# The Forum

by Alysha Herrmann and collaborators

## ARTISTIC INFLUENCES AND INSPO

(from Alysha)

This document is provided to help capture the intended flavour of the final work for grant assessment panels. It is not intended as a public facing document and the creative process itself with collaborators will influence and shift where we land.

Alysha is not a graphic designer and she has prepared this doc on the fly sitting on the floor while supporting a bunch of teenagers from Peterborough and the Riverland attending the Portal Festival in Barmera.

Images have been borrowed from artist websites and other public facing sources as visual references.

**Every Brilliant Thing** is one of my favourite plays for a variety of reasons, but it's influence/inspo for The Forum is specifically in how the work positions the audience.  Macmillan doesn't just tell a story about recovery being something we do together; the plays makes the audience do it by handing them the list and casting them as people who hold the narrator up. In other words, the form enacts the themes or argument of the play.

Much of my work as a playwright has explored the roles audiences can play, including using technology to directly interact with the actors and shape the narrative. The Forum extends this by casting the audience as members of a fictional community and inviting them to respond live through their mobile phones. Where Macmillan's participation is public, shared and visible, mine is deliberatly private and solitary. Each audience member engages alone, initially anonymously, mirroring the online spaces where so many young people seek hope but often find harm. Audience responses feed into a live stream shaped by others they cannot see, so the audience finds itself in the position of the bystander, choosing what kind of community they want to build. This experience unfolds alongside the joyful, celebratory action on stage, creating a deliberate tension between both.

Like Macmillan, I use form to enact theme, and like him I am conscious that this carries ethical weight. The Forum is designed to confront the audience with their own complicity, but also to show that the choices they make, even alone on a screen, shape how safe a community is for its young people. This is as true outside the theatre as it is inside it, and I am mindful of my responsibilty to care for the audience, particularly the queer young people within it, throughout the experience.

Image: Jimi Bani in Every Brilliant Thing by Duncan Macmillan with Jonny Donahoe. Dir. Yasmin Gurreeboo for State Theatre Company of South Australia. Photo by Matt Byrne.

Photos by Dylan Evans. Dir. Sanja Simic

I didn't know it at the time but the first seed of The Forum was planted as I sat in the audience of **Lysa and the Freeborn Dames by Claire Christian** (La Boite, 2018) bawling my eyes out. Why?

1. I was in my thirties and had seen lots of theatre but it was the first professional show I'd ever seen on stage that resonated with and spoke to my experience of living in regional communities - the love, complexity, frustration, heartache, and ongoing work of creating better futures. I didn't realise I've never felt represented until I saw myself represented and it made me understand the power and neccessity of representation in a whole new way.
2. I ADORED the set/staging/design, but most especially the way they'd cast a chorus of professional older women alongside a younger cast of graduate actors. A professional level intergenerational outcome creating networks and pathways for the younger actors and with this amazing chorus of experienced actors holding the quality high.
3. Political, funny, earnest, contemporary, banging soundtrack.

Production still of **Ruby Bruise** (2010) from Jane Howard's review on Australian Stage. I can barely remember the story of Ruby Bruise but I still think about the way it made me feel. I want The Forum to do that: evoking comfort, wonder and shades of dark and light. Similarly to Lysa - the influence includes use of a chorus, a banging soundtrack and a magical set.

Side of stage snap of Nancy Bate's **Blak Country** (2025) taken by me. There was a moment during this show where Nancy sang *For Your Love* and invited the audience to sing the chorus together. With the screen behind her cycling through photos, the audience standing singing together and the piano off to one side, I could picture The Forum for a moment.

The characters will come through our R&D next year but my gut says one of the characters is learning to play an instrument on stage.

There is a version of The Forum in my head that includes instrumental music students from local schools joining us on stage or a simpler version is a core song with a catchy chorus where the audience joins us.

Sage was a teen participant in afterscool drama workshops I ran for Ramble Arts early in my career. These pictures (taken by me and my friend Keeley) show adult Sage hosting a pride-themed open mic in the Ramble Hall (below, 2022) and presenting one of their poems at conclusion of the first Riverland Pride March (right, 2021). This sense of community ownership, joy, connection, and longterm legacy is the most important influence to me.

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRUI2yfmDkk

The spoken word poem **Orlando** by Andrea Gibson tells the story of the Pulse nightclub massacre. This performance presents the poem accompanied by the song *She Keeps Me Warm* (made famous as the chorus of Macklemore's Same Love) sung by original creator Mary Lambert. This performance always makes me sob. Holding the hurt and the hope side by side is what I imagine for The Forum. This combo of spoken word + music also points towards the hip hop + folk combo I imagine with Nancy, Kultar and myself.

There are so many other inspirations I could include here, but less is more, and now I need to jump in a car to drive my teens three hours home. #regionallife