

DAREBIN ARTS SPEAKEASY

PRESENTS

CUT CHILLI

BY CHENTURAN ARAN



**Darebin
Arts**

Image by Gregory Lorenzutti

WRITER'S MESSAGE

CHENTURAN ARAN
WRITER

Many children were separated from their families through fraudulent intercountry adoption practices. Too often, the voices of birth mothers and adoptees are lost beneath the more comforting narrative that these children were 'saved' from difficult circumstances.

Cut Chilli is a play about immense loss, imperfect histories and clashing narratives. It takes vulnerability to share your pain. It also takes vulnerability to listen to someone else's, especially when their story challenges your own. When we find a way to listen, we may discover a deeper, broader story with space for multiple truths.

I hope we find belonging... with our families, our neighbourhoods, our countries, with our bodies, and with the long line of ancestors who loved and survived for us.

Thank you to the adoptee community for sharing your stories.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

ISABELLA VADIVALOO
DIRECTOR

There are so many different experiences of intercountry adoption, with so many different stories and outcomes. The kind of adoption that led to Jamie being raised in the Mackenzie family is, thankfully, now illegal in Australia and Sri Lanka. However, many of those who experienced private adoption continue to navigate disjointed and traumatic relationships to their families, the culture they were adopted into and culture of birth. In her brilliant introduction to the published play script, Lynelle Long writes, "Good intentions do not negate structural harm. And recognising this does not diminish love—it deepens our understanding of it." As a team we are so grateful to the people who have shared their stories and experiences with us, letting us in on a fraction of the complexity of their specific lives and identities.

This story sits at the confluence of comedy and drama, a familiar and vital place. So many of us have sat at family dinner tables as the most difficult, painful, revealing, loving conversations of our lives have braided seamlessly with gags, teasing, long held 'in-jokes', 'dad' humour and too much wine. Over and over, in conversations I've had while making this show, I've heard how intercountry adoption is messy.

Family is messy. Growing up in Australia's dominant white culture with brown skin is messy. Identity is messy. Love is messy. And so, this show is messy.

ABOUT

NO ONE LEAVE THE TABLE UNTIL SOMEONE TELLS THE TRUTH

Jamie was abandoned as a baby in Sri Lanka. At least that's what Katherine told him, as she raised him in the beach town of Mandurah, Western Australia. But when Jamie falls for Zahra, an activist and podcaster who tells him about the shady history of international adoption, he begins to question his adoptive mother's narrative and wonders why he's never seen his adoption file.

Now Jamie's heading home, with a cultural lineage demanding to be felt and a determination to uncover the truth of his past, all the while with Zahra recording live for her podcast series, "Decolonising My Boyfriend". The truth, however, is more complicated than expected, and Katherine fights to cover up an old wound being opened, one that will reshape their family forever.

Nominated at the 2025 NSW Literary Awards, this scorching new comedy from Chenturan Aran is a banquet of cultural identity, displacement and ancestry. Inspired by pervasive adoption fraud in Sri Lanka, this is a play about difficult histories, and how we manage open dialogue to find vulnerability, truth, and acceptance.

Running time: approx. 110mins, no interval.

Show warnings: The work contains frequent coarse language; reference to drug and alcohol use/dependency; themes of: illicit intercountry adoption practices, grief, pregnancy loss, cultural insensitivity and racism.

CREATIVE TEAM

Writer: Chenturan Aran

Director & Co-AV Designer: Isabella Vadiveloo

Producer: Briannah Davis

Performers: Indra Liyanaarachchi, Anna Kaleeda, Alexandra Sangster, Ben Grant, Soren Jensen, and Aarati Ilanko

Set & Costume Designer: Ishan Vivekanantham

Sound Designer: Nick Rinaldi

Lighting & Co-AV Designer: Lana Rosalea

Stage Manager: Noemie Huttner-Koros

Supported by ICAV (InterCountry Adoptee Voices).

Cut Chilli received dramaturgical support from Jennifer Medway, Sonya Soares, David Burrowes, Ari Palani and Samah Sabawi.

This work was performed at The Old Fitz Theatre, Sydney (2024). It was developed through Union House Theatre and La Mama Theatre (2020), La Boite and Australian Plays Transform (2022), and Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) in the Cybec Electric reading series (2022). Chenturan and the *Cut Chilli* team extend their sincere thanks to The Old Fitz Theatre, La Boite, APT, MTC, Union House Theatre and La Mama Theatre.

The playwright would like to thank Lynelle Long, Julitha Amara, Daniel Cidrelius, Jai Wambeek, Lenore Marshall, Linzi Ibrahim, Janine Cohen, Ella Kamer, and Empty Seat Theatre.

