

TE AHUREI
TOI O TĀMAKI

AUCKLAND
ARTS FESTIVAL



A Stab in the Dark

NIGHTSONG

Streaming Online Fri 11 – Sun 13 March 2022

CREDITS

John/Warren

Joel Tobeck

Ann

Alison Bruce

Puppeteer

Milo Cawthorne

Puppeteer

Jon Coddington

Noah

Dave Fane

Voice of

The Interrogator

Carl Bland

Voice of

The Child

Roman Foster

Set Design

Andrew Foster

Lighting &

Projection Design

Filament Eleven 11

Puppet Design & Creation

Jon Coddington

Costume Design

Elizabeth Whiting

Sophie Ham

Music &

Sound Design

John Gibson

Associate

Sound Design

Andrew Furness,
Pilot Productions

Stage Management

Keira Howat
Chanelle Muirhead
Atarau Millwood

Props Master

Magdalena Hoult

Technical Operator

Peter Davison,
Pilot Productions

Audio Production

Sam Clavis,
Pilot Productions

Production Intern

Isabella Creemers

Stunt Coordinator

Stuart Thorp

Stunt Double

Scott Marsh

Livestream

Director

Rob McLaughlin

Livestream

Associate Director

Chris Dudman

Livestream

Technical Director

Simon Barker

Director of

Photography

Ralph Brown

Production Manager

Jamie Blackburn,
Pilot Productions

Associate

Production Manager

Hannah Moore,
Pilot Productions

Producer

Toni Tippett

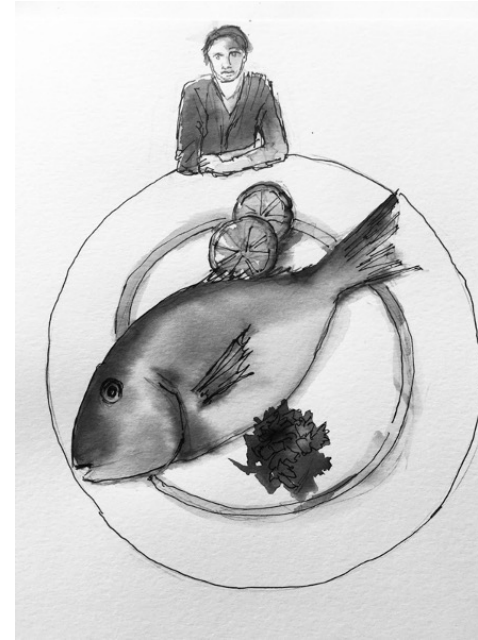
Writer

Carl Bland

Directors

Ben Crowder
Carl Bland

INTRODUCTION



Ann asks John if he wants Fish for Dinner

“We feel incredibly fortunate to still be able to share this work with our audience. The filmic elements within the show, and the highly visually nature of the work has lent itself to this hybrid style of presentation.”

— Nightsong

“Why God chose me to save the world is a f***g mystery.”**

— Noah (of the Ark)

What would you do if you met your exact double? What would happen if this double started following you? Forced his way into your life? Started to take it over?

The story is a page turner. A thriller full of surprises. A wicked, funny, and unpredictable ride as we watch someone's life unravel. Where they are forced to face the truth. What happened to that small innocent child we once were? What shapes us into the person we all become?

A Stab in the Dark uses extraordinary giant puppets, evocative film noir imagery, and a set that's so tilted our characters have to hang on for dear life. It is dark. Absurdly funny. Visually beautiful. You'll be on the edge of your seats as you watch good and evil battle it out.

