

NAOMI

BY PATRICK LIVESEY

DIRECTED BY BRONWEN COLEMAN

In 2015 Patrick's mum took her own life.

How did this happen? Who was to blame?

Portraying eight characters from Naomi's life, Patrick uses their real words – drawn from over thirty hours of interviews – to try and answer these questions.

This intimate and intense solo performance premiered at Adelaide Fringe earlier this year, receiving the Adelaide Critics Circle and Mental Health Awareness Awards as well as two Weekly Awards.

Brought to you by the creator of Fringe hits '*The Boy, George*' and '*DIRT*' and directed by Bronwen Coleman (*The Actors Studio, NYC*), Naomi dives beneath the surface of suburban facades to uncover a community left in anguish. With love, humour and unwavering honesty, it attempts to solve the unsolvable and offers audiences a rare insight into unspeakable tragedy.

With original music composed by Biddy Connor (*The Letter String Quartet*), Naomi is raw and courageous storytelling and a must-see show this Melbourne Fringe.

All photos by Jacinta Oaten





"Astonishing, raw and gut-wrenching. It's a triumph"

- *The Advertiser*



"A masterclass in acting... Proves that Patrick Livesey is
a force in modern Australian theatre."

- *Stage Whispers*



"Raw and hypnotic... a wonder to behold"

- *Mindshare*



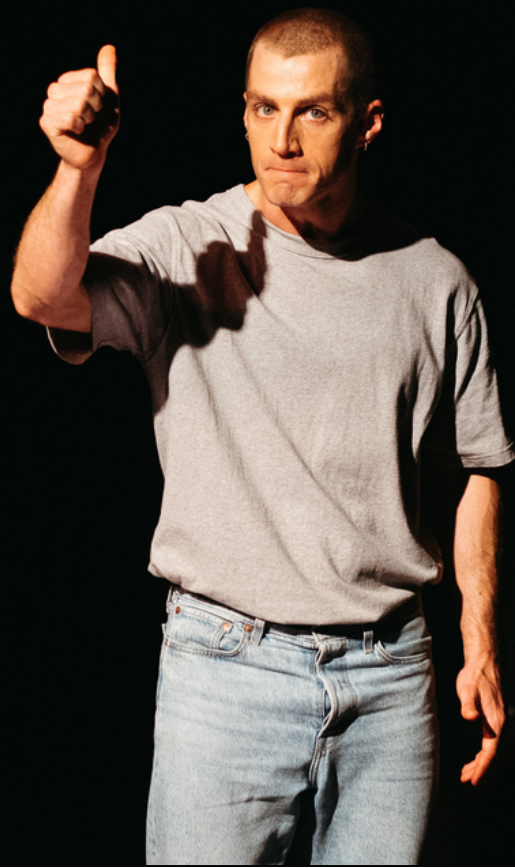
"Compelling and important theatre"

- *The Barefoot Review*



"Gritty and heart-felt"

- *Global Media Post*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work wouldn't be possible if it weren't for the bravery and faith offered to me by those I interviewed. Thank you for entrusting me with your memories of mum.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that we meet today on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, traditional owners and continuing custodians of this land. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging. This land was stolen and never ceded.

Always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Acknowledgement of Mental Illness & Substance Abuse

We acknowledge the individual and collective expertise of those with a living or lived experience of mental health, alcohol and other drug issues in attendance today including the experience of people who have been carers, families or supporters.

We recognise their vital contribution to this conversation and value the courage of those who share this unique perspective for the purpose of learning and growing together to achieve better outcomes for all.

Thanks

This season of *Naomi* would not have been feasible without the support of The Iceberg Foundation, The Pulteney Old Scholars Foundation, Sofitel Melbourne on Collins, The Dream Skin Clinic, Sam Harvey, Christina Jarvis, Nick Warden, Pinky Watson, Rosemary Walls & Combi Coffee. Endless gratitude to them and their extraordinary generosity.

Special thanks as well to Christopher Cullen-Watson, Joy Groves, Sue Raymond, Tyson Leung, Christine Meyer, Angus Cameron, Melinda Pike, Marie Louise, Hilary Rowe & Donna McFetridge.

DISCLAIMER

The words and recollections included in this production have been taken with full knowledge and consent on behalf of the interview subjects. All names and key signified have been changed.

The creative team behind *Naomi* have sought to create a compelling and illuminating insight into a specific experience of mental illness, substance abuse and suicide for use in a dramatic context.

