



HOWICK LITTLE THEATRE

THE GREAT DIVIDE

A comedy by **David Williamson**
Directed by **Andrew Johnson**

21 FEBRUARY – 14 MARCH 2026



THE GREAT DIVIDE

SYNOPSIS

When wealthy developer Alex Whittle sets her sights on the quiet coastal Australian town of Wallis Heads, she expects to buy land and loyalty with ease. But Penny Poulter, a determined solo mum, won't let progress trample her home or community. What follows is a sharp, hilarious showdown of money, morals, and survival as neighbours take sides and the town splits over its future.

CAST	CREATIVE		
Alex Whittle Hannah Thipthorpe	Playwright David Williamson	Wardrobe supervisor Jenny Connors	Lighting & sound operators Crystal Livingston, Rosie Elder, Glenn Horan
Grace Delahenty Shivaun Statham	Director Andrew (AJ) Johnson	Wardrobe assistant Viktoria Jowers-Wilding	Set construction crew
Alan Bridger Barrie Graham	Set designer Vic Leilua	Dressers Viktoria Jowers-Wilding, Jenny Connors, Ginny Jones, Justine Gibson, Linda Petrie	David Gifford (set foreman), Robert Ford, Pat Hudson, Doug Johnston, Ian McMahon, Dan Vlad, Andrew Walden, Chris Woodhead
Penny Poulter Julia Kellett	Lighting designer Crystal Livingston	Décor and props Abby Middleton, Alison Mudford	Graphic designer Emma Love
Rachel Poulter Claudia Gibson	Sound designer Mike Daley	Rehearsal prompt Erin Parkinson	Photography Andrew (AJ) Johnson, Lyndon Katene - LK Creative
Brian Nick Milnes	PRODUCTION		
Joelle Stephanie McIntyre	Production co-ordinator Carolyn Loader	Tech assistants Vic Leilua, Carolyn Loader, Mira Cameron	
Male swing actor Andrew (AJ) Johnson	Stage manager Paul Gapper		
Female swing actor Erin Parkinson	Assistant stage manager Bruce Wighton		

Principal Funder: Howick Local Board



A big thank you to the Howick Local Board for a grant towards a portable PA system and a pair of wireless mics.

This will give us and our hirers more flexibility around sound requirements for regular and one-off events.

This production is two hours, including a 20-minute interval. It contains occasional strong language and is recommended for ages 14+. Please remember to switch off all mobile phones and noise-emitting devices.



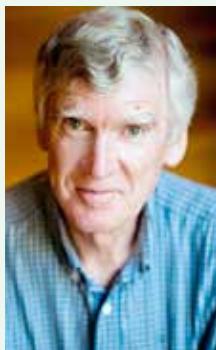
WELCOME AND DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I did a master's degree in politics. I know, weird way to start a director's introduction to a play, but bear with me. I specialised in political psychology: Why do people think what they think, how do we argue about ideas, and how does that make up a society? Since then, we've seen the rise of social media and the era of The Billionaire. Many of us now refuse to pay for news, resulting in the increased commercialisation of ad-driven media that drives us to choose only the clickbait news that confirms our sense of outrage or gives us warm fuzzies about things we already believe, and the increasing collapse of reasoned civil debate.

We've seen the rise of The Great Divide. It's been a heck of a journey in 30 years. I can't imagine what it's like for veteran Australian satirist David Williamson, AO, but he came out of retirement in his 80s angry enough to write this biting bit of theatre, so we get a few clues. The town of Wallis Heads becomes a battleground of modern ideas: every character is slightly exaggerated and a recognisable representation of someone we see in the news. Every character speaks "their truth". Every character has bits we agree with. Every character fails to see the others' perspective or find compromises. It's spiky comedy, but it reminds us sometimes we need a laugh that also makes us think.

Wallis Heads could be a town in the Coromandel. The beachfront in any NZ town. Our outstanding cast of familiar HLT faces and welcome new talent bring it to life, and we've made the staging as lively as the sharp tongues of our contrasting leading women. My thanks, as always, to the outstanding crew of talented people who have created our theatrical sandpit to play in. Imagine your favourite beautiful beach or coastal village, then watch as it attracts the attention of a billionaire. What side do you end up on in the great divide? Let's laugh, then think!

Andrew (AJ) Johnson



DAVID WILLIAMSON, AO

Playwright

Named as one of Australia's Living National Treasures, David Williamson is that country's best-known and most widely performed playwright and one of its leading screenwriters. His first full-length play *The Coming of Stork* was premiered in 1970 and was followed by *The Removalists*, *Don's Party*, *The Department*, *The Club*, *Travelling North*, *The Perfectionist*, *Sons of Cain*, *Emerald City*, *Top Silk*, *Money and Friends*, *Brilliant Lies*, *Sanctuary*, *Dead White Males*, *After the Ball*, *Corporate Vibes*, *Face to Face*, *Rupert*, *Sorting Out Rachel*, *Nearer The Gods*, *The Big Time*, *Crunch Time* and *The Great Divide*. He has had more than 55 plays produced. His plays have been translated into many languages and been performed internationally, including major productions in London, Los Angeles, New York and Washington.

David was the first person outside Britain to receive the George Devine Award (for *The Removalists*). His many awards include 12 Australian Writers' Guild AWGIE Awards, five Australian Film Institutes' Awards for Best Screenplay and in 1996 The United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Award. In 2005, he was awarded the Richard Lane Award for services to the Australian Writers' Guild. David has received four honorary doctorates and been made an Officer of the Order of Australia.