DAREBIN ARTS SPEAKEASY

Darebin Arts Speakeasy is Darebin City Council's award-winning year-round independent performance and development program. For over 10 years, the program has curated and invested in contemporary dance, circus, theatre and multi-disciplinary artists whose works offer audiences a dynamic and diverse mix of stories that matter to the community, celebrate cultural diversity and reflect the times we're living in.

Darebin Arts has backed many of the groundbreaking artists and companies that make Melbourne's art sector so iconic: RAWCUS, Ilbijerri Theatre Company, The Hayloft Project, Little Ones Theatre, Stephanie Lake Company, Elbow Room, MKA, Double Water Sign, and lead artists like Joel Bray, Michele Lee, Emilie Collyer, Anna Seymour, Stella Young and Sammy J.

ARTIST BIOS



CHENTURAN ARAN

(Writer)

Chentuaran is a Melbourne-based playwright, screenwriter, and journalist whose work blends sharp comedy with themes of family, identity, and technology. His debut play *Cut Chilli* premiered at the Old Fitz in 2024 to critical acclaim and a sold-out season, and was nominated for three NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Chenturan is also a video journalist with SBS, creating stories at the intersection of culture and community.



ISABELLA VADIVELOO

(Director & Co-AV Designer)

Isabella is a Naarm/Melbourne-based theatre director, deviser, and intimacy director with Tamil Sri Lankan and settler Australian heritage. She has directed works for Malthouse Theatre, Red Stitch Theatre, La Mama Theatre, and Next Wave, and is dedicated to politically engaged, form-pushing performance that centres underrepresented stories while cultivating safe, risk-taking creative spaces.

ARTIST BIOS



BRIANNAH DAVIS

(Producer)

Briannah is a creative producer, dancer and movement director. Her work focuses on supporting diverse artists, stories and contemporary form through collaborative and community practice. She graduated from Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (Bachelor of Arts Dance Honours, 2018) and since worked as the Producer in WA's leading not-for-profit arts organisations, The Blue Room Theatre (TBRT), Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts and ENCOUNTER Theatre. She has produced a diverse range of projects across dance, theatre and multidisciplinary form within TBRT, Propel Youth Arts, 10 Nights In Port Fremantle Festival, national and international Fringe Festivals (Edinburgh, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney) and State Theatre Centre WA.



INDRA LIYANAARACHCHI

(Jamie)

Indra (he/him) is a proud Australian-Sri Lankan actor. Exposed to the performing arts at a young age through his cultural practice with the Sri Lankan Theatre Group Melbourne, he continued his schooling at Beacons Hills College under a Theatre and Drama Scholarship. In 2025 Indra completed his BFA in Acting at the Victorian College of the Arts, during which, he was the recipient of the Lionel Gell (2024) and Irene Mitchell (2024) award scholarships for excellence. Recent credits include *How the King Learned to Live Forever* (Pummel Squad) and Pipli in *Great Expectations* (dir. Georgina Naidu). Screen work includes Dev in *Coconut* (dir. Ravi Chand, MIFF 2026) and Albert in *The Laugh* (dir. Rob Preston) as well as numerous student films.

ARTIST BIOS



ANNA KALEEDA

(Zahra)

Anna is an Australian-Lebanese actor based in Naarm/Melbourne. A 2023 BFA (Acting) graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). Anna has worked across professional and independent stage and screen projects. Films credits include *This Idea of Love* with On Rye Productions, and Jade in *After Party*. Her theatre credits include *Alone Experience* (dir. Lawrence T. Lewis and Devon Paulson), Oscar in *Sweat* (dir. Tasnim Hossain), Natasha in *INCONSOLABLE plus 4* (dir. Georgina Naidu), Lilith in *She Kills Monsters* (dir. Joe Paradise Lui), James in *All the Rest* and Claire in *Son of Byblos*.



ALEXANDRA SANGSTER

(Katherine)

Alex is an actor, facilitator, writer, activist, ward councillor at Darebin City Council, and Minister with the United Church in Australia in St Kilda working with people experiencing homelessness and mental health vulnerability. She began performing professionally in 1988, trained at Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), and has worked across screen, stage and fringe, with credits including *Blue Heelers*, *Halifax* and Playbox's *Language of the Gods*. She won the Australian Young Playwrights Award for a radio play on ABC Radio National, and joined Melbourne Playback Theatre where she has worked as actor and facilitator for many years. She is the author of *Did They Make Coffins That Small* — creative nonfiction that moves between grief, ecology, faith and the fierce tenderness of paying attention, and also appears as a writer with *The Age*.