Nothing in this production should be taken as fact or assumed to be as such. All recollections are subjective and incomplete accounts of the events that inspired them.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Pat recorded more than 30 hours of interviews with Naomi's friends and family to make this play. Central to our early developments was the project of interrogating which parts of these stories, of all of this incredibly personal material, would make up the play's shape. In addition, Pat had promised the Holden Street Theatres, where the play was to be premiered as part of the Adelaide Fringe Festival earlier this year, a play that would run 60 minutes – we had our work cut out for us.

Which parts of Naomi's story, as sprawling and complex as the story of any of one us, should be included? Any work of art is ideological – and what's left out is as significant as what remains. I felt we had to be very careful – how would we represent Naomi?

As a person with a lived experience of chronic mental illness, I felt sensitive to this: this idea of representation. A character who didn't end up in the play, who in early drafts Pat called "Chris," said:

I mean maybe I did think she was – there was something wrong when we split up. But it was not like it was speaking to someone else – see you know depression and things like that it's not like you're suddenly speaking to a different person. That's not what happens. You are speaking to this person you know, they are speaking to you about stuff that you understand and can relate to, it's – it's that, the experience or the logic is just skewed. And you listen to it and you think well that's just fucked.

Mental illness is tricky. My experience is that we often accept it in theory more easily than in practise. It can be hard, for any of us, to accept a loved one can't snap out of it. We need understanding, discussion, language around mental illness. My hope is that some of that might be gently provoked by this play.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

(Trigger warning: eating disorders)

From the age of 13 I struggled with eating disorders. In year 12, at the age of 18, my bulimia was worse than it had ever been. One weekend whilst mum was away I burst the blood vessels across my face from making myself sick. When mum returned that Sunday I tearfully apologised and promised it would never happen again.

At this point in time we'd been on this journey together for three years; ever since I outed myself in the car one morning on the way to school. Mum had taken me to weekly therapy, she'd read every book prescribed to her and had learnt all my tricks (or at least attempted to). Looking at Mum that Sunday I knew I had pushed us both into uncharted territory.

I sheepishly told her I wouldn't be going to school the next day. WebMD had informed me my face could take up to a week to heal. There was no way I was going to school.

What happened next infuriated me. But more than that it shocked me. Here was the person who once cried having threatened me with a wooden spoon, who let me have as many "mental health days" as I needed, who joked with me about how many absentee days I could rack up in my end of term report card. Here she was telling me that I had no choice but to go to school.

And worse still, I knew she was right...

Up until that point my illness had existed in private. It had been locked away behind bathroom doors, buried beneath shame and thriving in its isolation. Not anymore.

The next day sucked. As did the days following. I'm not certain how obvious it was to my peers but for me everything had changed. There was no more hiding.

It would be two years until I made myself sick for the final time and those thoughts will be with me for the rest of my life. But my process of healing and acceptance started that day when mum forced me out of the darkness and into the light of my high school quadrangle.

Honesty is hard. It's uncomfortable and messy and it's way easier to just not go to school. But the problems don't go anywhere unless we're willing to confront them. I share *Naomi* in the hope that mum's story may help a few more people find their way out of the darkness.



Naomi Jean Fornarino

January 29, 1965 - September 16, 2015

CREATIVE TEAM



DIRECTOR/DRAMATURG, Bronwen Coleman (she/her) is an award winning and proudly neurodivergent director, actor and teacher based in Melbourne. She is a Life Member of the Actors Studio, and has appeared in theatre, television and films internationally, including opposite Phillip Seymour Hoffman in the Academy Award winning film Capote. Under Bronwen's direction, Angus Cameron's *Dirt* won both the Frank Ford and Critics Circle Awards at the Adelaide Fringe in 2021. This production of *Dirt* went on to win Best Theatre at Fringeworld Perth in 2022. More recently, Bronwen developed and directed Patrick Livesey's *Naomi* which premiered at the Adelaide Fringe, winning the Critics Circle and Mindshare Mental Health Awareness Awards. Critics have called Bronwen's work as a director "fantastic", and "visionary". She is known for her "character-centered" approach, drawing on techniques developed at the Actors Studio. Bronwen is a graduate of the VCA and the Actors Studio MFA Program (New York).



