

# COUNTING AND CRACKING

எண்ணிக்கை, இல்லையேல்  
கையோங்கு

எழுத தோததேதே தமி எழுத  
கர்த்த

THE **PUBLIC.** NYU **SKIRBALL**

A Belvoir St Theatre & Kurinji Co-Production



# COUNTING AND CRACKING

The Public Theater and NYU Skirball present  
A Belvoir St Theatre & Kurinji Co-Production  
Written and Associate Directed by **S. Shakthidharan**  
Directed and Associate Written by **Eamon Flack**  
North American Premiere

## CREATIVE & PRODUCTION TEAM

Choreographer, Costume and Cultural Advisor **Anandavalli**  
Set and Costume Design **Dale Ferguson**  
Lighting Design **Damien Cooper**  
Music Composition and Sound Design **Stefan Gregory**  
Fight and Movement Director **Nigel Poulton**  
Vocal Coach **Laura Farrell**  
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## CAST

Ismet & Ensemble **Rodney Afif**  
Apah & Ensemble **Prakash Belawadi**  
Swathi & Ensemble **Senuri Chandrani**  
Thirru & Ensemble **Antonythasan Jesuthasan**  
Radha & Ensemble **Nadie Kammallaweera**  
Sunil & Ensemble **Ahilan Karunaharan**  
Lily & Ensemble **Abbie-lee Lewis**  
Priest & Ensemble **Gandhi MacIntyre**  
Young Radha & Ensemble **Radhika Mudaliyar**  
Siddhartha & Ensemble **Shiv Palekar**  
Vinsanda & Ensemble **Dushan Phillips**  
Nahinsa & Ensemble **Nipuni Sharada**  
Hasaanga & Ensemble **Sukhbir Singh Walia (Sunny)**  
Young Thirru & Ensemble **Kaivalya Suvarna**  
Bala & Ensemble **Rajan Velu**  
Aacha & Ensemble **Sukania Venugopal**  
Musician **Kranthi Kiran Mudigonda**  
Musician **Venkatesh Sritharan**  
Musician **Janakan Suthanthiraraj**

# CREATIVE TEAM'S WHO'S WHO

**S. Shakthidharan** (Playwright and Associate Director) is a western Sydney storyteller with Sri Lankan heritage and Tamil ancestry. He's a writer, director, producer, and composer. Belvoir: *The Jungle and the Sea* (co-written with Eamon Flack), *Counting and Cracking*. Other theater credits include Zana Frailon's *The Bone Sparrow* (Pilot Theatre, UK), *Stay* (Sydney Festival). In development: a new play with Belvoir, a MTC and STC co-commission, his first novel, a feature film with Felix Media, and a new TV project. His debut play *Counting and Cracking* won the Victorian Premier's Literature Prize and the NSW Premier's Nick Enright Prize for Playwriting; the production won seven Helpmann and three Sydney Theatre Awards. *The Jungle and the Sea* won the Victorian Premier's Drama Prize and 4 Sydney Theatre Awards. Shakthi is the Director of Kurinji and was Founder/Artistic Lead of Co-Curious (2018-2022) and Founder and Artistic Director of CuriousWorks (2003-2018). Shakthi was the Carriageworks inaugural Associate Artist and is a recipient of both the Phillip Parsons and Kirk Robson awards.

**Eamon Flack** (Director and Associate Writer) grew up in Singapore, Darwin, and Brisbane. Since 2003 he has worked as a director, writer, actor, and dramaturg throughout Australia and internationally. He has been the Artistic Director of Belvoir since 2016, and his directing credits include *Counting and Cracking*, *Holding the Man*, *Angels in America*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Packer and Sons*, *Ghosts*, *Ivanov*, *Babyteeth*, *Life of Galileo*, *As You Like It*, *The Rover*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Blind Giant is Dancing*. Adaptations include Chekhov's *Ivanov* and *The Cherry Orchard*, Gorky's *Summerfolk*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Ibsen's *Ghosts*. *Ivanov* won four Sydney Theatre Awards, including Best Mainstage Production and Best Direction. *The Glass Menagerie* and *Angels in America* won Helpmann Awards for Best Play. *Counting and Cracking* won Helpmann Awards for Best Play, Best Direction, and Best New Work; the NSW Premier's Nick Enright Prize for Playwriting, the Victorian Literary Prize, and the Victorian Premier's Award for Drama. Other credits: co-adapting Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, and co-devising *Beautiful One Day*. Education: University of Queensland, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts.

**Anandavalli** (Choreographer, Costume and Cultural Advisor) is a veteran classical Indian dancer with an international career spanning over 45 years. Born in Sri Lanka, she performed as a young prodigy across India and Europe under the tutelage of dance luminaries from both the East and the West. In 1985 she migrated to Australia and founded the Lingalayam Dance Academy and Company. Lingalayam's work incorporates dance, live music, text, and design. The company's central focus is to express the timeless, unique role of women and dance in our society. Anandavalli is deeply committed to advancing the course of Indian dance as well as the broader scope of artistic development



Photo: Pia Johnson

in Australia. Through a series of innovative, national and international collaborative partnerships, today Lingalayam's choreographic vocabulary far transcends the boundaries of its original performative paradigms, and presents contemporary work founded on its classical origins. Anandavalli was the pivotal actor/dancer in the 2022 Belvoir Street Theatre and Lingalayam Dance Company's 2022 co-production of *The Jungle and the Sea*, which won four Sydney Theatre Awards, including Best Mainstage Production.