Digital World Premiere

Friday 11 March 2022, 8.00pm

Performed and filmed at Q Theatre

1hr 15mins no interval

Contains strong language and violent themes

COMMISSIONED & PRESENTED BY

Auckland Arts Festival

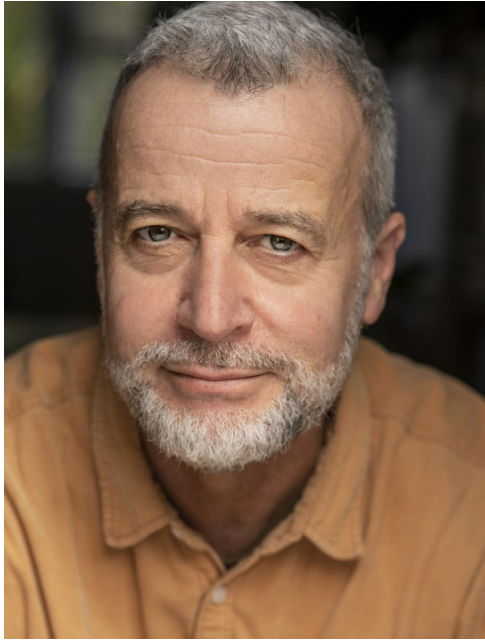
WITH SUPPORT FROM

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DIRECTION

Artistic Directors, Carl Bland and Ben Crowder, have been collaborating for over ten years. They believe that theatre should be a transformative experience; that audiences should go into the theatre space and come away seeing the world in a new way. Or at least seeing the possibility that the world around us is not always as it seems.



Carl Bland
Director

Carl Bland is a writer, actor, and painter. He wrote and created his own shows with Peta Rutter under the name Nightsong Productions. Their shows included *The Bed Show*, *The House of Doors and Camels*, *Peta and Carl at the Last Supper*, and *Sofa Stories*. Collaborating with Theatre Stampede, they also made *Head* (2005 winner of Chapman Tripp Most Original Production) and *360 – a theatre of recollections* for the 2010 New Zealand Festival. *360* won an inaugural excellence award and also The Hackman Cup – the people's choice award for most original production – at the 2014 Auckland Theatre Awards.



Ben Crowder
Director

Ben Crowder is a theatre director and creator, and a co-founder of Theatre Stampede. He has directed all their productions since 1999. Past productions include: *360 – a theatre of recollections*, *Head* (both in collaboration with Nightsong Productions), *The Young Baron*, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the national tour of *Blossom*. Ben also works extensively as a freelance director and creator. He's worked with Auckland Theatre Company, Silo Theatre, Red Leap, Dust Palace, and Auckland Live, among others. He is often engaged on the development of new works. Recent productions include *Niu Sila*, *The Man Whose Mother Was a Pirate*, and *Famous Flora*.



John Interrogator Fly

CAST & CREATIVES



Joel Tobeck Performer

One of Australasia's most experienced and respected actors, Joel Tobeck comes from a theatrical family. He made his stage debut aged five with mother Liddy Holloway.

Stage work has ranged from Shakespeare to musical theatre. He has worked in bands as a singer and guitarist. His skillset embraces voice work, radio, improv, Theatresports, dance, and choreography.

Screen appearances have been equally diverse. Two dozen film roles on a spectrum from whimsical comedy to intense drama and horror; and a television career that has seen him move comfortably between New Zealand, Australia, and the U.S in a variety of genres.

19 years apart, Tobeck played two regular characters in *Shortland Street*. He had a rollicking time in *Westside* and played Burgermeister in Peter Jackson's *Mortal Engines*.

The busy times continue: playing Laurie Mains in the miniseries *Jonah*, another season of *The Blake Mysteries* (nominated for a 2019 Equity Ensemble Award), *Runaway Millionaires*, *The Luminaries*, *One Lane Bridge* (Seasons 1 and 2), and the massive *Avatar 2* and 3 production.

Awards include Best Actor in the NZ Film & TV Awards; Most Outstanding Performance by an Actor at the Australian Subscription Television & Radio Association Awards; and in 2019 a Best Actor nomination for *Alibi*, an innovative non-linear drama for TVNZ On Demand.



Alison Bruce Performer

Alison Bruce feels blessed to have worked with some of New Zealand's great theatre innovators over her career.

She began at Theatre Corporate and the Mercury Theatre in the 1980s and worked with Theatre at Large, Inside Out, and The Watershed.

She has performed in driveways during lockdowns with The Rebel Alliance, in the domain with Auckland Arts Festival pyromaniacs, in arenas with Kip Chapman for World of Wearable Art, and on flooded stages and in freezing warehouses.