In 2021, his memoir, *Home Truths*, was shortlisted for the 2022 National Biography Award.

ANDREW (AJ) JOHNSON**Director**

A regular on HLT's stage, AJ is excited to be directing again. Previously, he directed *Renovations for Six* and assistant-directed *Aurélia* at HLT. He directed or co-directed shows over a decade as a Life Member of the University of Canterbury Drama Society, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Shakespeare Who?* and *Albuquerque Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Script*. Between voice acting and recording audiobooks, stage and occasional screen appearances, improvising at Covert Theatre, and photography gigs, he works as a careers advisor to secondary-school students. So he can fit more things in, he asks anyone with good cloning tech to please get in touch urgently.

**HANNAH THIPTHORPE****Alex Whittle**

Hannah is excited to be bringing Alex to life in all her entitled, powerful and controlling ways. She says it's been a great role to get stuck into, exploring a character who has seemingly sacrificed genuine human connection for money and power. Hannah made her HLT debut last year playing Mrs Wallace, Lady Lebanon and others in *The Case of the Frightened Lady*.

She moved here in 2024, having lived in Wellington for nearly 20 years, where she performed with Stagecraft and Khandallah Arts theatres. Favourites include *The Revlon Girl*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Woman in Mind*. She says it's been a pleasure working with another talented HLT cast and crew.

**JULIA KELLETT****Penny Poulter**

Julia first performed here in 2023 as a hyperactive housewife in *The Book Club Play*, followed by the role of a blind woman in *Wait Until Dark*. She had a brief affair with the wonderful Dolphin Theatre in 2024 in *Joyful and Triumphant* before returning last year to play Becca in *Rabbit Hole*. Previously, she lived in London for nine years, playing the struggling actor and working for a physio clinic to pay the bills. For two years, she was lucky to combine her love of theatre and addiction to travel by touring a sketch-comedy/English-teaching show across the Czech Republic and Slovakia – easily one of the best experiences of her life. Julia is enjoying being in a play that contrasts so much with *Rabbit Hole*. She says she has a much better instinct for naturalistic drama, so she's loving the chance to dive into a comedy again and learn from her talented castmates and director.

**SHIVAUN STATHAM****Grace Delahunty**

Shivaun returned to the HLT stage last year after four years, and has found it hard to leave. After closing out 2025 with the Christmas chaos of *Many Happy Returns*, she starts the new year by swapping her Irish accent for an Australian one. She is grateful for the privilege of playing the always-composed (and underestimated) Grace, alongside this highly talented cast and crew. She hopes you enjoy your visit to Wallis Heads as much as she has.

As always, she wishes to thank Bruno, Ember and Lark for their unwavering support.





CLAUDIA GIBSON

Rachel Poulter

Claudia is excited to return to the stage in *The Great Divide*, taking on the role of Rachel after spending the past year tucked away in the lighting and sound booth. Her last onstage appearance was as the formidable Miss Darbus in National Youth Theatre's *High School Musical*, and she's loved rediscovering the rhythm of acting through a character she genuinely relates to.

Although the sheer volume of lines has her slightly terrified, she says being back onstage, after time spent in tech and HLT's Tuesday night drama classes, has reminded her how naturally performing fits.



BARRIE GRAHAM

Alan Bridger

In this production, Barrie continues to seamlessly metamorphose from playing an itinerary of inspectors (or a cluster of coppers or beat of bobbies, if you prefer) in various Agatha Christies and other whodunits at both HLT and Dolphin to a furniture salesman (*Wing, Renovations for Six*, 2025).

He is now donning mayoral chains for the first time in this classic contemporary re-gendered David and Goliath rematch, where the valley of Israel is transported to a "sad, dying, dumbass little backwater" somewhere near the surf beaches of the Gold Coast.



NICK MILNES

Brian

Nick grew up in 1980s Hong Kong where enough (some would say more than enough) Australians lived to give him a facility with the accent. Using a David Williamson piece to audition for drama school in his native UK (alongside a suitably plummy Shakespeare bit), he eventually found his way to the Antipodes, braving a year in Perth before settling this side of the Tasman.

He says *The Great Divide* gives him an opportunity to deploy his Strine safely behind the confines of a fourth wall. When not acting, he enjoys pavlova, Crowded House, Russell Crowe and any kind of yeast-based spread.



STEPHANIE MCINTYRE

Joelle

Steph is ecstatic to be back on stage following her role as Nina in HLT's 2025 production of *Vanya, Sonia, Masha and Spike*. Before joining the HLT family, she gained stage experience at high school playing Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* and Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Off stage, Steph is nurturing the next generation after completing her Bachelor of Education at the end of last year. She is thrilled to be working with this amazing cast and stepping back into the spotlight.



HOWICK LITTLE THEATRE

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COMING NEXT TO
HOWICK LITTLE THEATRE

HOWICK LITTLE PLAYS 2026

A series of black silhouettes of actors in various poses are positioned around the large red title text. One is sitting on the top left 'H', one is standing on the top left 'L', one is standing on the top right 'L', one is sitting on the bottom left 'P', one is standing on the bottom left 'A', one is standing on the bottom right 'Y', and one is sitting on the bottom right 'S'.

Directed by Vic Leilua,
Carolyn Loader & Beate Wiebel

BIG STORIES IN SMALL PACKAGES

25 - 28 MARCH 2026