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PRESHOW INTRODUCTORY NOTES

State Theatre of South Australia presents:

The Appleton Ladies’ Potato Race written by Melanie Tait.

The audio described performances at the Royalty Theatre, will take place on **Saturday 12 June at 2:00pm and Tuesday 15th June at 6.30pm.**

The production runs for 1hr30mins, with no interval.

There will be a **pre-show sensory tour** at 12.45pm on the 12th June and 5.15pm on 15th June. **If you would like to attend the sensory tour, meet in the Theatre foyer 5 minutes prior to the tour.** The sensory tour will explain and explore aspects of the set and props and usually includes meeting the performers. This will take approximately 30 minutes.

*NOTE: If however you are unable to attend the sensory tour, the audio describers will commence pre-show introductory notes, fifteen minutes prior to the performance. A receiver and earpiece will be provided for you to use, to hear the description.*

Sponsored by State Theatre Company’s *Dramatic Women* donor group, the play is inspired by true events from Melanie Tait’s background and personal experience. An important story, this comedy, about 5 very different women and a very real annual potato race, depicts the plight of a tiny fictional Australian agricultural community, fighting for equality and survival.

The **Appleton Ladies’ Potato Race** at the Royalty Theatre, is the home of South Australian Calisthenics, and an grand dame of Adelaide’s theatrical circuit. Her red velvet scalloped curtains rise either side of the proscenium arch, from stage level to the ceiling. Gilded edging traces the proscenium arch that thrusts above the stage and highlights the ornate plaster circles set in the high ceiling around four chandeliers.

**Set and Props**

The key elements of the set are the corrugated iron fences and sheds of the country town of Appleton. The use of coloured lighting and spotlights bouncing off the corrugated iron walls throughout the play, creates versatile and diverse spaces which delineate the variety of community activities, and create a rich sense of country life. A vertically orientated two-meter-high corrugated iron fence leads from the auditorium on either side, diagonally to the stage. On platforms above the fences, are bags of potatoes. ‘Appleton Potatoes’ is stenciled in black, on the front of the hessian sacks. Tall open metal towers one on each side, are draped with bunting, made of bright fabric triangles, in shades of red, orange, blue and green.

The performance space is split level. From the main stage, there is a twenty-centimetre step down, to the lower level running the width of the stage, closest to the audience. At the back of the space is a corrugated iron/tin shed, wall, its outer edges are approx. 3 meters tall and curve up to meet each other, at a peak at about 5 meters in the centre, small patches of blue sky on either side are created by lighting, which darkens to purple as evening draws in. Tall, corrugated iron walls on either side of the stage, around three metres high by three meters wide, run along the sides of the space and meet the back wall, in a neat corner.

Matching the curve of the back iron walls, a gently curved piece of corrugated iron one-meter-deep, arches over the stage just below the proscenium arch.

A two-meter-square cross-stitched sign in brown, yellow and green, hangs below it, announcing proudly “Welcome to Appleton, Population 1557, with an emoji of a smiling potato wearing a tall white chef’s hat, and the slogan ‘Australia’s Best Potatoes”. Below the sign is a square wooden table set on the upper level, on an angle with two chairs, one with a handbag hanging off the back. The table is dressed with a red and white checked tablecloth, and two water glasses.

To the left of the stage, a tubular agricultural iron gate with six lines of wire strung through it, sits flat along the diagonal side fence line. When the gate is opened, it sits between the main stage and the lower level, dividing the green areas of the playing fields or football oval, from the showgrounds. Wooden crates are used as seating.

To create the Hairdressing Salon a portion of the left wall folds down and out to become the counter in the salon. The counter has a curved edge and reveals an arched recess in the wall of the salon. Drawn laboriously along a curved ceiling track a large pair of blue sequined scissors, glitter above the stage announcing the name of the salon ‘Get Nikked (spelt NIKKED)’. The furniture in the salon is predominantly pink, consisting of a retro hair dryer on wheels and a chair. These face the audience as if looking into a mirror. When the counter is returned to the upright wall, it disappears, and the props are removed.

A similar shaped counter drops out of the right wall to become a suspended office desk in the Doctor’s surgery. Medical books and objects fill the curved bookshelf, and a laptop sits on the floating desk. An office chair on castors completes the doctor’s surgery.

Hanging themed banners in patchwork fabric pieces, announce key scene changes. This theme is first introduced by the cross stitched ‘Welcome to Appleton’ sign.

During the two talk back radio sequences, cross stitched Emojis signs magically light up as they move across the blackened stage.

At the local produce market, a patchwork sign announces ‘Crop swop’ in bright patterned fabrics. This scene also has a small fold out market table with a red and white checked tablecloth and a neat red and white market umbrella. The white sections of the umbrella are hand painted with bright coloured apples. There is also a selection of large cane baskets, filled with apples and other produce.

A patchwork banner featuring oversized bras, undies, and socks, hanging on a washing line, is flown across the stage to set the scene for ‘Barb’s Australian Story’, as she recalls the iconic beginnings that led to the ladies joining in the Appleton Potato Race.

The Appleton Show Pavilion is utilised for several scenes. In one flashback, we revisit the ‘Appleton Show of 1988’. Two large posters decorate the industrial sized wooden doors which are created, when the back iron wall is hinged open from the centre. A low corrugated iron fence is revealed sitting behind the pavilion doors. Kaleidoscopic lighting is used to reimagine the 1988 Under 12’s Appleton Physical Culture Competition.