Bruce has also worked with Silo Theatre, Massive Company, Auckland Theatre Company, and has been involved with Red Leap Theatre since its inception in 2008.

In 2021 she played Mary in Shane Bosher's long-awaited play *Everything After*, a role written specifically for her.

Bruce is also a sought after actor in the screen industry having played numerous key roles in many renowned New Zealand and International productions, including *Mercy Peak*, *The World's Fastest Indian*, *Top of the Lake*, *The Almighty Johnsons*, *Legend of the Seeker*, and *The Power of the Dog*. Most recently she has been seen on our screens in award-winning local series *One Lane Bridge* and *The Gulf*.



Milo Cawthorne Puppeteer

Having acted from a young age, Milo Cawthorne has established a prolific career in film, television, and theatre. His television credits range from children's shows *P.E.T Detectives* and *The Amazing Extraordinary Friends* to drama series *When We Go To War* and *The Brokenwood Mysteries*.

He has appeared in feature films *Human Traces*, *Guns Akimbo* (alongside Daniel Radcliffe), the 2016 remake of Kiwi classic *Goodbye Pork Pie*, and a leading role in *Deathgasm*. Most recently, Cawthorne acted in the New Zealand drama series *Mystic*.



Jon Coddington Puppet Design & Creation

Jon Coddington promotes himself as a theatre designer and collaborator, illustrator, animator and sculptor, and has been primarily working as a puppeteer and puppet maker for nine years. Highlights include sell-out international Fringe Festival hit *Puppet Fiction* (2012–18), a marionette homage to the movie *Pulp Fiction*, and the manipulation and making of puppets for Fat Freddy's Drop's music videos *Clean the House* (2013) and *Special Edition* (2019).

He has worked in screen puppetry with training by Muppeteer Peter Linz at Whoa Studios in Auckland producing the series *Custard's World* for TVNZ (2018), created puppets for the New Zealand Arts Festival show *The Devil's Half Acre* (2016), NZ Comedy Festival show *Hand To God* (2017), and recently created puppets and performed in Silo theatre's *Peter and the Wolf* (2017), and Trick of the Light Theatre's *The Griegol* for Auckland Arts Festival (2021).

CAST & CREATIVES



Rachel Marlow & Brad Gledhill
Production Designers

Bradley Gledhill and Rachel Marlow are production designers and co-founders of design company Filament Eleven 11. Creating the lighting and projection design for *A Stab in the Dark* has been a labour of love! Filament Eleven 11 works collaboratively with designers, directors, and companies to create dynamic production designs and lighting environments for live experiences, and to produce work that puts design and technology at the centre of storytelling in an inventive and unique way.

The company produces designs for theatre, dance, rock and roll, corporate events, televised live events, and installation art experiences. With lighting at the core of every design, their work expands to video design, projection design, set design, system design, and overall production design. Filament Eleven 11 is drawn to work that is pushing boundaries and is led by inspiring creatives. No surprise then that Filament Eleven 11 have worked with Nightsong across the years, in a myriad of roles – from *Head and 360* – a theatre of recollections, to *Te Pō* and *Spirit House*.



John Gibson
Music & Sound Designer

John Gibson has been composing original music for New Zealand theatre, film, dance, and television since 1980. During that time, he has composed over 100 scores and sound designs for theatre. In 2008 he received a Qantas Film & Television award for his score for Vincent Ward's film *Rain of the Children*. He has performed in Edinburgh in a comedy he wrote and directed called *Gordon Six Pence He Is Music*. Gibson is currently adapting a book by Alain de Botton for the stage.



Elizabeth Whiting
Costume Designer

Elizabeth Whiting has designed costumes for Auckland Theatre Company, Silo Theatre, Nightsong, NZ Opera, Indian Ink, Court Theatre, Red Leap Theatre, New Zealand Dance Company, Okareka Dance Company, Douglas Wright Dance Company, and many others.

