

WHAT COLOUR IS YOUR SKY?

ROBOT SONG

THEATRE WORKS AND NCM PRESENT

ROBOT SONG

BY JOLYON JAMES

12 - 21 FEBRUARY | THEATRE WORKS

theatre works, 14 acland street, st kilda

NCM



CREATIVE VICTORIA



Theatre Works and the Robot Song team respectfully acknowledge First People's sovereignty and recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters and storytelling by Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia.

We pay our respects to the many clans and language groups in Victoria, to their elders past and present, and acknowledge the strength and resilience of all Aboriginal peoples.

Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

ABOUT THEATRE WORKS

Theatre Works is Australia's home of independent theatre: a creative precinct where artists take risks, new stories are born, and audiences discover the bold voices shaping contemporary culture. For more than 45 years, Theatre Works has supported artists to develop, make, and share ambitious new Australian work. Today, our precinct is stronger and more interconnected than ever.

Located in the heart of St Kilda, the Theatre Works Precinct brings together four purpose-built venues: the Main Theatre, the Explosives Factory, the TWiSK Rehearsal Space, and the Black Box Café & Outdoor Stage. Each space plays a distinct role in the creative lifecycle, providing artists with everything they need to move from idea, to development, to premiere, to tour; all within a single, supportive ecosystem.

Our model is simple but rare: we share investment and risk with independent artists. Through co-producing, commissioning, and tailored producing support, we ensure artists are backed by real resources: free development space, professional equipment, rehearsal infrastructure, marketing, ticketing, and technical support. This gives artists the freedom to take creative risks while removing the financial and logistical pressures that so often limit independent work.

Every year, more than 600 artists pass through our precinct, developing and presenting work across 50+ productions.

Many go on to regional and national touring, VCE Playlist recognition, and major awards. Our audiences are equally diverse: from loyal locals to school groups, visiting families, and new theatre-goers who discover us through the café, bar, or festival partnerships.

The precinct allows us to operate at a scale unique in Victoria's independent sector. The Main Theatre offers a fully equipped black box for bold, ambitious work; the Explosives Factory provides a home for experimentation, residencies, and intimate performance; the TWiSK Rehearsal Space offers year-round free development space; and the Black Box Café & Outdoor Stage connect the precinct to the daily life of St Kilda, welcoming more than 20,000 visitors each year.

Together, these venues form a pipeline that supports artists at every stage of their practice while building community, diversifying income, and embedding independent theatre deeply into the cultural fabric of St Kilda. This integrated precinct model - development to presentation, bar to black box, artist to audience - is what makes Theatre Works unique.

This is the heart of Theatre Works: a place where artists are held, supported, and challenged; where audiences encounter work that surprises and moves them; and where community grows, one story at a time.

TEAM THEATRE WORKS

DIANNE TOULSON (she/her) Executive Director / Creative Producer

ADAM GARDNER (he/him) Marketing / Graphic Design / Box Office Manager

JADE HIBBERT (she/her) Company Producer

CHRIS PATRICK HANSEN (he/him) Marketing and Producing Associate

RIVER STEVENS (he/him) Front of House Co-ordinator

JOSHUA FERNANDEZ (he/him) Venue Operations Assistant

ANNE HENDERSON (she/her) Finance Administrator

ROBOT SONG

BY JOLYON JAMES | PRESENTED NCM

WRITER/DIRECTOR/DESIGNER

Jolyon James

COMPOSER/MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Nathan Gilkes

PERFORMERS

Adeline Hunter
Phillip McInnes

PERFORMER/MUSICIAN

Michelle Doyle

TECHNICIAN

Justin Gardam

STAGE MANAGER

Stephanie Young

DRAMATURGY

Christian Leavesley

ORIGINAL COSTUME

Beth Sayer

ORIGINAL LIGHTING DESIGN

Paul Lim

SET CONSTRUCTION

Tom Eeles at JT Custom Builds

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Sarah Branton

ORIGINAL COMMISSION

Arena Theatre Company

CONNECT WITH ROBOT SONG

Website - <https://jolyonjames.squarespace.com/robot-song-the-musical>

Facebook - <https://facebook.com/meccano202>

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/robotsongmusical>

ROBOT SONG IS A **WITH THEATRE WORKS** PRODUCTION

Shows in the **WITH THEATRE WORKS** stream align strongly our values and missions - these works we co-produce and co-present with independent artists and/or companies. Projects within this stream receive significant producing, marketing, PR and production support in addition to free use of the venue and a generous box office split.



