

# EUPHORIA STUDY GUIDE





Original production co produced by Country Arts SA and  
State Theatre Company of South Australia in 2021

## EUPHORIA

By Emily Steel

### SYNOPSIS

School teacher Meg wants to start a new festival called “Euphoria” to celebrate everything her country town has to offer. Former student Ethan doesn’t think there’s much to celebrate at all, until he meets Annie and hatches a plan for a campervan escape. Meg’s husband Nick wants Meg to slow down, but there’s still so much to do – get grants, make run sheets, hurry to Adelaide to win the support of the Premier... She’s spinning fast. And the rest of the town is noticing.

An Antipodean *Under Milkwood*, Emily Steel’s *Euphoria* brings to life a South Australia regional community, full of love, pain, complexity and humour, with two virtuosic actors playing a range of idiosyncratic characters.

Informed by real conversations between Steel and people who live in these communities, *Euphoria* is a sharply observed play about the human habit of distracting ourselves from our most vulnerable parts.

For more, watch the trailer for the show online: [statetheatrecompany.com.au/shows/euphoria](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/shows/euphoria)

#### ORIGINAL DATES:

Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre / 6 May – 15 May 2021  
Outer metropolitan and regional areas / April, May & June 2021

#### 2023 NATIONAL TOUR DATES:

1 May – 26 August  
NSW: 1 – 26 May / VIC: 5 – 14 June / WA: 20 – 25 July / SA: 1 – 26 August

#### RUNNING TIME:

Approximately 90 minutes (no interval).

#### SHOW WARNINGS:

Contains strobe effects, coarse language and adult themes referencing mental illness and suicide.

If you need to talk to someone about your mental health, please reach out to one of these services:

**Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

**Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636 or [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

**Headspace:** 1800 650 890 or [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

Resource created in 2021 by State Educate. Support for State Educate comes from the State Theatre Company South Australia Education Giving Circle.

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# 2023 CREATIVE TEAM & CAST



Playwright  
**Emily Steel**



Director  
**Nescha Jelk**



Set & Costume Designer  
**Meg Wilson**



Lighting Designer  
**Nic Mollison**



Composer & Sound Designer  
**Andrew Howard**



Meg/Various  
**Ashton Malcolm**



Ethan/Various  
**James Smith**



Understudy Meg/Various  
**Wendy Bos**



Understudy Ethan/Various  
**Jonathan Darby**



Production Manager  
**Monica Hart**



Stage Manager  
**Stephen Moylan**

## Original Cast and crew

PLAYWRIGHT Emily Steel

DIRECTOR Nescha Jelk

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER Meg Wilson

LIGHTING DESIGNER Nic Mollison

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER Andrew Howard

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Emma Richardson

MEG Ashton Malcolm

ETHAN James Smith

STAGE MANAGER Bridget Samuel

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL Adan Richards

PRODUCTION MANAGER Gabrielle Hornhardt

TOUR TECHNICIAN Abigail Heuer

CREATIVE PRODUCER Alison Howard

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES PROGRAMMER Tammy Hall

EXECUTIVE PROGRAMMER Louisa Norman

Costumes made by State Theatre Company South Australia Wardrobe.  
Set made by State Theatre Company South Australia Workshop.



## WRITER'S NOTE FROM EMILY STEEL

I travelled all over South Australia with Country Arts SA, doing research for *Euphoria*. We met lots of people in lots of country towns, at town halls and libraries, cafes and shops, pubs and museums, in aged care homes and men's groups and youth groups, on farms and in schools and in acute mental health units. Wherever we went, we would ask, "What's the best thing about living here?" And so many times, the answer we got was, "Well, everyone knows each other, so there's always someone there if you need help." And then we would ask, "What's the worst thing about living here?" And so many times, the answer came back, "Well, everyone knows each other, so it's impossible to have any privacy."

That double-edged sword of community life became the core of the play. Yes, *Euphoria* is about mental health, but it's not just about mental health, and it's not about "psych wards" (though those were nothing like the padded cells we so often see in films). It's about mental health out in the world, in a community, how that community can support the people within it and can also weigh them down. There are ways in which living in a country town is very different from living in a city, and ways in which it's not so different at all. There are ways in which living in regional SA is surprisingly similar to growing up, as I did, in a village in (old) South Wales, where everyone knows everyone's business, and there's no getting away from each other because your mum is the school dinner lady and your sister is married to the vicar's son...

The town in *Euphoria* is not based on any one town but has aspects of many. The characters are not based on specific people, but some details of their lives have been inspired by the conversations we had. It was a great privilege to meet so many people in so many communities, and to hear about their experiences. *Euphoria* is fictional, but I hope that, thanks to all those who helped with the research and development, its story will feel real.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH EMILY STEEL

## What sparked the central idea and themes behind *Euphoria*?

Sometimes I might start writing a play because I just have an idea and I sit down and write it, and then I have to sell that script to a theatre company so that they will put it on. Sometimes I pitch an idea to a theatre company and they like it, and we knock it back and forth a little bit, and then they commission me to write that play. Sometimes a theatre company comes to me and they already have an idea for a project and they ask me if I'll write it - that's what happened with *Euphoria*. Alison Howard (Creative Producer) and Tammy Hall (Creative Communities Programmer) from Country Arts SA came to me and said they were interested in creating a play about mental health in regional South Australia. Over time that idea broadened to encompass the highs and lows of living in country SA.

## What is your vision for the play?

I went into this without a vision for the play. I knew that it was going to be heavily researched, and that we were going to visit a number of country towns in regional SA. I thought it would be stupid of me to have too much of an idea of the play before I even got to those places and did that research. So I had no vision. I was just open to finding out about what these towns were like and how people saw the towns they lived in and themselves. That's really where it began, with just listening to what people have to say.

## What approach did you take when writing the play?

In 2018, Alison, Tammy and I went on a research tour. We went to Berri, Lameroo, Streaky Bay, Ceduna, Whyalla, Mt Gambier and Bordertown, and we talked to lots of people in all of those places. We talked to teachers and high school students, doctors and the person who ran the café, farmers and refugees. We talked to pretty much anyone we could and asked what it was like to live in those communities.





