

La Mama Theatre presents

RUNNING WITH EMUS

A tragi-comic play about refugees, identity and belonging.

Seventy-six year old Pat has dropped out of life and is living on her verandah, watching birds, when her granddaughter arrives to stir up the town. Throw into the mix - an Italian ghost, a bigoted Mayor, a chorus of laconic locals, a bunch of dairy cows, a low-flying pelican, a big secret and an emu that can run faster than a car - and you have a story about what it is to be Australian in a multicultural world.

Running With Emus is a new Australian play by award-winning regional Victorian playwright, Merrilee Moss, directed by Kim Durban (MTC, QTC, Playbox, La Mama, Red Stitch Theatre) and starring Julie Nihill (best known for her role as the publican Chris Riley in *Blue Heelers*).

The playwright, known as "Moss", was inspired to write the play when she moved from Melbourne to the small town of Cohuna on the edge of the Murray in 2014. Despite many welcoming gestures from the community, she felt an unexpected and uncomfortable level of culture shock, and as a "newcomer" or "blow-in", was cast into the role of outsider. About the same time, she accompanied the Gannawarra Refugee Support group to a Shire meeting to submit a motion to make the Shire a "Refugee Friendly Zone". These two things combined to kick-start her creative journey.

While the setting of the drama rarely strays from a cluttered farm verandah (with a nod to traditional Australian classics such as *The Drover's Wife*), dramatic elements occur that take us elsewhere: character transformations, transitions of time, a ghostly presence and a gradual exposition of the play's secrets. The chorus adds an element of non-naturalism to the play: on one level it is pure entertainment, apparently disconnected from the main action, but on a deeper level, under the guise of humour, it asks the spectator to reflect on and critique their own attitudes to the "newcomer", and to question their identity in the context of colonialism. A character in the play, Raffaele, symbolises the remnants of the migrant experience in a regional town, the loss of connection experienced by the newcomer, and brings a hint of cultural diversity from another era.

We are mounting the production at a time when our country is burning and people are looking for hope. Running With Emus, with its dry humour and cross-generational embrace gives those flashes of hope some room, celebrating the wisdom of the old, the reflections of the country and the feisty energy of the young as they work to create a refuge that can change their world.

Kim Durban, director.

Moss was supported in her research by a grant from the Australia Council in 2016. The play's premiere launch on 29th February 2020 at Tree Tops Scout Camp, Cohuna, was funded by Regional Arts Victoria.


 2020 VCE
THEATRE STUDIES

Image by Darren Gill

Written by **Merrilee Moss**
 Directed by **Kim Durban**
 Performed by **Julie Nihill, Kevin Dee, Gregory J Fryer, Elizabeth Sly, Sam Baxter**
 Designed by **Adam (Gus) Powers**

A VCE, Theatre Studies, Unit 3 production.

SEASON TIME 11th - 22nd March 2020
 Wed - Thu 1pm & 6.30pm | Fri 11am & 7.30pm | Sat 7.30pm | Sun 4pm
VENUE La Mama Courthouse
 349 Drummond Street, Carlton
TICKETS \$30 Adult | \$20 Concession
 School Ticket Packages Available
BOOKINGS 03 9347 6948 or www.lamama.com.au



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