ROBOTS, AUTISM AND THE POWER OF PARADOXES

BY JOLYON JAMES

A few years back I found a video I had made with my son. I had built a WALL-E style robot for him out of a box and some coffee cups. Creative projects have always been part of our language and instinctively as a parent I noticed that they were often our clearest moments of communication. It wasn't until he was diagnosed with autism two years later that I realised the importance of this style of play with him. Coincidentally his diagnosis also revealed the many misconceptions and fears about autistic people, primarily that they are like robots who lack empathy and feeling. Our experience with our son and wider autistic community told us this could not be further from the truth, in fact, our son's sensitivity is sometimes so overwhelming he occasionally, like WALL-E just needs to shut down.

This idea forms the central premise for Robot Song challenging these stereotypes and poses the paradoxical question "if we're all different doesn't that kind of mean we are all the same?" My background is in visual arts. In a sense it was my first language, having grown up in a family of professional artists. Over the last 40

years I have been squirrelling away ridiculous ideas that I imagined might someday be useful and somehow they all coalesced inside this show. There was something about the language and experience of creativity that is fundamental to my son's and subsequently my own, ability to understand the world.

Robot Song is primarily a personal reflection about parenting and the profound ability creativity has to cut through when language fails. The show uses live animation, animatronics, puppetry and photography culminating in an actual giant robot I built with my two sons in my own backyard. Visually its ridiculous!

After my son's diagnosis, I had to radically reassess many fundamental things that I had taken for granted. This show is a story about parenting and the challenges parents may face as guardians of a child who is seen as 'different' or needs a little extra support. But at its core is a conversation about the right to define ourselves on our own terms.

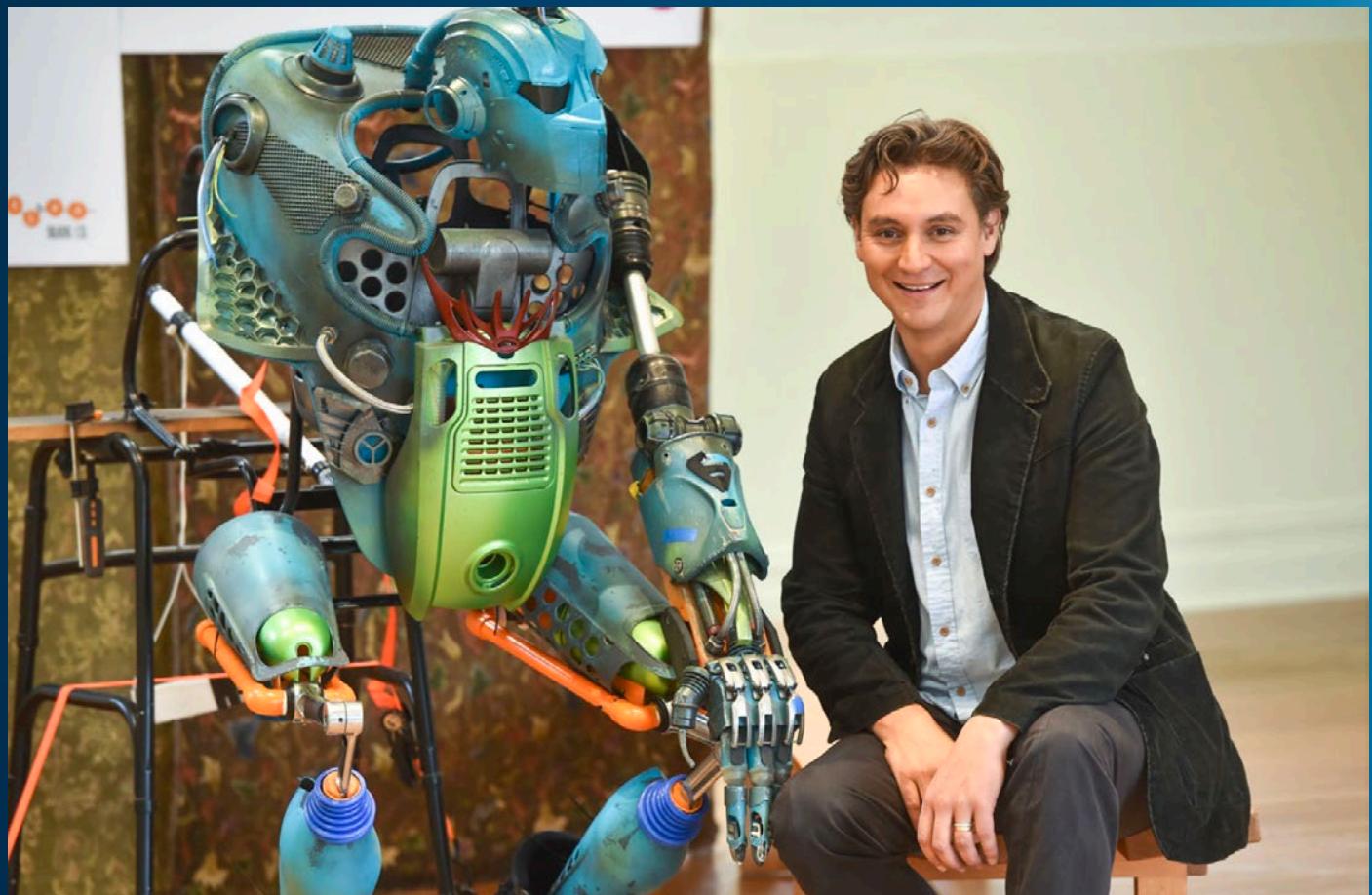
Young peoples lives are noisy complex places full of competing and often contradictory agendas.