We also visited acute mental health wards in Whyalla, Berri and Mt Gambier where we spoke to clients, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, nurses and peer support workers. We were interested to find out what was great about living in country towns, and what was hardest about it.

The questions we kept asking everybody were: What's great about living here? What's not so great about living here? The answers we got in pretty much every place were very, very similar. Most people agreed that the best thing about living in the country was that everybody knows each other, which means there's always someone around if you need help. The worst thing people commonly identified in country towns was also that everybody knows each other, which makes it really hard to have any privacy. It means that if you're in a situation where you're struggling, on the one hand there can be people there to support you, and on the other hand it can be hard to ask for help if you don't want everyone to know your business. That, in a nutshell, is where the characters of Meg and Ethan came from in *Euphoria*.

All of the characters in *Euphoria* are made up. Not one of them is based on a real person. There are quite possibly details from different people that have all been pulled into these characters. There are also details from my own life that have been put into these characters. But I was really careful and deliberate about not basing them on anyone that I met. When I was talking with people in different communities about what they thought of their town, I didn't record any conversations, and I didn't take notes while they were talking. After each chat, I went away and made notes on the things I remembered and the things that made an impression on me. I used these conversations as inspiration, but it's really unlikely that I really captured anyone's actual words.

## What was your process for writing *Euphoria*?

The process of writing *Euphoria* started in a similar way to plays I have written in the past – with interviews and research. The difference with *Euphoria* is the sheer amount of research that was done and the enormous amount of information that I had from different perspectives on these towns. This meant a big part of my job was going through all of the material and trying to find a story.

With any play there is need for a redrafting process. The first draft is never the final play. I wrote the first draft of *Euphoria* back in 2018, and it was terrible. I think the only things that are in the final draft of this play that were in the first draft are the characters of Meg and Ethan, but their stories were different and the way I told those stories was different.

After the first draft, I got some feedback from Alison and Tammy at Country Arts SA and went onto a second draft. A big shift in the second draft was that the play changed from being mostly dialogue, where two or more characters talked to each other, to monologues, where only one character is talking most of the time. The reason for that shift was that this was intended to be a touring piece that would only have two actors.

After the second draft was completed, the director, Nescha Jelk, came on board and we had our first creative development with some local actors. We spent a week reading over different drafts of the script and asking lots of questions. The most useful question for me came from actor Rory Walker. He asked what the play would be about if it weren't about mental health. This opened up the whole story. We started asking questions about how to define 'community' and what responsibilities we have to one another within our communities. These conversations completely changed the way I'd been plotting the play, and by the end of that week I had a new storyline and a new way of linking Meg's story with Ethan's story.

The third draft had a public reading in the Adelaide Fringe in 2019, and we received feedback from the audience. The fourth draft was taken on a development tour where we gave readings of sections of the text to general public audiences in lots of different country towns. We got a lot of questions and feedback from the audience on this tour. My job was to take on all of that feedback and turn it into the final draft.

The process to develop and write this play has been fairly extreme. I don't think I've ever had to take on so much feedback and filter through it to figure out what the story is, what's useful to the story and what feedback is going to best serve the story I'm trying to tell.

These responses are based on a video interview and have been edited for length and clarity. Video interviews are available under the drop-down menu for *Euphoria* at [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-resources](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-resources).



A portrait of director Nescha Jelk, a woman with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a dark jacket over a blue collared shirt. She is looking slightly to the right with a calm expression. The background is a light-colored, textured wall.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE FROM NESCHA JELK

This play, from the first creative development through to rehearsals, has been made with deepest respect for the experiences of South Australians living regionally. Because 80% of the creative team and cast grew up in regional towns, we felt we already personally knew many of the characters and experiences that Emily has laid out so vividly in this work.

While *Euphoria* focuses on a fictional regional community, the ideas and questions within it are universal: how do we tackle mental health? What is our responsibility here to ourselves, our loved ones and our community? What is their responsibility to us?

*Euphoria* is not trying to 'solve' mental health, nor is it a judgement on any of the characters' actions, thoughts or decisions. Instead, it is an acknowledgement that we are only at the cusp of understanding the human brain and its emotions. It is an acknowledgement of the immense and complex tapestry of feelings that influence each and every one of us on a daily basis. It acknowledges that we all travel our own rocky journey towards finding mental wellbeing or mental health - whatever those terms mean to each of us individually.

*"It rains. And the whole town relaxes, just a little. People lose that pinched look, that tired look, that endurance runner look. They talk a little more, smile a little more. The hard part's over. For now, at any rate."*

- Meg, speaking to the audience



# AN INTERVIEW WITH NESCHA JELK

## What first drew you to this play?

I first heard about *Euphoria* before I was involved in the project. I was working with Emily Steel, the playwright, on something else and heard her talking about this creative development regional tour that she was doing. She explained that she was going to towns throughout regional South Australia, visiting communities, mental health units and schools. In each of these communities, she was asking locals about the good things and the difficult things about living in a country town. I was really intrigued by the project and thought it sounded really exciting. I loved the amount of consultation that had happened before Emily had even written a first draft, and that the play came out of these conversations. I think it's a really good conversation, talking about what there is to celebrate about living in regional South Australia, but also about the hard things.

I grew up on a farm in an area that's not classified as part of regional Australia but was a pretty 'country' area. I feel really connected to this material because of that. When I was approached to direct the play I agreed immediately.

## What is your approach to preparing for a new work?

You have to be really flexible when approaching any new work because every play is different. As the director, you have to be quite flexible in the development of a new work, responding to the playwright's own processes and inserting some of your own processes, too.

Directing is a really interesting experience. It feels like you're learning how to do it anew with every new piece of work. I don't really think there's one way to approach a work, but that's what makes directing so much fun. You have to figure out your processes all over again every time, working with different creatives and cast to bring a vision and story to life.



