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# THE FLEA

BY JAMES FRITZ

4 FEB - 8 MAR 2025

# THE FLEA

## CREATIVE TEAM

Director & Designer  
Assistant Director  
Lighting Designer  
Associate Set Designer  
Video Designer

Patrick Kennedy  
Luke Visentin  
Topaz Marlay-Cole  
Tom Bannerman  
Alec Council

## CAST (in order of appearance)

Emily Swinscow / Queen Victoria  
Charlie Swinscow /  
Bertie, Prince of Wales  
Henry Newlove / Lord Somerset  
Abberline / Hammond /  
Gladstone  
Hanks / Barwell / Lord Euston

Sofie Divall

Samuel Ireland  
James Collins

Mark Salvestro  
Jack Elliot Mitchell

## PRODUCTION TEAM & CREW

Production Coordinator  
Stage Manager  
ASMs  
  
LX/SX Operator  
Set Construction/Bump-in

Gemma Greer  
Hermione Bathurst  
Lara Kyriazis  
Harry Peters  
Nathaniel Pernecita  
Patrick Kennedy  
Tom Bannerman  
Luke Visentin  
David Marshall- Martin  
Roger Wishart  
Stuart Corner  
Adrien Stark  
Chris Lundie

Production Photography

Hero image: AI composite © New Theatre

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the country on which we meet today, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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MANAGER@NEWTHEATRE.ORG.AU**





## JAMES FRITZ PLAYWRIGHT

James Fritz studied writing at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. In 2014, he wrote *Four Minutes Twelve Seconds*, which premiered at The Hampstead Theatre. Other plays for stage and radio include *Parliament Square*, *Start Swimming*, *The Fall*, *Comment is Free*, *Death of a Cosmonaut*, *Lava*, *Dear Harry Kane* and *Skyscraper Lullaby*.

He has won the Critics Circle Theatre Award for Most Promising Playwright, the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting, The Imison and Tinniswood BBC Audio Drama Awards and the ARIA Radio Academy Award for Best Drama. He has also been nominated for the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre. *The Flea* premiered in 2023 at The Yard Theatre in London.

Fritz often writes about power and class dynamics and *The Flea* is based on the Cleveland Street scandal of 1889, when a homosexual male brothel on Cleveland Street, London, was discovered by police. The government was accused of covering up the scandal to protect the names of aristocratic and other prominent patrons.

At the time, sexual acts between men were illegal in Britain, and the brothel's clients faced possible prosecution and social rejection if discovered. It was rumoured that Prince Albert Victor, the eldest son of the Prince of Wales and second-in-line to the British throne, had visited the brothel, though this has never been substantiated. Unlike overseas newspapers, the British press never named Albert Victor, but the allegation influenced the handling of the case by the authorities.

The police acquired testimonies that Lord Arthur Somerset, equerry to the Prince of Wales, was a patron. Both he and the brothel keeper, Charles Hammond, managed to flee abroad before a prosecution could be brought. The male prostitutes, who also worked as telegraph messenger boys for the General Post Office, were sentenced but no clients were prosecuted.

In an interview, Fritz has talked about the challenge of finding the right balance between being historically accurate and telling an exciting story:

*"I hope it's accurate in all the right ways. But anyone coming should absolutely not treat it as the historical record! The play is playful, and very much 'a story', which hopefully is made clear.*

*I hope it's relevant in loads of ways. For me there's no point writing about the past unless you're writing about the present in some way: the way in which our establishment looks out for itself, the way that shit rolls downhill in an aristocratic, class-based society, the way in which we shame and marginalise people in order to keep the boot on their necks. All of that still goes on today. 'The Flea' is my attempt to take a 'gods' eye' view of a scandal – to show the ripples of one telegraph boy being arrested from the very bottom of society to the very top.*

*The play is set in 1889 so obviously it's a different world culturally, but it's a fascinating and complex time in queer history. In 1885 a law was passed that created a new, very unspecific crime called 'gross indecency'. Suddenly it became incredibly easy to prosecute homosexual men based on little more than hearsay. So all of a sudden there was this incredible climate of fear, which is why somewhere like Cleveland Street is set up and why its discovery causes such a scandal. A few years later, in part due to the public fallout from Cleveland Street, you had the trial of Oscar Wilde.*

*At its heart it's a story of a boy and his mother who get caught up in this series of political events they don't understand."*

Helen Tonkin, New Theatre Literary Manager, 2025

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

*The Flea* by James Fritz is a remarkable piece inspired by true events, reimagined through a hyper-theatrical lens that bridges history with the present. This production delves into Victorian England in the 1880s but with a dash of a hint to another resonant era: the 1980s. Both periods witnessed intense scrutiny and oppression of the queer community and echoes of royal scandals and cover-ups still feel strikingly relevant today. Power remains as imbalanced as ever, its weight felt most heavily by the marginalised.

