



Loren Hunter and  
Amanda Harrison as  
Evie; (inset) writer,  
Hugo Chiarella.

# EVIE FINDS HER VOICE

Vaudeville is brought back to life through the eyes of Evie May, the central character in a new, original Australian musical.

**WHEN IT** comes to original musicals, Australia is still finding its way. *Priscilla*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Georgy Girl* and *The Boy From Oz* have shown what's possible, but we still need to reach beyond the jukebox musical format for original music compositions.

New Musicals Australia develops original musicals through Sydney's Hayes Theatre. With *Melba* and *The Detective's Handbook* already under their belt, the latest production *Evie May*, tells the story of a veteran variety performer and her journey from regional Western Australia to vibrant Sydney. Set in 1966, on the eve of the last performance at the Tivoli Theatre, May's life is told in flashbacks.

Writer, Hugo Chiarella developed the idea while performing in the recent Australian production of *Les Miserables*. Naomi Livingston wrote the score.

"Naomi came to me with an idea centered around this character in a dressing room, who tells her story," says Chiarella. "We talked it over for a long time and decided that the final decades of the Australian Vaudeville circuit, at the Tivoli, would make a great setting," he says.

"I've always been fascinated by the Tivoli. The period, from pre-World War II through to its final days, was a time of such enormous cultural transformation in Australia and it's a rich backdrop to set our story against."

"I think people will relate to all the central characters," says Chiarella. "The show is set in an era that was particularly difficult for women. Evie has a child out of wedlock, chooses not to marry, and ultimately falls in love with a woman. These things just weren't spoken about in Australia in the '30s and '40s. Lesbianism wasn't even illegal in Australia at that point because people didn't think it existed!"

"Evie's story is about someone striving to assert their place in the world in the face of marginalisation and, unfortunately, that's still an experience that a lot can relate to."

Amanda Harrison (*Wicked*) plays the older, reflective Evie, while Loren Hunter (*Rent*) plays the younger woman. Kate Champion (*Nothing To Lose*) directs an impressive cast including DNA favourites Tim Draxl (*A Place To Call Home*) and Keegan Joyce (*Please Like Me*), Jo Turner (*The Merchant Of Venice*) and Bishanyia Vincent (*Starfish*).

Does Chiarella see Australia as a theatre environment where original musicals can succeed and flourish?

"I hope so," he says. "*Muriel's Wedding* was an exciting step forward. It's great to see an Australian show with an original score getting support from a subsidised company and commercial producer. The fact that it did so well and that it's going to have a life beyond its originating season is enormously exciting. I hope it paves the way for more. But musicals are risky; they are expensive to develop and produce. That New Musical Australia along with the Sydney Theatre Company and Queensland Theatre Company are beginning to support original musicals is encouraging."

"To me, *Evie May* is about culture, community and connection," says Chiarella. "I hope people watch it and become more aware of a part in our cultural past that's been largely forgotten. The core message is about the importance of connecting with one another to form communities."

**MORE:** Evie May plays from 12 October.  
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