



Beneath The Music

Encounter

Produced by Performing Lines WA

Contact: Jeremy Smith

jeremy@performinglineswa.org.au

08 9200 6212

Level 1, King St Arts Centre, Murray St, Perth
performinglines.org.au

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Key Contacts | Performing Lines

Senior Producer Jeremy Smith
jeremy@performinglineswa.org.au
tel: +618 9200 6213

Production Manager Nick Glen
nick@performinglines.org.au
tel: +61447 845 081

Marketing Manager Cecile Lucas
cecile@performinglines.wa.org.au
tel: +61 416 865 526

Director's note - Jay Emmanuel

The conceptual playing ground for *Beneath The Music* was born from two historical events: the joy of legalised same-sex marriage in Australia (2017), and shortly after, the relief of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in India (2019). Both were watershed moments in the fight for equal rights. Though society and law at large had somewhat 'caught up', change and acceptance are slow to come.

These events birthed moments of solidarity for some, but they were also met with opposition by others. Then there is a third group, those at the divide of wanting more change but not knowing how to reconcile the past. How does an entire culture honour its traditions and beliefs whilst shifting towards a space of acceptance? How does one human being honour two worlds within them, with the clarity of one path? As a Queer man born in India and living in Australia, I am someone living between two worlds. I was driven to create this work by my need to understand how change comes about, and how one can accept change when it arrives. How does one transform?

As part of the process, I wanted to explore Queerness, from contemporary and ancient perspectives. This led me to the Mahabharata - the epic Indian Sanskrit poem which is one of the foundational pillars of traditional and popular Indian culture. There are a multitude of stories of transformations in Mahabharata; gods transforming into humans, humans to Demigods, humans to animals, man to woman, and so on. These transformations embody Queerness in its complexity. These stories gave visibility to Queerness inside of an ancient epic, and a place in history.

Through the Mahabharata I found *Until the Lions* by Karthika Nair - a book of narrative poetry that is written from the point of view of characters from Mahabharata who are outliers; from the silent but powerful matriarchs, the Queers, sages, serpent queens who are only fleetingly mentioned in the Mahabharata and whose perspective and voice we rarely see or hear. At first, *Until the Lions* was a source of inspiration. However, during the development, it became apparent that we needed a writer, and it was a dream come true when Karthika herself accepted our invitation to write this new work.

This piece has taken years to develop and nurture by many collaborators and associates because there was so much to discover and a lot that was invisible due to erasure spanning centuries. It is a work that embodies Queerness in its creation where boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, language, caste, and geography, are dissolved. Instead, the pillars that hold this work are the universal spaces of imagination, authenticity, and empathy.

It has been an absolute pleasure bringing this story to life, to rewrite history, to reclaim stories that are forgotten, and to reach just one step closer to a place where everyone can belong. No outsiders. No disposables.

I hope mostly that this piece is a meditation on the nature of change and acceptance.

Writer's note - Karthika Nair

Stories We Hold, Stories That Hold Us...

The pulse is a rhythm. The breath is a rhythm. They are rhythms that lie beneath the music. Beneath all music. Conceptualising and writing *Beneath the Music* was an attempt to bring to the surface these often inaudible rhythms connecting us all to each other, as humans, as living beings. The rhythms that connect us across territory and time, gender and race and other human-made constructs...

Beneath the Music is, perhaps, wish fulfilment of the kind that life does not always provide. Then again, as the old Urdu dictum goes, ummeed pé duniya kaayam hai: the world is tethered by hope. And sometimes we need to hope, to shape, our desired world into being, bit by little bit. *Beneath the Music* is my expression of that hope, of our shared hope, for all those of us who may have been termed different – for a myriad of reasons – and struggled for a sense of belonging.