COMPOSER, Biddy Connor (she/her) has composed, arranged and performed for a diverse range of projects including film, television, theatre, large-scale community events and games. In 2018 Biddy composed and produced the music for the animated interactive game *Paperbark* and live acrobatic show, *The Bottle Collector*. In 2016 she was a finalist in The Melbourne Music Prize Outstanding Musicians Award. Biddy is the Artistic Director and viola player for The Letter String Quartet. In 2019, TLSQ presented a work in progress with support from Chamber Made and Nite Art called *All that you hear is all that is heard*. She has released an album of original songs under the moniker *Sailor Days*. Biddy is regularly called upon as a violist, singer and musical saw player. She has worked with Spiritualized, Winged Victory for The Sullen (USA), Jherek Bischoff (USA), Jen Cloher, Darren Sylvester, Richard J Frankland, John Cale, Sophie Koh, Goon Sax, Mick Harvey, Grand Salvo, Laura Jean, Jon Rose, Gang of Youths and Evelyn Ida Morris. Biddy produces and hosts a weekly show on 3MBS called *Classically Kids*, a music show for younger listeners.



CHOREOGRAPHER, Siobhan McKenna (she/her) is a Melbourne/Naarm based choreographer and dancer, graduating from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2016 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance and graduating in 2021 with Honours. Siobhan has since presented her award-winning choreography internationally as well as in key Australian festivals such as Dance Massive, and developed ongoing relationships with major Melbourne companies such as Temperance Hall, Lucy Guerin Inc. and Dancehouse. Siobhan's choreographic credits include, Darebin Arts Speakeasy: 'Rhythmic Fictions' (2022), Lucy Guerin Inc. in partnership with the Substation: 'Drama 2,3,4' (2019), Dancehouse with Dance Massive Festival: 'Utterance' (2019), Victorian College of the Arts: *Petri Dish* (2016).

CREATIVE TEAM



LIGHTING DESIGNER, Harrie Hogan (she/her) is a lighting designer based in Naarm. She began her training at Newtown High School of the Performing Arts before completing a bachelor's degree in production at the Victorian College of the Arts (2019). Her recent design credits include Kerosene (Benjamin Nichol, 2021), 5 Stars (Kissing Booth Productions, 2022), Grace (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre, 2022) and Nothing (A Ry Presentation, 2022). She also works as the production manager for Na Djinang Circus, helping bring their repertoire of shows to audiences across Australia. In 2022, Harrie was the Malthouse Besen Placement in lighting and nominated for best lighting design at the Green Room Awards for her work on Kerosene. Harrie is a keen collaborator and proud to be counted amongst the growing number of women in her field.



SET & COSTUME DESIGNER, XaSha Chua-Huggins (she/her) is a Set and Costume Designer/Maker who intends to create escapist outlets. She is eager to provide opportunities for audiences to periodically observe and exist within alternate realities. In 2022, some of XaSha's design credits include Set and Costume Designer for Naomi directed by Bronwen Coleman, Design Assistant to Emily Collett for RAWCAS' A Resourceful Hero directed by Kat Cornwell. In 2021, XaSha graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Design and Production), at the Victorian College of the Arts; The University of Melbourne's Faculty of Fine Arts and Music. Some of her credits include; Set Designer for Sweet Charity (2021) directed by Jayde Kircher; Associate Set Designer for Cloud Nine (2021) directed by Maude Davey; Set and Costume Designer for Pile of Bones (2020) choreographed by Stephanie Lake. Devoted to generating moments to dream, XaSha aspires to create unique worlds for all forms of entertainment.



CREATOR/PERFORMER, Patrick Livesey (they/them) is a queer non-binary multi award-winning actor, writer and producer. Their work has received recognition from theatre festivals around the country, in particular for 'The Boy, George' (NZ Tour Ready Award, Best Performance nominee, Melbourne Fringe 2018), 'DIRT by Angus Cameron' (Best Theatre, Fringe World 2022, Critics Circle Award, The Frank Ford Award, Weekly Award for Best Theatre, Adelaide Fringe 2021) and 'Naomi' (Critics Circle Award, Mental Health Awareness Award, Weekly Award for Best Theatre, Adelaide Fringe 2022). In 2022 their play 'Gone Girls' was programmed at Gasworks Arts Park and 'WOOLF' won the inaugural Fast Track Award from Midsumma Festival. As an actor they have featured in '#KWANDA' by Tom Ballard and 'The Campaign by Champion Decent'. In 2022 they received The Marten Bequest to further their actor training at Maggie Flanigan Studio in New York City. Patrick is a 2017 Theatre Practice graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts.