JOYFUL NOISE

BY TIM SLOVER

9 - 19 September

The Greek Theatre Marrickville

JOINING
THE DOTS
THEATRE

2026 SEASON

Director's notes

Madeleine Stedman

Handel's *Messiah* is almost certainly the world's most performed oratorio; every other year people gather beneath the sails of the Sydney Opera House - as well as almost every one of the last 85 years at the Sydney Town Hall - to participate in this behemoth work, which takes between two and three hours.

This commitment is evidence of Georg Friedrich Handel's lasting impact here and around the globe. Safe to say Handel has many devotees, but even if you know nothing about the composer or about *Messiah* as a concert piece tracing the story of Christ, you are doubtless familiar with four iconic syllables.

HAAAAAL - LE - LU - JAH

Messiah's famous chorus might have been the biggest thing to happen to this old Hebrew phrase in the mainstream until, perhaps, Leonard Cohen (or if you are a millennial of a certain age, *Shrek*). The clear, joyous strains from Handel's oratorio praising God have almost become a cliché, an easy shorthand in film and TV for revelation or salvation, and more often than not it's played for laughs. If you didn't grow up in a Christian tradition or with a sound knowledge of choral music, and I include myself in this category, you may have encountered Handel's iconic chorus in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969), *Scrooged* (1988), *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* (1989), *The Simpsons* (1990), *Dumb & Dumber* (1994), *Father Ted* (1995), Face/Off (1997), *Sabrina, The Teenage Witch* (1998), *Runaway Bride* (1999), *Arrested Development* (2004) or *Spongebob* (2008), to name a few notable uses.

Although there are exceptions, such as *Manchester by the Sea* (2016) and *Boychoir* (2014) which both feature segments of Handel's oratorio, and explicitly Christian films, such as *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) the ability of the chorus to communicate joy, triumph, even ecstasy so well has meant it has become a victim of its own success.

So when I took on this project, my second with Joining the Dots Theatre after last year's *Conscience*, I knew that this would present a challenge, especially when considering an audience split between those who know it all too well and those who have little idea of Handel and his canon. How to bring along an audience and make us all hear the music with new music ears?

The Baroque era saw a huge leap forward in mechanical timekeeping. For the aristocracy extremely intricate clocks - and the latest fashion: the pocket watch - were the source of much fascination. Such mechanical wonders were followed by increasingly elaborate automata and music boxes. Created by clockmakers and artisans, these early robots, for example the Jacquet Droz Automata - that appeared to be able to write, draw and even play music of their own volition - hold a unique place of fascination for me as my father is a horologist. So they became the natural choice to serve as a synecdoche for Handel's times in our version of *Joyful Noise*. Small, tireless, an ersatz perfection; music and movement free from baggage, dirt and soul.

One of the elements I enjoy most about Slover's telling of the messy making of *Messiah* is the very real challenges faced by the artists, the constant contortions and compromises. Handel, Susannah and Kitty all face relentless pressure in the spotlight of a town ravenous for something newer, faster, more perfect or more scandalous. And even in the regal halls of St James's Palace, King George II faces assaults from without and within.

This play does not place much emphasis on the notion of a lone genius, or perfect divine inspiration. Indeed, Slover's vision of 1740s London is populated by an ensemble of decidedly imperfect characters. Handel for instance is constantly beset by financial woes, political considerations and gout, on top of the town's mania for new things. The creation of *Messiah* is rendered not as a composer looking to the heavens for epiphany but seeing the story of Christ reflected by the struggles of those around him.

God is in the mud.

About the playwright

Tim Slover is an award-winning American playwright, screenwriter, and educator. He holds a bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. Currently a professor of theatre studies at the University of Utah Department of Theatre, Slover heads the playwriting program.

Slover's dramatic works frequently explore compelling historical figures facing high-stakes personal and public trials. His stage plays include *Virtue* (about 12th century polymath Hildegard of Bingen) *March Tale* (William Shakespeare) *Treasure* (Alexander Hamilton) and *Lightning Rod* (Benjamin Franklin). Beyond the stage, his television writing for the historical documentary *A More Perfect Union* earned an Emmy nomination. He is also the author of the critically acclaimed holiday novel *The Christmas Chronicles: The Legend of Santa Claus* and the non-fiction book *Messiah: The Little-Known Story of Handel's Beloved Oratorio.*

Joyful Noise remains one of Slover's most celebrated achievements. First premiering in 1998, the backstage historical drama went on to achieve a highly successful Off-Broadway run at the Lamb's Theatre in New York, captivating audiences with its witty, scandalous, and deeply human exploration of George Frideric Handel's struggle to bring his masterpiece, *Messiah,* to the London stage.