**Dale Ferguson** (Set and Costume Design). Belvoir: *The Jungle and the Sea*, *Sami in Paradise*, *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, *Brothers Wreck*, and *The Power of Yes*. Other theater: *Exit the King* (Broadway); *Death of a Salesman* (GWB, Andrew Henry Presents); *37*, *Come Rain or Come Shine*, *An Ideal Husband*, *The Weir*, *The Speechmaker*, *The Crucible*, *Top Girls* (MTC); *A German Life* (Adelaide Festival); *Emerald City*, *L'Appartement* (Queensland Theatre); *Because the Night*, *Away*, *Brothers Wreck*, *Night on Bald Mountain*, *Dance of Death*, *Timeshare* (Malthouse Theatre); *Così*, *Away*, *Les Liasions Dangereues* (Sydney Theatre Company). Opera: *Tosca* (Opera Queensland WA Opera); *The Magic Flute* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); *Anything Goes* (Opera Australia); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Adelaide Festival, Houston Grand Opera, Canadian Opera). Awards: two Helpmann Awards, several Green Room Awards, Tony and Drama Desk nominations.

**Damien Cooper** (Lighting Design). Belvoir: *The Weekend*, *Into the Woods*, *Light Shining In Buckinghamshire*, *Wayside Bride*, *Things I Know To Be True*, *Mark Colvin's Kidney*, *The Dog/The Cat*, *Radiance*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Miss Julie*, *Stories I Want to Tell You in Person*, *Cat on a*

*Hot Tin Roof*, *Peter Pan*, *Strange Interlude*, *Neighbourhood Watch*, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *The Seagull*, *Gethsemane*, *Keating!*, *Toy Symphony*, *Peribanez*, *Stuff Happens*, *The Chairs*, *The Spook*, *In Our Name*, *The Underpants*, *The Sugar House*, *A Taste of Honey*, *The Ham Funeral*, *Exit the King*. Sydney Theatre Company: *On the Beach*, *White Pearl*, *Top Girls*, *Dinner*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Disgraced*, *Arcadia*, *Orlando*, *The Golden Age*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *The Women of Troy*, *The Lost Echo*, *Rifle Mind*, *Tot Mom*, *The Shape of Things*, *Far Away*, *Bed*, *Julius Caesar*, *Summer Rain*, *Boy Gets Girl*, *The Metamorphosis*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *A Walk With the Goons*, *The Art of War*, *The Great*, *Honour*, *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness*, *Blood Wedding*, *Bloodland*, *Under Milk Wood*, *The Splinter*, *Storm Boy*, *The Long Way Home*, *Children of the Sun*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Awards: three Sydney Theatre Awards, three Green Room Awards, two Australian Production Designers Guild Awards.

**Stefan Gregory** (Music Composition and Sound Design) is an Australian composer and sound designer for theater, dance, and film. His recent productions include: *The Present* (Broadway), *Medea* (BAM), *Yerma* (Young Vic), *Counting and Cracking*, *The Wild Duck*, *Thyestes* (Belvoir), *Medea*, *Ibsen Huis*, *Husbands and Wives* (Toneelgroep Amsterdam), *Drei Schwestern*, *Engel In Amerika*, *Medea* (Theatre Basel), *Trilogie de Vengeance*, *Les Trois Soeurs* (L'Odeon), *Avalanche* (Barbican), *There Is Definitely a Prince Involved* (Australian Ballet), *L'Chaim* (Sydney Dance Company), *Wonangatta*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Arturo Ui* (Sydney Theatre Company), *The Dig* (Netflix). Awards: two Sydney Theatre awards, Helpmann Award, OBIE, and Drama Desk nomination, ARIA Award nominations as member of Faker, Sidney Myer Fellowship.



# A NOTE FROM OSKAR EUSTIS

Dear Friends,

*Counting and Cracking* is an extraordinary play.

It's a family drama and a historical drama; a sweeping portrait of a country whose tenuous unity is being challenged by forces of tribalism and politics, and of a family torn apart by conflicting loyalties and history. It's about a country, Sri Lanka, whose history is unknown to most Americans — yet whose story has resonance and rhyme with so many of the stresses the United States finds itself faced with today. It's epic and intimate at the same time, gloriously unique and uncannily familiar. Like *Doctor Zhivago*, *War and Peace*, or all of Shakespeare's plays, for that matter, it sees the most personal relationships swept up in and determined by the great historical forces that move through society.

I had the great good fortune to meet its brilliant author, Shakthi, while I was in Australia on a brief sabbatical in the early months of 2023. I was introduced to Shakthi by tonight's director, Eamon Flack, who is also artistic director of the Belvoir St Theater in Sydney. Despite my determination to write and reflect during my time abroad, and not get caught up in the theatrical life around me, once I met Eamon I just got more and more intrigued by what he is creating at that remarkable theater. He's a wonderful director, true, but he also had a sense of mission and purpose, a belief that the theater can impact the world in profound ways, that I found deeply sympathetic.