## How did visiting regional communities assist in developing your ideas and vision for this play?

In 2019, I was fortunate to go on a trip through regional South Australia to visit the communities Emily had consulted with the previous year. We were also able to add a few new towns into that trip. It was so much fun! Visiting these communities was so valuable. We got to meet so many incredible people and hear their stories. We also shared bits of the play and got some amazing feedback. For example, we had a character named 'Nate' and were told that would not be a common name in most country towns.

Speaking with high school students in these communities was really helpful. One of the main characters, Ethan, is 19 years old and talking with young people helped us to learn more about what 19-year-olds get up to in country towns, how they speak, what kind of language they use and that kind of thing.

Hearing people tell their own stories and talk about their experiences and how they connected with our work was powerful. Visiting these communities not only helped with things like language, but really fuelled us up and made us excited to bring this work to the stage, particularly in those communities where we met with people.

*"Sometimes I miss the city. I miss walking down the street and being ignored by everyone I pass. I miss being able to disappear."*

- Meg, speaking to the audience



## How did you become a director? What advice would you give to young people who want to direct?

I knew that I wanted to be involved in theatre from a young age, although I didn't really know what form that would take. I don't know why I made that decision; it was just a decision I'd made very early on. For a long time, I thought I would be involved as an actor. I got into drama school at the Flinders University Drama Centre where I started off studying acting. After my first year, an amazing teacher called Anne Thompson asked me if I would like to try directing. This was not something I would have had the guts to pursue myself at that time. I didn't know any young directors and I thought you had to be a grey-haired super-brain who has read thousands of books and who knows the answers to everything. I was pretty naïve about it but that's what I thought. Anne gave me this great advice. She told me that you do not need to have all the answers to be a director, you just need to have the right questions. That completely shifted the way I thought about directing and it still influences my work to this day.

To me, directing is very much a collaborative process. It's about working with the cast and creative team you've gathered together and picking everyone's brains. The director isn't alone in figuring out how to approach the work but can approach it by working together with a team.

My biggest piece of feedback for anyone interested in directing is that it's not the work of a solo genius. You don't have to be a genius or a god-like being, and you don't have to pretend you are either.

## What next?

Our "What next?" sections include questions and activities based on previous pages. These can be used for individual reflection or as class exercises.

When you think about growing up on a farm, what images or words come to mind? Gather three images and three words and share them in a small group.

Discuss the following: Do you think these ideas you have about country life are based on real experiences, or are they based on a photo, TV series or film you have seen? If you live in a country town, what depictions are accurate and which are inaccurate? If you live in the city or a metropolitan area, what have your own experiences of visiting or living in the country been? How do these tally with your perceptions of the country and what you think living there would truly be like?

## Supporting materials

Video interviews with Emily Steel and Nescha Jelk

Link under the drop-down menu for *Euphoria* at:

[statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources)



## CAST Q&A

with Ashton Malcolm  
(Meg/Various)

### How do you approach a new character?

When I'm working on a character, the first thing I do is start with the text. It sounds really obvious but it can be easy to get excited and run with my imagination. To curb this, I try to always come back to what the playwright has written because they know the characters better than anyone.

In *Euphoria*, I play Meg but I also play a few other characters. I started the process by looking at what other characters say about the characters I play. This gives me a sense of who these characters think they are, who other people think they are, and even their position within the community.

I then start thinking about physicality and voice, and how I can use those things to differentiate the characters. In this play, Jim [actor James Smith] and I share a few roles as we both play different townspeople. That means part of my process is chatting to Jim, seeing if he has any ideas and sharing those together. Tapping into a similar physicality or vocal quality helps us each to embody that character and acts as an easy signifier for the audience.

But for me, the most exciting thing in characterisation is to come back to the script. I like to see what is said about my character, how they come off the page and find the physical and vocal qualities to bring that to life.

*"My plate's fine. I've got a perfectly balanced plate. I am spinning my plates, Clive, I am spinning about 10 of them, and all my plates are perfectly fine."*

- Meg, speaking to school principal Clive



## What processes do you use to get into character?

The processes I use really change depending on the play and the role. For example, when I played a soccer player in a play in 2019, I did all this physical training. I am not sporty at all so that's not normal activity for me. I spent a lot of time learning how to kick a ball, how to look reasonably coordinated when I run, and those kinds of physical things.

My preparation for *Euphoria* has been very different. Meg, the main character that I play, goes on a really intense journey over the course of the story. Because of this, I wanted to feel as mentally healthy and fit as possible going into the show. For me, that's been all about balance. Because the play looks at mental health, I wanted to make sure my mental health was in a really good place. Leading up to *Euphoria*, I was doing lots of yoga, trying to eat well, trying to sleep well, and even having regular check-ins with a psychologist. This is all to ensure that I'm across my mental health so that I can portray Meg in a really safe, sensitive and compassionate way.

## How did the process of the community creative development help in your understanding of *Euphoria*?

Through Country Arts SA and State Theatre Company South Australia, we were able to do a creative development in 2019. We toured around a lot of regional towns, many of which we'll later be performing in. I grew up regionally in Port Pirie and Nuriootpa, and I find it really exciting going back and connecting with those places. It was also a lot of fun thinking about *Euphoria* while we were in those towns because we'd spot things that are mentioned in the play – like, there's the mechanic, the high school, the local pub. It felt like some of those towns could actually be the *Euphoria* town. Emily has done an amazing job with her research and writing, and the result is a play that is deeply rooted in regional stories.





Getting to share *Euphoria* and test it out in regional communities was a very special experience. Usually, especially with a new play, you don't really know what an audience will think until you're performing it. With this one, we were able to go to the Lameroo pub, have a beer with the locals, read a few scenes and ask for their opinions. They were really honest with their feedback. They laughed a lot and seemed to like it. It really made me think we're onto something special. I'm really looking forward to taking the finished play back to those communities.

## What do you think makes this play special?

I think this story is really important, particularly in the way it shows a regional community and that way of life. When I grew up regionally, I don't remember seeing plays that showed what my life in the country was like. A lot of the plays, films and TV about country life that I watched were this kind of idealised version living in the country. Those stories didn't really show the strengths and weaknesses of relationships. They didn't really portray how great it can be to be living somewhere a bit more isolated or how challenging that way of life can be. I feel like this play shows that in a really genuine, nuanced way. It doesn't patronise; it doesn't talk down to anyone.