My approach to *The Flea* integrates my signature theatrical and performance aesthetic, drawn from my experimental work, into what might initially appear to be a traditional Victorian drawing-room drama. The stage design reflects this juxtaposition: it is deliberately uneven, unexpected, off-kilter, and surreal, symbolising the crushing weight imposed on the working class and those trapped within societal hierarchies. This visual language aims to underscore the play's themes of oppression and systemic injustice.

Performance modes are another vital aspect of this production. The play as we have staged it unfolds as Emily Swinshaw's reimagining of events. When she speaks directly to the audience, we enter a world of naturalism, of storytelling and of confession. However, when she imagines moments she was not present for, the performance shifts into a theatrically heightened style. Drawing from Victorian-era symbolist acting and tableau imagery, these scenes evoke the heightened emotions and repressive norms of the time.

I hope this production of *The Flea* will make you titter, perhaps unsettle you, and ultimately break your heart.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. And thank you to the company and creative associates for bringing this behemoth of a production to life.

Patrick Kennedy, 2025





#### PATRICK KENNEDY DIRECTOR / DESIGNER

Hailed as “one of the country’s most fascinating theatre practitioners” (British Theatre), Patrick Kennedy is an Offie Award nominated director and producer recognized as one of the leading European avant garde figures. Originally trained as an acting teacher under the Globe Theatre’s Jacqueline Bessel, Patrick began producing and creating experimental theatre in 2009.

For New Theatre: Debut.

Other theatre credits include: Eugene Ionesco’s *The Lesson* (Edinburgh Fringe); since then he has almost exclusively directed and produced the work of Richard Foreman, the doyen of the American avant garde. Highlights include the Offie Award nominated *Zomboid!* (New Wimbledon Theatre) and the critically acclaimed occult opera *Elephant Steps* at Arcola Theatre’s Grimeborn Festival. In 2012, Kennedy co-created a new Weimar era musical *Halbwelt Kultur*, which played a

sold out run in London’s West End at the Jermyn Street Theatre in Nov/Dec 2013.

Patrick made his Australian debut as director/designer of *Sophia=(Wisdom): The Cliffs* which he produced at New Theatre in January 2024.



#### LUKE VISENTIN ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Luke is an actor and director, with a BFA in acting from NIDA.

For New Theatre: *Control*.

Other theatre credits include: *Sophia=(Wisdom): The Cliffs* (Patrick Kennedy), *Come Again, Rhomboid* and as assistant director on *The Pigeons* (KXT), ‘Konstantin’ in *The Seagull* and ‘Sir Andrew’ in *Twelfth Night* (NIDA), *Morning to Midnight* (the Opera Centre), puppet shows for Horizons Theatre, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet* tours, *Wind in the Willows* (ASC), *Hamlet* and *Cinderella* (Opera Australia). Short film credits include: *Icarus*, *Puncture*, *Lady May* and *Death Drive*.



#### TOPAZ MARLAY-COLE LIGHTING DESIGNER

Topaz is an emerging theatre technician and lighting designer, who recently completed a BFA in Technical Theatre and Stage Management at NIDA.

For New Theatre: Lighting Designer, *Atlantis*.

Other recent theatre credits include *The Cherry Orchard* (Old Fitz) and *The Pigeons* (KXT on Broadway), both produced in 2024. During her time at NIDA she worked on several shows including Head Electrician for *Sweeney Todd*, *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, and Lighting Designer for *The Great Theatre of The World*, *Amadeus* and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. She has also worked with Sydney Festival for the past three years as an Assistant Event Coordinator for *In Chamber*, *Encantado*, *Masterclass*, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of The World* and *Dark Noon*.



#### TOM BANNERMAN ASSOCIATE SET DESIGNER

Tom is a Sydney-based set-designer. His body-of-work is considerable, with *The Flea* marking his 292st production, including 80 set-designs for New Theatre.

His most recent New Theatre productions are *Ink*, *The Ballad of Maria Marten*, *Jumpers for Goalposts*, *Chimerica*, *The Spook*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Neighbourhood Watch*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Pygmalion*, *My Night with Reg*, *The Elements of an Offence*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The HIV Monologues*, *The Little Dog Laughed*, *Marat/Sade*, *That Eye/The Sky*, *The Ritz*, *When the Rain Stops Falling*, *Dying for It* and *Jerusalem*.