This timeless story is currently making the leap from stage to screen. Slover wrote the screenplay for the major upcoming biographical film ***The King of Covent Garden.*** Directed by Andrew Levitas, the film stars two-time Academy Award winner **Anthony Hopkins** as Handel and chronicles the intense, rule-breaking creation of the *Messiah.*

Cast & Creatives

Laila Chesterman
Susannah Cibber

Laila Chesterman is a multidisciplinary creative who has worked foremost as an actor, then as director, producer, singer and musician across stage and screen. They recently graduated from ACA with a Bachelors in Performing Arts (Acting). Prior to ACA, Laila originated roles in *Bathory Begins* and *Lights in the Park* (ATYP) and the *Monologue Collective* (We Are Not Producers/KXT bAkehouse). Whilst at ACA, Laila's credits include *Saved, Art, Hedda Gabler, Macbeth, Our Town, Cosi, Don's Party*, and *Women Talking*. They also directed their own adaptation of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*. Laila is an associate producer with Good Time Theatrics, producing *Selkie* (Old Fitz/Sydney Fringe, Adelaide Fringe, NIDA), *Awakening* (Factory Theatre) and the upcoming *Never The Sinner* (Qtopia). They starred as Moritz in *Awakening* and will also perform in Never *The Sinner* later this year (Qtopia).

Mason Phoumirath
Charles Jennens

Mason Phoumirath (He/Him) is a Thai/Lao performer.

He graduated from the University of Wollongong with a Bachelor of Performance in 2015 and is currently living and working on Dharug and Eora land.

Mason's stage credits include *Australian Graffiti* (Sydney Theatre Company), *Human Activity, The Linden Solution, Too Human,* (KXT bAKEHOUSE), *Three Sisters* (Flightpath Theatre), *A Very Expensive Poison* (New Theatre) *Monologue Roulette* (Old Fitz) and *A National Tour with Poetry In Action* (2022)

Mason's screen credits include *To Freely Flourish*, written and directed by Victor Wu and *Everyone Gets Bored Of Everything*, written and directed by Andrea Mudbidri.

Mason has also performed as a dancer, Tut (Shaun Parker and Company) and *Static of the Radio* (Sydney, Melbourne Fringe), a six hour durational dance marathon inspired by the dance marathons of the 1920s Mason is currently represented by MCSM.

Nicholas Papademetriou
George Handel

Nicholas is a graduate of WAAPA. He has worked extensively in the industry - primarily as an actor - and has appeared in productions for all the major companies in Australia including STC, MTC, Belvoir Street Theatre, The Ensemble and Black Swan. He has worked in productions in London, Edinburgh, Athens and New York in Greek Tragedy (by Mike Leigh) and his person show SNAG, which also toured Australia. Other highlights include the role of George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, the national tour of *12 Angry Men, The Odd Couple,* and playing Sigmund Freud in *Freud's Last Session* (Seymour Centre, Glen Street Theatre). Most recently he appeared in *Stage Kiss* (New Theatre) and as Aegeon in *The Comedy of Errors* for Sport for Jove. This will be his sixth production with Joining the Dots.

Lloyd Allison-Young
John Smith

Lloyd Allison-Young is a theatre artist, composer, and sound designer from Sydney. He is a graduate of the l'Ecole Internationale de Theatre Jacques Lecoq, Paris and the Stella Adler Studio of Acting, New York. With an artistic emphasis on experimental and original physical theatre, he has devised and performed in award-winning, critically acclaimed productions, internationally and across Australia, including *BEETLE* (Legs On The Wall), *Love For One Night* (NORPA), *Symphonie Fantastique* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Little Eggs Collective). His recent character work in narrative theatre includes T*he Removalists* (The New Theatre), nominated for best supporting actor (Sydney Theatre Awards), *Cyprus Avenue* (Redline Productions), *Nearer The Gods* (Ensemble Theatre), and *Violins of Hope* (Moira Blumenthal Prod.) He has also composed original music for critically acclaimed and award winning independent productions (*Gods & Little Fishes*, New Theatre, 2022 // Symphony Fantastique, Little Eggs Productions 2021). As a sound designer and voice-over artist, he has produced and delivered campaigns for: Tourism Tasmania, SBS, Australian Retirement Trust.

Angela Johnston
Kitty Clive.

