

Preshow Notes - *Looking for Alibrandi*.

Performance June 15, 1pm.

Audio Description by Tom Hodge and Emma Bedford for Riverside Theatres.

This is a touring stage production of *Looking for Alibrandi* by Vidya Rajan, based on the book by Melina Marchetta, and presented by Riverside Theatres and Brink Productions'

The play will be approximately 2 hrs 20 mins (with a 20-minute interval).

Recommended for ages 12 and up. The play contains coarse language, (in English and in Italian), mild stage violence, reference to suicide, sexual references, domestic violence references, discriminatory language & smoke/haze.

This is a stage adaptation of the beloved Australian 1992 novel of the same name. Also a groundbreaking film from 2000.

An honest and empowered portrait of 1990s Mediterranean culture that speaks of systemic racism in Australia from a migrant perspective. It follows Josie Alibrandi in her final year of high school. *Looking for Alibrandi* defined a generation and continues to resonate with those caught in the stranglehold of identity and othering in this country. With live passata sauce making, traditional Italian music and a soundtrack of Australian pop classics, *Looking for Alibrandi* is a vibrant theatrical experience full of passion, laughs, and beauty.

'There's a legacy of teenage girl's literature, from Anne of Green Gables to Bend It Like Beckham, of these girls being highly intelligent and precocious and restless to remake the world in their own image. And I think that's very true to life. Teenage girls are often the canary in the coal mine of social change... Their coming of age is often loaded with interesting social and historical stuff.' **Vidya Rajan Playwright**

Characters and Costumes

Cast

Chanella Macri plays 17-year-old Josie.

Lucia Mastrantone plays Christina, Josie's young Mum and Lucia also plays Sera her school friend.

Jennifer Vuletic plays Nonna, Margaret Throsby and Sister Bernadette

Ashton Malcolm plays John Barton and Ivy, Josie's classmates

Riley Warner plays Jacob Coote

Chris Asimos plays Michael, Josie's father and briefly appears as Sergio, Sera's boyfriend.

Josie – whose full name is Josephine Alibrandi is a 17 year old, going on 18, school-leaver. Josie is a second generation, Italian-Australian schoolgirl

Quoted in an interview in 2024 actress Chanella says of herself “I grew up too big, especially physically”, describing her body shape as ‘living in a bigger body’. Chanella herself is a second generation immigrant with Samoan-Italian heritage. ‘From a long line of storytellers’ she says. Her body size is significantly larger than the other cast members. She has a pronounced stomach and bottom and a lumberous walk. Chanella as Josie has a large, expressive face and shoulder-length dark curls, worn half up, half down with a dark claw clip at the back, and bobby pins at intervals around her forehead. Chanella has strong, dark eyebrows that assist in telegraphing her teenage emotions. Her features soften around Cristina, her mum.

Josie has 3 distinct costume changes. All changes are performed on stage, she disrobes, revealing her undergarments and her fleshy arms and middle. Josie wears a pair of black tights pulled up over her stomach, black floral knickers and a soft pink, underwire bra.

At Nonna’s, on scene 1 Josie wears a wide necked, short-sleeved, maroon, floral dress with a full skirt that ends at her knees, it pairs with her stockings and black lace-up, chunky ankle boots (similar to Doc Martin boots).

Josie’s school uniform is small maroon and white checked dress to her knees, with a white collar, short sleeves, and buttons down the front. A cheap polyester/cotton blend, synonymous with Australian schools.

Josie’s red dress for the school dance is bright red satin with a soft tulle-like overlay. Three quarter sleeves puff around her upper arms, more snugly fitted at her forearms. The dress is wide necked and princess line, cinched in under her bust. The gathered fabric falls down front, over her stomach, ending below her knees. It’s an awkward length, modest and of a style older than her years. She wears low, black heels with it, and stockings.

Katia Alibrandi, played by Jennifer Vuletic, is an older Italian woman in her 70s who is referred to as ‘Nonna’. She wears a bouncy, shoulder-length, light brown wig, loose and centre parted. She tucks her hair behind her ears. She is whippet-thin, tall and small-breasted, with a long face. She wears the same outfit throughout, a short-sleeved, light blue, polyester dress patterned with clusters of large, loud, brown, red, cream and pink flowers, a matching belt at the waist.

