

THE WORD

WHO IS IN CONTROL?



THE WORD was created on the sovereign lands of the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nations. We pay respects to Elders past and present, and stand in solidarity with all First Nations peoples.

**“THE
WORD
IS A
VESSEL”**

CREDITS

Performers /

Frankie Lee Willcox
Grace Annan
Harris Tate Elliott
Harriet Turner-Browne
Jackson Reid
Kleopatra Dukas
Noray Hosny
Oscar Munro
Spike Angwin
Sunday Bickford
Vito van Hout

Directing Intern / Clea Carney

Writing Intern / Spike Angwin

Stage Management Intern / Alice Coffey

Script / Michele Lee, Michael Carmody, Nadja Kostich and **The Word** ensemble

Director / Nadja Kostich

Composer and Sound Designer / Allara Briggs Pattison

Choreographic Artist / Bridget Fiske

Video Designer / Michael Carmody

Set and Costume Designer / Matilda Woodroofe

Lighting Designer / Richard Vabre

Assistant Director / Alice Qin

Producer / Lara Week

Production Manager / Kofi Isaacs

Stage Manager / Steph Young

Sound System Designer and Operator / Justin Gardam

Production Assistant / Julia Landberg

Photographer and Graphic Designer / Jason Cheetham

PR / Pitch Projects

Access Guide / Alice Qin, with Artemis Muñoz



DEVELOPMENT CREDITS

Thank you to the wonderful young artists who have previously been a part of the making of **The Word**:

Interns / Matisse Knight and Jyden Brailey
Performer / Gaatha Sivom

SONG CREDITS

Harrie's Song

Written by / Harris Tate Elliott

Arranged by / Allara Briggs Pattison and Harris Tate Elliott

Words

Written by / Barry, Robin and Maurice Gibb

Arranged by / Allara Briggs Pattison, Grace Annan and Jackson Reid

Grace's Lullaby

Written and arranged by / Grace Annan

Everybody Wants to Rule the World

Written by / Roland Orzabal, Ian Stanley and Chris Hughes

Arranged by / Allara Briggs Pattison, Grace Annan, Harris Tate Elliott and Jackson Reid







BIOGRAPHIES

Performers

Frankie Lee Willcox

My Mimi (grandma) teaches Woi Wurrung language at my primary school. She teaches me Yawuru every day. Mimi connects me to words and to my culture. When I lose my words, she's the person I go to. She helps me find myself in my words again.

Grace Annan

I remember when I went to Ghana in the holidays to visit my family. I hadn't seen them for 10 years and I felt like I had lost connection with them. I wanted so badly to be able to ask them about how their lives have been and tell them about mine and learn about what it was like living in Ghana, but every time I would try and speak to my nana manfoah (grandma), it would go terribly because she doesn't speak a word of English and I don't speak a word of Twi. I almost felt defeated because the lack of words I had to give to her in Twi was causing this disconnection. It's weird how words are everything and nothing at the same time.

Harris Tate Elliott

My creativity comes through writing songs. Adrenaline comes over me and they pour out of my head. Words are lyrics. When I can't speak the burning thoughts inside my head, I sing them. Even if they're not perfect and even if I never fully write them down. It's a beautiful word vomit that feels... right.

Harriet Turner-Browne

Words are more mutable than I once thought. I used to be so quiet that it freaked people out a bit, but as I used my words more and more it got much easier. What once tumbled out of me as strained, ugly globs of syllables, now feels as natural as breathing. Waves can't hurt you if you know how to ride them; and it's the same with words.

Jackson Reid

When I was little and me and my mum were on the train, I saw emus for the first time. I said to my mum "look umes," and that stuck until I found out they were called emus.

Kleopatra Dukas

I was flopped across my friend's couch at a family event—her grandmother walked into the room and asked me my name, and for the love of everything in me I couldn't remember it, my own name, hell, I couldn't even formulate one sentence about myself. I ended up sitting there in complete silence like a stunned mullet while my friend cackled her head off on the floor.

