



BACK
TO
BACK
THEATRE

UMAC presents
Back to Back Theatre's

Ganesh Versus the Third Reich

17 - 19 June 2026
Union Theatre

Synopsis

The story begins with the elephant-headed god Ganesh travelling through Nazi Germany to reclaim the Swastika, an ancient Hindu symbol. As this intrepid hero embarks on his journey, a second narrative is revealed: the actors themselves begin to feel the weighty responsibility of storytellers, questioning the ethics of cultural appropriation.

Challenging the distinction between perception and reality, the show is made before our very eyes and takes on its own life. It invites us to examine who has the right to tell a story and who has the right to be heard.

Duration

Approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes,
without an interval.

Content Warnings

Patrons are advised that the performance of Ganesh Versus the Third Reich contains coarse language and adult themes including violence and the Holocaust. The production is a work of fiction and does not purport to be an accurate representation of historical fact or scripture. Recommended for ages 15+.

Cast and Creatives

Devisors

Mark Deans, Marcia Ferguson, Bruce Gladwin, Nicki Holland, Simon Laherty, Sarah Mainwaring, Scott Price, Kate Sulan, Brian Tilley, David Woods

Director, Devisor & Design

Bruce Gladwin

Performed by

Simon Laherty, Scott Price, Tamika Simpson, Brian Tilley and David Woods

Additional Performance

Georgina Naidu

Lighting Design

Andrew Livingston, Bluebottle

Design & Set Construction

Mark Cuthbertson

Design & Animation

Rhian Hinkley

Composer

Jóhann Jóhannsson

Mask Design & Construction

Sam Jinks, Paul Smits

Translation

Karen Witthuhn, Greg Bailey

Script Consultant

Melissa Reeves

Costume Design

Shio Otani

Creative Development Actors

Brian Lipson, James Saunders, Sonia Teuben

Associate Director

Kate Sulan

Sound Engineer

Byron Scullin

Stage Manager

Alana Hoggart

Assistant Stage Manager

Sheshtin Honey

Production Manager

Bao Ngouansavanh

Company Manager

Erin Watson

Producer

David Miller

Executive Producer

Tanya Bennett

UMAC acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work. We pay respect to their Elders past and present, and their enduring traditions of knowledge sharing, performing and storytelling on this land.

Director's Note

Rita Halabarec and Sonia Teuben, set us off on the narrative journey. Rita spent nine months drawing Ganesh, in blue biro on reams of white paper, while Sonia birthed a terrifying Neo Nazi skinhead in the rehearsal room. Our story was apprehended and realised by multiple minds.

In 2008 we conceived of *Ganesh Versus the Third Reich*, the fantastical journey of the elephant headed Hindu God travelling from India to Germany to reclaim the swastika from the Nazis. The actors, the collaborators all thought it was a great conceit and we took collective pleasure imagining its potential.

We knew our narrative was morally fraught; it was too dangerous for a little theatre company from Geelong to appropriate Hindu Gods and create a fairytale within the holocaust. Despite our pleasure the show could not be made.

Over time our thinking shifted. Our self-imposed censorship – our reasoning that we could not create the work – became our rationale for bringing it to life.

Ganesh Versus the Third Reich is not only a hero's adventure of epic proportions but the story of its making. It is Back to Back's attempt to test and understand its own cultural and moral limitations.

Bruce Gladwin

Artistic Director, Back to Back Theatre

About UMAC

University of Melbourne Arts and Culture (UMAC) presents, curates and commissions inspiring and entertaining arts experiences throughout the year at its award-winning cultural precinct on the northern edge of the CBD.

Located next to the No. 1 Swanston Street tram stop, minutes from Lygon Street, the precinct includes three main venues: the new Union and Guild Theatres at the Arts & Cultural Building, the magnificently restored deco Building 189 and the open-air Amphitheatre. This 6-Star Greenstar New Build precinct has already been recognised with multiple wins at the Australian Institute of Architects and the 2023 Good Design Awards.

Under the leadership of University of Melbourne Performing Arts Director Virginia Lovett, UMAC presents an annual off-semester program of major contemporary works, activating these civic, cultural spaces in the CBD North and offering a new destination for arts lovers and artists.

About Back to Back Theatre

Based on Waddawurrung Country, in the Victorian regional centre of Geelong, Back to Back Theatre is widely recognised as an Australian theatre company of national and international significance. The company is driven by an ensemble of actors who identify as having an intellectual disability or as neurodivergent. The company considered one of Australia's most important cultural exporters.

From 2009 to 2024, the company has undertaken 88 national and 130 international seasons of its work. This includes presentations and screenings at the world's pre-eminent contemporary arts festivals and venues such as the Edinburgh International Festival, London's V&A Museum and the Barbican, Vienna Festival, Holland Festival and Theater der Welt, the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, the Public Theater in New York, Festival Tokyo, West Kowloon Cultural District Authority in Hong Kong, and Buenos Aires International Festival.

Since 2009, we have delivered community and education workshops to over 34,000 participants, with a focus on artistic excellence and inclusive practice.

Back to Back Theatre has received 23 national and international awards including the 2024 Venice Biennale Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Theatre, an International Ibsen Award, a Helpmann Award for Best Australian Work, an Edinburgh International Festival Herald Angel Critics' Award, two Age Critics' Awards, a New York Bessie and the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Group Award for our long-standing contribution to the development of Australian theatre. In 2015, Bruce Gladwin received the Australia Council for the Arts' Inaugural Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatre. The ensemble were awarded the 'Best Ensemble' in the 2019 Green Room Awards.

Back to Back Theatre is supported by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, and the City of Greater Geelong.



UMAC is part of the University of Melbourne

