



LA MAMA EXPLORATIONS PRESENTS

Ballet For Boys

June 9th - 11th

La Mama Courthouse

WRITER'S NOTE

Our world has always been one that celebrates and promotes the norms of the mainstream, which makes sense. Why would you not cater to the many instead of the few? 'Ballet For Boys', however, is at its core a show for the few. The soft boys, the tough girls, the genderqueer folk, and the weird kids who couldn't go to parties on the weekend because of their extracurriculars – they have all been yanked from the periphery and brought to the stage. But truthfully, most of the people I know have a little bit of a weird kid inside of them. And it is my hope that those jagged, squiggly, lumpy parts of you, no matter how buried, are brought to the lake's surface tonight to dance and swim and play along with these ugly ducklings, just long enough to turn into swans.

– Francesco Mandarino (they/he)

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I was first invited onto this development for "Ballet for Boys" in December last year as an advisor, when La Mama very kindly gave us a residency that led to this showing for Explorations 2026. It has been an honor and privilege to direct this iteration of this play that is so personally relatable, as I'm sure is to many of you as well, going back to that squirmy, trying time in a young person's life. And despite all that discomfort, from a heated rivalry, an awkward crush, anxious self-doubt, or a constant questioning of our own forming identity, we do in-fact persevere, for ourselves, for our friends, for our art, and for love.

"At the end of the day, there's always friendship." – a dear friend of mine.

– Tessie Yu (she/they)

We would like to thank the following for their involvement and support in developing 'Ballet for Boys'

La Mama

Our Intimacy Director, Josh Richardson

Photographers - Darren Gill, Alice Naish, Mary Schofield, Isla Johnstone, Ronin Green

The Cybec Foundation and the City of Melbourne Multi-Year Arts Grants Program

MUSE Festival

Past Cast and Creatives:

Zoe Isabella Anastasiou

Alessandra Alessio

Hannah McGlinchey

Francesca King

Tim Wilson

Digby Bunnett

Max Jobe

Thierry Mendoza

Fabian Jones

James Pringle

Georgia Campbell

Charlie Turner

Emilie Hoyne



Francesco Mandarinino (they/he)

Writer & Choreographer

Francesco is an artist and storyteller based in Naarm. Most recently, they choreographed/assistant directed the musical “Sainting Joan” at Theatre Works. They have also choreographed dance comedies such as “That’s What I Want”, and have co-choreographed cabarets such as “Swift”. Currently, they are studying a Bachelor of Arts at Deakin University, majoring in Creative Writing. They have also trained in Showfit’s two-year full-time musical theatre course. “Ballet For Boys” is their debut as a playwright.



Tessie Yu (she/they)

Director

Tessie Yu (she/they) is an emerging theatre director, actor and filmmaker based in Naarm, specializing in text-based theatre and comedy. Originally from Hong Kong, Tessie is passionate about working with artists from all backgrounds, putting marginalized voices and performances on stage, amplifying queer, BIPOC/migrant and feminist stories. Tessie’s acting and film training heavily inform their directing process, working from an actor-led, collaborative process. Since migrating to Melbourne in late 2024, Tessie has directed a number of projects, including “SPRUIK!”, an outdoor queer rom-com for Melbourne Fringe 2025, play readings “Dinner at mine when my dad dies” by Enhui and “Here if you need” by Jamila Main.



Iva Lilly (she/they)
Producer & Social Media

Iva (she/they) is a queer actress and opera singer with a passion for telling new Australian stories through music and theatre. She has trained as a soprano at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and is a graduate of Showfit's two year full-time Musical Theatre course. Most recently, she starred in the comedic lesbian rom-com 'SPRUIK' in Melbourne Fringe. Currently completing a Bachelor of Laws, Iva uses her extensive theatrical experience with her legal studies to promote inclusive and equitable productions.



David Wotherspoon (he/him)
Set and Costume Designer

David (he/him) is a set and costume designer working across Magandjin (Brisbane) and Naarm (Melbourne). He holds a Master of Design and Production (Design for Stage) from the VCA, is a co-founder of the theatre collective Inscape Assembly, and an alum of the Wattle Fellowship, a sustainability leadership program. David's recent works include set and costume design for Melanie Lane's dance production Under Oath, and set design for Leticia Carceres' Attempts on Her Life.