At first, she is barefoot, her skirt hides her knees, and her calves are encased in flesh-coloured stockings that end below the knee. As Scene One progresses she will put on a red cardigan and practical red sandals. Over her dress, for tomato preparation Nonna wears a sleeveless light blue smock that covers her chest and waist.

Nonna hard life weighs on her shoulders. A god-fearing older woman full of big sighs. She moves quickly, with small steps and expresses feeling with her whole body. Nonna is often clasping her hands at her front, looks heavenward and never idle.

The same actress plays Sister Bernadette, an old Anglo-Australian nun at Josie's school, St. Martha's College. Sister Bernadette wears traditional catholic robes, a black, long-sleeved, floor-length habit and sensible black shoes, with a wimple over the top (a white neck cover, with a wide, white, band around the forehead and a long, black opaque veil over the top) it covers her whole head.

And Jennifer Vuletic also plays Margaret Throsby – as a voiceover only, an ABC presenter in Josie's aspirational dream sequence.

Christina played by Lucia Mastrantone, a short, slim woman with long, brown, wavy hair worn loose and centre parted. She has red-lip sticked lips and a strong nose. Christina is in her mid-30s, a first generation Italian Australian woman, daughter of Katia, mother of Josie.

She wears a fitted red bodice with a low heart-shaped neckline and a buttonless purple cardigan over the top. Her cardigan sleeves end mid-forearm. Beneath it Christina wears a fitted, red and white pencil skirt. Bold, dotted white lines criss-cross into squares on the red material. Her legs are bare, and she wears bright red, low-heeled, slip-on shoes.

Tomato preparation at Nonna's requires Christina to wear an apron and her's is a plastic-coated, full-fronted light blue apron with red piping and thin red ties behind her back at her waist. The floral pattern is brown, yellow, blues and green.

The actress also plays Sera – Josie's school friend, in a blonde wig, a fellow Italian-Aussie teen.

Sera is brash and full of beans; she gestures frequently and enthusiastically with her hands and her body. Her school uniform is the same red and white check as Josie's, worn short on her thighs. Her blonde hair is loose to her shoulders, rumpled. Her legs are bare, and she wears white ankle socks and black Mary-Janes, a practical sandal with an enclosed toe and a single strap that buckles in front of the ankle.

Michael Andretti is played by Chris Asimos, also in his mid-30s. Michael is a first generation Italian Australian man. Josie's father. Michael is goodlooking with a short crop of dark hair, a long face and a chiselled jaw. He is clean-shaven with a crisp, white shirt worn untucked at the waist and unbuttoned at the collar over beige chinos (light weight, cotton-based trousers) paired with shiny, chestnut-brown beetle crusher-dress shoes.

Briefly he plays Sergio at the dance in tight black dress pants and shoes, and a black singlet.

Jacob Coote is played by Riley Warner. A 17-year-old teenager from a working-class Sydney suburb. Josie's boyfriend.

Jacob Coote's is an Anglo-Aussie teenager with brown hair to his ears, worn loose and centrally parted. He has facial hair, a brown moustache and beard, giving him a scruffy air. He wears his white school shirt untucked, sleeves rolled up loosely to below his elbows and unbuttoned at the neck. Grey trousers, and black beetle crushers. He's a tall kid who is confident; he often stands with his hands in his pockets.

John Barton is played by a woman, Ashton Malcolm. John is a smartly dressed Anglo-Aussie teenager from a rich family, who attends St. Martha's College. A blonde-haired teenage boy with a side part and a layered fringe, swept away from his forehead. He wears a dark blue blazer and a striped tie and grey shirt. grey pants and black beetle crushers.

He has a gentle demeanour, sincere, he carries stillness with him and buries his hands in his pockets. John has a quick smile and an easy demeanour with Josie.