For other theatres: *Isolde and Tristan* (Sport For Jove at Old Fitz Theatre), *Stories from the Violins of Hope* (Bondi Pavilion), *The Wasps*, *Just Macbeth!* and *Tales of the Wild Bush* (NSW Public Schools Drama Co, The Studio, NIDA), *A Day at the Beach*, *House on Fire* (South Sydney

High School), *Wild Thing* (NSW tour and Flight Path Theatre), *Love from a Stranger* and *Sherlock Holmes & the Death on Thor Bridge* (Genesian Theatre), *The Real Inspector Hound*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Twelve Angry Men* and *Amadeus* (Saint Aloysius’ College), *Eight Gigabytes of Pornography* and *Mark Colvin’s Kidney* (Drill Hall Mullumbimby), *Things I know to be True*, *Endgame* and *Charley’s Aunt* (Civic Playhouse, Newcastle)

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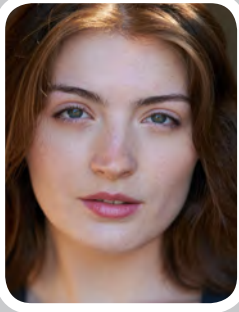
**Insta: @newtheatresydney**

**JAMES COLLINS HENRY NEWLOVE / LORD SOMERSET**

James recently graduated from Actors Centre Australia's Bachelor of Performing Arts course. For New Theatre: Debut.

Other theatre credits include: *The Laramie Project* (Newcastle Theatre Company); *The Pillowman* (White Noise Productions); *Our Country's Good*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *A View From the Bridge*, *Everybody*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Actors Centre Australia).

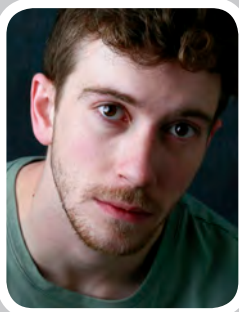
James is currently in pre-production for a feature film *Marvellous Party*, which he is co-directing.

**SOFIE DIVALL EMILY SWINSCOW / QUEEN VICTORIA**

Sofie an Australian-American actor thrilled to be making her first Australian stage appearance since her return home to Sydney after completing a BA in Theatre at Oberlin College.

For New Theatre: Debut.

Recent theatre credits include: *Murray Hill* (Flea Theater, NYC), *Measure for Measure* and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (Oberlin Summer Theater Festival), as well as *Collective Rage: A Play in 5 Betties*, *What We Look Like*, *Cabaret* and *Urinetown* (Oberlin Mainstage).

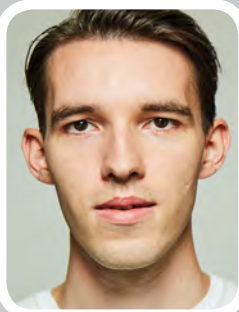
**SAMUEL IRELAND CHARLIE SWINSCOW / BERTIE, PRINCE OF WALES**

Samuel is a theatre, television and film actor, and playwright, who moved to Gadigal country from Boorloo (Perth) in 2024 to further his practice. He received a Diploma of Acting from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2018, and a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Theatre Arts from Curtin University in 2021.

For New Theatre: Debut.

Other theatre credits include: *The Pillowman* (Hayman Theatre Company), *A Sleep of Prisoners* (THEATRE180), *Double Act* (Songbird Theatre Company) and the Performing Arts WA Award nominated show *Mosquito* (Sunburnt Productions). His feature film credits include: *Runt* (See Pictures) and *The Light* (Inklight Cinema). His television credits include: *Invisible Boys* (Stan) and the leading role in *Itch* (Komixx Entertainment). He co-founded Songbird Theatre Company in

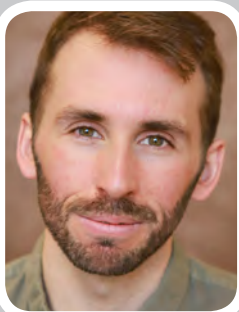
2021 and was an inaugural member of Black Swan State Theatre Company's FORGE playwrighting group.

**JACK ELLIOT MITCHELL HANKS / BARWELL / LORD EUSTON**

Jack trained at the Stella Adler Studio of Acting in New York, and with Physical Lab in London. He also has an MA in English Literature from Sydney University.

For New Theatre: *The Spook, Ink, Hangmen*.

For other companies: *The Government Inspector* (Fingerless Theatre), *Much Ado* (Flight Path Theatre/Attractive, Not Model Attractive), *Mourning Overnight* (Edinburgh Fringe, Hen & Chickens London), *Indebted to Chance* and *The Recruiting Officer* (Old Red Lion), and *Peer Gynt* (Endangered Productions).

**MARK SALVESTRO ABBERLINE / HAMMOND / GLADSTONE**

Mark Salvestro is an actor, playwright and independent theatre producer, newly based in Sydney. He trained part-time at the Actors Centre Australia in Sydney and full-time at the Howard Fine Acting Studio in Melbourne.

For New Theatre: Debut.