As both a parent and an artist who spends considerable time working with young people I can see how dangerous it can be to hand over the definition of ourselves to others. Convincing us that we are at the whim of things beyond our control, can make us feel powerless and unable to see things for what they really are.

The lead character, Juniper, models a successful journey through this complex process, which can hopefully provide a blueprint for other young people. Juniper learns about herself through the idea that acceptance can only happen with self-acceptance. This is a highly

tough nut to crack for anyone let alone an 11 year old girl but with the unconditional love and support of her parents it is achieved in the most spectacular way.

I'd love to think Robot Song provides a glimmer of optimism in a world that feels desperately in need of it. I don't pretend that it provides all the answers but if it can spark a conversation about how we can nurture, respect and support our most precious commodity, children, then I feel it has been worthwhile.



JOLYON JAMES

DIRECTOR, DESIGNER AND CREATOR



Based in Victoria, Jolyon James is an independent multidisciplinary visual artist, writer and performance maker focused primarily on the theatre for young people sector.

Between 2013–2021 he was the Artistic Associate and Lead Artist with Arena Theatre Company and has held teaching, mentoring and directing roles at The Victorian College of the Arts, Monash University and Collarts. He designs and leads creative workshops for young people, mentors emerging artists and creates pathways into the industry through active cultural leadership.

Career highlights include winning the prestigious 2019 Helpmann Award for Robot Song; multiple Drama

Victoria Awards; sold-out presentations at major arts venues including the Sydney Opera House, Arts Centre Melbourne and Geelong Arts Centre; appearances at national and international festivals; and twice head-lining Adelaide's prestigious DreamBIG Festival. Robot Song has toured extensively throughout Australia and overseas and has been selected for the VCE Drama Playlist over multiple years. In 2026, Robot Song will showcase at the Boston Academy of Music and is currently undergoing a Spanish translation.

From 2022-2024, Jolyon created IMAGINE LIVE, based on Alison Lester's beloved book *Imagine*. The performance toured nationally as one of the largest independent touring shows in Australia for 2025, reaching over 40,000 young audiences in 46 venues.

As a passionate advocate for access and inclusion, Jolyon has made works for Vision Australia, collaborated with Rawcus, and built site-specific community works across aged-care facilities and regional schools. Accessibility is central to both the process and presentation of his work, and he actively creates space for artists from diverse backgrounds.

NATE GILKES

COMPOSER / MUSICAL DIRECTOR



Nate Gilkes is an award winning musician and artistic director working across disciplines of theatre, music and performance.

Nate's artistic practice sits at the colliding points of music, theatre and opera. Nate sees music and the sung voice as fundamental connectors to our own ancient, human story and the activating agent for making theatre.

Nate composed the score for robot song and Jolyon James new work, *Imagine Live*. He currently works with Opera Australia in sydney.

JUSTIN GARDAM

TECHNICIAN



Justin Gardam is an award-winning designer whose practice spans sound, composition, video and dramaturgy for theatre. Justin was the audio designer for NCM and Jolyon James' musical children's show *IMAGINE LIVE* based on the book by Alison Lester's (Nicholas Clark Management, 2024-25).

Recent highlights of his other work include *Pride and Prejudice* (Bloomshed, 2024), *Animal Farm* (Bloomshed, 2023), *Laurinda* (Melbourne Theatre Company, 2022), and *The Meeting* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre, 2022). As associate designer, his credits include *Truth* (Malthouse Theatre, 2024), *Macbeth: An Undoing* (Malthouse Theatre, 2024), *Homo Pentecostus* (Malthouse Theatre/Joel Bray Dance, 2024), and *Hour of the Wolf* (Malthouse Theatre, 2023). Justin is the recipient of three Melbourne Green Room Awards, and has received fifteen Green Room Award nominations for his work across design, writing and direction. He graduated from Monash University with a Bachelor of Performing Arts and holds a Master of Dramaturgy from the Victorian College of the Arts.

