



CUSP

BY MARY ANNE BUTLER

 **Brown's Mart Theatre**

 **WC**

NOTE NOTE Contains adult themes, frequent coarse language, descriptions of sexual acts, references to trauma and self-harm

Suitable for ages 15+

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Darwin Festival takes place on what has always been Larrakia land. We wish to pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of this Country and to their ancestors. As the Festival welcomes contemporary artists and art from Australia and around the world, we also celebrate the continuing culture of the Larrakia people.

Scroll through to read more about this performance of CUSP. Enjoy the show!



ARTIST'S NOTE

A NOTE FROM THE WRITER

It's almost four years since CUSP had her world premiere at Brown's Mart Theatre in Darwin. Produced by ATYP and Brown's Mart, CUSP was directed with nuance and love by Fraser Corfield. Following its Darwin season, CUSP transferred – in March 2020 – to The Stables Theatre at Griffin.

There had been whisperings since late January 2020 of a virus sweeping the globe. The first COVID-related death in Australia was recorded on 1st March. March 2nd revealed 30 cases, including the first community transmission.

The official opening at Griffin on 13 March 2020 was an absolute cracker. My siblings and nieces travelled a long way to see the show on 14 March, an act which meant the world to me. A few days later theatres went dark across the country, and the season of CUSP was closed down. That darkness hit many people: industries, lives and livelihoods. The timing for CUSP was atrocious, but so many people suffered so much more.

It's always a privilege for a new Australian play to go more than one round on the ferris wheel, and it's an absolute joy to see CUSP back on stage in 2023 – this time at Darwin Festival following a season at ATYP's Rebel Theatre, again under Fraser's energising directorial hand, and brought back by a collaboration between Artback NT, ATYP, Darwin Festival and

Brown's Mart. The same incredible Northern Territory design team has once again rendered vivid the Top End landscape: capturing its glorious light, unique sounds, and the ubiquitous louvres which open up every Top End home to the natural elements. Joshua McElroy once again nails the role of Elvis, joining two new cast members: Larrakia woman Lakesha Grant and Abbey Morgan.

Many thanks to Fraser Corfield and Jenny Medway for commissioning me to write CUSP, way back in 2017. And to Fraser – thanks for staying so true to this story, and giving it more of your deft, nuanced touch. Thanks to dramaturg Jane Fitzgerald who was pivotal in finessing CUSP's complex timeline and picking up script inconsistencies. Special thanks to Rosealee Grimes [nee Pearson] for cultural input and advice which helped craft Rosie's life out at Yirrkala: making real her life on Country and helping to problematise the choices she faces as a strong young Indigenous woman torn between living on Country and moving to the city to study medicine.

CUSP merges the Northern Territory's vast Top End landscape with three teenagers teetering at the cusp of their adult lives, juggling choice and chance in a world where, as the character of Elvis says, "Some people get better choices to choose from". It is a love letter to the people and landscape of Australia's Top End: in particular our youth, who hold the future so delicately and respectfully in their more-than-capable hands.

We hope you enjoy the ride.

- Mary Anne Butler

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

There's a particular joy in being able to share this production of CUSP with you in 2023. It's rare for a director to be able to follow a play from the very first discussion with a playwright, through to sitting in the opening night of the finished production. In this case, CUSP's Sydney premiere fell afoul of the COVID closures of 2020. Our three-week season shut down in just three days. We got to see the script receive the accolades it deserved, but the production so clearly warranted a wider audience.

This play offers three beautifully drawn characters, each wrestling with decisions that will change their lives. It's a play about those thresholds in life that must be crossed in one form or another. While hopefully not too many of us will contend with the decisions these characters face, sooner or later we all get our moments of reckoning – those moments in our lives that leave us older, sadder, wiser. But these are the moments that make us the people we become.

Mary Anne Butler has crafted a play that offers a directing opportunity that is equal parts exhilarating and daunting. It is exhilarating in the colour and depth of the story. The language blends poetry and potent imagery with the slap of a teenage turn of phrase. But it is daunting because the language only flies if we genuinely feel for the characters, believe in their relationships, see the truth in their eyes. It is one thing to read the words on the page, it is another to find young actors with the confidence and clarity to bring them to life.

Though the world has changed since we first staged this production, I have no doubt it remains absolutely current. We had a school from Western Sydney join us for a day of rehearsals and the first comment from a student? "It's really powerful to see a play that has characters that we can relate to. It's like what we're dealing with, us or our mates." That is the power of a good play.

It has been a privilege to be a part of this exceptional Australian play's beginning.

– Fraser Corfield

CREDITS

Mary Anne Butler – Writer

Fraser Corfield – Director

Jane FitzGerald – Dramaturg

Cj Fraser-Bell – Set Designer

Jessie Davis – Lighting Designer

Brad Fawcett – Sound Designer

Kate Atkinson – Tour Manager

Chris Kluge – FX/LX Technician/Operator, and lighting re-design for the Darwin Festival season at Brown's Mart, 2023

Rosealee Grimes [nee Pearson] – Cultural Consultant

With

Lakesha Grant, aka Kootsie Don – as Rosie

Joshua McElroy – as Elvis

Abbey Morgan – as Maddie

Isaac Harley [Understudy]

Mema Munro [Understudy]

CUSP was made possible with assistance from the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, Playing Australia, and through the support of the Australian Theatre for Young People and Browns Mart

DARWIN FESTIVAL

Darwin Festival is a major event with a local heart that connects communities through the celebration of arts and culture.

The centre piece of what makes August in Darwin the best time of year, this tropical winter festival is loved by locals and adored by visitors. It shines a light on the stories and cultures of the Territory, creates and presents magical moments and offers you a space to play.

DARWIN FESTIVAL 2023
RUNS 10 – 27 AUGUST



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