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## I Forgot To Remember To Forget: An Enchanting Collaborative Offering From No Strings Attached – Theatre Of Disability ~ Interview



[AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE ~ AUS/SA ~ THEATRE]

by Catherine Blanch

For 25 years, No Strings Attached – Theatre Of Disability has worked toward redefining the perceived limitations of disabilities in the Arts by demolishing the ‘fifth wall’ of the performance paradigms by not only working with people with disabilities but also to infuse their creative ideas from within and turn them into a collective reality.

Following their sell-out season at the 2018 True Colours Festival in Singapore, the No Strings performers are now bringing their exciting collaborative theatre production *I Forgot To Remember To Forget* to the Space Theatre stage for its Australian premiere season.

We speak with Artistic Director Alirio Zavarce and begin by asking where the idea for this performance originated from.

“When I became the Artistic Director of No Strings Attached in 2016 there was no artistic program for me to inherit. So, it gave me a great opportunity to do a consultation with all the amazing actors from No Strings and ask them what they wanted to create? What were their creative needs, hopes and ultimately their dreams as artists and performers? That was a really exciting process and the starting point for a whole new vision of the company as everything we do at No Strings is based on ‘the voice’, the needs, wants and dreams of our performers. At No Strings, our performers are the stars – not just support acts – which makes us one-of-a-kind in Australia.

“After the consultation I created an Artistic Vision that aligned with the desire of our performers,” he says. “One thing that struck me was all the performers that identify as themselves having a lived experience of memory loss and wanted to create a theatre piece about it. So, to investigate memory and how we ‘forget’ and ‘remember’, we started to explore resilience, how we deal with and accept change, how sometimes we have to re-learn everything and how sometimes we forget it all.”

**Alirio tells us how happy he is with this No Strings cast for *IFTRTF* which features Michaela Cantwell, Kathryn Hall, Cassie Litchfield, Kym Mackenzie and Duncan Luke.**

“I love using autobiographical material; it’s a style I have been working with since *Sons & Mothers*. You could call it ‘Documentary Theatre’ so everything has been co-created and co-design by each of the artist in the piece. All is based on their voices, it is true collaboration and we have created this world of ‘*I Forgot*’ together.

“Michaela Cantwell has an incredible body of work as an actor and theatre-maker with Brink and STCSA and so many other companies across Australia,” he says. “We started to collaborate and talk about the process of where is she now and how is she has been recovering from the stroke. So, we got really excited about creating a piece that would share with an audience how is it like to reinvent yourself and relearn things all over again. What is it like to forget things or how do you deal with things that you remember but can’t do anymore.

“Another amazing performer and collaborator is Kathryn Hall,” Alirio says. “She’s brilliant and has shared how there are also moments where she forgets things. She might be on the bus and think, ‘*Oh. Am I going to or coming from the city?*’

“So, we started the process by examining memory and how do we forget things and how we remember things, which is something we all do but there are things which exacerbate it wither through illness or accidents or medication. It has been great to develop a performing style that allows us to play with forgetting in the world of theatre where everything is about remembering.”

**Having seen *Sons & Mothers* a couple of times, the emotions that poured from the eyes of audience members matched the performances of the actors on stage – possibly because of the pure honesty and the relatability of the story and the performers. Do you feel that *IFTRTF* will grasp people’s hearts in the same way?**

“Thank you, *Sons & Mothers* will always be a very special piece and I find it really hard to compare but I can tell you that *I Forgot To Remember To Forget* is a really beautiful piece of theatre. It makes

something so intangible like memory and forgetting, tangible.

“We all forget things, maybe just the keys or your mobile phone,” Alirio says. “We all remember things and that is the starting point to emphasise and evoke memories in the audience themselves. What I really learnt during this process is that if you don’t remember who you are it’s my responsibility to remind you who you are and your identity, for we live in each other’s memories.”

**No Strings Attached have a supportive team that works behind the scenes including actor Matt Crook who has been collaborating on *I Forgot* for a while, composer Tyson Olsen who has captured the beauty of the piece, emerging Adelaide costume designer Ashley Boyce, and set builder Shane Pope.**

“I came with an idea about the set and the awesome Shane Pope, who constructs beautiful pieces of wood furniture at Pure Furniture but he has never worked in theatre before,” Alirio says. “Shane just found all the solution in giving us a great canvas to play with his set design. We also have our all-rounder, super technician Brad Thomson. We’ve done quite a number of projects together and we continue to collaborate and develop a language in the projection world, lights and all technical elements for *I Forgot*.”

**This year, No Strings Attached – Theatre Of Disability is celebrating 25 years. We ask Alirio if he would like to share anything about the company and their journey.**

“Wow, it’s amazing, isn’t it? 25 years! Yes, I would like people to know that No Strings is a world-class theatre company that proudly works exclusively with performers with a lived experience of disability. Our award-winning productions deeply move audiences to the point where disability disappears.

“At No Strings we believe in breaking the ‘fifth wall’ – the barriers associated with disability. We entertain while we empower and we celebrate ability while being committed to excellence and innovation. By letting ability shine through, we’re challenging expectations and educating society to achieve true inclusion. Our theatre showcases the power of diversity and acceptance, where disability doesn’t define.”

**What is the thought behind changing the name from No Strings Attached – Theatre Of Disability to simply ‘No Stings’?**

“We are not really changing the name and people always shorten it, so we wanted to own that and also a coming of age after 25 years: No Strings – the theatre redefining disability.”

**Alirio mentions that they have a terrific workshops program that is tailored to the needs, abilities and skills of each participant, with professional theatre mentors who consult and collaborate with all the performers to explore themes and ideas to create award-winning theatre.**

“You can come and try these free – everyone is welcome,” he says. “Regular workshop programs run weekly throughout school terms, with The Troupe running on Tuesday nights and The Studio on Saturday mornings. Other groups are convened in response to demand and you can find all the

information by visiting our website at [www.nostringsattached.org.au](http://www.nostringsattached.org.au).

**If you could share one thing that you feel would bring people to see the show, what would it be?**

“It’s beautiful,” Alirio says. “It will touch you and it will make people see their own memories and experiences of forgetting and remembering from a new perspective.”

**Is there anything else you would like to add?**

“Yes, we would love Adelaide to get behind us and you all get to see *I Forgot To Remember To Forget*. I can try to explain it but, like anything, you have to experience it and live the stories with us so you can really understand what we do as a theatre group and how relevant it is to everyone. This is a theatre piece of our times talking about our lives and proudly made in South Australia.”

*I Forgot To Remember To Forget* performs at Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre, at various times, on Wed 3 Jul until Sat 6 Jul.

Book at BASS on 131 246 and [bass.net.au](http://bass.net.au). Click [HERE](#) to purchase your tickets.

Click [HERE](#) to watch the promotional video of *I Forgot To Remember To Forget*.



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