Introductory Notes

1. Introductory information

**Event name:**

Chalkface, by Australian writer Angela Betzien

**Event presenter:**

State Theatre SA and Sydney Theatre Company in association with Adina Apartment Hotels

**Event synopsis:**

Chalkface is set in the present day. In this black comedy, schoolteacher tales are tested to the limit when the principal assigns school terror Hurricane Little to the class of experienced teacher Pat and new teacher Anna.

**Audio Describers**: Jo Ankor and Jules Fielke

1. Set description

Chalkface takes place in a daggy staff room somewhere in Australia in the current day. Two fluorescent strip-lights reveal the staff room floor - half dirty once-cream carpet and grubby ancient linoleum. The walls are dingy faded pale green on the lower half and even more dingy, peeling, once-white paint on the upper half. The walls are adorned with a notice board carrying skew-whiff pinned notes, several sad posters promoting ‘Keep Calm and Keep Teaching’-type messages, a large set of wooden pigeonholes with teachers’ name in bold print and topped with forgotten school trophies, fading pictures are blu-tacked above a photocopier, an antiquated speaker, an even more ancient alarm, a fire extinguisher, wall phone, defunct clock and two semi-rusted air vents. EXIT signs glow green and white.

To the left is a portable blackboard, several mis-matched casual chairs around a low 1960s coffee table, a sad plant in a pot and a hat stand holding raincoats and old bags. One chair is upholstered in pale blue fabric with a print of flower bunches on it and beside this is a very small round side table. Another seat is a double with bright orange upholstery. Just behind these, a door with a glass window and pull-down blind leads into a tiled hallway. To the right of this doorway stands a red-lidded secure-disposal wastepaper bin, an old desk carrying a black Public Address (PA) microphone and scattered papers (beneath which sits the Lost & Found box), then the bank of pigeon-holes and a second door with a narrow bubble-glass window, also leading into a tiled corridor. To the right of these are the doors for the female and male toilets.

The right-hand side of the set consists of a kitchenette, containing cupboards and drawers painted a tired cream, a sink with a hot water unit above it and a large fridge. A microwave and kettle are squeezed onto the kitchen bench along with hand sanitiser, a big tin of coffee powder, box of teabags, old water bottles and similar debris. Mugs occupy an upper cupboard. A blue and white checked tea towel is thrust through a drawer handle while a vacuum cleaner leans against a yellow-lined white rubbish bin. The fridge sports a scattering of magnets and a green first-aid kit on top. Next to the fridge is a pair of securely locked grey cupboard doors (the Stationery Cupboard!) and finally the photocopier, a paper-shredder and the requisite stack of boxes of copy-paper.

Centre-stage, two white-topped staffroom table form an L-shaped work space surrounded by five stackable black plastic chairs. A large sticky-tape dispenser, more hand sanitiser, piles of papers, a large staple-gun and assorted bits and pieces are jumbled across the tabletop.

Various musical and percussion instruments, such as tambourine, rhythm-sticks and recorder, are used during the play. The teacher Denise arrives with these in a large cardboard box. A xylophone also features as part of the PA system. Other props include: two lengths of bunting, a large cake with a very large cake-knife, a thermos flask, a guinea-pig in a cage and a guinea pig not in a cage.

At one point, Anna and Pat meet inside the Stationery Cupboard. Shelves of brightly coloured folders, water bottles, packets of coloured paper, crayons and stationery supplies are revealed. In this tight space, Anna and Pat sit, knee-to-knee, almost nose-to-nose, on cartons of copy-paper.

Please note that a device of quick visual vignettes is used in the play; brief actions, separated by blackouts, build a comedic sequence. These are described, with a single word - ‘blackout’- separating their quick passage.

The song we hear near the end was written by Jess Dunn, composer for the play.

1. Characters and Costumes

Pat Novitsky – Catherine McClements

Denise Hart – Susan Prior

Douglas Housten – Nathan OKeefe

Anna Park – Stephanie Somerville

Cheryl Filch – Michelle Ny

Steve Budge – Ezra Juanta

In order of appearance:

Denise is played by Susan Prior. Denise is a music teacher. Her brown hair is an angled bob cut into the nape of her neck. She has a nervous scattered energy. She wears a hairband, dangly earrings, a white button through liberty shirt with a small floral print, a knee length dark green corduroy skirt, short sox and shiny beige MaryJane shoes with heavy black soles. Later a beige lacy knit cardigan and brown shoulder bag are added. As the play progresses the skirt is pulled up to accommodate her growing baby bump. In book week Denise wears ‘A Very Hungry Caterpillar’ costume.