She was responsible for the central performance design for the World of Wearable Art for six years. Her work has been presented at Edinburgh Festival and the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. She won the Chapman Tripp Theatre Award for Costume Design for *The Arrival* (Red Leap). Her opera designs have been well reviewed in Australia and the United States.

This year Whiting is designing *The Life of Galileo* and *Blithe Spirit* for Auckland Theatre Company, *Stab in the Dark* for Nightsong, and *The Most Naked* (Project MUSE). She designed *The Hall* (Bullet Heart Club) which has just opened in Wanaka and *Paradise or the Impermanence of Ice Cream* (Indian Ink). Earlier this year she designed *Don Pasquale* for the Opera in Schools Programme for NZ Opera.



Andrew Foster
Set Design

Designer, director, and actor Andrew Foster was a co-founder of the award-winning Wellington theatre company Trouble, and has become known for his contribution to the development of new work.

Designs include *Mr Red Light* and *Te Pō* for Nightsong; *Things I Know to Be True* at Court and Circa Theatres; *To Kill a Mockingbird* at The Civic for Auckland Theatre Company; Gary Henderson's *Shepherd and Peninsula* for Court Theatre; the dance work *Orchids* with Foster Group; and Michael Hurst's *King Lear* at Circa Theatre. Work as a director includes Eli Kent's *Black Confetti* for Auckland Theatre Company; *The Lead Wait, Red*, and *Venus in Fur* at Circa Theatre; and the immersive works *Apocalypse Z* and *Second Unit: What We Do in the Shadows*.

Foster is married to choreographer Sarah Foster-Sproull. They have two very cool children, daughter Ivy, and son Roman, who makes his stage debut as the voice of the child in *A Stab in the Dark*.

A STAB IN THE DARK EXPLAINED

A Stab in the Dark is an attempt to try to understand why people do bad things. Why do they commit terrible acts of violence? Is evil part of human nature? A common thread for this behaviour is a lack of empathy. An inability to feel for their victims. And a sense of injustice. That the world has rejected them and doesn't care about them. And yet there are lots of examples of people killing someone they profess to love.

So on to the story. I have tried to create a narrative that constantly surprises the audience. To make it a page turner. The reasoning being the stronger the story grips you, the more daring you can be in the telling of it. *A Stab in the Dark* deliberately uses several very aesthetically opposed mediums. A giant puppet; an actor playing two characters that look the same. A woman who mysteriously we never quite see. Throughout the play we catch glimpses of her. Her arms at dinner. The side of her face in the hallway. Her power is in her voice and the stories she tells. We also have an episodic, beautifully-crafted filmed sequence of the Noah story. A ridiculous giant fly and low tech props. A combination of three-dimensional objects and two-dimensional ones. How can these all live in a world that we can believe in? In a world we can become emotionally invested in? The wonder and the magic is that they can, because we are caught up in the story. We want to know what happens next. And these aesthetic opposites help amplify the central themes within it. The fragmented central character. The complexity of human nature. The struggle we all have with our own identity. These elements become integrated and wholly essential within the story.

One of the ways I think the work is innovative is the way it's created. There isn't the usual script and set. All the visual elements are thought of and put on the page at the same time as the words. Each have equal importance. Each help tell the story. Often when people first read the script, they only hear the words and can't imagine the pictures. So they are unaware of the power of this multi-layered approach. Each moment in the play is experienced through words, pictures, and sound. Each is carefully crafted like layers of paint. There is a lot of precision in this. From experience, this approach makes the play linger in your thoughts. It makes the emotional impact resonate longer. *A Stab in the Dark's* central theme is Good and Evil. It's bold. It deliberately uses opposing visual techniques and performance styles. It is very dark and very funny.

What is its conclusion? Beware of self-obsession. How easily we distort. How easily that person you stare at in the mirror can tell you lies; can make you justify anything. Seems to me this is an important truth. Especially in a contemporary world that offers so many opportunities for us to become transfixed by our own image. But there is also Hope. If you can tear yourself away from yourself you'll find love has been calling your name.

— Carl Bland



SCRIPT EXCERPT

We open on a round table. Sitting in its centre is a candle with a flickering flame. We watch the candle for a while. Then an arm appears out of the table. It slowly rises up. The hand hovers over the flame then extinguishes it between two fingers.