I was talking to my grandma about *Euphoria* because she lives in the country and was a farmer for a long time. We were discussing how important it is to talk about regional communities and mental health, and how it's a really difficult conversation to get started. I'm hoping this play will start that conversation. From the chats I've had with my grandma and a few other people, I think that it will.



## CAST Q&A

with James Smith  
(Ethan/Various)

### What tools or methods do you use when working on characterisation?

Every actor will be different, but for me, characterisation and building a character involves a bit of everything. When I read *Euphoria* the first few times, I started by thinking about who Ethan, the main character I play, reminds me of. That's often where I start my characterisation – I'll think of that guy from high school or that teacher or that person who works at the servo who remind me of the character. I'll think about their physicality, maybe something about the way they carry themselves or sit in a chair. It could also be something about the way they speak and use their voice. I like to mine my memories for ideas.

Working with the text is another huge part of characterisation for me. I'll see what physical cues and insights I can gain from the writing and use that as a structure for building a character. That goes hand-in-hand with working with the director. I'll bring my ideas and the director might like it or might have some ideas of their own.

So my characterisation process involves working with the text, working with the director and throwing in a bit of that guy who used to be a bully in high school.

### How to you prepare to embody multiple characters in one show?

There have been a couple of shows where I've had to play multiple characters, It is really fun, but you have to be on your game because they need to be sharp, distinct, separate characters. You don't want the audience to be wondering who you're meant to be. It's not as simple as just giving one of the characters an eyepatch, you have to find strong distinctions between the characters. You want the audience to be able to see a physical cue or recognise a vocal quality and lock it away subconsciously so when you return to that character, they can easily recognise what you're doing. I'm working with the director, Nescha Jelk, to make sure this happens in *Euphoria*.



## **What processes do you use to prepare for a show, for rehearsals or during the production season?**

During the season, it all really depends on how the play begins. For example, when I was in State Theatre Company South Australia's production of *Jasper Jones* a few years ago, I needed to make some preparations prior to each performance. That play begins at a high level of intensity and I didn't want to walk onto the stage without having warmed up a bit. Because *Jasper Jones* was set in 1965, I tried to bring a sense of that time period into my dressing room. I looked up the top 20 charts in Australia for that year and made a playlist of the songs. I'd listen to these in my dressing room and put on my character's glasses to try and ease myself into the character and show. Obviously, the things you do change for each show you're working on.

In rehearsals, I like to draw and doodle a lot. I always hope the directors and actors I'm working with know I'm not rude when I'm doing this! It probably looks like I'm tuning out or something, but I actually use it as a way of focussing. It's something I do a lot and I find it really helpful when I need to focus.

## **Why do you think it's important to tell this story?**

Theatre companies are trying to be diverse and capture accurate representations of Australia, and this story is an important part of that. To leave out stories about country towns and regional communities would be completely remiss and unforgivable, in the same way it would be to ignore any aspect or community of our society. I've heard someone say that it's State Theatre Company South Australia, not the Adelaide Theatre Company. That might be a simple saying but it's true.



I grew up in the country and I found I was always having to make the trip to the suburbs or the metropolitan area to visit friends and family, but they'd hardly ever travel to see me. For some reason, like it says in the play, the distance to come from the city to visit the country seems like a longer trip than the other way around. I think it's vital that places like Country Arts SA and State Theatre Company South Australia do that trek. You can't just expect everyone to come to the city for a cultural experience.

I think it's important to tell stories like this and to bring them out into regional communities. It's important to tell Australian stories the best way we can – and *Euphoria* is a good one.

## **What advice would you give to a young person who wants to be an actor?**

All I can really speak from is personal experience. I went straight from high school to study at the Flinders University Drama Centre and I personally responded really well to that training. It was really hard – the contact hours were long and it's a four-year course. It was a big commitment, but I appreciated the rigor of the course. It opened my eyes to experimentation, hard work, work ethic, writing, reading and so much more. If you're serious about becoming an actor, I would definitely think about training.

I also think it's important to see as much live theatre as possible, and to engage with theatre companies and the arts in general. Try and fill your head up with good stuff and fill your heart with the things that move and interest you.

Think about why you want to be an actor. It's not as glamorous as it might seem. It can be hard yakka – and that's actually a good thing. Think about what you want to bring to the industry and what little niche you might be able to carve out for yourself within it. Think about what stories you want to tell and what part you want to play.

When you've done your training, the next thing is to find artists whose work moves you or challenges you. Finding these artists locally is a good place to start. Nurturing relationships with other artists is really important and can lead to great things.

*"It's a famous local tragedy. I'm a famous local tragedy."*

- Ethan, speaking about his father's death

## **Supporting materials**

The Q&As with Ashton Malcolm and James Smith are based on video interviews and have been edited for length and clarity. Video interviews are available under the drop-down menu for *Euphoria* at [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-resources](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-resources).



# EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS

## MEG RILEY

School teacher Meg is good at getting things done. She is from Adelaide, but moved to the country town in which *Euphoria* is set 10 years prior to the events of the play. She's married to Nick who grew up in the town and whose family are known there. Meg hints that she is still thought of as an outsider by some townspeople, but has made a place for herself in the local high school and seems eager to participate in community activities. In one example of her community involvement, Meg mentions a local craft group where she has been taught to knit. However, her main community engagement within this play is the Euphoria festival. This new event, created by Meg, is something she felt was important to highlight and celebrate all the wonderful things going on in the town. Meg tends to give the impression of a friendly, cheery young woman who likes to get things done.

Early in the play, we understand that Meg sometimes struggles with balancing her desire to keep busy and the tendency to take on too much. This is exacerbated when she stops taking anti-psychotic medication for an unnamed mental illness. The symptoms of Meg's illness seem to be having lots of energy, decreased need for sleep, talking fast, making impulsive decisions, restlessness, being easily distracted, overconfidence in her ability to do tasks and engaging risky behaviours, like driving too fast. These are all symptoms of what mental health professionals call 'mania'. Meg is concerned that the townspeople will find out about her mental health and will worry about her teaching their children. While Meg struggles to keep the balance she needs for her mental health, she is a kind, caring person who seeks to look after others and look for the best in any situation.