STEPHANIE YOUNG

STAGE MANAGER



Steph is a Naarm/Melbourne-based arts freelancer hailing from Gunaikurnai country in West Gippsland. Specialising in stage and production management, Steph builds collaborative and inclusive processes that centre safety, care, and access across every layer of performance-making. Steph has built a diverse portfolio of award-winning productions in experimental arts, circus, contemporary dance, physical theatre, cabaret, theatre, festivals, musical theatre, opera, and classical music.

Steph collaborates with organizations that are deeply engaged with their communities. They were the stage manager for the 2025 six-month Australian National Tour of IMAGINE LIVE, created by Jolyon James. Following this, they been invited to return as stage manager for the 2026 international tour of his other show Robot Song, and for the continued tours of both IMAGINE and Robot Song throughout 2026.

ADELINE HUNTER

PERFORMER - JUNIPER MAY



Adeline is a Melbourne-based actor, singer, dancer and voice over artist. She is a 2023 Showfit Musical Theatre graduate who recently toured to every Australian state and territory with Jolyon James' show, IMAGINE LIVE, based on the beloved book Imagine by Alison Lester.

Adeline's stage credits include Bearded - Ensemble/Hailey Cover (Theatre Works), Parade - Mary Phagan/Dance Captain (Sydney – Seymour Centre & Melbourne – Chapel Off Chapel), The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee - Logainne Schwartzandgrubenierre (Hayes Theatre), and Urinetown - Little Becky Two-Shoes/Dance Captain (Soundworks Productions).

She has performed in educational theatre programs with Perform! Education and The National Theatre for Children and toured extensively around Victoria and NSW.

PHILIP MCINNES

PERFORMER - DAD



Phillip graduated from WAAPA - Theatre 2002 and has worked extensively as an actor and deviser, sound engineer and video editor, puppeteer and voiceover artist.

Working to create new works that transport, challenge, delight and leave an audience awestruck is what Phillip enjoys and aims for. He's been privileged to do this on such projects as The Sleepover, The House Of Dreaming, Starchaser And Marlin Expedition - Arena, Ot - Chronicles Of The Old Testament And Hard Rubbish- Malthouse Theatre, Mr Freezy And Men Of Steel - Men Of Steel, Home - Piaf 2007 And Grug - Windmill.

Phillip has recently helped develop and perform in Jolyon James new production, Imagine Live. Film and TV credits include: Judy And Punch, Top End Wedding, Dr Blake, Dying Breed, Stingers, Blue Heelers and Neighbours.

Phillip has been a proud member of MEAA since 1999.

MICHELLE DOYLE

MUSICIAN + PERFORMER - MUM



Michelle is a classical and folk harpist and pianist based in Melbourne, renowned for her comprehensive musicianship, professionalism, and engaging stage presence. Her current creative outlet is the virtuosic harp and fiddle duo Mickey & Michelle, who have completed three international tours and performed at major festivals throughout Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. Together they have released two acclaimed albums, with their latest, Solace in Wonder, nominated for Best Folk Album at the 2024 Victorian Music Awards. They are also finalists in the 2025 Australian Folk Music Awards. Michelle is a sought-after session and touring musician, regularly collaborating with leading artists across genres. Her passion for Celtic traditions has inspired collaborations with Scots singer Fiona Ross and participation in major projects such as Shane Howard's Exile: Songs and Tales of Irish Australia, alongside artists including Paul Kelly and Declan O'Rourke. Earlier highlights of Michelle's career include winning two consecutive Paddy O'Neill Award's, performing at the National Folk Festival and Port Fairy Folk Festival, representing Australia at Celtic Colours International Festival in Canada, and being named Face of the National Celtic Festival 2015. She began her musical journey on the Bellarine Peninsula before training at the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, where she was selected for the VCE Top Class and Top Acts concerts at Hamer Hall, Melbourne.

A PROFOUNDLY MOVING PORTRAIT OF A COMMUNITY
LEARNING TO LIVE BEYOND TRAUMA.



THEATRE WORKS PRESENTS

BEYOND THE NECK

A QUARTET ON LOSS AND VIOLENCE BY TOM HOLLOWAY

19 MARCH - 4 APRIL | THEATRE WORKS

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