Noray Hosny

I was in Italian class when I realised how similar Arabic and Italian were, all over the world "gambari" means prawn. I never realised the connection languages had until then.

Oscar Munro

I remember through my final years of high school, I was in my exams, and I sat there reading the dictionary, and I misread a word so terribly it makes no sense. I don't remember the word, but I remember sitting there not doing anything for 20 minutes sitting in this feeling of dread because my words had betrayed me.

Spike Angwin

I never quite know how my words will turn out; sometimes I write the most eloquent pieces ever written. But most of the time I write as if I am the monkey three seats down from the one who is finishing Macbeth.

Sunday Bickford

For me words are stories, words are memories or moments in time. My words give me the ability to go back, to go forward, to live in the now.

Vito van Hout

Words, for me at least, feel quite often restricting and limited; my art is explored to help say what I can't in any words. My feelings and thoughts constrict my mind and art helps to untangle them, I've learned a lot about myself through this production and other art I've undertaken during this time. It's a beautiful thing really.

Creatives and Crew

Alice Coffey

Recently I was on a call and they needed the name on my bank card which is "Alice R Coffey". I got nervous and worried they didn't hear me say "R" clearly enough so I tried to give them a word to relate it too and the first word that popped into my head was "Racecar". My dad across the room burst out laughing and said "why didn't you just say your real middle name, Rose". Now I think the person thought my middle name was "Racecar".

Alice Qin

When I moved to Australia aged 8 and was learning to speak English, I used to be very confused when once a week, everyone seemed to be on my level and we were all learning simple words like greetings and body parts. It was years later when I realised, that was Italian class!

Allara Briggs Pattison

I yearn to hear, speak and understand every Yorta Yorta word. Those words hold our old people's way of being and knowing without being diluted by English, they hold our lore, and how to live in balance with all parts of life. Our First Nations languages in

this country are experiencing linguistic, so I hope the exploration of this production helps the audience connect to the importance of words in every language and that no language should take the place of another. Words are power. Language is resistance.

Bridget Fiske

1. I have spent much of this process thinking of my friends where speaking a language, their language, is resistance.
2. Sometimes I wonder if Wordle is a fortune teller.
3. I love lists.

Clea Carney

Words are such a beautiful, messy, complicated miracle of human life, and I have always been so fascinated by them from a very young age. To think about all of the different factors that have come together and led to the invention of approximately 31,000 languages that have existed throughout human history is truly mind blowing.

Jason Cheetham

Words tell stories. Stories are how we understand the world.

Justin Gardam

When used in proximity of an imagination, words are all-powerful things that can create universes and galaxies all by themselves. When

it comes to making art, they're like flint to the imagination's steel.

Kofi Isaacs

For a long time when I was younger I struggled with properly communicating myself. It wasn't until I got to high school that it really improved, when words and language took a back seat to movement. A picture tells a thousand words but so can a gesture or a raised eyebrow. I communicate best swinging on a trapeze, not by the book.

Lara Week

My family name is a word that in English means seven days. It used to be a different word, which in the language of my migrating ancestors means a body of water, like a bay or inlet. I suppose they changed it to fit in better with the new people in charge. The two words sound kind of similar, but they mean different things, and I think they tell a different story about the people who carry them.

Matilda Woodroffe

It's not often that you hear a word that you've never heard before and have no idea of its meaning or intent. During the rehearsal process of this show I've had the pleasure of being surrounded by the next generation of words and slang

and have learnt a new word to add to my vocabulary from the young people. When sharing some of my designs and ideas with them I was met with "oh yeah that's based" which I've been reassured is a good thing and a compliment. So yeah...hope you enjoy the show and that you find it uh... based.

Michael Carmody

Sometimes I think my only responsibility on any given day is to find the words that most honestly and accurately express what's on my mind. If I can do that, then everything else seems to take care of itself. The challenge is to find those words. It's easier said than done. When it happens, I find it exhilarating and space expanding.