Ashton Malcolm also plays Ivy – Josie's nemesis at school. Rich and John Barton's childhood friend. Her long, flowing white-blonde hair is caught in a maroon headband for school and worn loose at the dance. Her school uniform is maroon check, and it ends modestly below the knee. Her white socks are pulled up to just below her knees. Ivy wears brogues.

At different times actors take on a variety of other roles - spying Nonnas etc. as required.

Josephine Alibrandi anchors the story and space, with scenes shifting around her and between realism and adolescent fantasy/imagined nightmares. As the work expands, the lives of the other women also find expression. Sometimes 2 locations appear at once.

Creatives

Director Stephen Nicolazzo – currently Artistic Director of Brink Productions.

Vidya Rajan – Writer

Kate Davis – Set and Costume designer

Daniel Nixon – Composer and sound designer

Katie Sfetlidis – Lighting designer

Rosa Voto – Choreographer

Set and Props

The Riverside Theatre is a traditional proscenium arch venue, with 761 seats across three levels: the stalls, the circle, and the gallery. The architectural design is based on the common European Opera House concept providing a warm, intimate, live performance space. The stage is approximately 12 metres wide by 5 metres deep and is raised above the audience's floor level.

At the back of the space are four tall red intersecting curtains. These run the full length of the space, and the characters sometimes enter and exit through them.

The set remains the same, a clutter of crates filled with tomatoes framing the action. It is at once Nonna's kitchen, Christina's kitchen, the school, the dance, Nonna's living room, the garage and outside. Lighting helps to isolate areas of the space where action takes place. It's an evocative, versatile set design set up in the following way.

In front of the curtains are three groups of stacked grey plastic crates filled with tomatoes. Each crate is approximately 50 centimetres long by 30 centimetres deep and 30 centimetres high, and some of the stacks are seven crates high. A red plastic tub is placed within the group of crates on the left.

At the start of the show, on our left of the space towards the front are five tomato-filled crates, two of which are stacked. Nestled close is one green, plastic outdoor chair, and a transparent-blue, plastic tub.

On our right, in front of stacked crates is a kitchen table, approximately 2 metres long and 60 centimetres deep, it is covered by two tablecloths, a red and white plaid pattern cloth covered by a clear plastic sheet. On the left of the table is a tin of Nescafé coffee, a red flask of hot water and an angular, stove-top coffee maker. On the right of the table is a silver tomato press which is used to puree cooked tomatoes into passata.

A blue tub is located on the ground under the press to catch the passata as it squashes. On the table are various cooking utensils, tongs, mixing bowls, spoons and a colander. Underneath the table is a yellow crate. At the start of the show, Christina brings in a second identical crate with tomatoes inside and places it under the table next to its fellow, yellow crate.

There are two classroom style chairs with black metal legs and a blue plastic bucket seat. These move around the space depending on the action. One is to the left of the table, and the other directly in front of it.

To the right of the table is an oil barrel with a brown rusted finish. This has been converted to a cooker and has tomatoes cooking inside. In the description, this is the stove. The barrel has hooks on the left which hold a long wooden spoon to stir the tomatoes, and a metal ladle to scoop them out. In front of the barrel on top of a green plastic tub is a bread crate. This crate is loosely covered with cheesecloth

material, coarser than fishnet. This is used to drain excess liquid from cooked tomatoes before they are transferred into a smaller white tub.

The floor of the space is covered in a white carpet with diagonal floral patterns.

Featured props

Throughout the show, various props are used within each scene. Josie carries a maroon school backpack with two large zippers. Inside the bag at the start of the show is a black schoolbook, a bottle of premixed spirits, and later some pamphlets for different universities and TAFE courses.

Through the show, Nonna looks through a red photo album which is first located under the green chair. One of the photos she consistently pulls out is of a man called Marcus Sanford which she handles fondly and with reverence. Two more similar photo albums are brought in when Josie visits Nonna in Act 2.

Other featured props include 90's style mobile phones and cameras used by spying nonnas, schoolbooks, a megaphone used by Sister Bernadette, and a creeper used by Jacob. A creeper is a low platform with wheels on it used by mechanics to get under a car.

This is the end of the preshow notes.