

## **GRACE UNDER PRESSURE**

by David Williams & Paul Dwyer  
in collaboration with the Sydney Arts & Health Collective

Alexander Theatre, The Ian Potter Centre for Performing Arts  
Monash University  
15-16 April 2021

### **CO-WRITER & DIRECTOR'S NOTE**

Back in 2017 Paul Dwyer and I, with the support of the Sydney Arts and Health Collective, set out to make a theatre work that might open a broader public conversation about some of the persistent workplace issues facing health workers. *Grace Under Pressure* is based on interviews with doctors and nurses and asks: how do we as a society care for those who devote their lives to caring for us? Can a doctor or nurse give a patient the best possible care if he or she hasn't slept for days? What if they are also being bullied or sexually harassed at work? What if they complain about having to work excessive hours, but are told to stop whinging and suck it up? How do they cope with the pressure?

We interviewed around 30 people – physicians, surgeons, interns, registrars, nurses, a paramedic, a hospital administrator and even a union official. Despite a wide range of ages (from mid-20s to early 70s) and experience levels (from medical students to recently retired), stories of bullying, discrimination, harassment, overwork, and burnout were distressingly common. But amongst all this there were also stories of humour, joy and satisfaction – genuine human connections amongst the labour of care. In creating this show we tried to do justice to all of these stories, so generously offered by our interviewees.

It's fair to say that *Grace Under Pressure* feels very different in 2021. The central question driving this show – how we care for those who care for us – has gained deeper resonance in this continuing global pandemic, when new barriers to caring for our carers have emerged. From doctors forced to move out their family homes to reduce the potential risk of infection, to PPE shortages, to nurses being abused at petrol stations for walking in their uniform, health work in a pandemic has brought new anxieties. How might we better care for our care-givers in such a time?

I hope that *Grace Under Pressure* might help all of us to think more deeply about this complex and challenging issues, and together begin the work of first imagining, then building healthier health care cultures and systems.

*David Williams, April 2021*

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS:**

**Writers:** David Williams & Paul Dwyer

**Sydney Arts & Health Collective:** Dr Claire Hooker, Associate Professor Louise Nash, Dr Karen Scott, Dr Kimberley Ivory, Dr Jo River, Professor Paul Macneill and Mr James Dalton

**Performers:** Emily Taylor, Sal Sharah, Tanya Schneider and Meg Dunn

**Understudies:** Carla Jane McCallum, Richard Bligh, Mary Helen Sassman and Stephanie Panozzo

**Understudies (Western Australia):** Amy Mathews, Igor Sas, Helen Hanson and Arianna Williams

**Director:** David Williams

**Dramaturg:** Paul Dwyer

**Lighting Designer:** Nick Higgins

**Sound Designer:** Gail Priest

**Set & Costume Designer:** Isabel Hudson

**Producer:** Suzie Franke

**Company Stage Manager:** Maureen Thomas

**Touring Technician:** Glenn Parry

**Associate Producer:** Bec McGuinness

**Associate Director (WA Understudy cast):** Hellie Turner

**Stage Manager (WA Understudy cast):** Jenny Poh

**Set Construction:** Thomas Creative

**Tour Freight:** Gypsy Entertainment

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Australian Government  
RISE Fund

**THE  
BIG  
ANXIETY** festival of  
arts + science  
+ people

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**alternative  
facts**

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

### DAVID WILLIAMS (Co-writer/director)

David is a Melbourne-based theatre artist whose works open spaces for public conversation about political and social issues. He was the Curator of ATF2015, and his theatre works have won Helpmann, Green Room and Drivers' Awards. David holds a PhD from UNSW and is the director of Alternative Facts Pty Ltd. He was the founder and artistic leader of version 1.0, and co-created and produced all of the company's work from 1998-2012, including *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)*, *The Wages Of Spin*, *This Kind Of Ruckus*, *The Disappearances Project*, *Deeply Offensive And Utterly Untrue*, *The Bougainville Photoplay Project* and *The Table Of Knowledge*. Over the past two decades he has crafted evocative performances from found materials such as interviews, archives, and transcripts of public inquiries. Recent works include *Quiet Faith*, based on conversations with Australian Christians about religion and public life, *Grace Under Pressure* (co-written with Paul Dwyer), crafted from interviews with doctors and nurses about hospital workplace cultures, and *Smurf In Wanderland*, an autobiographical work about football fandom and geographic belonging. His new works in development include *Smaller*, *Sincere Apologies*, *Only Players* and *Public Good (Parts 1-4)*.

