

in theatre and film since 1988 and is an experienced writer, actor, director, teacher and musician. A graduate of VCA (Acting) he has created more than 23 professionally theatre shows and over 35 shows for community organisations around Australia and internationally. His solo theatre show, *Going My Way?* gained 4.5 star reviews in the Edinburgh Fringe. Dave worked on radio for three years (3RRR) and worked as a musician recording albums in Mexico City, Bryon Bay, Arnhem Land and Melbourne. As well as his band projects he recently released a solo debut album and EP. Dave played Gordon Bleu's evil nemesis Oswald in Sofia's play *The Anorexic Chef*.

DAVE EVANS is best-known as accordionist in The Band Who Knew Too Much, an Australian combo whose moniker is based on a screenplay Alfred Hitchcock liked well enough to film twice during his career. Dave's theatre work includes *War Horse* and Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*. Dave also performed with Susan Bamford Caleo as part of the La Mama Rebuild national campaign launch.

TERI STEER trained and worked in Brisbane and Toowoomba before moving to Melbourne. Teri studied scenography, stage management, music and drama at university. Teri has toured with *When The Light Leaves* and appeared on stage

in Brisbane Arts Theatre, and became part of the Technical Ensemble. Over the last year, Teri has been working with 15 Minutes From Anywhere, Citizen Theatre and at La Mama. Over the years, she has worked as a mechanist, in performance, design, production and site management, costume and set construction for theatre. Teri currently works for Red Stitch Actors' Theatre and Arts Access Victoria in addition to her freelance work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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La Mama Theatre is on traditional land of the Kulin Nation. We give our respect to the Elders of this country and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people past, present and future. We acknowledge all events take place on stolen lands and that sovereignty was never ceded.

We are grateful to all our philanthropic partners and donors, advocates, volunteers, audiences, artists and our entire community as we work towards the La Mama rebuild. Thank you!

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THE TOP SECRET VIOLIN CASE

21 - 26 JAN 2020



Image by Darren Gill

THE TOP SECRET VIOLIN CASE

Cast

Alana Hunt - Ionel Stoican, an ambitious violinist

Sasha Čuha - Brad Spiro, an American music student

Kirri Büchler - Tony Covaci, a proud, exclusive contrabassist who flirts with the west

Sofia Chapman - Nicu Valentinu, an accordionist with a secret of his own

Voices only

Dave Evans - News Reporter

Sofia Chapman - Mom / MayorGabi

Will Tait - Vasile, A Grade Securitate (Secret Police) operative

Dave Houston - Dumitru, a lower grade Securitate operative

Outside Eye - **Görkem Acaroglu**

Set construction - **Alana Hunt**

Projection art, set paintings and ferrets - **Sofia Chapman**

Lighting/ Sound operator - **Teri Steer**

Sound design / Musical Director - **Sofia Chapman**

CREATOR'S NOTES | SOFIA CHAPMAN

This is not a documentary. In writing *The Top Secret Violin Case* I was partly inspired by an intriguing true story of a violinist turned spy catcher, here highly fictionalised with the introduction of the character Brad Spiro, whose experiences as a queer westerner learning music in Romania strangely mirror those of Sofia and Alana in our travels. The whole concept of being scrutinised by secret police and having something to hide possibly stemmed from growing up queer in Tasmania late last century where homosexuality and even cross dressing were illegal.

I, Sofia first started writing this play in 2015 after a trip to Eastern Europe with Vardos in which we first visited the Palace of the People in Bucharest. Its sheer enormity struck me, and the thought of all the suburbs and culture which were squashed in order to make way for its construction. When Alana and I first visited Romania in the 90's there was still much inherent paranoia left over from the secret police days of the Ceauşescu regime in which citizens were recruited to spy and inform on their neighbours. How tragic, too, to see the aftermath - how the regime messed up the music, creating megalomaniacs in white suits trying to look insanely happy and palatable, in concerts and recordings which were effectively propaganda under state control. This seizing of control is of course not only limited to communism, as evidenced by what our illustrious leader wishes to enforce in Australia, abolishing the right to protest and secondary protest through boycotting products and companies we believe unsound, and a home affairs ministry which will investigate itself for corruption.

Aside from the thanks below I wish to mention my father Peter Chapman, Associate Professor of History at the University of Tasmania, who always encouraged us to look further than the veneer of politics fed to us by the media, and posed the question I have quoted in this play, 'Who organises society, and for whose benefit?'