Everything turns black. In the blackout the table is raised to its upright position.

Lights up. We see Noahs giant face staring back at us. He begins to talk.

Noah

Why God chose me to save the world is a fucking mystery? Mind you there were moments on the voyage when I felt at one with him, when the sea was calm, the animals sleeping and the horizons endless. Mostly at dawn or dusk, when I looked up and the far-away seemed suddenly near-by. When I knew he was there and I was meant to be at home in the world, if only for a few tranquil moments... then I felt his presence... and it was accompanied by an incredible longing.

There is a lighting shift and the screen transforms into a large round table upended at a 70 degree angle. Sitting at the table is a muppet like puppet... Three times human size. We'll call him the interrogator. Also sitting at the table is another man. He's real. His name is John.

Interrogator

Can I get you anything? Tea, Coffee, Water?

John lifts his hands which have until now been hidden. He has a pair of handcuffs on.

John

You can take these off.

Interrogator

Yes. Silly rule really. Just procedure.

The handcuffs release on their own and fly into the air, disappearing into the sky.

John

A glass of water would be nice.

Interrogator

Of course.

We see projected onto the table a pair of arms. They pour a glass of water.

John

Am I under arrest?

Interrogator

You're being detained

John

For what?

Interrogator

Murder of course.

The table image changes and we now have a bird's eye view of a giant glass of water. It takes up the entire table top. A fly is swimming on the surface of the water fighting for its life. It appears to be drowning.

If you don't mind, I'm going to ask you a few questions.

John

There's a fly in my water.

Interrogator

How unfortunate. Shall we begin.

John

It's drowning.

Interrogator

State your full name.

John

I can't sit here and watch it die.

Interrogator

Name.

John

It's trying to stay afloat.

Interrogator

Your name.

John

I might be able to save it.

John reaches into the giant glass and pulls the fly out of the water. The fly which was a projected image is pulled from a small secret door in the table and is now a real fly about 18 inches wide. John holds it to his ear.

John

It's not breathing.

Interrogator

Can we move on?

John starts to do CPR and mouth to mouth on the fly to try to bring it back to life.

It's dead.

John

No. There's a faint heartbeat.

Interrogator

Do flies have hearts?

John

Every living thing has a heart.

Interrogator

Not true I'm afraid.

John

It's breathing.

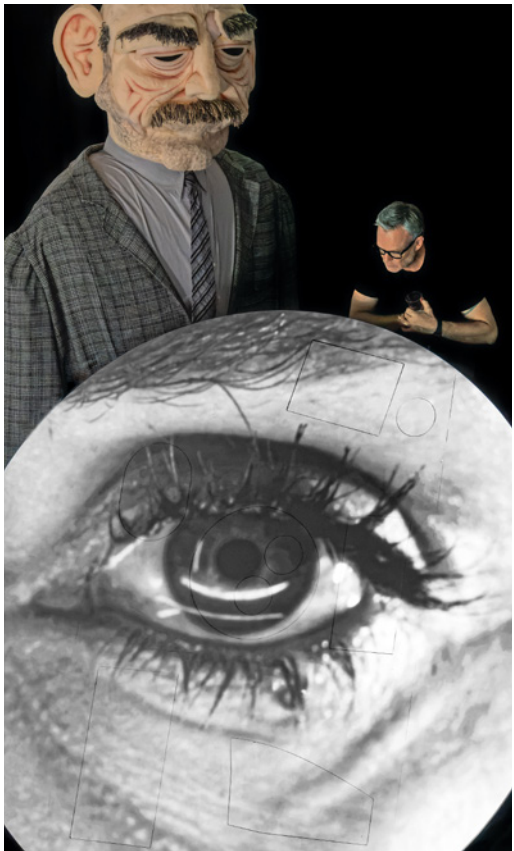
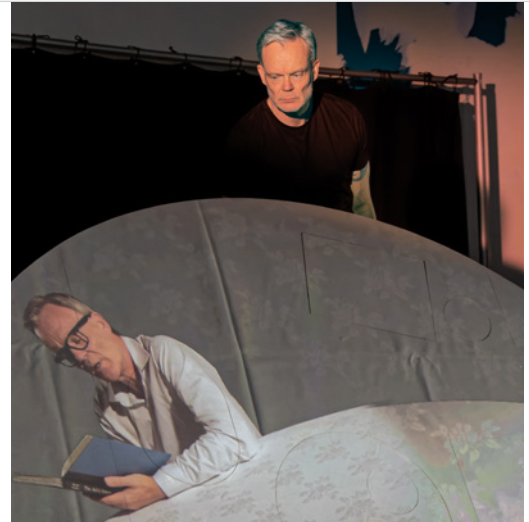
Interrogator.

