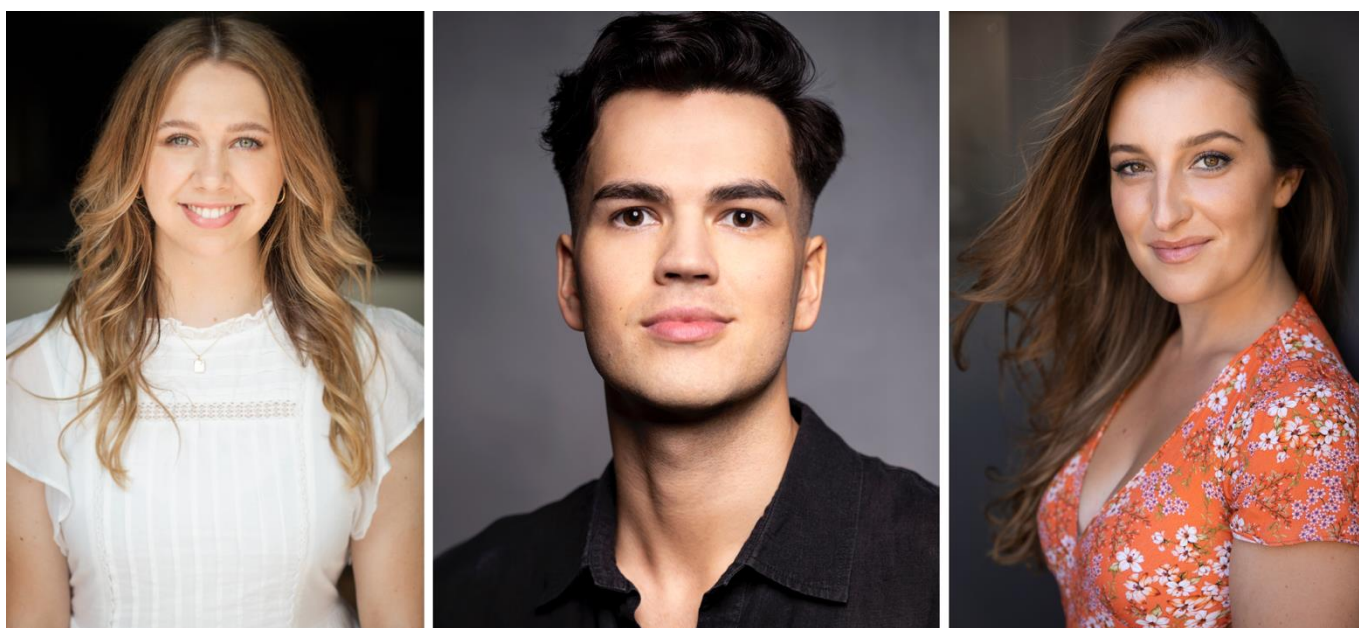


Bell Shakespeare announces full cast for world premiere of vibrant Australian contemporary musical

The Lovers

- Featuring some of the best voices in Australian musical theatre -



Images (L to R): Brittanie Shipway, Blake Appelqvist and Natalie Abbott.

Sydney, Australia: Bell Shakespeare today announced the full cast of the upcoming production and world premiere of *The Lovers*, a pop musical written by young Australian writer and composer **Laura Murphy** reimagining Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a fresh and infectious original score.

Presented at **Sydney Opera House** from **23 October – 20 November 2022**, the production will feature some of the best voices in Australia's musical theatre scene, including **Natalie Abbott**, **Blake Appelqvist**, **Brittanie Shipway** and **Jerrod Smith**. Previously announced cast members include **Stellar Perry**, making her musical theatre debut, and **Monique Sallé**.

The young cast features some of Australia's most exciting voices:

- **Stellar Perry** makes her musical theatre debut as **Oberon**. The 2020 finalist of *The Voice*, Stellar Perry has co-written, co-produced and top lined for songs with DJ's and Producers worldwide for almost two decades with several reaching the top of the Dance charts in the US and Australia.
- **Monique Sallé** is a rising star in musical theatre and will star as the mischievous **Puck**. Sallé's most recent roles include originating the role of Janette in ATYP's debut Australian musical *The Deb* earlier this year and starring in the 25th Anniversary production of *RENT* as Maureen at the Sydney Opera House.

- **Natalie Abbott** takes on the role of **Helena**. An actress, singer and performer, Abbott's love of performing began back in 2013 after winning the Bell Shakespeare regional performance scholarship, and this marks her first role in one of the company's productions. Abbott recently appeared as the leading role of Muriel Heslop in the national tour of *Muriel's Wedding The Musical* in 2019, as Phebe in *As You Like It* with the Melbourne Theatre Company, and in the ABC TV series *Aftertaste*
- **Blake Appelqvist** stars as **Demetrius**. A Māori (Ngāti Porou) and Swedish multidisciplinary artist, Appelqvist recently played Harry on the Aria-nominated *Fangirls* World Premiere Cast Recording (Ghostlight). Their previous musical theatre credits include Oaken in *Frozen*, Miss Understanding in *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, Ziegfeld Tenor in *Funny Girl*, Esteban in *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, *West Side Story*, *Ghost*, and Angel in *Kinky Boots*.
- **Brittanie Shipway** stars as **Hermia**. A singer, actor, writer and dramaturg, Shipway recently wrote and starred in her debut play *A Letter for Molly* at Ensemble Theatre which was a semi-finalist in the Rodney Seaborn Playwrights Award in 2021. Brittanie is a recipient of the prestigious Dreaming Award from Australia Council of the Arts and her latest play, *Senser*, will debut in late 2022 at Theatre Works. Currently, Brittanie is developing a new Gumbaynggirr musical, *Yellow Rock*. Her other performing credits include starring alongside Natalie Bassingthwaite and Paulini as the Arbiter in *Chess*, Kay in a national tour of *The Sapphires*, The Witch in *Big Fish*, Claire in *Ordinary Days*, Lauren in *Kinky Boots*, Mary in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl* and Bianca in *Othello*.
- **Jerrold Smith** will star as **Lysander**. Smith grew up in a large musical family and was encouraged to pursue his skills in performance at a young age. He graduated from the Queensland Conservatorium with a Bachelors Degree in Musical Theatre, and has since been touring Australia as a professional actor and musician, performing alongside talents such as Patti Lupone, Lucy Durack and Josh Piterman. Most recently he starred in The Mitchell Old Company's production of *Heathers* in the role of J.D. Jerrod is currently writing, recording and performing his original music.