On the evening prior to the great race, the Appleton Show Pavilion becomes the potato packing shed. Large potato filled bins on wheels, are strategically pulled out of the back wall and placed back-to-back in a central position. When packed with potatoes, the twenty-kilogram sacks for the women and fifty-kilogram sacks for the men, are stacked into the cavities of the wall alongside a set of industrial scales, in readiness for race day.

The first scene is a meeting of the Appleton Show Committee which is held in the local Pub. A light with three amber coloured lamp shades hangs from the ceiling above the square table and two chairs.

**Characters and Costumes**

First, we meet Penny, at 40 years old, she’s now career woman, a doctor. Her slender frame is accentuated by the pale blue and white check pants- suit, with fashionably flared cuffs and asymmetric collar and hem lines. Penny has tightly curled blonde hair to her shoulders and holds herself upright, open shoulders and confidently strides around in sensible tawny brown leather, lace up shoes. Her wristwatch with a brown leather band, has a large round face. In her surgery she wears a white embroidered blouse with long puffed sleeves tucked into pale blue pleated cotton trousers. Around her neck is slung a stethoscope.

Bev and Barb two long standing friends, both in their 70’s often appear together.

Bev is stocky in frame and slightly stooped in her black, white and grey checked flannel shirt. This hangs loosely over deep blue, hiking pants, as she shuffles about in comfortable dark slip shoes. Bev’s long grey hair is dragged up into a ponytail, trendles of which, escape around her face. Around her neck hang a pair of thin gold rimmed glasses on a cord. She totes a grey carry bag with “Buy Local” written on the side.

Barb, conversely, bounces about in tidy cream coloured lace up shoes, long loose blouse and baggy trousers, in shades of Olive green. Even her glasses are green. Regularly smiling with sparkling eyes, her round face is framed by her short grey bobbed hair.

Draped across one shoulder is a long grey woollen scarf and around her neck is a string of pale green gemstones.

Nikki, Penny’s cousin, also 40, owns and runs the local hairdresser and waits the tables at the Pub as a second job. She’s tall and robust and a bit rough round the edges. Her leopard print leggings appear from under the grey publican apron, over a black t-shirt. In her salon, she adds a pale blue denim mini skirt and black equipment belt with a pair of gold scissors emblazoned on it. Her black trainers have pink laces the same shade of bubble gum, as her ankle socks. Her hair is brunette parted in the centre, artificially curled, with dark pink streaks in the front.

Rania’s clothing is colourful and patterned. Her long dark hair is wrapped up in a knotted silky head scarf, her dark features and eye makeup are accentuated, by large white daisy petal earrings. Around her waist is a leather platted belt holding up ¾ length, loose legged, black and white striped trousers. Her blouse is short sleeved in pale yellow floral print and her boots are dark brown leather. Rania is in her 30’s and stands strongly at approx. 5’6’’. At the Crop Swap, Rania adds a collarless short bomber jacket, made from multiple patterned fabrics, sewn together, a zip up the front. In her training clothes Rania has black leggings under a maroon pair of shorts, a bright blue t-shirt and black trainers.

Three of the Characters appear in a flash back to 1988, where Nikki at the age of 10 is competing in a physical culture competition. Her long dark hair is swept up in a bun on top of her head, adorned with a pink, white and lime green bow. She struts and gesticulates with exaggerated dance moves, in a shiny blue, long sleeved leotard, decorated with lime green tule netting, and pink ribbon.

Penny also aged 10, her hair in bunches sports a head band with two potatoes bobbling on the end of springs. She’s in a red and white cowboy shirt with red pockets, tucked into a knee length pair of denim shorts. She squints through a pair of large round glasses and wears long socks and lace up shoes.

Bev has transformed into a bouncy 30-year-old version of herself in a pink blouse, bright floral skirt, and a redhead curly wig.

A mystery man, Alexander Strumpet, appears in a blue, black a white nylon sports tracksuit. His face is obscured by the hood apart from a long droopy black moustache.

From time to time, a male and a female stage assistant, make an appearance in denim jeans and checked shirts, work boots and Akubra hats, as they deftly move scenery around onstage.

**Cast**

Penny Anderson Anna Steen

Bev Armstrong Carmel Johnson

Barb Ling Genevieve Mooy

Nikki Armstrong Sarah Brokensha

Rania Hamid Susie Youssef

**Production Credits**

Writer Melanie Tait

Director Elena Carapetis

Designer Kathryn Sproul

Lighting Designer Nic Mollison

Composer/ Sound designer Andrew Howard

Accent Coach Jennifer Innes

Choreographer Carol Wellman Kelly

Wigs/Dresser Jana DeBiasi

Stage Manager Gabrielle Hornhardt

Stage Assistants Jennifer King and Grant Pertrusevics

**Access Information**

For up-to-date access information please contact the Royalty Theatre

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This document has been written and produced by Carol Wellman Kelly and Julie Fielke.

For more information on audio described performances please contact Jody at Access2Arts using the email address [audio.describer@access2arts.org.au](mailto:audio.describer@access2arts.org.au) or speak to the audio describers at the theatre.