## NICK RILEY

Nick is Meg's husband, a local mechanic who grew up in the town and doesn't want to leave. He worries a lot about Meg and often demonstrates his concern that she's not coping. His greatest fear is losing her. He isn't as into the town stuff as Meg, but is kind and will help others in need.



## ETHAN THOMAS

Ethan is 19 years old, fresh out of high school and not sure what he wants to do next. Although he was accepted to go to university in Adelaide, Ethan abruptly decided not to attend. This baffles his mother but Ethan later explains to the audience that he was concerned about his mother being left alone. Although he was raised on a farm, Ethan was never good at farm work and the land was sold after his dad died. Towards the beginning of the play, Ethan finds work in a local pizza restaurant. He excels as a waiter and seems proud of his abilities. However, he quickly becomes overconfident and this leads to bad decisions.

Ethan often tries to pretend he doesn't care about much, especially with his closest friend Jimmy. This perception is broken down for the audience when Ethan talks about his parents and when he starts planning for the future with Annie, a girl he meets who wants to travel across Australia. Nick also notices Ethan's underlying sensitivity, despite the tough exterior, and tries to talk to Meg about this. It is evident that Ethan has grief and questions over his father's death that he has not had the opportunity to work through. Ethan is someone who works hard (sometimes just to prove people wrong, but sometimes to help others), who wants to seek something outside of his country town and who cares a lot for the people who support him. Although not willing to reveal much of his own inner struggles, Ethan is increasingly frustrated that no one will talk to him about important things like his father's death.

*"I think, if they'd had more kids maybe we'd still have the farm. Like, my dad wouldn't've had to do it all on his own. It wouldn't have mattered that I was no good. Wouldn't have mattered if I went off to uni, cause there'd still have been someone to be here with my mum. Right?"*

- Ethan, speaking to the audience





## OTHER TOWNSPEOPLE

Jimmy is Ethan's best friend and the son of a prominent businessman in the town. He comes from money and has more opportunities than Ethan. He can be reckless and doesn't really seem to care a lot about Ethan. Jimmy often gets Ethan in trouble or encourages his reckless behaviour.

Annie is the girl Ethan likes and hopes to travel around Australia with. She asks Ethan questions about his dreams. His relationship with her makes him think about travel and ambitions outside of the town.

Shauna is Ethan's mum and a local post office worker. She doesn't understand the decisions Ethan is making and tries to push him in the right direction. She worries about him a lot.

Penny is the town busybody and do-gooder who seems to seek recognition for her competency and hard work. She rubs Meg up the wrong way and seems keen to take over the festival. However, when Meg has gone through a difficult time Penny does show some generosity and a willingness to help.

Clive is the school principal, a kind man who likes cracking jokes and tries to make sure he's doing the right thing.

Michaela is the owner of the local pizza place and offers Ethan a job. She seems to recognise his potential and is willing to forgive his mistakes on the job, but her priority seems to be her business and reputation.

A number of other townspeople are also referenced but are minor characters, with many only referred to by name without actually speaking themselves.



## What next?

Pick a character from *Euphoria*. What are the key differences between the chosen character and the other characters in the story? List any important physical features, their emotions and their key motivations or desires. Come up with ideas about their speech, posture, mannerisms and gestures. Why do you think these work for the character? For example, if you think the character should speak in a mumble, what does that mean? Are they shy? Do they not care about what they're saying? Or are they just pretending not to care?

Many of the characters in the play have hidden fears or worries. Write a letter from your character to someone they trust – this may be another character in the play, could be someone mentioned, such as Meg's brother, or could be someone made up, like a childhood best friend who has moved away. Have them reveal something about themselves that they never say aloud in the play.

Perform the letter as a monologue. Remember to keep the list of their physical characteristics, emotions and other mannerisms in mind in your performance.

## Supporting materials

Video interviews with Ashton Malcolm and James Smith:  
[statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources)



# DESIGN ELEMENTS

## An interview with Meg Wilson, Set & Costume Designer

### What is the role of a designer in the theatre?

The role of a theatre designer is to visually communicate the ideas and concepts of the playwright and the director. That communication needs to be done in an aesthetically pleasing way, as well as a functional way.

### What approach do you take when designing a work for theatre?

With a new play like *Euphoria*, I will work very closely with the playwright and the director to determine their visions for the story and what they're trying to communicate with the work. In my early discussions with the director, Nescha Jelk, we quickly worked out that we wanted to create a common space that could be located anywhere in rural South Australia. We wanted to use materials from spaces such as a town hall, supper room, school gymnasium or the function room at the local pub. We looked at common elements such as timber floors, red curtains and community message boards – all things you might find in those spaces. We wanted to bring the elements of those different places into the one space so that we could transform it without needing to change the set too much.

*“When I moved out here people would say, ‘oh, the drive to Adelaide? It’s further coming this way.’ And I didn’t know what they were talking about. But now I do. People don’t come and visit. You have to go and visit them.”*

– Meg, speaking to the audience





## What do you need to consider when designing a set for a touring show?

The process for designing a touring set can be very different to a singular stage set. With *Euphoria*, we're designing a set that needs to create the feel of a town hall – whether that set is located within an actual town hall in the country or is in a 'black box' theatre, like the Space Theatre in Adelaide. We need to evoke that country town feeling no matter what space we're in.

We decided the best thing for this design was to create a space that could transform very easily using doors and moving walls to reveal spaces of different shapes. This also provides flexibility for the set to expand and contract to fit within the space requirements of different venues. For example, part of the main set is a circle with a six-metre diameter but not all the venues we're touring to will have that space and depth. To ensure we can fit the set in these spaces, I've designed it so that you can take away the front part of the circle to create a straight edge.

The other consideration when designing this particular touring set was the ease of putting it together. The set needs to be installed in a couple of hours and packed up again very quickly after the show. I tried to make everything so that it packs up into a very small space to fit in the truck, while still expanding to be quite a large set.



