

LEADING LADIES

Catherine McGregor (left) with Heather Mitchell, who plays Catherine in *Still Point Turning*. (INSET) Rehearsals for the Sydney Theatre Company production.



MAKING HER STORY

Serving in the military, playing cricket and coming out as trans – Catherine McGregor’s story arrives on stage.

OVER THE past few years, Catherine McGregor has become a high-profile LGBTIQ identity.

As a trans woman serving in the Australian military, her story unfolded before the Australian public, creating some controversy, but raising awareness of the trans community.

Malcolm McGregor had a challenging early life – a rugby player, cricket fanatic, and Lieutenant Colonel in the Australian Army who was awarded the Order Of Australia. But things changed dramatically in 2012 when Malcolm transitioned into Catherine. Her story is now brought to the stage in the Sydney Theatre Company’s *Still Point Turning*.

Written and directed by Priscilla Jackman (*The*

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Father), the play is based on a series interviews given by McGregor herself, which make up the majority of the show’s dialogue.

For Heather Mitchell, taking on the role of McGregor has been a profound experience. Mitchell’s long career work spans Shakespeare to the film version of *Muriel’s Wedding*, but nothing prepared her for the challenge of portraying Cate McGregor.

“Cate has an extraordinarily rich story,” explains Mitchell. “What makes hers doubly rich is her ability to articulate it with such self-knowledge, intelligence and insight. Her story may ruffle some feathers and prompt extreme reactions, but it is her story and her life, and she owns it wholly.”

Understandably, McGregor’s story has its moments of melancholy, which many in the LGBTIQ community will relate to, but there’s also room for humour. Her life as a husband, athlete and soldier in the machismo military world contrast the life she leads today.

Vivacious, determined and inspiring, for Heather Mitchell, getting to know the person behind the larger-than-life character has been an experience.

“I’ve been blessed to have spent time with Cate,” she says. “Every moment with her is a joy and an enriching experience both personally and professionally. She has been extraordinarily generous in sharing her past and present with me. Because she is so giving of herself, I’ve had to do very little in terms of researching the events in her life. Her openness with her feelings has been remarkable. I’ve read her books and many of her amazing articles and speeches; she’s a phenomenal writer. She has even attempted to teach me how to swing a cricket bat.”

The play’s cast also includes Ashley Lyons (*Home and Away*) as Malcolm, and in the role of the young Malcolm is *The Project*’s transgender host Andrew Guy. Georgina Symes (*Rake*) plays mother, Chantelle Jamieson (*Crownies*) is Dr Amar, and Nicholas Brown (*Harrow*) plays former Indian cricket team captain, Rahul Dravid.

This staged biography delves deep, examining McGregor surviving alcoholism, the death of her parents, serving in East Timor and, of course, her transgender journey.

Still Point Turning offers not just an insight into Catherine McGregor, but also the lives of transgender people in general.

“I hope that by representing Cate’s story as honestly as possible, it may help people develop new insights and understandings,” says Mitchell. “It may open up questions and shifts in perception. Fortunately, there is a new visibility and acceptance for trans people, however, there are still many who are fearful and maintain narrow views. My greatest joy would be that this show promotes acceptance and a sense of celebration.”

MORE: *Still Point Turning* plays at the Wharf Theatre, Sydney 21 April to 26 May.