



BACK TO BACK THEATRE ANNOUNCE NEANDERTHAL - Histories(s) du Théâtre VIII.

An individual's journey into obsolescence, set against the extinction of a species.

Back to Back Theatre is delighted to announce **NEANDERTHAL - Histories(s) du Théâtre VIII**, a major new work from the multi award winning company.

Inspired by conversations with paleoanthropologists, a philosopher, a Lacanian psychoanalyst and six actors with an intellectual disability, **NEANDERTHAL - Histoire(s) du Théâtre VIII** is an expansive work that interrogates the themes of extinction and cognition.

NEANDERTHAL will have its World Premiere at **Monash University's Performing Arts Centre (MPAC)** from 22 – 24 April 2027 and International Premiere at **Vienna Festival** in May 2027 ahead of touring to Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide in 2028.

It will have its first Public Rehearsals in Paris in November during a two week Creative Development as part of the **Festival d'Automne à Paris** where Back to Back Theatre has been honoured with selection as the 2026 Portrait Artist for the Festival, presenting five of their acclaimed works across Paris over eight weeks.

NEANDERTHAL is devised by Bruce Gladwin, Alana Hoggart, Erin Kearns, Grace Kenny, Simon Laherty, Nathan Legg, Sarah Mainwaring, Scott Price, Ingrid Voorendt, Jessica Walker, and directed by Back to Back Theatre's Artistic Director Bruce Gladwin, who returns to the directing role for the first time since 2019.

In a sweeping narrative that moves between pre-history and the contemporary, an acclaimed voice over artist specialising in American accent and omniscient tone tries to get the life he wants but fails. NEANDERTHAL utilises a story within a story structure. In the midst of recording a natural history series, *The Last of the Neanderthals*, a sequence of life changing events forces the voice over artist to face his own obsolescence. It's a story of an individual's journey into irrelevance, set against a story of extinction of a species.

New York based, Grammy nominated trombonist, conductor and composer **Andy Clausen** is creating the musical score for NEANDERTHAL. Brass horns have always heralded the hero, and here the Neanderthals and the Back to Back actors are elevated as champions by a brass quintet, who join the players on stage to deliver a lush cinematic score. The quintet will also fulfil choreographic and acting duties. Eleven performers on stage, marks a significant shift in Back to Back's cast size and the first time in the company's history to have the opportunity to work at this scale.

Announcing the new work, **Back to Back Artistic Director Bruce Gladwin** said, "Co-written with the actors with intellectual disabilities, NEANDERTHAL leverages the actor's pathology as a subject of discourse, so-called deficits in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour are paralleled to evolutionary science's misunderstanding of The Neanderthal. Both Neanderthals and the intellectually disabled have been screwed over by history, but this complex and unpredictable production uses wigs, fake moustaches and one pervading narration to counter the chaos of otherness; hundreds of years of human exceptionalism and ableism obliterated.

Neanderthal is an unapologetically complex work, delivered in form with restraint and simplicity. Drawing on the conventions and aesthetics of natural history documentary, scenography is constructed then stripped away. NEANDERTHAL is simultaneously a quest for authenticity, a mockery, a meticulous documentary and a grand theatrical experiment. "

The Back To Back Ensemble said: "We are excited and curious to bring Neanderthal to an audience. We look forward to performing it and seeing the reactions on people's faces. Neanderthal is complicated, dramatic and funny. It's got depth. The show is based on our conversations. There's themes of sex, violence, evolution, and the extinction of humans. Neanderthal connects to history and also to real life problems that we all have. We wear wigs in the show, except for Nathan, who plays the main character and already has a lot of hair. There's film acting in the show and a live band who play brass instruments."

Musical composer Andy Clausen said, "I am deeply honoured and excited to be working with Back to Back Theatre on this new production. From the moment we started conversing about the project, I sensed a group of kindred artistic spirits, and I have been deeply inspired by Bruce's vision for the piece, getting to know the actors and musicians, the ethos of the company, and the story itself. Attending a recent workshop, I was nearly moved to tears witnessing the actors and musicians bringing together the text and my music for the very first time. I am so looking forward to the road of collaboration ahead, and the opportunity to contribute original music to this story. "

Paul Grabowsky, Executive Director, MPAC said: "Back to Back Theatre has long been one of Australia's most original and influential artistic voices, creating work that resonates on stages around the world. As a Monash-commissioned project, Neanderthal reflects our commitment to supporting ambitious artists and bold new ideas. Our partnership also exemplifies the unique creative opportunities of being a public arts centre on the campus of a major university, where the company's engagement with Monash paleontologists and neanderthal experts - conversations full of Back to Back's trademark curiosity, humour and imagination - has helped shape the creation of this work. We're incredibly proud to partner with Back to Back and to premiere this landmark work, Neanderthal in 2027."

Milo Rau, Artistic Director of the Vienna Festival said: Back to Back Theatre is one of the most radical and deeply moving theatre companies of our time. Their profoundly political work has captivated

Viennese audiences, showing how theatre can transform the way we see the world. Now the company returns with NEANDERTHAL, the eighth chapter in the Histoire(s) du Théâtre series. It is a great gift to host its international premiere in Vienna.

NEANDERTHAL takes the second part of its title from 'The Histoire(s) du Théâtre,' an ongoing, multi-part international performance series curated primarily through NTGent (Ghent's city theatre) and prominently featured at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen), inviting leading global directors and choreographers to construct personal, deconstructed, or historical examinations of humanity's oldest art form. This new work from Back to Back will be the eighth addition to the series when it is performed at the Vienna Festival in 2027.

About Back to Back Theatre

Back to Back Theatre is 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 2026, the company has undertaken 88 national and 131 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 was awarded the 'Best Ensemble' in the 2019 Green Room Awards.

NEANDERTHAL – Histoire(s) du Théâtre VIII was originally commissioned by Monash University through MPAC.

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