## **What are some of the most rewarding and most challenging parts of being a designer?**

The most rewarding and challenging parts are kind of connected to the same thing for me – that moment when everything comes together. That moment is when the set goes up in the theatre for the first time, you see it under the lights accompanied by the sounds, and you see how the actors interact with the space. Seeing it on a screen or a scale model or in your own mind, it can be hard to confirm that the set and costume design elements are going to do all of the things that you need them to do. I think the most challenging thing for me is the lead-up to that moment of coming together, but it's also the most awesome feeling when it does.

## **What advice would you give someone who wants to design for theatre?**

My biggest piece of advice would be to just immerse yourself within theatre and within the arts in general. I don't come from a background in theatre; I've come from a visual arts background and worked through to interior design and furniture. Identifying the bits I loved from those areas and from design, I found that they all came together in theatre set and costume design. Having made this discovery, my approach was to volunteer with every company that I could. This helped me to find out more about the work and make sure that I was really getting into the place I wanted to be within design and within theatre. My advice would be to immerse yourself, get involved and just do it.

These responses are based on a video interview and have been edited for length and clarity. Video interviews are available under the drop-down menu for *Euphoria* at [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-resources](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-resources).





# MUSIC & SOUND

## An interview with Andrew Howard, Composer & Sound Designer

### **What is the role of a sound designer? How does this differ from the role of a composer?**

The role of a sound designer is two-fold. These two parts are the technical design and the artistic design.

The technical design consists of choosing of all the speakers, microphones and all other equipment that will be used for a production. This includes doing technical drawings for where the speakers are in the theatre, measuring all cabling lengths, supplying the weight of any equipment that is flown, and all other speaker information data, such as where the speakers are pointing and their time relationship to other speakers within the system.

The artistic design is sourcing or creating sound effects, atmospheres, pads and drones that will be part of the aural environment, along with any music that is composed by a composer or licensed from a pre-existing source. The designer is responsible for the entire aural environment for a show.

The composer writes and records the music for a show and sometimes also creates the pads and drones as well.

### **When do you start the composition and sound design for a piece of work? What is the process once rehearsals start?**

I generally start composing for a piece of work a couple of weeks beforehand, if I have time, but otherwise it would be starting in about day two of rehearsals. The process for composing once rehearsal starts is just shutting myself off in my studio and trying to knock out three or four tracks a day, which I then feed into the rehearsal room.





As far as sound design goes, there are a lot of technical drawings that need to be done. Making speaker and microphone choices, sorting out cable links, and all that sort of stuff is part of this process.

## How does sound design connect with the vision or message of a play?

Sound design is very much about creating worlds in the theatre. There are two particular worlds you're creating – one is the world in which the actors inhabit, and the other is the world the audience inhabits. Those worlds do blend at times, often with the use of music or sometimes with the sound effects and atmospheres created by the sound designer.

## Diegetic & non-diegetic sound

*Euphoria* features both diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Diegetic sound is noise where the source is found on the stage or in the action of the play; it relates to the world the actors inhabit, which Andrew Howard spoke about above. Examples of diegetic sounds could be a creak of the door, a cup being thrown, the screech of a microphone or someone clapping – all sounds the characters can hear in their world.

Non-diegetic sound is added in and is not drawn from the action on stage; this is the sound present in the world the audience inhabits. Non-diegetic sounds are used to create a feeling or mood for the audience – they might be atmospheric sounds or music.



# LIGHTING DESIGN

## An interview with Nic Mollison, Lighting designer

### **What is the role of a lighting designer in theatre?**

The lighting designer works together with the core creative team for a production, which includes the director, set and costume designer and sound designer, to create the lighting design that responds to the script of the play. The lighting designer uses the different lighting variables of intensity, direction or focus, colour and time to create atmosphere and selective visibility that complements the delivery of the story to the audience. I think good lighting should not be distracting or noticeable and should help the audience to connect emotionally to the characters and to the story. Practically, this all has to be achieved within the given budget, timeframe, equipment and labour resources.

### **How would you describe the lighting design for *Euphoria*?**

As a touring production, the lighting for *Euphoria* needs to work in many different performance spaces – from fully resourced large theatre spaces to small community halls. This limits what is possible. There is also a time limitation to set up the play in the venue – two people have only three hours to do the set-up at many venues. We are touring with the majority of the lighting equipment to make sure the lighting is consistent across the various venues. Because of these limitation, simplicity is the key.

I am using LED lighting fixtures that give us a wide variety of colours in the one lighting unit which enables us to use less lights than if we used conventional (incandescent) lighting fixtures. This also helps with the power requirements as LED lights do not need as much power either.





## **How does the lighting design emphasise or connect with the themes of the show?**

*Euphoria* is a complex story that has many characters that are played by just two actors. There are many scenes, locations and character changes that happen very quickly. The lighting has to help the audience understand these fast changes of character and locations using quick transitions between the lighting scenes. The lighting for *Euphoria* will be a mixture of naturalistic and non-naturalistic lighting.