### PAUL DWYER (Co-writer/Dramaturg)

Paul is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney. He has published widely on applied theatre, in particular the work of Augusto Boal, and is currently completing a monograph on discourse and performance in restorative justice conferencing. Paul is also a performance maker with extensive professional experience in documentary theatre, including *The Bougainville Photoplay Project*, which toured throughout Australia and won a Melbourne Green Room Award, *Tribunal* with Powerhouse Youth Theatre, and *Beautiful One Day*, a collaboration with Ilbijerri Theatre, Belvoir St Theatre, version 1.0 and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Palm Island.

### THE SYDNEY ARTS AND HEALTH COLLECTIVE

The Sydney Arts and Health Collective is an interdisciplinary collaboration of researchers, educators and arts practitioners at the University of Sydney. The Sydney Arts and Health Collective formed in 2016 to explore performance and creative arts approaches to high levels of bullying, harassment and mental ill-health among clinicians and healthcare students. Core members include A/Prof Paul Dwyer, Theatre and Performance Studies, a verbatim theatre maker specialising in the use of theatre for change in conflict settings; Dr Kimberley Ivory, Population Health, a specialist trainer in equity and diversity; Dr Claire Hooker, Sydney Health Ethics, a leading arts for health/health communications researcher; Prof Louise Nash, Brain and Mind Centre, a psychiatrist with extensive research on the wellbeing of doctors; Dr Karen Scott, Westmead Hospital, an education researcher who has demonstrated the extent of teaching by humiliation and bullying experienced by medical students; Dr Jo River, Sydney Nursing School, a health sociologist with research interests in suicide; and A/Prof Paul Macneill, Sydney Health Ethics, who has lengthy research and practical experience using drama based approaches to teaching medical ethics and in exploring arts and ethics. The Collective began work piloting drama skills-based workshops to improve workplace communication and build professionalism through embodied learning, and then produced the verbatim theatre work *Grace Under Pressure*, a verbatim theatre work led by leading verbatim theatre maker David Williams, for the Big Anxiety festival in 2017.

### GAIL PRIEST (Sound Designer)

Gail is a Sydney-based artist with a multi-faceted practice in which sound is the key material of communication and investigation. Originally trained in theatre she has worked as a sound designer/composer for performance collaborating with independent directors and choreographers such as Martin del Amo, Jane McKernan, David Williams and Andrea James. She has exhibited her own sound-based installation work nationally and internationally, most recently as part of Experimenta Make Sense, Melbourne and national tour, ISEA2016 Hong Kong, Werkleitz Festival Germany and at UTS Gallery, Sydney in an exhibition she also curated. She has released several

albums of exploratory music through her own label Metal Bitch as well as Flaming Pines and Endgame records. She writes extensively about sound and media arts, in particular for RealTime magazine, as well as being the editor of *Experimental Music: audio explorations in Australia* through UNSW Press (2009). She was the 2015/2016 Australia Council Emerging and Experimental Arts Fellow.

### **SUZIE FRANKE (Producer)**

Suzie has extensive experience as a Producer, Production Manager, Lighting Designer, Event Manager, and Company Stage Manager, and has produced, managed and delivered national tours for more than ten years. She is currently a Producer for CDP Theatre Producers and Executive Producer for Alternative Facts Pty Ltd. Previously, she co-founded and managed the independent theatre company Blackbird Productions. Recent large-scale projects include working as the Production Manager of the Moomba Parade, one of Melbourne's most loved events for the City of Melbourne, and the Production Manager on the annual APACA Conferences in Melbourne (2010), Perth (2011), Darwin (2012), Sydney (2015), Melbourne (2016), Chatswood (2017) as well as the APACA conference, Australian Theatre Forum, and Australia Council Marketing Summit in Canberra in May 2013. Recently for CDP she was the lead producer on the national tour of *Snugglypot and Cuddlepie, Mr Stink, Billionaire Boy, Midnight Gang, Charlie and the War Against the Grannies* and the *13-, 26-, 78- and 91- Storey Treehouses*.