VARDOS: Driven by Alana on wild violin, chased by Kirri (double bass) and Sofia (accordion), Vardos play folk and Romany music learnt from Rroma musicians during their Eastern European travels. Vardos have played throughout Australia, toured to Europe, Britain, New Zealand, New Caledonia and the U.S., garnering glowing reviews for their electrifying live performances, in particular Alana Hunt, violinist, as the 'live wire in chief'. Vardos have performed at the Famous Spiegeltent in Melbourne and Edinburgh, released 5 albums and appeared in film and television.

ALANA HUNT formed the band Vardos in 1993 in Perth, where Vardos worked professionally for five years, appearing in many festivals including the Fremantle Festival and the Festival of Perth; during this time Alana also made two trips to Hungary to study Hungarian folk music with Beáta Salamon (Méta folk music band) and gypsy music with Miklós Kónya. Alana relocated to Melbourne late last century and Sofia and Alana have made seven further trips to Eastern Europe since 1999. Alana has assisted with set construction in 4 of Sofia's La Mama seasons. Alana's acting experience includes the lead role in the short film *The Private Part* by Faezeh Alavi, which premiered in the Persian Film Festival in Sydney 2019.

SOFIA CHAPMAN was a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Modern Languages and an award winning classical pianist in Tasmania before running away with the piano accordion. Performances include WOMAD Festival in Adelaide and Reading and theatrical seasons in a barge on the Rhône in Avignon, France. Sofia studied playwriting with the Australian National Playwright's Centre where she worked with dramaturgs Richard Bladel and May Brit Akerholt. Sofia's plays include *Todd in Venice*, *The Anorexic Chef*, *The Accidental Death of an Accordionist* and *Untitled*, or *The Seat of Narcissa*, which premiered in 2016, and was invited back for La Mama's 50th birthday Mini Fest in 2017. Sofia also features in the La Mama 50th anniversary commemorative book. Sofia's epic *The Four Accordionists of the Apocalypse* won the 'Best Emerging Writer' award at the 2012 Melbourne Fringe Festival.

KIRRI BÜCHLER is a multi-instrumentalist, sound designer, composer and sound artist who has studied internationally and performed in various ensembles in Melbourne. She has played and improvised music for Sanctum Theatre and Roundangle and has collaborated with Sofia as a sound artist and actor on *The Anorexic Chef* and *The Four Accordionists of the Apocalypse*, the title role in the short film *The Albino Bride* and the band *The Kurts*. Kirri has performed double bass with Vardos since 2012, violin with *The Mystic Charmers*, and also electric bass as her alter ego, in the Transylvanian Gypsy Kings, Dragomir Fotherington-Smythe, who also features in Sofia's short film *DOGS/ DEMONS/ DESTINY* which screens in Lisbon in 2020.

SASHA ČUHA has been acting for almost a decade,

in various companies and productions. His highest film achievement was on the Hollywood production *The Singularity* where he was a special ability performer. Regarding theatre he has played lead roles in classic pieces such as Tennessee Williams *The Glass Menagerie*, appeared in the feature film *Fags in the Fast Lane* in 2017, and in many indie productions. A very versatile performer with a basis in realism, he has often been called to do character work spanning everything from dark and sinister to a comedic flamboyance. Sasha has studied acting mostly on the job but with some specialised training through *Zen Zen Zo* and with Lynton V. Harris in his world renowned 'Scare School'. Sashais fluent in Serbian.

GÖRKEM ACAROGLU is an interdisciplinary performance maker and theatre director of contemporary plays, premieres of new writing, site-specific works and adaptations. Görkem has written and directed numerous performance works including the award winning *Yet to Ascertain the Nature of the Crime* about attacks against Indian students in Australia and *Pandora's Eyes* about women recovering from addiction. Görkem was Creative Director of Melbourne Workers Theatre 2010-12 and founder/Artistic Director of *Metanoia Theatre*. She was an inaugural Sidney Myer Creative Fellow and has a PhD in Cyborg Theatre, Masters in Interactive Media and Film Arts and an Honours degree in Theatre (UNSW). She is a VCA graduate Director and was a member of the NIDA Playwright's studio.

WILL TAIT is a songsmith, MC and presenter with a passion for inspiring wonder and revealing the hidden potential in situations and gatherings. He has 17 years experience as an educational presenter in the sustainability sector, and is the lead singer of 8Foot Felix, a theatrical multi-genre festival band touring in Australia and overseas. He is motivated by the idea that our modern global culture is reaching out for a new story about the workings of the world, a story of potential and abundance in which we see ourselves as integrally connected to each other and our universe. Through music, theatre, whole-heartedness and humour he creates moments of sharing, inspiration and joy that give this new story a meaningful, tangible presence in our everyday lives.

DAVE HOUSTON has been working professionally