Laura Murphy, who is one of Australia's most exciting playwrights at the forefront of composing new Australian work, has been developing this project for the past 12 years. *The Lovers* will give audiences a fresh perspective on Shakespeare's classic tale, exploring the magic and mishaps of romantic love, with original pop songs sung by the cast and accompanied by a live band. The production will be directed by award-winning director **Shaun Rennie** (*Rent*, *Baby Doll*) with a bright and vibrant aesthetic realised by set and costume designer **Marg Horwell**, who was behind the design of the recent critically acclaimed production of *The Picture of Dorian Grey* at Sydney Theatre Company.

Writer Laura Murphy said: "*The Lovers has been my passion project for the past 12 years and it's an absolute dream for me to see it finally coming to life. I am so excited to announce the full cast and am blown away by their talent. These are truly some of the best musical talents Australia has to offer, and I can't wait to see what they do with the roles as we start rehearsing.*"

"For this production, I wanted to take Shakespeare's text and look at how it relates to us now, by reinventing it with a contemporary voice through original lyrics and a modern pop score. Our infatuation with romantic love began long before Shakespeare was writing about it 400 years ago, and The Lovers explores how those narratives have either evolved or remain the same today."

Bell Shakespeare Artistic Director Peter Evans said: "*We've been looking for a musical project for a while now, but it had to be the right one. When I saw one of the first workshops of Laura's work, I knew we had found something special, and I think it will be around for a long time.*"

Tickets for *The Lovers* are now on sale at <https://www.bellshakespeare.com.au/the-lovers>

Ends

MEDIA CONTACTS: For more information and interview requests please contact Articulate: Jasmine Hersee, jasmine@articulatepr.com.au, 0451 087 196 or Claire Martin, claire@articulatepr.com.au, 0414 437 588.

KEY DETAILS:

The Lovers

The Sydney Opera House

23 October – 20 November 2022

<https://www.bellshakespeare.com.au/the-lovers>

CAST:

Natalie Abbott as **Helena**

Blake Appelqvist as **Demetrius**

Stellar Perry as **Oberon**

Monique Sallé as **Puck**

Brittanie Shipway as **Hermia**

Jerrod Smith as **Lysander**

CREATIVE TEAM:

Writer & Composer Laura Murphy

Director Shaun Rennie

Music Director Andrew Worboys

Designer Marg Horwell

Lighting Designer Trent Suidgeest

Sound Designer David Bergman

Choreographer Yvette Lee

Fight & Intimacy Director Nigel Poulton

ABOUT LAURA MURPHY:

Laura Murphy is fast becoming one of Australia's most prolific creators of new musicals. Laura is the composer and lyricist behind the critically acclaimed Australian musical THE DISMISSAL and the "fierce and fabulous" immersive dance musical QWEEN LEAR.

Laura began writing and composing in 2009, writing the music and lyrics for WILLIAM AND SPARKLES' MAGICAL TALES with Ambience Entertainment and the Nine Network. She then went on to write and compose for several television programs including MAGICAL TALES: SURPRISES, IMAGINATION TRAIN and I AM ME.

As a performer, Laura is an award-winning artist who has performed across Australia and abroad. Laura toured Australia in the role of "Tania" in MURIEL'S WEDDING as well as having originated the role of "Janine" in its world premiere production. Other roles include "Lenora" in CRY BABY, "The Witch" in INTO THE WOODS, "Sally Brown" in YOU'RE A GOOD MAN CHARLIE BROWN, "Emma" in FUNNY GIRL, "Gabriel" in AN ACT OF GOD and "Jan" in the Australasian tour of GREASE. For television, Laura played the role of "Sparkles The Fairy" across five seasons in WILLIAM AND SPARKLE'S MAGICAL TALES as well as two seasons of its spin-off series MAGICAL TALES: SURPRISES.

Her latest original work, "ZOMBIE!" THE MUSICAL is due to be presented with Hayes Theatre Co in 2023.

ABOUT BELL SHAKESPEARE:

Bell Shakespeare is Australia's national theatre company specialising in the works of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Founded in 1990 with the dream of sharing Shakespeare's plays in a way that was relevant and exciting to all Australians, the company has evolved further than its visionary founder, John Bell AO, could have hoped.

Today, Bell Shakespeare tours major theatre productions, education programs and outreach initiatives to every state and territory in Australia and beyond. Performing and teaching in theatres, schools, youth justice centres and regional and remote communities, the company enjoys unrivalled reach and impact, further extending its influence through innovative digital programs.