Catherine McClements plays Pat Novitsky, she has messy dark curls, deep set blue eyes, and a wide mouth. She is clearly depressed, yet still moves quickly in keeping with her somewhat sharp character. She is slender and wears beige pants and t-shirt under a navy puffer jerkin. Metallic lace-ups complete her outfit. Later a soft rust coloured sweater with high roll neck is worn and she carries a large beige tote-like shoulder bag. For the sleep over at the school, she wears a black onesie with white bones, like an Xray, under her blue jerkin. It has a white hood. In book week Pat wears an overcoat and padding as the headmistress in ‘Matilda’.

Douglas is played by Nathan O’Keefe. He first appears on stage with his bicycle, in cycling gear, including goggles and shoes. His white helmet is emblazoned with red and blue flashes, a black lycra suit with a deep scooped neckline is worn under a tight zippered black top. He changes into a grey, brown suit that befits his status as the Principal. His long brown hair is worn in a ponytail, and he has a trimmed beard and moustache. He wears a green striped tie and a pale pattered white and green shirt. His sox are bright orange above black leather shoes. In book week Douglas wears a ‘Margaret Thatcher’ mask.

Anna is played by Stephanie Somerville. She has thick mid length blondish locks parted in the middle and often smiles (she looks like fun!). She wears a hip length white shirt under a short, knitted vest in vibrant orange and pale blue check pants. The front of the vest is striped in alternating bands of orange, purple and pale pink. To this ensemble Anna adds a bright multi-coloured flower necklace, fine rings on her hands which have blue painted fingernails. She wears chunky red heels covered with pale blue spots. ‘Cool to be Kind’ in printed on her cotton shoulder bag/tote. Later she adds a longline cardigan that is chequered in large red and pink squares. For the sleep over at the school Anna wears Dr Suess Pyjamas and pink fluffy slippers. In book week Anna dresses as the Lorax, from Dr Suess.

Flitch, the officious administration manager played by Michelle Ny is passive aggressive. Her thick dark hair is cut blunt at shoulder length and bounces briskly as she walks. She wears a charcoal grey suit teamed with an oyster grey silk shirt. The skirt has kick pleats at the lower back edge, complemented by black stockings, and heels. For book week she wears a red cloak and white hat as a character in ‘The Handmaids Tale’.

Steve, played by Ezra Juanta is a gay PE teacher. Half of his dark hair is pulled up and back into a man bun, he is bearded and has a moustache. He wears a navy vest over a white t shirt, navy shorts over black leggings with fluro pink detailing, white sox and green/blue sneakers. A black man-bag is slung across his body, and a wide black elastic support is strapped around his middle. He carries around a pale blue donut cushion. In book week Steve appears in an ‘Angelina Ballerina’ costume. The mouse mask is pushed back so it sits on the top of his head, he wears a pink tutu with a long white mouse tail, and ribboned ballet slippers laced around bright pink tights.

Lanyards with keys hang around their necks, and the majority also wear wrist watches.

1. Cast and Creatives

Playwright Angela Betzein

Director Jessica Arthur

Designer Ailsa Paterson

Lighting Designer Mark Shelton

Composer & Sound Designer Jessica Dunn

Assistant Director Clement Rukundo

**Performers:**

Ezra Juanta – Steve Budge

Catherine McClements – Pat Novitsky

Michelle Ny– Cheryl Filch

Nathan O'Keefe– Douglas Housten

Susan Prior– Denise Hart

Stephanie Somerville– Anna Park

1. Event details

Event date and time: The first audio-described performance is **Saturday 13th August** at 2pm, with a touch tour commencing at 1pm.

The second audio-described performance is on **Monday 15th August**, at 6.30pm, with a touch tour commencing at 5.30pm.

A post-show Q&A follows this performance and will be audio described.

Event location: The production takes place in the **Dunstan Playhouse** at the Adelaide Festival Centre.

Ticket information: Tickets through Ticketek

1. Access information

The production takes place in the **Dunstan Playhouse** at the Adelaide Festival Centre. Access is through the Playhouse foyer via the Riverbank Concourse.

The **Dunstan Playhouse** is wheelchair accessible and guide dog friendly and there are two accessible toilets in the venue. One is opposite the bar adjacent the Space Foyer. The other is opposite the main reception desk, near Door One of the Dunstan Playhouse.

Getting to the event:

Please contact the **Adelaide Festival Centre** on 131 246 for details on current Covid requirements and the best access route to the theatre complex.

Assistance: assistance is offered by venue staff