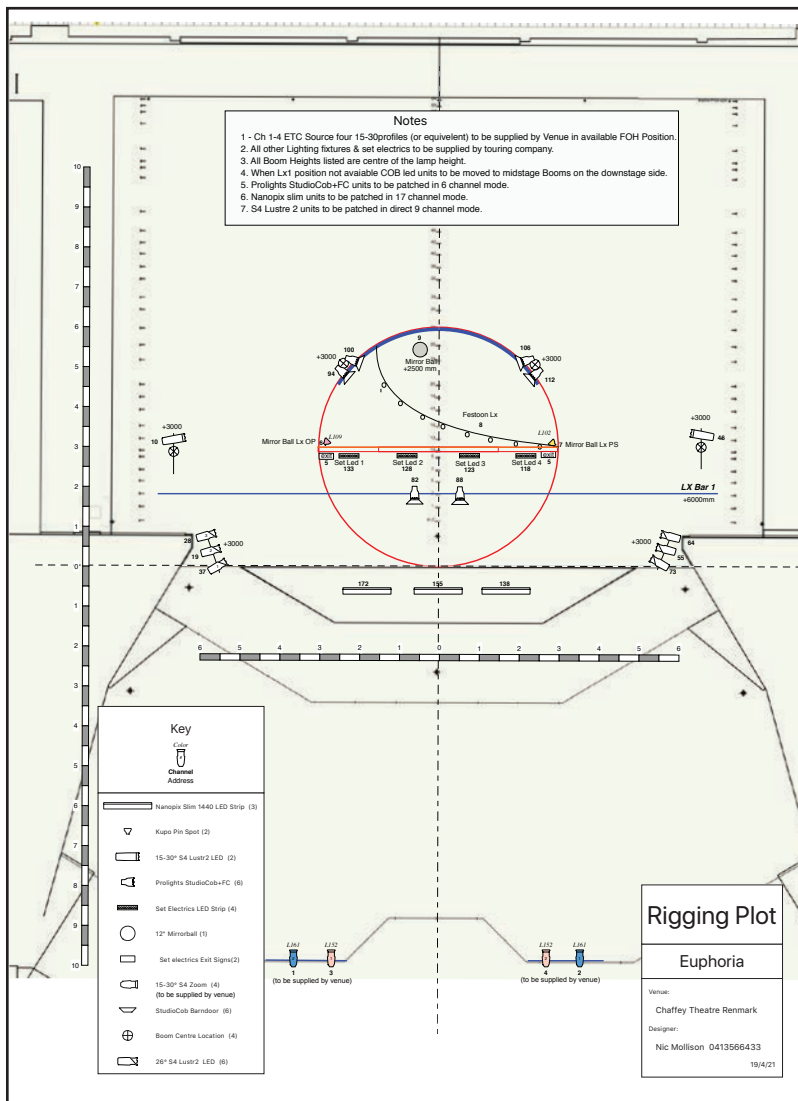
## **What processes or techniques do you use to create the lighting design for a play?**

I start by reading the script to get any clues on the various lighting needs for the play. While reading, I highlight any mention of a specific location or time of day or night, whether its outside or inside, and any mention of the type of space the characters are in, such as "day time classroom", "at home early evening" or "outside at night". I aim to give a sense of these spaces with the colour, direction and intensity of the light.

I watch some rehearsals to get idea of where the actors are moving on the stage (blocking) to make sure they are lit properly over the whole stage.

Generally, as a lighting designer, I am constantly observing the real world and making mental notes on how what I see can be represented on the stage. I consider what quality of light, colour or direction would give me a similar look on stage. I love observing the natural world, how light interacts within it and how this affects our perception, mood and sense of reality.





The lighting plan for *Euphoria*.  
Provided by Nic Mollison.

## What advice would you give to a student who would like to get into lighting design?

There are a few good courses around. I went to the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) and studied lighting design for film, TV and theatre for three years. At the time, it was the only dedicated purely lighting design course in Australia.

Find a mentor, someone that you can call on and ask questions. My mentor is Rick Fisher, who I consider one of the best lighting designers in the world. I have been very fortunate to know Rick over my career and have kept in contact with him for 25 years.

Observe light in the world around you, try to imagine how you would re-create what you see around you on the stage. This also helps you to build up the skill to be able to pre-visualise lighting in space in your mind's eye so you can make decisions about how to realise your designs in the theatre before you get access to the venue. Keep up to date with technology, as it is changing all the time. Research and try to learn something new every day.



## What next?

Choose a type of design on which to focus – set, costume, lighting or sound. Think about what sort of direction you might take with your design. Would you use a naturalistic feel or choose something more abstract?

Think about the feeling you are trying to create with your design. List how the elements you have chosen might reinforce this feeling. How might you change these elements as the play progresses?

Create a mood board for your design – focus on a particular scene or moment if that is helpful. For set, costume and lighting design, find or draw images and diagrams related to your vision. For sound design, find sounds or songs to get the feel you are looking for and create a playlist.

In writing or in a presentation, explain why you have made these choices and how your design connects with the story and themes of *Euphoria*.

## Supporting materials

Video interviews with Meg Wilson and Andrew Howard:  
[statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources)

# EXPLORING MENTAL HEALTH

## An interview with Adan Richards, mental health professional



### What is your role in this production of *Euphoria*?

In my role as the Mental Health Professional for *Euphoria*, I support the cast and crew in the development of the play during rehearsal. I will also offer mental health support on the road to the cast and crew as they navigate the challenges of touring, and of stepping into the feelings of characters portraying distress and extreme states.

After performances, I will be present at Q&A sessions to facilitate conversations should discussions move into topics related to mental health. I will also be there to support audience members should they be experiencing distress in relation to the performance and would like to discuss further.

Before and after performances, I will be demonstrating 'just listening\*', which is as simple as it sounds – just me and two chairs, to demonstrate how simple and useful it can be to offer yourself to listen deeply to another person.

As the tour moves through different communities I will be engaging with different services and community groups to run workshops, have discussions and/or setup spaces where the community can learn more about available supports.

### How did you get involved in the production?

I grew up in a country town for 17 years and witnessed firsthand the joys and challenges of living in a rural community.

Whilst at university, I was a public speaker for batyr, a preventative mental health organisation. Through batyr, I shared my story of distress and relationship with suicide to break down stigma in schools and universities. I then became a peer worker at headspace and a representative on the Youth Advisory Group at the South Australian Mental Health Commission. I finished my Honours degree in Psychology at UniSA at the end of 2019, and now work full time in a lived experience community support role.



I feel lucky to have gotten the gig of travelling around with *Euphoria*, which allows me to combine a lot of the professional skills I've gained over the years with my passion for art.

## **Why do you think it is important to have someone filling this role for this production?**

My view is that art reflects life, and when done well it can be an invaluable resource for generating hope. Artists, who sometimes need to step into the feelings of characters in distress and extreme states, deserve to be supported, as this work can be very challenging. More importantly, perhaps, it gives a chance for *Euphoria* to facilitate deeper conversations with communities, and for the *Euphoria* project to continue pushing dialogue around mental health forward.