Most recently, Mark performed in his new play, *The Queen's City of the South*, at Qtopia Sydney in October 2024, which is inspired by the history of the Cooma Gaol and its use as a 'gay prison' in the 1950-60s. His solo theatre works have toured to critical acclaim with *The Will To Be* winning a Best Theatre Weekly Award at Adelaide Fringe 2020, and being remounted for performances in Melbourne, Cooma, Queanbeyan, Merimbula and Sydney.

While living in Melbourne, Mark co-founded theatre collective North of Eight, and performed with Australian Shakespeare Company at the Prague Fringe Festival in 2018. Other theatre credits include: *Chiaroscuro* (Canberra Theatre Centre), *Comedy of Errors* (Australian Shakespeare Co), *Buried at Sea* (solo show), *Strata Inc.* and *Navy Pier* (North of Eight), *Lonely People are Always Up in the Middle of the Night* (La Mama), and *Couch Potato* and *Fairy Tale News* (WIT Inc.).

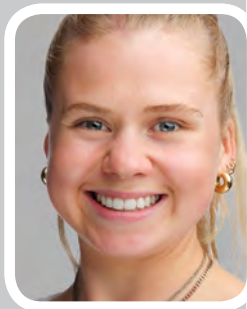
He is represented by Victoria Sadiqzai at Khans Entertainment Agency. Learn more: [www.marksalvestro.com](http://www.marksalvestro.com)

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#### HERMIONE BATHURST STAGE MANAGER

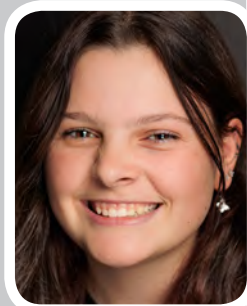
Hermione moved to Australia from London in October 2024. She has been a keen theatre enthusiast since beginning summer courses at Sylvia Young Theatre school, aged ten. Throughout school she did LAMDA exams up to grade 8 and drama A-Level, making her directoral debut in the final year of school with *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Other productions at school included *Guys and Dolls*, *Teechers* and *Spring Awakening*.

Following this she went on to teach drama to year 6 students in London and was Stage Manager for their summer show of *Olivia!*, a female version of *Oliver!*

For the last two years, Hermione has been working in Event Management within the fashion industry. Hermione's on -screen debut was for the 2020 *Inkey List Sister Series* campaign,

alongside her sister, a fellow actor.

For New Theatre: Debut.



#### LARA KYRIAZIS ASM

Lara trained at NIDA and holds a Diploma of Live Production and Technical Services.

For New Theatre: Debut.

Other experience includes: *McGuffin Park*, *The Memory of Water* (Ensemble Theatre), *The Pigeons* (The Other Theatre/KXT on Broadway), *21 Chump Street*, *Ephemera*, *Musical Theatre and Stage and Screen Showcase*, *Technical Artistry Showcase* (NIDA), *Unearthed Project* (Triple J/Dice), *Me and My Girl*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Grease*, *Clue*, *The BFG* (Frensham School).



#### NATHANIEL PERNECITA LX./SX OPERATOR

With nothing more than a suitcase and a completed Bachelor's degree, Nate leaves behind his friends and family from Ponoke Wellington and sets off to Gadigal Sydney for a fresh start and new opportunities. In an attempt to plant his roots and find community, he signed up to be a volunteer at New Theatre, only to immerse himself in the deep end, training to be a Sound and Lighting Operator on this production.

For New Theatre: Debut.



**COMING NEXT**

**FIGHTING  
BY XAVIER COY**

**18 MAR - 12 APR**

**WHO'S WHO AT NEW THEATRE 2025**

**STAFF**

**THEATRE MANAGER &  
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR**  
Gemma Greer

**PUBLICIST**  
Alice Livingstone

**TECHNICAL MANAGER**  
Mehran Mortezaei

**FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGERS**  
Eddy S Dharmadji (Coordinator)  
Marica Fumanti  
Harlee Timms

**PLAY ASSESSORS**

John Keightley (Coordinator)  
Annie Bilton  
Michael Briggs  
Doug Cairns  
Susan Jordan  
Sahn Millington  
Rayma Watkinson  
Raymond Patman (Administrator)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**PRESIDENT**  
Rosane McNamara

**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Elizabeth Ivory

**TREASURER**  
Michael Pedersen

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**  
Louise Fischer

**ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE**  
Margaret Thanos

**LITERARY MANAGER**  
Helen Tonkin

**PREMISE MANAGER & LICENSEE**  
Dr David Marshall-Martin JP

**SECRETARY (EX-OFFICIO)**  
Gemma Greer

**EMERITUS THEATRE CAT**  
'Mouse'

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New Theatre Management Committee, staff and volunteers.

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