"There was a big tree.  
It had always been there.  
Nobody could remember when it wasn't.  
It was the only tree, the last.  
All the others had been cut down.  
To make newspapers.  
Toothpicks.  
Buildings.  
And art."

Bruce Pascoe

INSPIRATION – by Nadia Sunde

In May this year I took myself to the heart of an ancient redwood forest on the outskirts of Rotorua, New Zealand.

I wrapped my arms around the trunk of one of the majestic giants and closed my eyes.

It wasn't hard.  
It wasn't complicated.  
The earth didn't move.

But my heart stirred, sang and unfurled.

And just like that...I remembered.

......

I grew up on 14 acres of apple orchard in the West Auckland hills. There were close to 4000 trees planted by my grandfather, father and brother and I knew exactly which ones were best for climbing. They blossomed together like pink frosted snow...flowers turning to fruit. Those trees gave my family our livelihood for three generations and shaped every single day of my childhood.

There was one gnarled fig growing amongst the apples whose fruit was sweeter than anything you've tasted. Nana smuggled it onboard the ship from Croatia in 1952, carefully tending to it as a cutting on her long journey. I often wonder how she felt the day she rested its familiar roots in a strange new world.

......

Returning home from New Zealand I found an email from my good mate, celebrated Australian author and anthologist Bruce Pascoe, with a new short story he'd written. It was called The Last Tree and told of an ancient tree and the community of people who commit themselves to caring for it and, in turn, each other.

Bruce’s words were a celebration of all that I had recently remembered: trees hold our stories, our connection to the earth, to ourselves and to community.

I believe children witness trees as treasured members of community…and so we write this story for them.
THE PROJECT

‘For the traditional owners, nature is not just nature, it is also culture; and culture is not just culture, it is also nature.’
K.J. Weir

The Last Tree will premiere from 5 – 8 April 2018, having been commissioned for Festival 2018 at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.

The Last Tree brings together artists, storytellers, musicians, families and community to explore and celebrate our personal interactions with trees and how these relationships shape our sense of self, place and ecological identity.

This is achieved through a combination of theatrical performance and community engagement events, in collaboration presenters, and targeted to children aged 6 - 10 and their communities.

The Last Tree presents an unprecedented scale of collaboration between local communities and nationally and internationally recognised writers, artists and musicians.

The legacy of this project relates to the well-being of the community by:

- fostering and developing an expression of self and identity in relation to place;
- providing a stable environment for social, emotional and artistic engagement, accessible to a diversity of cultures, needs and age groups;
- initiating a positive culture of collaboration for professional artists and presenters to deliver original work and creative strategies for community engagement.

The Last Tree will reach regional audiences and communities through libraries, venues and schools.

The Last Tree will be well received by national and international literature and arts festivals as a headlining addition to children’s programming. Bruce Pascoe and Nadia Sunde (the writers) currently enjoy a high profile as presenters at these events.

To better define the project, understand its components and how they intertwine, the project can be broken down into two sections:

A. Performance

B. Community Engagement
THE SHOW

*The Last Tree* is a 45 minute interactive theatre performance targeted to audiences 6 - 10 years and their communities.

Gathered around an ancient tree (a large sculpture inspired by the Moreton Bay Fig and crafted by artist David Murphy) audiences become the local townsfolk, brought together for a retelling of stories from life lived amongst the roots and branches.

In an energetic (at times hilarious) and moving performance from actress Nadia Sunde *The Last Tree* celebrates traditions of primary orality (the storage of knowledge without written words) by calling forth from the rugged branches, gnarled roots and papery leaves memory, experience, story and song.

Inspired by a short story from author Bruce Pascoe, *The Last Tree* explores themes of community, identity, belonging, environment and legacy. Nadia Sunde & Bruce Pascoe have adapted and scripted the story as a theatrical interpretation, inclusive of original music.

In Bruce’s story the local townsfolk are called to action by the dying wishes of their matriarch ‘Mother Earth’ to protect the last tree from being cut down in order to make way for a new development. Half the townspeople take it in turn to sleep beneath the tree each night (Treesleepers) while the other half bring them meals (Dinnerbringers).

In the process of this community exchange cultural foods, stories and conversations are shared with kindness and growth. Before long, the tree has struck seedlings and is no longer the last tree...now it is just the oldest tree in the forest.

Bruce is a Bunarong, Tasmanian and Yuin man based in Gipsy Point, Victoria. His book, *Dark Emu* (Magabala Books 2014) won the Book of the Year in the 2016 NSW Premier’s Literary Awards.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

- Nadia Sunde - co-writer / actress / composer
- Bruce Pascoe - co-writer / creative consultant
- David Murphy - set design / construction - ‘the tree’
- Stewart Barry - co-composer / musician
- Lucia Masciullo - illustrator for promotional artwork image for the show

Presenter Kit - The Last Tree
PERFORMANCE DETAILS

- Touring Party: 4
  - Nadia Sunde – actor
  - Stewart Barry – musician
  - Crew - sound and lighting technician