ARTIST BIOS



BEN GRANT

(Waiter/Jeff)

Over his 40+ year theatre career Ben has always held a strong interest in new Australian stories, having performed in world premieres by Nick Enright, Jane Bodie, Raimondo Cortese, Ro Bright and others. A National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) graduate, Ben won the Green Room award for Best Performance in Independent Theatre for Angus Cerini's *Save for Crying* (La Mama Theatre) in 2011 and collaborated with Robert Lepage as an actor/author in Ex Machina's *Playing Cards: Hearts* from 2013 to 2015. Ben has also performed for The Rabble, Ridiculusmus, Melbourne Theatre Company, Malthouse, Bell Shakespeare and Red Stitch as well as many independent productions.



SOREN JENSEN

(Lee)

Soren is a professional actor with over two decades of experience across stage, screen, commercials and voiceovers. Most recent credits include *All Her Fault* (TV), *First Moon* (feature) and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (stage). He performs in and directs the immersive Jury Experience, and is narrating the audiobook *The King's Ransom*, sequel to Matthew Reilly's *The Detective*. His screen credits include *Wentworth*, *Home and Away*, *Dr Blake Mysteries*, *Informer3838* and *Warnie*, alongside stage work on *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* as Hagrid. He is represented by IWM and Melbourne Voice Management. He is a proud union member.

ARTIST BIOS



AARATI ILANKO

(Miḷakāy)

A Bharatanatyam dancer trained in Australia and India, Aarati brings a contemporary but community-minded approach to the stage. Born and raised in Australia, she is a proud advocate for Tamil language and culture, with extensive experience in Tamil theatre performance. Her artistic practice is grounded in abhinaya, the expressive heart of Bharatanatyam, where she explores emotion, identity and storytelling with care and nuance. *Cut Chilli* is her first mainstream theatre production, and she is excited to share her love of movement, performance and heritage in a space that celebrates diverse voices, lived experiences and inclusive artistic expression for communities everywhere.

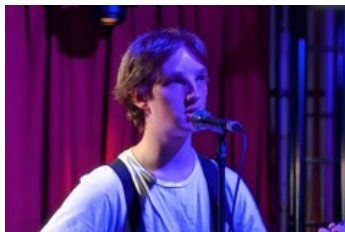


ISHAN VIVEKANANTHAM

(Set & Costume Designer)

Ishan is a multidisciplinary artist specialising in set and costume design for live performance and graphic design for film and television. A graduate of the Master of Production Design course at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), his work spans theatre, cabaret, musical, opera, ballet, film and television. Ishan's craft and passion for scenography has been recognised with the Cassidy Bequest – Production Scholarship (2022) and the Trina Parker Scholarship (2023). In 2025, he joined the Melbourne Theatre Company's Future Creatives program and was the inaugural recipient of the Truscott Prize, supported by the Truscott Foundation, Victorian College of the Arts, and Victorian Opera.

ARTIST BIOS



NICK RINALDI
(Sound Designer)

Nick is a composer and sound designer based in Naarm/Melbourne. A Bachelor of Music (Honours) graduate from the University of Melbourne, he works across theatre, film, and video games, creating immersive soundscapes that elevate storytelling. With a particular passion for live performance, Nick enjoys exploring the relationship between sound, space, and audience, crafting audio that is both emotionally engaging and technically considered.



LANA ROSALEA
(Lighting & Co-AV Designer)

Lana Rosalea is a proud neurodivergent, queer and multidisciplinary theatre maker and lighting designer based in Naarm/Melbourne who has recently graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts Bachelor of Fine Arts (Theatre). They are a self-taught lighting designer with works spanning dance and theatre, committed to working on shows which uplift marginalised voices, such as *Poems of A Transsexual Nature* (dir. Cynda Jace Beare), *no title* (dir. Gryff Connah), *Please Don't Catch Me When I Fall* (dir. Aimee Raitman) and *Rabbit & Watson* (dir. Keith Brockett). She transfers her storytelling training into lighting through designing transformative states which enhance the feeling and journey.

ARTIST BIOS



NOEMIE HUTTNER-KOROS

(Stage Manager)

Noemie is a performance-maker, writer, dramaturg, community organiser and stage manager whose work engages with queer histories, ecological crises and Jewish Yiddish musical traditions. Some of their shows include: *Mother of Compost* (M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, Melbourne Fringe nominee Best Theatre 2023), *The Lion Never Sleeps* (Australian Book Review's Arts Highlights of 2019, Performing Arts WA awards 2021), and *Democracy Repair Services* (The Blue Room Theatre Best Writing Award 2023, Melbourne Fringe 2025). Noemie was the winner of the 2020 Venie Holmgren Environmental Poetry Prize and 2021 Western Australian Young Environmentalist of the Year. They have stage managed and been a dramaturg on new works across theatre, performance art and music.