Michele Lee

I work with words all day; in my case, English words. I am having the magical experience of watching my 7-year-old son learn English at school. Last year in prep, as the literacy was kicking in more, he suddenly began to write his own short stories. The spelling is imperfect when he writes and I know it doesn't really matter. But I just love how he spells 'whale' as 'wayool'. As I read this word and in his handwriting, I can hear his voice saying it. So it is perfect.

Nadja Kostich

My mum taught me to piece words together with little cardboard letters, like the ones you push into the clear plastic pouches of the old-fashioned pencil cases. They were black letters on a gold background and I loved playing the game of words, the shapes of the lines and that time with my mum. They were Cyrillic letters, I was learning my first language, Serbian, and I must have been about 3 or 4 years old. Writing this, I'm both there and here and I have no word for that feeling.

Richard Vabre

When I was 6 or 7 I wrote "Phil [my brother's name] is a Poo" on the neighbour's fence in chalk. I thought it would wash away but it stayed there for over 20 years. Every time my family came out the front of our house I had to stand in front of it to try and mask it. Those words haunted me.

Steph Young

Deciphering the meaning behind words can feel like decoding a complex puzzle, and you need to have all the pieces. The intricacies behind social cues, metaphors, sarcasm and language's subtle nuance can make it hard to feel understood.

**“YOU’LL
SEE,
WHEN
ALL IS
FOUGHT,
IT’S *INK*
THAT
SEEPS IN”**





NOTES FROM (SOME OF THE) CREATIVES

Michele Lee

This is a show where the performers play versions of themselves, stretching across time—before, now and after. They excavate their own words and all words. It's exquisite. We've co-devised and co-written this together, as we've all gotten to know each other over an extended development period. The more recent rehearsal period with the full creative team on board has amplified the richness in what we built in the text. Integral in the process of this work is the continual listening we've all brought.

It may be in the second after the show ends that something about the show sinks in for you and your own relationship with words and language. It may be on the ride home. It may be in 5 years or 50. It may echo into the lives of your children, if you have them. We hope that in being with us as we speak this complicated theatre language we created to make this show, a show about language and languages and one word and all words, that in making a maze out of what is already a maze, you will find a path out of it afterwards and into a set of thoughts, of feelings, into your own words.

Clea Carney

The Word has been a year-and-a-half-long process for the young performers involved and has gone through many different forms and held many different meanings throughout that time.

For some, this show is about the intricacies and complications of human language and communication; for others, it explores an impending threat of censorship and control in modern-day society; some consider **The Word** to be a celebration of language and of each other's individuality. To me, this show is all of those things and many more; it contains infinite meanings—language contains infinite meanings. Our words now belong to you, the audience, and you can take them as you will. A reflection. A call to action. A lament. A revelry.

This has been a difficult process in many ways for the young cast—balancing this work with the many trials and tribulations of High Schooling. For our first rehearsal this year, the entire cast—as well as much of the crew and creatives—sat around in a circle to read through the new, but not quite final, script. We had not seen this script before, but it was in many ways familiar to us as it was born from the performers' words and ideas from the past year.

Throughout this year, the performers and everyone involved—myself included—have learnt to incorporate countless aspects of performance and art to create this piece. Our performers are the driving force behind **The Word**. As directors, crew and creatives, our job has been to assist, facilitate, conduct and encourage them in this extraordinary journey to where we are today.

Michael Carmody

Words. Sometimes they're just so wordy and insistent and direct and what you long for is the space and stillness and indirectness of wordlessness. But then words have this way of sneaking up on you again, announcing themselves, needing to be formed and communicated in some way. It's a relentless and inescapable back-and-forth. Two miraculous parts of the nature algorithm.

This show is about different groups of people, across different periods of time, grappling and battling with words. It's about the word in the personal private realm. The struggle to work out what you want to say and how you want to say it. To be understood, or not. To connect. The courage it takes to use your words. The triumph of finding your words. The sense of cheating chaos. The small gifts of truth and beauty. And it's about the word in the broader public and political world. Who's in control? What's at stake when words become unsayable? If we don't listen, if we don't stand up for our words, what darkness awaits? Can words save us? Can we save words? Will this vessel hold?