- Length: 45 minutes.
- Audience: 50 - 100 capacity. Targeted to children aged 6 - 10 and their communities. Seated in a semi-circle on the floor surrounding the stage space in order to maximise audience interaction and engagement.
- Stage: Featuring a beautifully lit hoop pine plywood tree sculpture, inspired by the Moreton Bay Fig and constructed by David Murphy. The ‘Tree’ 4 meters x 4meters (roots included), including a structural adaption allowing a minimum height of 2.4 meters to accommodate different venues.
- Bump in: 4hours / Bump out: 2hours
- Sound / lighting equipment travels with the production. Use of in-house sound & lighting systems where available.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Last Tree provides the thematic feeder to a series of optional workshops, community engagements and events. A Community Engagement Kit is supplied to all presenters detailing workshop and event activities including -

- 'Gathering Leaves' - community workshops that invites participants to repurpose pages from disused books into leaves for the tree branches.
- 'Poet-tree' - a poets and storytellers night with a local tree as a centrepiece.
- 'Seedlings' - a pre-show engagement where children pot their own seed/tree in recycled book pages to take home. These ‘seedlings’ form part of the show when children are asked to come and sit with their seedlings under the tree at a point near the end of the performance.
- Community quilting group work on a quilt that features in the performance.
- 'Guest writers talk' - presenting Nadia Sunde for a live ‘in conversation’ event.
BIographies


Bruce Pascoe is an award-winning Australian writer, editor and anthologist based in Gipsy Point, Victoria. Bruce is of Bunarong, Tasmanian and Yuin heritage. His books include Shark, Ruby-eyed Coucal, Ocean, Earth and Nightjar. Bruce has also written a number of non-fiction works, the latest includes Dark Emu, published by Magabala in Feb 2014. Dark Emu won the NSW Premier’s Book of the Year in 2016. Mrs Whitlam (YA) was published in 2016 and has been shortlisted in the Childrens’ Book Council Awards for 2017. He attended the ANZ literary festival in London and the Dublin Literary Festival in 2014 and travelled to Ireland, Edinburgh, Mongolia, India, Washington and New York to talk about Dark Emu at Writers’ Festivals, Universities and Indigenous communities in 2015, Bali and South Africa in 2017.

Nadia Sunde – http://www.nadiasunde.com

Nadia Sunde is an internationally acclaimed children’s theatre writer and performer, and multi-award winning songwriter. She is also a published picture book author, an early years music and literacy educator, actress, comedienne and ABC radio presenter. Nadia has written four children’s theatre shows and currently works with Bloomsbury Publishing to bring the Harry Potter book series to life at festivals across Australia and New Zealand.

David Murphy - http://www.davidmurphyart.com/

David Murphy is a visual artist and designer living and working in Melbourne, Australia. The bulk of his work in the past 20 years has been in site specific public artworks, although he also creates ephemeral and performance based art works, theatre design, musical instruments, houses and bespoke timber riding sculptures.

The recurring themes in his artwork have been the interplay between mathematics and music, sacred geometry, science, as well as narrative and its connection to community.

Lucia Masciullo - http://luciamasciullo.com/about/

Lucia is an award-winning children’s book illustrator born and bred in Livorno, Italy. She moved to Australia in 2007 and she now lives and works on the Gold Coast. Lucia has collaborated with several top Australian and English Publishers and illustrated fifteen books, among which the CBCA Honour Book and Prime Minister Award shortlisted Come Down, Cat!, written by award-winning author Sonya Hartnett, CBCA shortlisted Family Forest and the best-selling series Our Australian Girl.

Stewart Barry – musician

Stewart Barry is a renowned Australian musician, playing and recording with perennial Australian favourite, the island-flavoured Bobby Alu. He is the director of a weekly jazz event in Brisbane known as Jazz in The Box as well as being a co-director and founder of the Brisbane Fringe Festival. Stewart is a multi-skilled musician, having played the piano for at least as long as he’s been on the bass, and as if that wasn’t enough he’s a knockout baritone too. Whether it’s his majestic and well-loved double bass, Bessie, or the petite but very funky Kala U-bass (ukulele size), Stewart strikes a tone that is always deep, low and sweet. And the depths, it seems, enchant this artist no end.
MARKETING COPY

Short copy

Discover hidden stories and treasure amidst the branches of *The Last Tree*.

Recreational treehugger Verula Vroom invites you into the story sanctuary of *The Last Tree*. Beneath its canopy you’ll be swept headlong into hilarious and heartfelt tales of courage, care and community.

Long copy

Discover hidden stories and treasure amidst the branches of *The Last Tree*.

Recreational treehugger Verula Vroom invites you into the story sanctuary of *The Last Tree*. Beneath its canopy you’ll be swept headlong into hilarious and heartfelt tales of courage, care and community.

Part theatre, part storytelling, part family dreaming space; this engaging and interactive theatre experience will leave you with a deeper connection to the special trees in your own life.

Inspired by a short story from Australian author Bruce Pascoe, *The Last Tree* is co-written by Bruce Pascoe and Nadia Sunde and performed by Nadia Sunde (*with musical accompaniment from Stewart Barry on double bass*).

CONTACT

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Presenter Kit - The Last Tree