Met a lot of heartless people.

John

Goodbye my friend.

The fly flies off.



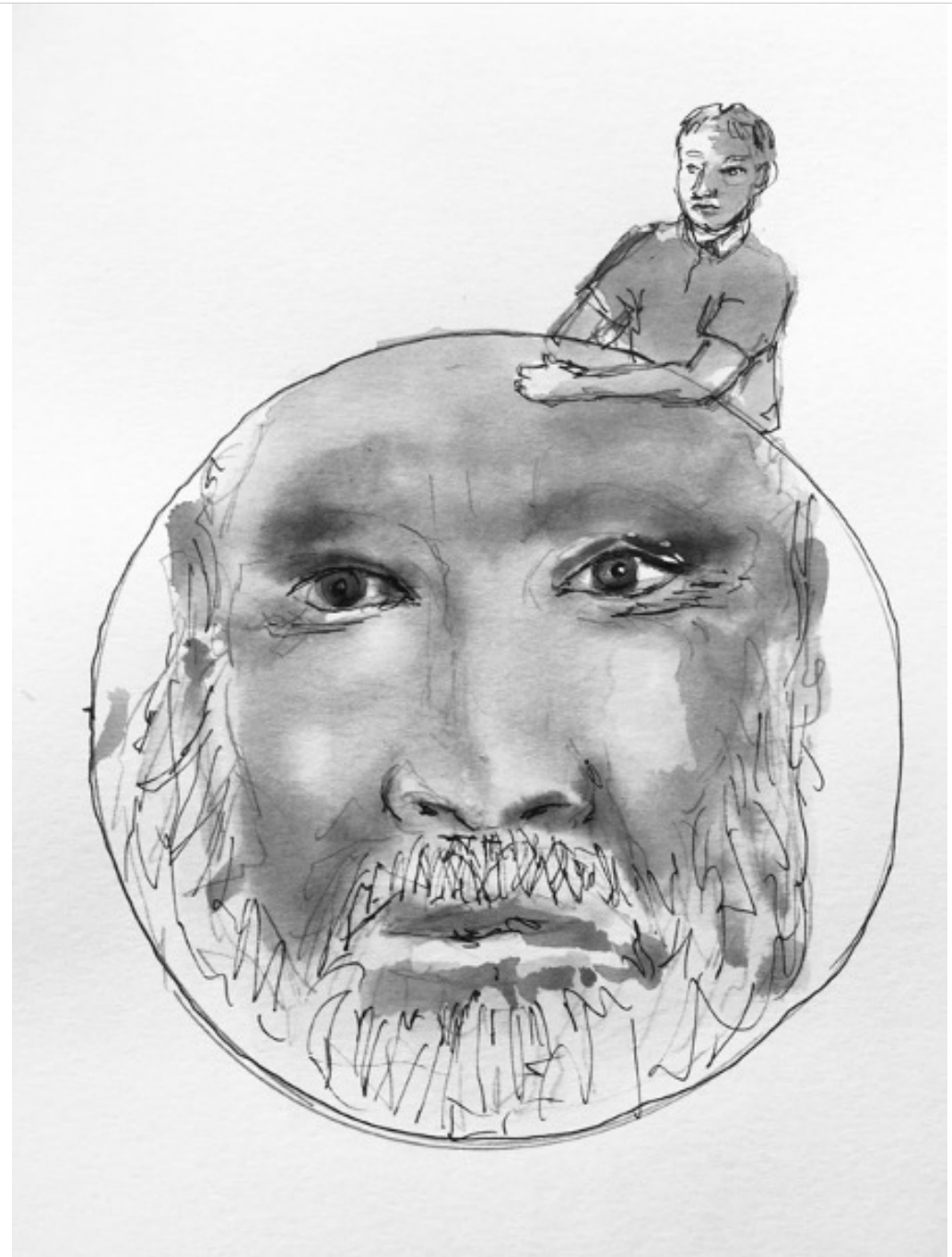
SUPPORT NIGHTSONG

With these fresh challenges and limitations presented to us, Nightsong are responding with a renewed tenacity for delivering high quality, innovative theatre.

As a valued ally of Nightsong, if you were able to assist us at this tumultuous time, you can do so by visiting nightsong.co.nz/support-us

All contributions go towards ensuring we can continue to generate new New Zealand theatre, engage with high-performing artists and to keep delivering our access initiatives. All donations received are suitably tax deductible and wildly appreciated.

THIS PRODUCTION WAS SUPPORTED BY



John and Noah

SPECIAL THANKS

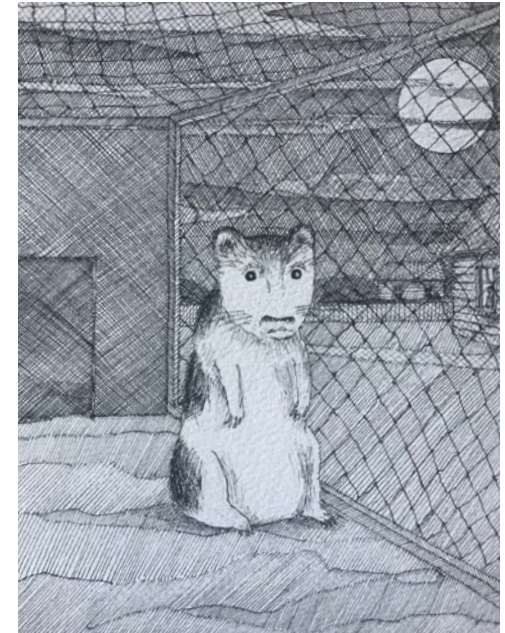
COMING SOON



John escapes into the Hauraki Gulf on a small boat with an outboard motor

Firstly, a huge thank you of course to all those who support Nightsong through our Accomplice, Ally, Co-Conspirator, and Renegade programmes, as well as special thanks to Shona McCullagh, David Inns, Steph Walker, Alice Kirker, and the supportive team at Auckland Arts Festival who have all made this show possible.