Angela lives and works on the land belonging to the Eora and Dharug nations. She is an actor, theatre maker and voice artist with a Bachelor of Performance from the University of Wollongong. For theatre, she most recently performed in *A Campfire Story* at the Sydney Fringe, and *Khair* at PYT Fairfield. She has also appeared in *UFO* (Griffin Theatre), *Monologue Roulette* (Old Fitz), *Forgotten* (Hobart Playhouse), *Come Again* (KXT), *Beth* (NIDA), *Cate F***ing Blanchett, Kallistei* and *Horse Play* (Sydney Fringe), I*ngle and Pretty Fly for A Dead Guy* (Shopfront), *Once in Royal David's City* (New Theatre) and *Persuasion* (Genesian Theatre). For film, Angela has appeared in a number of shorts, including In *The Cold of the Sun* (AFTRS) as well as the feature films From *All Sides* (Bina Bhattacharya) and *Her Last Laugh* (Joy Hopwood).

Alison Chambers
Mary Pendarves

Alison graduated from acting school well into last century. Most recent theatre credits include *Conscience* (directed by Madeline Stedman),*The Front Page* (New Theatre),*The Children* (directed by Madeleine Withington), *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Babette's Feast* (both directed by Nicholas Papademetriou), *Relativity* (directed by Johann Walraven), *Rabbit Hole* (Exit Game Productions), *W;t* (Joining the Dots Theatre), *The Telescope* (Old Fitz), *The Chapel Perilous* (New Theatre) and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Chester St). Her TV credits include *All Saints, Home and Away*, T*he Surgeon, Water Rats* and A *Country Practice* and many forgettable TV commercials and yes, a couple of not-so-forgettable ones. In 2018 she co-founded Joining the Dots Theatre Company to tell stories that spark excellent conversations. She is a proud member of MEAA.

Christopher Stollery
King George II

Christopher is a graduate of both the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) and the Australian Film Television & Radio School (AFTRS). He has toured the stages of Europe with Cate Blanchett, performed sketch comedy with John Cleese at the Sydney Opera House, sang in a musical with Tim Minchin, danced the choreography of Meryl Tankard and directed Steve Smith, the Australian Test Cricketer, in a Television Commercial.

He has been nominated for a Green Room Award twice and a Sydney Theatre Award nominee three times.

As a writer / director, his short films have won over 30 festival awards around the world including and Palm Springs, Aspen and Flickerfest.

Christopher has also had an extensive television career, most recently in *Dear Life* which is streaming on Stan and *Motel Blue Murder* showing on ABC. Film credits include *Predestination, The Rage in Placid Lake, The Nightingale* and the forthcoming *Tenzing for See-Saw* Films and *Apple* with Willem Defoe and Tom Hiddleston.

Matthew Abotomey
Bishop Egerton

Matt Abotomey holds a Bachelor of Creative Arts (University of Wollongong). His performance credits include: *Shooting Hedda Gabler* – Secret House, *Cowbois* – Siren Theatre Co., *The Bridge* – CrissCross Productions, *Conscience* – Joining the Dots, *Three Sisters* – Virginia Plain, *Timon of Athens* – Sport for Jove, *Parliament of Women* – Queen Hades, *Banging Denmark* – New Theatre, *Apocka-Wocka-Lockalypse* – Tooth and Sinew, *Labyrinth* – Dream Plane Productions, *UFO* – re:group.

Madeleine Stedman
Director

Madeleine Stedman is a Sydney/Gadigal based playwright and theatre maker who's works include *Shortcuts* (Shopfront Arts - 2019), April Marlowe's *Abortion* (25A - 2020), *Purple Weeds* (Bloom: Intersection ATYP - 2022) and *Mercury Poisoning* (KXT - 2024). She is one half of Snatched Theatre Collective. She served as Assistant Director on *The Children's Hour* at the Old Fitz. *Joyful Noise* is her second production with Joining the Dots Theatre, she first worked with the company in 2025 directing *Conscience* by Joe DiPietro at the Greek Theatre. She is a graduate of UOW and a proud member of MEAA.

Mia MacCormick
Production Designer

Mia MacCormick is an Australian Set and Costume Designer for live performance and screen. With a background in interior architecture and self-taught garment creation, her practice is driven by a love of making and informed by interdisciplinary influences, resulting in design thinking that is both pragmatic and imaginative. She approaches each project with a resourceful mindset, creating work that is visually engaging and thoughtfully responsive to the unique needs of every production.

Curiosity sits at the centre of Mia's practice. She is drawn to research, experimentation, and collaboration, embracing an iterative design process that allows ideas to evolve through making. She believes thoughtful design has the power to deepen storytelling, reveal new perspectives, and create meaningful connections between performers and audiences.

As an emerging designer, Mia is committed to developing a body of work that is imaginative, considered, and grounded in the integrity of the creative process. She hopes to create designs that not only bring her joy but also enrich the experiences of collaborators and audiences alike.