We seem to be reverting to an age when who we are, who we are not, increasingly gets determined as though identity is an unchanging and unchangeable single. We, as nations, faiths, beings, bodies, memories...It feels strange, it feels painful, because everything should remind us of the opposite: myth and history, art and geography, and if not anything else, the earth itself. *Beneath the Music* is also a reminder, as much to myself as anyone else, that life – human life, planetary life, cosmic life – has been a story of unending flux. A reminder that, sometimes, stories can be more than stories.

One story which changed my life as a chronically ill teenager was Haroun and the Sea of Stories, Salman Rushdie's magnificent, creative response to the fatwa. I read it at eighteen, in hospital after my fifteenth surgery, desolate at the thought of being dependent for the rest of my life. Haroun . . . gave me resistance, which is even more than hope. It taught me that I could be more than a dysfunctional body, that not everything was defined by an external reality. With *Beneath The Music*, I would like to thank the tale-tellers of the world who have given us the stories that we can hold on to, for hope and for resistance. For life on our terms.

Review excerpts

“Beneath the Music is a beautiful piece of theatre that is poetic, highly physical, and very sensual.” [Stage Whispers](#)

“A very different and moving piece of theatre, Beneath the Music, easily holds its audience for its 75-minute duration. A thoughtful, engrossing, and engaging production.” [Stage Whispers](#)

“Beneath the Music is an elegant and moving story of familial redemption.” [Limelight Magazine](#)

“As a queer audience member, I felt buoyed by a story that finds acceptance, one that traces our roots to ancient texts, that shows us that we have existed since the beginning. (...) Ultimately, Beneath the Music brings joy.” [Seesaw Magazine](#)

Audience Feedback

“An amazing show. Well done to all involved. It was a joy to witness - the music, lights, projections, props, movement and mostly importantly perhaps, the cast, came together seamlessly like a beautiful tapestry. A story worth telling and done so in a very thoughtful and considered way.”

“I loved the actors deliverance of the whole story, the music, the cultural references, everything was awesome and I enjoyed every minute of watching it.”

“It gave me a perspective I hadn't thought of before.”

“So wonderful to see theatre of this calibre in a non-western theatre style with a wonderfully diverse cast. The guest international stars were awesome. Loved the movement (of bodies and sets), the traditional dance, the script and direction. Bravo - a worthy successor to Children of the Sea.”

“Jay Emmanuel is an important Australian theatre maker and should be supported on his mission to make visible invisible stories.”

“Really beautifully done, was so awesome seeing Tamil creatives and POC creatives being platformed.”

Performance history

June 2023 | Subiaco Arts Centre, Subiaco WA

Marketing Information & Acknowledgment Requirements

Any variation to the requirements below must be agreed with Performing Lines' Producer and Marketing Manager. **All marketing materials available for download from:**

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/cwzve5uh0ls47zd0wva8b/h?dl=0&rkey=eapihvwbad6j17t2hvg9k3aci>

Billing

<Your Venue>

presents

Beneath The Music

An Encounter Production

Written by Karthika Nair

Concept and Direction by Jay Emmanuel

Produced by Performing Lines WA

Creative Team

Concept and Direction Jay Emmanuel

Writer Karthika Nair

Performers Kalieaswari Srinivasan, Manjula Radha Krishnan, Ramith Ramesh and Tyrone Earl Lraé Robinson

Choreographer James O'Hara

Set and Lighting Design Willy Cessa

Sound Design and Composition Tao Issaro

Lighting Realiser Peter Young

Costume Design Nicole Marrington

Costume Consultant Kalieaswari Srinivasan

Video Artist Elham Eshraghian-Haakansson

Video Artist Collaborator Asha Kiani

Terrakoothu Master Kalaimamani P. K. Sambandan Thambiran

Production Manager TBC

Stage Manager TBC

Intimacy Coach Gabrielle Metcalf

Produced by Performing Lines WA

Presented by Encounter

Short Copy (150 words)

Please note: *this is indicative copy only. We will work with your marketing teams to create copy best suited to your presentation context.*

Beneath the Music is an intimate yet epic story of a mother and son's journey of acceptance and understanding. Created by Jay Emmanuel and written by Karthika Nair, this poetic physical theatre work celebrates gender fluidity and queerness across generations and cultures. Keshav and his husband start a new life in Australia, but when Keshav's mother asks for his help in India, he must confront her disapproval of who he is and the life he has chosen. Through an unexpected encounter with an ancient festival and a traditional Indian story, mother and son navigate the path towards love's acknowledgment and acceptance. Drawing inspiration from Karthika Nair's book, *Until the Lions*, this captivating performance explores an Indian classic through queer perspectives, unveiling diverse notions of gender and sexuality. With a talented cast and creative team, *Beneath the Music* weaves together dance and theatre to tell a poignant tale of identity and understanding.

Long Copy (230 words)

Please note: *this is indicative copy only. We will work with your marketing teams to create copy best suited to your presentation context.*

Beneath the Music is an exploration of the journey from resistance to acceptance of queerness, especially by those we hold dear. Created by Jay Emmanuel and written by Karthika Nair, this poetic new physical theatre work is, above all, a celebration of gender fluidity and queerness across generations, traditions, and cultures.

Keshav and his husband are settling into their first home together in Australia. When Keshav is asked by his mother to return to India to help the family, he must confront her disapproval of who he is and the life he has chosen. A surprise encounter with an ancient festival and a traditional Indian story help mother and son on the road to love's acknowledgment and acceptance.

Partly drawn from French-Indian poet Karthika Nair's award-winning book *Until the Lions*, *Beneath the Music* looks at this Indian classic through queer eyes to uncover and celebrate different cultural and generational ideas of gender, sexuality, and intimacy. A team of internationally renowned performers and a stellar creative team bring this physical yet poetic work to life through poignant and energetic theatrical vignettes that combine dance and theatre.

Beneath the Music is a story of a mother and son's journey of acceptance. A story driven by love, it is ultimately a search for identity and understanding that will strike a chord with anyone who has ever felt they are living in two worlds.

Logos

All logos available from:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/bcajmdaezwmn75f3e2a0x/h?dl=0&rlkey=b2leck8m0gga9vo3iahx46owb>

1. Encounter
2. Performing Lines WA
3. DLGSCI
4. Creative Australia
5. Fremantle Arts Centre and City of Fremantle
6. Creative Partnership Australia
7. Footscray Community Arts

Logos must be included on all advertising and promotional material associated with the tour and performances of *Beneath The Music* unless explicitly agreed otherwise, including, but not limited to, season brochures, flyers, posters, advertisements, media releases, promotional videos, web pages and programs.

Acknowledgements

Produced by Performing Lines WA, *Beneath The Music* was originally commissioned by Footscray Community Arts with the support of The Malcolm Robertson Foundation. The creative development has been supported by the WA Government through the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Creative Partnership Australia, Fremantle Arts Centre and the City of Fremantle. The world premiere of *Beneath The Music* was supported by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its arts funding and advisory body; and the WA Government through the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries through its Western Australian Theatre Development Initiative program. The play includes excerpts from the writer's book *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata* (Archipelago Books USA).

Acknowledgements must be included in addition to logos where space allows, including, but not limited to, season brochures, flyers, web pages and programs. These should also be acknowledged in speeches and announcements where appropriate.

Thank you **Encounter offers special thanks to development performing artists and consultants:** Harry Kearton, Harish Vijaya, Nadika, Sophia Kaushik, Eli Lam, Daksha Sheth, Pavan Hari, Jeremy James, Praashekh Borkar, Ella Hetherington, Sabarish Menon, Pratiksha Sindhu, Daniel Martis, Manuao TeAotonga, Dev Issaro and Matt Edgerton.

Encounter thanks the following for their generous support: Sunstone Legal, Cullen Mcleod Lawyers, Greenwoods and Herbert Smith Freehills

Images **Production shots (by Dan Grant):**
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/q68x62d4v48s89qvjkgvm/h?dl=0&rlkey=hqycaogi6f2xuql3ksz6zcd3s>

Video links **Promo video:** <https://vimeo.com/880386368>
Promo video (w/ Vox Pops): <https://vimeo.com/880386781>
Full archival (not to share publicly, password: ENCOUNTER):
<https://vimeo.com/837789327?share=copy>

Duration 75min

Warnings Contains depictions of intimacy, sexual references and strobe lighting.

Age suitability Recommended for ages 15+

Artist Biographies: **Jay Emmanuel | Creator and Director**
 for use online, in printed programs, etc
 Born in India and based in Australia, Jay is an internationally acclaimed performer, writer, and director; and is currently the Artistic Director of Encounter. Jay migrated to Australia in 2009 and is a graduate of the Jacques Lecoq School in Paris. Jay’s recent works include *The Tides of Longing* (Western Australian Symphony Orchestra) and the highly acclaimed work *Children of the Sea*, presented at the Perth Festival. He recently featured in Why Not Theatre’s production of *Mahabharata* (Why Not Theatre / Barbican - London) and the award-winning play *COUNTING AND CRACKING* by Belvoir St. Theatre. In 2019, He was selected for the Australia Council for the Arts Future Leader Program and was awarded an Australia Council Career Development Grant the following year.

Jay’s artistic practice is committed to community empowerment using participatory theatre-making processes through the community arts and cultural development (CACD) space to facilitate expression for communities to tell their stories.

Karthika Nair | Writer
 Karthika Nair is the co-author of *A Different Distance* (Milkweed Editions, 2021), renga written with poet Marilyn Hacker. *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata*, her reworking of the foundational South Asian epic in multiple voices, won the 2015 Tata Literature Live Award for Book of the Year (India). *Les Oiseaux électriques de Pothakudi* (Éditions Hélicium/Actes-Sud, 2022), her latest children’s book illustrated by Joëlle Jolivet, is on the shortlist of the 2023 Prix Félipé and the Prix Franco-Allemand de la littérature jeunesse.

The dance performances Nair has scripted and co-scripted have been staged at venues across the world. These include Akram Khan’s multiple-award-winning *DESH* and *Until the Lions* (adapted from a chapter of her book), and Carlos Pons Guerra’s *Mariposa*, a queer reimagining of Puccini’s opera *Madame Butterfly*. She is the co-founder of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui’s Antwerp-based dance company, Eastman, and executive producer of several of his and Damien Jalet’s works.

Ramith Ramesh | Performer

Ramith Ramesh is an actor, theater maker and traditional Kudiyattam practitioner, grown up in Kerala, South India. Currently he lives in Hyderabad, Telangana, where he teaches as a full time Assistant Professor at the recognized GITAM University. Ramith received his training from the esteemed Intercultural Theatre Institute (ITI) in Singapore and from Kerala Kalamandalam. He appeared on stage more than 250 times at numerous national events and across the globe.

In addition, he has taken part in many theatrical productions and served as an assistant director in various short films. He worked with Ariane Mouchkine and Theatre du Soleil in Paris, with Indianostrum Theatre in Pondicherry, and has taught Kudiyattam in theatre organizations in and outside India. Ramith has received several accolades for his dedication to his career. His work focuses on applying the Asian traditional forms and principles to the performing arts of the 21st century.

Tyrone Earl Lraé Robinson | Performer

Tyrone Earl Lraé Robinson, is a Perth based artist, working in a wide range of dance related fields such as performance, choreography, teaching, curation & dramaturgy. Robinson has been working professionally since 2010, and has worked with independents and companies both nationally and internationally. In 2021, Robinson launched his own contemporary dance company 'OFF-base Dance', alongside co-creator Shuling Wong. Their goal is to use the company as a platform to present more culturally and creatively diverse dance shows to the Australian audiences.

Kalieaswari Srinivasan | Performer

Kalieaswari is an actor and writer based in Chennai who has made her mark in India, Europe, and Australia. A Berlinale Acting Studio alumna, she gained recognition for her role as the female protagonist, Yalini, in the Cannes 2015 Palme D'or-winning film *Dheepan* directed by Jacques Audiard. Her performance in *Sivaranjanikum Pengalum* directed by Vasanth S Sai received critical acclaim and awards at national and international film festivals. Kalieaswari has worked alongside legendary theatre director Peter Brook in the play *The Prisoner* and was part of the presentation on *The Tempest*. She has showcased her talent internationally in projects like *On The Other Side - Concert for Piano* and *Silences* and *Figure Studies*. Kalieaswari's recent ventures include featurettes in *Begum Parvathi* and *Pablo Neruda*, as well as the film *Rettai Jadai*. She is currently developing her first feature film script, *Paper Plane* with support from the Goethe Institute Chennai.

Manjula Radha Krishnan | Performer

Manjula Radha Krishnan (Manju) is a Malaysian born performing artist and choreographer who has called Perth home for the last 20 years. Manju has trained extensively in the Indian classical dance styles of Bharata Natyam, Odissi and Kathak as well as Contemporary dance at the Temple of Fine Arts (TFA) in Malaysia and Saraswathi Mahavidhyalaya (SMV) in Perth. Though performing has been her main focus, Manju is also passionate about teaching the arts at SMV(Perth). Apart from playing key roles in numerous SMV dance productions, Manju's recent work includes Jay Emmanuel's *Children of the Sea* (Perth Festival 2021), Emele Ugavule's *Remarkable Women* and *Patch's Lighthouse* (Perth Festival 2022) which received positive feedback and reviews.

James O'Hara | Choreographer

James O'Hara has been a collaborator his entire career. With 20 years of experience as a dance performer, teacher, choreographic assistant and director, James is immersed in dance communities all around the world. Born and raised between the Swan River and the Indian ocean in Walyalup/Fremantle WA, James was a member of Ballet Junior de Genève and recipient of a Princess Grace Foundation Bursary in 2004 and has worked with Ballet Preljocaj, Ross McCormack, Michael Keegan Dolan, Marina Mascarell, Stephanie Lake, Damien Jalet and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and as a guest with Cedar Lake/Ohad Naharin, Australian Ballet/Gideon Obarzanek, Paris Opera Ballet and Bolshoi Moscow. James has been nominated for Helpmann, Green Room and Australian Dance Awards and is recipient of a West Australian Dance Award. James was Co-Artistic Director of the New Zealand Dance Company in 2020-22 and is currently Co-Director of STRUT Dance in Boorloo/Perth.

Willy Cessa | Set and Lighting designer

Willy Cessa is a France-based artist who began his career studying music before expanding his skills to include light and set design. He has collaborated with a diverse group of artists, including Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui on productions such as *Shell Shock*, *Constellation*, *Pluto*, *Tezuka*, *Firebird*, *Nomad*, and *Genesis*, and with Yabin Wang on *The Moon Opera*, *An individual Soliloquy*, and *Genesis*. He has also worked with Fanny de Chaillé on *Une Autre Histoire du Théâtre*, *Les Grands*, *CHUT*, and *Le Groupe*, as well as Damien Jalet on *Les Médusés*, and Cie Wang & Ramirez on *PARTS*. In addition to these collaborations, Cessa has contributed to numerous other projects, including Robyn Orlin's *And So You See*, Franck Il Louise's *Drop it!*, and Herman Diephuis' *D'après JC*.

