended up committing this crime. Part of the job is then to work out how to help them avoid repeating it. The job does not require an assessment of guilt.

Sometimes I turned myself into a fly on the wall, watching the interview. It was often moving, compelling, funny and sometimes in the right circumstances, it was transformative. Repeating this experience many times with a range of people and crimes, in prison and in the community produced in me an ongoing and compelling dilemma: 'How should we treat people who commit offences whilst maintaining their dignity?' I felt the need to find creative solutions to this question.

I believe in the value of a one-on-one relationship between an offender and a competent member of the community such as parole officer. Even in a heavily surveilled interview room, something important can take place between these two people. *The Chat* explores the comical, dark and abstract aspects of this relationship, critically reflecting on the complexity of the subject matter. In it's layered and fictitious reality there is enough fiction to keep its participants from new traumas and enough truth to keep us all close to the edge.

The projects developing methodology has deliberately avoided a therapeutic discourse, while focusing on all possible care and permission for participants. Through mutual trusts and a focus on exploring the theatre work itself, the shared experience continues to challenge both artists and participating ex-offenders. The balance we have strived to achieve between ethics and aesthetic has rested strongly on the abilities of collaborators David Woods and Ashley Dyer. 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. Ashley introduces participating ex-offenders to the stage with a careful and insightful permission to risk. This allows them to continually explore themselves and the content during performance. It really is happening fresh each night. It can fail, it might, and that makes it all the more interesting.

In 2016 we look forward to a new partnership with Monash Universities Criminology department which will explore the potential of our artistic work to feed into a program to aid training for parole officers. Workshops will continue to be held for ex-offenders and artists offered through offender support organisations including Judy Lazarus Transitional Centre and Australian Community Support Organisation and a season of the performance will be presented in Melbourne.

James Brennan

'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 AND CREW

Co-creators **James Brennan, David Woods**

Workshop Facilitators **Ashley Dyer, James Brennan**

Performers **Angela Chaplin, Ashley Dyer, David Woods, James Brennan, John Tjepkema, Mark Flewell-Smith, Nick Maltzahn**

System Design **Alex Davies**

Production Management & Lighting **Glenn Dulihanty**

Sound and Set Design **James Brennan**

Costume and Production Magic **Willloh S. Weiland**

Production Assistant **Terri-Leigh Redding and Kirsten White**

Contributors **Sammy Hoy, Peter Barry, Suzie Beach, Jessica Borthwick, Doddy, residents of Judy Lazarus Transitional Centre, Danny Smith**

Special Guests **Jack Charles, Dr Anna Errikson, Fr Peter Kennedy, Debbie Kilroy, Michael Balfour, Sarah Woodland, Saul Holt, Wayne Weaver, Pam Wilson, Robert Henderson, Sam Watson, Jami-Leigh Acworth, Olivera Simic, Ann Ferguson and a few other rare and brilliant minds.**

Photography by Bryony Jackson