## **What sorts of messages or ideas about mental health do you think are portrayed in *Euphoria*?**

Whilst no single story could ever comprehensively cover the entirety of mental health as a subject, this play explores an interesting range of challenging experiences, and places them in a vivid world of contextual complexity. Importantly, we see those challenge in the context of full and rich lives, and thus characters' identities are not limited to diagnostic labels, i.e., depression.

## **What do you hope an audience will gain from seeing this work?**

I hope that audiences see themselves in the characters of the play, in the full spectrum of their experiences, light and dark. I also hope people have a great time watching an extremely talented team put together a great production!

\*Find out more about '*just listening*' at [justlistening.com.au](http://justlistening.com.au)

## **Mental health support**

If you need to talk to someone about your mental health, please reach out to one of these services:

**Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

**Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636 or [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

**Headspace:** 1800 650 890 or [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)



# THEMES & CONCEPTS

## In *Euphoria* by Emily Steel

### Mental Health

Mental health is the central theme in *Euphoria* and a huge issue facing regional communities. Any mental illness discussed within the play remains unnamed and unlabelled. In Meg's case, the audience might have their own ideas about the mental illness she increasingly grapples with throughout the play in accordance with her symptoms (see more on page 19). However, this play is not about any specific mental illness. Instead, it grapples with the way regional communities and individuals address mental health and the wellbeing. The lack of access to professional support and medical care is an important issue addressed within the play, as is a lack of privacy around medical or mental health care. As both Meg and Ethan work through personal issues, the audience is asked to consider the following questions. What does a community owe to the individuals within it? And what do those individuals owe to that community? These questions feed into many of the other themes addressed in the play and in this study guide.

### Community

The regional community depicted in *Euphoria* seems to be very close-knit. From the opening scene, we understand that it's a town where everyone knows everyone, and many have lived in the community for generations. Despite having lived in the town for 10 years, Meg is apparently still considered a newcomer to some, but has obviously worked hard to make herself a part of the community, through her work as a teacher and now as the coordinator of the Euphoria festival. The play demonstrates how living in such a small town can lead to a lack of privacy, revealing characters' weakest or darkest moments for everyone to see and talk about with one another. An example of this is when Ethan has gotten drunk at his workplace and expects everyone will be talking about it. But the play also shows how small communities like this offer support when it is needed. For example, when Clive checks in on Meg or when Penny offers to continue managing the Euphoria festival in the background and let Meg take the credit as the 'face' of the event.



## Self-Discovery

Both main characters in *Euphoria* go on a journey of self-discovery. Ethan starts the play with a lack of direction. While he got the grades to get into university, he decided to stay home, as he did not want to leave his mother alone. Over the course of the play, we see Ethan grow in his commitment to others and in his dedication to particular jobs and plans. We also see him deal with the death of his father, who drove into a tree on the outskirts of town and died. It is not entirely clear to Ethan or to the audience whether this crash was an accident or an act of suicide, although many townspeople seem to feel it is the latter. In the final scene, the audience can see how far Ethan has come in his understanding and knowledge of himself.

Meg also goes through a process of self-discovery over the course of the play. Although much of her journey surrounds the way she considers and treats her mental illness, the self-discovery component is more about the way she accepts help from the community. At the beginning of the play, she feels as though she is the only one who can do what she has set out to do at work and with the Euphoria festival. She generally rejects offers of help. As her mental health worsens, Meg takes on more responsibility and continues to shoulder it all by herself. We see a change by the end of the play when Meg is able to accept help from other townspeople and admit when she needs assistance or support.

*"It's a balancing act. Keep busy, but not too busy. Keep my energy up, but not too high. Stay involved with things, but not too involved or I'll tip myself over into... somewhere I don't want to be."*

- Meg, speaking to the audience.





## What next?

Choose a theme or topic presented in the play – it can be one of those addressed directly by the study guide or another theme or topic you noticed in the work. Write down at least two examples of times when this theme or topic was presented in the play. What do these scenes or moments say about your chosen theme or topic?

Browse a newspaper or news website. Can you find any examples of current news stories or events that reflect your the theme or topic? What location did the news story or stories take place in – was it the town or the country? How do you think the way we deal with this theme or issue differs between the city and the country? How does the news coverage of their issue or theme differ from the way it is portrayed in *Euphoria*?

Write down your responses using quotes from the play and from the other media (news, film or TV show).

Discuss your ideas and thoughts in pairs or a small group.

## Supporting materials

Video interviews with Meg Wilson and Andrew Howard:  
[statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/state-educate-resources)

# FURTHER ACTIVITIES

## WRITTEN RESPONSE

Write a review of this production of *Euphoria*, taking into account direction, acting, design elements and audience response.

For guidelines on how to write a review, see our review writing resource linked in the dropdown menu for *Euphoria* at [statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program](http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program)

## WRITTEN RESPONSE & ACTIVITY

Throughout the play, the audience is given insight into what Meg and Ethan are thinking through their monologues. But what might the other characters have to say about what is taking place?

Choose one of the other characters mentioned in the play. Think about a particular moment or event within the story where your chosen character is affected by their response is not seen – perhaps a time when Nick is sitting home with Meg in hospital, or when Shauna is wondering why Ethan got so drunk at work. Write this scene as a monologue from the point of view of your chosen character.

Optional: Perform the monologue for your class, keeping in mind the physical and vocal traits you think that character would have and their emotions in the moment.

## DISCUSSION

As a class, discuss the idea of 'community'. What does that term mean to you? What are examples of communities in your own life (e.g. school, sport club, religious group, online gaming, social media)? How do you think communities have changed over the past decades? How do online communities differ to real life communities? How are they similar? How are communities different across cultures and locations within Australia? What about internationally? How do you think this might change in future?

## ACTIVITY

Design a front of house experience or poster for this production of *Euphoria*. Think about the audience, themes and messages of the production. How might you emphasise these in your design? Come up with colours and concepts, list your ideas and sketch them out. Create a final product (a poster, model or final design sketch). Ensure everything that is included is there for a reason.



Government of South Australia  
Arts South Australia



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