### **EMILY TAYLOR (Performer)**

A performer with over 15 years' experience, Emily is especially known for her comedy and character work. She recently starred as Constanza Mozart in *Meeting Mozart* at The Sydney Opera House and completed two national tours in the comedy revue *Senior Moments* (starring Max Gillies and Benita Collings). Emily has worked as an actor for Arena Theatre Company, MTC, Melbourne Playback and CDP. Emily has received much critical acclaim for her solo shows, winning multiple awards for *Cannonball* (Melbourne Fringe Tour Ready Award and Best Solo Show NZ Fringe), and a Green Room Award for her debut cabaret *Hello You*. Her shows *Pet* and *Backwards* both played to sold out crowds at Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

### **MEG DUNN (Performer)**

In 2021, Meg will tour Australia performing in David Williams' acclaimed *Grace Under Pressure*. In addition to her acting work, Meg is the founder of Breath and Bones Theatre Co. and directed Dennis Kelly's *DNA* at Chapel off Chapel. Meg is a 2019 graduate of the VCA and recipient of the college's 2018 Pratt Bursaries Award for excellence in Acting. In 2018 Meg choreographed *That Bastard Brecht* which won best international show (The Derek Awards 2018) at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

### **TANYA SCHNEIDER (Performer)**

Tanya's recent credits include *Harrow* (ABC), *Metrosexual* (9Go & 9Now), *Heist* (web series), and the short films *Occupation*, *Smother* and *A Picture of Other People*, for which she received the Best Actress Award at the Sanctuary Film Festival. Tanya studied at The Actor's Workshop, holds a BA (Film & TV Production) and continues to train as often as possible, including participating in masterclasses with esteemed teachers such as Patsy Rodenburg and Larry Moss. As well as being a trained yoga and meditation teacher, Tanya has been an acting tutor for NIDA Open since 2010, and has also won the ATOM Teachers Award for her work making films with children in the Indigenous community of Cherbourg.

### **SAL SHARAH (Performer)**

Recent acting credits include *Grace Under Pressure* (Alternative Facts, Seymour Centre), *Where the Streets Had a Name* (Monkey Baa), *The Incredible Here & Now* and *Hakawati* (National Theatre of Parramatta/Sydney Festival). Other Theatre Credits include *Jump for Jordan* (Griffin); *Miss Julie*, *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Belvoir); *Felliniada* (Belvoir/Auto de Fe); *Salome* (Crossroads); *My Son the Lawyer is Drowning* (Ensemble Theatre); *Alex & Eve* (Bulldog Theatre Company).

**NICHOLAS HIGGINS (Lighting Designer)**

Nick Higgins has been an independent lighting designer since graduating from WAAPA in 1999. He has worked across all genres in all states and for most companies. Nick is not only a lighting designer, but a photographer and film-maker. He was a nominee for the Best Lighting Design Award, Sydney Theatre Awards for his design for *Frankenstein* for the Ensemble Theatre Company. Nick and his partner moved to Tasmania after working on a show and falling in love with the state.

**ISABEL HUDSON (Set & Costume Designer)**

Isabel is a Sydney-based production designer and graduate of the NIDA design course (2015) and holds a Bachelor of Arts (Screen and Sound) from UNSW (2012). Isabel was awarded the William Fletcher Foundation Tertiary Grant for emerging artists in 2015. Recently, Isabel has designed Set and Costumes for: *Grace Under Pressure* (Seymour Centre/ The Big Anxiety), *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Sport for Jove), *I love you now* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company), *The Plant* (Ensemble Theatre Company), *The Merry Widow* (Opera Australia – Assistant Set Designer to Michael Scott Mitchell), *Intersections* (ATYP), *The Shadowbox*, *Hurt* and *Blackrock* (White Box Productions), *The Block Universe* and *Journeys End* (Cross Pollinate), *The Chamber Pot Opera* (Bontom; Sydney, Adelaide and Edinburgh seasons), *Slut* (Festival Fatale), and worked as an associate on Opera Australia's *My Fair Lady*. In 2015 Isabel designed *A Dream Play* directed by Kim Carpenter, *Top Girls* directed by Susanna Dowling, *Love and Honour and Pride and Pity and Compassion and Sacrifice*, directed by Priscilla Jackman.