Sebastian Richardson
Lighting Designer

Sebastian is a Lighting Designer and Technician based on Gadigal land in Sydney. His experience in lighting ranges from Musical Theatre to Experimental Queer Performance Art and Installation Work, as well as festivals, galleries and live events. With a broad range of experience across different styles and environments, Sebastian approaches each project from a different perspective, mixing and blending ideas to create a unique relationship between the work and its lighting. He is interested in how lighting can shape atmosphere, space and the way an audience experiences, processes and perceives a performance. Sebastian currently works across Musical Theatre focusing on Set LX and Lighting Design roles, alongside his ongoing work in experimental and creative performance spaces. His practice is driven by collaboration, experimentation and finding new ways to use lighting to support and transform a work. He enjoys working across different disciplines and environments, bringing together technical knowledge and creative thinking to create lighting that feels considered, expressive and connected to the work.

Ashlyn Gill
Stage Manager

Ashlyn is a lighting and stage manager combo. She has a Diploma of Live Production (Nirimba TAFE 2024) and has worked across backstage as a stage hand for *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Campbelltown Town Hall Theatre), backstage assistant for Denise Utz School of Dance for many years and stepped in for *The Magicians Nephew* as the stage manager/lighting operator.

Charlotte Leamon
Sound Designer

Charlotte Leamon is a Sydney-based composer and sound artist who writes in various medias including chamber, electroacoustic, multimedia and theatre. Her works have been presented in Los Angeles, London, Berlin, France, Argentina, Alaska, Mexico and across Australia. She has collaborated with the Australian Haydn Ensemble, ANAM and RMIT. Her theatre credits as a sound designer and composer for 2025–2026 include: *Monster* (Tiny Dog Productions: KXT), *Contest* (Space Jump Theatre Company: Flightpath Theatre), *Instructions for Correct Assembly* (Clock&Spiel Productions: Flightpath Theatre) and T*wo Hearts* (Space Jump Theatre Company: Flightpath Theatre). Charlotte's sound design for *The Culture* (Powersuit Productions) toured internationally in New York and New Zealand and she travelled to Edinburgh Fringe Festival as music director for *Puppets* in 2022 (Olivia Ruggiero Productions).

Ben Dewstow
Team Player

Ben's Theatre credits include playing Joseph McCarthy in *'Conscience'* (Joining the Dots Theatre 2025) Belleroche in *'Dangerous Liaisons'* (New Theatre, 2025) Phillip in *'Lurking'* (Independent, 2024), Alexander Kamishnikov, Mario Scaramella, Tim Reilly, FSB 2, Nurse Michena in *'A Very Expensive Poison'* (New Theatre, 2023), Hans Andersen/ various characters in *'The Fairytale of my Life'* for Sydney Fringe (2022), Stranger/Wolf in *'The Park'* at New Theatre (2022), Brian in *'Love Addict'* at Chippen Street Theatre, Chippendale (2021), Bull, Frederick and Dog in *'Animal Farm'* at The New Theatre (2020), Clive Barry in *The Gloveman* at Blood Moon Theatre (2017), Lord Darlington in Oscar Wilde's *'Lady Windermere's Fan',* with Bondi and Eastern Suburbs Theatre Company (2016) and Farmer Oak in *'Far From The Madding Crowd'* at the Genesian Theatre (2016).

Thank you

Bernadette and Damien Ryan:
Sport for Jove

Maddie Withington: New Theatre

The Bridge Church, Kirribilli and Rozelle for welcoming us for rehearsals

Christ Church Lavender Bay for welcoming us for rehearsals.

Bec Kimpton: Head of Marketing (JTDTC)

Rachel Heriot: Graphic Design

Iain Cox: Photography

Our set construction team:
Bronte Hunt, Amelie Brown, Alice Vance, Grace Maccormick, Alex Galatidis, Isaac Chetcuti

Our costume team:
Robin Monkhouse, Siann Lau

Our Front of House team:
Clare Burgess, Bec Kimpton, David Whalley, Lorraine Martin, Fiona Gardenr, Rowena McNicol, Deb Clements, Eliza Johnson, Mark Whalley, Iva Whalley, Claire Browning, Paul Shepanski, Scott Walters and Susannah Coles

The JTD theatre Board:
Scott Walters (Chairman), Paul Shepanski, Susannah Coles, Lorraine Cheung

JOINING *THE* DOTS THEATRE

Website: joiningthedotstheatre.com.au
Facebook: www.facebook.com/JoiningtheDotsTheatre
Email: joiningthedotstheatre@gmail.com