Thomas Coombes (he/him)
Sound Designer

Thomas Coombes is a session guitarist and composer who studied a Bachelor of Music (degree with honours) at the University of Melbourne. Thomas further specialises in hip-hop-inspired choreography, performing as part of a troupe and directing several original productions. His love for music and dance ultimately supports his interest in sound operation for dance and music theatre events.



Holland Brooks (they/them)
Lighting Designer

Holland Brooks (they/them) is a versatile emerging writer, lighting designer, and technical stage manager with a Bachelor in Performing Arts (Performance Making) from WAAPA. They are currently undertaking a Masters of Writing for Performance at VCA. Holland is particularly interested in disrupting the idea of what is 'stageable' and 'possible' in live performance contexts - both on and offstage, by pioneering the contemporary genre of queer fabulism.



Jude Paddon-Row (he/him)
Justin

Jude Paddon-Row (he/him) is a Naarm-based Actor and aspiring wordsmith. Born in Eora, Jude was first introduced to performance after making his professional debut at thirteen as 'Friedrich' in the Australian production of 'The Sound of Music' at the Capitol Theatre. As a teenager he competed as a dancer for three years, where he first developed his fascination for movement and transformation through experiencing the body's relationship to space. "Acting" for Jude held more mystery than other forms of performance, leading him to be accepted to study at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting). His VCA credits include Dobchinsky in 'The Government Inspector' (dir. Joe Lui, w. Gogol), Tuzenbach/Solyony in Laurence Strangio's adaptation of 'The Three Sisters', The Dogskin Plaster Seller/Crowd in 'The Other Shore' (dir. Bernadette Fam. w. Gao Xiangjian), and Teck DeBrancovis in Lillian Hellman's 'Watch on the Rhine' (dir. Alice Qin, w. Hellman). In his process, he's driven by a strong intrigue with both the physical and psychological dimensions of character, approaching each with equal parts rigour and play. Jude is thrilled to be making his La Mama debut at the season of explorations, surrounded by other developing artists and the future of theatre in Naarm.



Jermaine Ferguson (he/him)
Pierre

In his first year of a Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) at the University of Melbourne. Jermaine is thrilled to be apart Ballet 4 Boys. Since a young age he had a love for all things to do with the arts. Throughout high school Jermaine played leads in both musicals and plays. He is loving having the opportunity to develop his character of Pierre through both acting, dance and physical movement.



Kaelen Green (he/they)
Sky

Kaelan is a graduate of Federation University's Arts Academy (BAPA) with Company 2025. His stage credits include *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky (Kostioyov), *Pippin* (Pippin Cover/Dance Captain), *Futuration Cabaret* (Featured Dancer), and self devised works entitled *Tethered* (featured dancer) and *Emotions Anonymous*. Their screen credits include working with Baby Banksia on ABC's *More Than This*, and commercial work on Westpac's recent 'Double You' campaign. He is proudly represented by Aran Michael Management.



Abe Geyer (he/him)
Rudy

Since graduating from Showfit in 2024, Abe had the opportunity to tour around Australia with *Imagine LIVE* (Nicholas Clark Management). He then appeared as Sky in *Mamma Mia* (AG Theatre) at the beginning of 2026. He has had a blast developing Rudy since the very first reading back in 2024!



Rosie Russell (she/they)
Vanessa

Rosie Russell is a queer cabaret performer born on Kurna land. She holds a Diploma of Music Theatre from NIDA and a Bachelor of Music Theatre from the Elder Conservatorium. While studying in Adelaide, Rosie became a resident artist of beloved local lineup The Finest Filth Variety Hour, also performing at the Adelaide Cabaret Festival. Her award-winning original comedy cabaret Bisexual Intellectuals has played for Adelaide and Melbourne audiences in 2024 & 2025.



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Box Office is open 1 hour before show time.

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La Mama Theatre is on the traditional lands of the peoples of the Kulin nation, and we give our respect to the Elders and to all First Nations people past, present and future. We acknowledge all events take place on stolen lands and that sovereignty was never ceded.