Our tremendous gratitude also goes out to Dylan Drego, Takahide Nakazawa, Red Leap Theatre, Michelle, Fran and Luke at Elephant Publicity, Kate Elliot, Andrew Nicoll at Hudson Gavin Martin, Graham Morris, the Nightsong Board, Andrew Grainger, Gui Taccetti, Phil Gregory, Emily Hurley, Laura Trundle, Angela Gourdie at Auckland Live, Louise Gallagher at PANNZ, Wolfgang Hoffman, Janette Partington at Omnigraphics, Thomas Braid, Bridie Thomson, Amanda Hereaka, Renee Casserly, Eleanor Congreve, Chloe Klein, Megan Andrews, Catherine George, Kirsty Brownfield, Lesley-Anne Carey, Richard and Jane Coon, Shane Boshier, Phil Gregory, and Q Theatre.



I Want To Be Happy

Surrealism, like a dream, is a way of revealing truth. Jumping off from a series of short stories by Peta Rutter, *I Want To Be Happy* is a blackly funny, surrealist character study featuring Jennifer Ludlam and written by Carl Bland.

Setting Nightsong's rich visual aesthetic against a seemingly small and domestic event. *I Want To Be Happy* is a highly theatrical and moving piece of work that questions love, loss, and identity.

I Want To Be Happy premieres in 2023.

MARCH
2022

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