Peter Young | Lighting Realiser

Born and based in Western Australia, Peter is an experienced and versatile creative professional who specialises in lighting design, implementation, and creative projects. Since graduating from the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2019, Peter's presence in the field has quickly grown with a comprehensive and diverse list of credits to his name. Theatre design highlights include world premiere productions such as Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company's *FIFO* (2020) & *Dating Black* (2021) as well as Fremantle Theatre Company's production of *Meat* (2021). In addition to his creative credits, Peter has worked extensively, in a technical capacity, at many of the major theatres and performing arts venues across Western Australia including His Majesty's Theatre, Crown Theatre and the State Theatre Centre of WA. Most recently, Peter was the Lighting Realiser for Laura Boynes' *Equations of a Falling Body* produced by Performing Lines WA.

Nicole Marrington | Costume Design

Nicole Marrington is a Costume designer, coordinator and maker based in Perth, Western Australia. Since graduating from the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2011 she has most recently enjoyed costume designing *Las Hormigas/The Ants (PICA)*, *SITU-8:CITY (STRUT Dance)*, *All Shook Up (Hama Productions)* and *Homeward Bound (Lazy Yarns)*. Nicole is a founding member and co-manager of Studios on Bulwer (S.o.B) a shared creative space in Perth CBD where she currently has residency.

Elham Eshraghian-Haakansson | Video Artist

Elham Eshraghian-Haakansson is an award-winning Iranian-Australian researcher, director, and video artist. Her arena of work centers itself within communal and collaborative social practice. Her research navigates inherited stories and post-memory felt by displaced community through the poetics of the moving image. She invites viewers to become the 'witness' rather than the 'passive bystander', examining empathy in film-poems, and immersive multi-media experiences facilitating a critical discussion surrounding empathy, custodianship, compassion, and social change. Her work has exhibited nationally and internationally, receiving numerous prestigious art awards for her video installations such as the 2018 Dr. Harold Schenberg Art Prize, 2020 Invitation Art Prize, 2020 14th Arte Laguna Special Prize Award and the 2022 Ellen José Art Prize. Her artistic values prioritize agency, empathy and legacy advocating for community arts programs, as co-founder of the Second Generation Collective, which seeks to bridge intergenerational gaps, navigating trauma and communal care.

Tao Issaro | Sound Design and Composition

Tao Issaro is an Indian/Australian percussionist, composer, actor and creator based in Kerala, South India and Perth WA. Drawing deeply from his roots in India, over the years Tao has developed a unique and dynamic live performance language- combining percussion, movement, physical theatre and storytelling. As a performer Tao has worked with renowned artists like George Brooks, Ranjit Barot, Rajasthan Roots, Felix Zenger, Maati Baani, Kutle Khan, and at international festivals like BBC Proms, Holland Dance Festival and the Perth International Arts Festival. As a composer Tao produced music for notable groups such as Daksha Sheth Dance Company (Ind), Tura New Music (Aus), Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company (Aus), Ochre Contemporary Dance Company (Aus), Aakash Odedra Company (UK), Casa De la India and Residui Teatro (Spain), The Muddha (South Korea), Kerala Tourism (India) and the Indian Navy.

Encounter

Encounter is a new independent theatre company working at the intersection of contemporary performance and community-engaged practice. We connect people through imaginative storytelling that embrace diversity, identity and belonging. Encounter “makes invisible stories visible” by increasing the representation of marginalised voices and stories from across the spectrum of contemporary Australia. Encounter works to diversify and create powerful contemporary performances by connecting inter-cultural dramaturgy within a community- engaged cultural practice.

Performing Lines WA | Producing Transformative Performance

Performing Lines is a national organisation that produces provocative contemporary performance by Australia’s most audacious independent artists. We curate a portfolio of work that is propelled by pressing questions and new ways of seeing the world. We champion the unconventional, the marginal, the rebellious and the new. Our purpose is to champion risk and to ensure that the breadth and plurality of Australia’s creative potential is represented and celebrated. Based in Perth, **Performing Lines WA** works exclusively with Western Australian artists, with a network of producers and presenters around the country and the world.

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