"The basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. If you can control the meaning of words, you can control the people who must use the words."
- Philip K Dick

Spike Angwin

What are words? I mean what are they really? Can we even be technically describing them if we are, in fact, using words to explain what they are? So many questions that daunted us, unanswerable and confounding. We started by having discussions, trying to wrap our heads around these vast yet minuscule ideas, all in a circle, pitching our own thoughts. Everyone on the same level, discussing equally. But once we introduce so many opinions how do we sort through them? What do we decide on as the true answer? Is there one absolute solution?

We had no idea.

So we changed it up—what if we read excerpts from other texts, pieces about words that forced us to contemplate how we wanted to tackle this show. Did we just want a group of people sitting around talking? Or did we want something with action and drama?

We had no idea.

So we changed it up, we stopped looking for answers and just started looking for what felt interesting and what felt sincere. We tried making our own little plays just to see what we could come up with, we tried writing down lists of words from prompts that we thought were authentic, we tried just moving around in ways that were compelling.

And that worked.

Through the minds of the creatives, the gems were found, the ideas that blew everyone away, and were crafted together into one work. Parts of everyone involved taken and melded to form a stronger whole. The souls of so many people exist in this work because every single one of us has created something that is in this show, have put a part of ourselves into this show.

That's why it's true, that's why it's powerful, that's why we are here. To show who we are and what we believe in.





Nadja Kostich

The Word cannot possibly contain the countless memories, dreams, experiences, intentions, and stories that words carry for us. We reached for the stars when we started making this performance. We envisioned a polyphony of multiple languages layered in a symphony of consonants, vowels, syllables—the tongues of those before us and those after us. The amazing young and established artists and production team of **The Word** speak or are ancestrally connected to so many languages: Arabic, Twi, Yawaru, Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish, Serbian, Greek, French, Singhalese, Hmong, Yorta Yorta, German, Mandarin, Spanish, Bahasa Indonesia, Tok Pisin, Dutch, Kanien'kéha, Gaelic and Burmese and more. Yet our common language of English remained dominant, a system that bound, engulfed, swallowed the more fragile connections to different modes. We grappled, circled, wrestled, upended and embraced hurts, scars, losses... and found glimmers of hope that words can heal, conjure and transform. Still, the polyphony remained elusive. The subject was immense—bottomless and insurmountable all in one.

Over time and constant decanting, this colossal collaborative effort is what we share with you today. Not only words but languages of gestures, symbols, light, and sound. Making **The Word** with this intrepid, talented, astonishing team of young and established artists has been visceral, personal, intimate, epic, exhausting, moving. It required monumental patience and nerves of steel by us all to allow all the layers, the people, the stories, the gems to be brought to light from the depths of each contributor and find their place in the whole. I only realised in these final moments that this itself is the polyphony, not some imagined choral language piece, but the beautiful humans who have taken the risk to share themselves through this rich creative process with each other and finally with you, our audience. Everyone worked with love, an astonishing team: these young people, their light and presence, their endurance, has moved and changed me; Allara's incredibly fine score, hand made from hours in the rehearsal room playing live; Bridget's detailed embodied choreography that woke us up to the sounds of each cell; Michael's striking video design that is borne of weeks of tireless, deep and inspired script and rehearsal work; Michele's amazing listening, her writer's brain, her beautiful humour and incisive questions; Matilda's bold and brilliant design response; Richard's stunning lighting; Alice's constant encouragement, ideas, and support; Lara's calm leadership; the dream production crew; and St Martins' heroic staff. Thank you to you all—what an astounding and monumental group effort. To quote our youngest cast member: **The Word** is a vessel, and it glows.

ST MARTINS WHOLEHEARTEDLY THANKS:

The carers, families, and communities who have enabled each person in the team to take part in creating this work.

St Martins workshop artists who, over weeks, months and years have invested untold creative energy with members of **The Word** ensemble.

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Auslan Stage Left

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