As he told me the story of the creation of *Counting and Cracking*, I knew I was in the presence of a theater artist who would be right at home at The Public. The tale of the development of the play you will see tonight is, in itself, an epic and profoundly moving tale. This grand play belongs in a larger theater than The Public, so we are grateful it has found a New York home at NYU Skirball. We have had a long and happy history of working with Skirball, and Jay Wegman has provided indispensable New York homes for many extraordinary artists. From Druid to Gob Squad, Skirball has enriched New York's cultural life by investing in extraordinary artists.

And Shakthi — brilliant author, activist and social worker, theater-maker and artist, son and father — is an artist worth investing in. His broad knowledge, magnificent heart, and deeply integrated sense of justice shine through in this production. I can't wait to watch this play land on New York audiences — and I can't wait to see what he does next.

Welcome. It's an honor to have you here and a pleasure to share this story with you.

**Oskar Eustis**

Artistic Director, The Public Theater

# A NOTE FROM S. SHAKTHIDHARAN

Ten years ago I was hungry. Hungry to learn about my mother's homeland. To know my history. So I started on a journey that had no clear end.

I read everything there was to read on the subject. I had conversations with so many gracious and intelligent Sri Lankans from all around the world. I was reeling from the overload, but slowly, very slowly, a story was being born. It was a story about parents and children. About coming together and breaking apart and coming together again — in our families, our governments, our countries.

And this story became something bigger than my own hunger. It became something that had a power. The power to help my mother reconcile with her homeland. To connect people across deep divides. The power to collapse time and join continents.

The story became less about fitting my community into a simple narrative, and more about presenting a group of people in all their glorious complexity. It became less about discovering "the truth" of what happened in Sri Lanka, or what brought us to Australia, and more about understanding the stage as a sacred space where many truths can gather at once.

The stories we choose to believe in underlie all our actions, thoughts and feelings. In *Counting and Cracking* I hope to provide audiences with a new story to believe in: about Australia, about Sri Lanka. It's a story in which migrants are not asked to discard parts of themselves to fit in, but instead are asked to present their full selves, to expand our idea of what this country can be. It's a story of how the politics of division can win the battle, but never the war, around how power is gained in this world. It's a story in which love may not triumph over adversity, but through sheer persistence and resilience can eventually overcome it. And finally it's a story about reconciliation: between parents and children, between neighbors and enemies, between your new home and your old home, between society and its institutions.

Many different types of humans came together to make this show. People from very different walks of life, companies from very different parts of the creative industries. It's been quite the ride for all of us, as we have each utilized our different sets of expertise to make this wildly ambitious dream a reality. No one entity could have done it on its own. Much like the story of *Counting and Cracking*, the process of making this work proves that real power can be gained when different groups come together to create something new.

**S. Shakthidharan**

Playwright and Associate Director

# A NOTE FROM EAMON FLACK

*Counting and Cracking* is about the basic need we all have to connect — to each other, the world, the past, and the future. Most of our lives are spent making and nurturing these connections, on every scale of life, in small ways and big ways. The small ways are usually age-old, human-scale things: love, family, language, story, belief, food, home, place, the passage of time from one generation to the next. The big ways are more likely to be newer, systemic inventions: nation states, institutions, ideologies, economies. *Counting and Cracking* is about the relationship between the big stuff and the small stuff. The big stuff has developed more and more into a protection racket that feeds off the human stuff in exchange for often dubious claims to order and growth. And as with any uneven contest, the impact of a big force on a small one is inherently violent. A language shattered, a family torn apart, a place torn down.

All these connections, big and small, are fragile. They cannot be taken for granted. We inherit them, they are in our keeping. The big stuff must take care of the small stuff. The small stuff is what matters most. We cannot be a nation or a whole person if we cannot keep hold of these connections. And when a person or a group of people have been torn apart then the only options are to revive the old connections, or make new ones. Usually both.

This show is the product of new and revived connections. Bringing it together took an almighty effort by a great coalition of people and communities from many ways of life. Some of those encounters in the making of the show were as raw as those depicted in the show, and some of them became key moments in the play.

*Counting and Cracking* is what it is about. New connections are always possible. New stories are always possible. And increasingly necessary. We mix from here and there, now and then. Water and water.

## **Eamon Flack**

Director and Associate Writer

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Counting and Cracking* is dedicated to Lingamani Rajarayan (1933-2018), affectionately known to me as “Chinni”. Chinni was the first person in my family to open up to me about Sri Lanka. We sat in her kitchen in London and over several days of Scrabble and curry she talked and I listened. Her spirit is woven into the fabric of this story. My only disappointment in the making of this work is that Chinni is not here to see it.

*Counting and Cracking* features direct quotes from a diverse array of people: Sri Lankan politician (and mathematician) C. Suntharalingam (with the permission of his

family), Sri Lankan journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge (with the permission of his brother Lal), Yolngu woman and artist (and dear friend) Rosealee Pearson (with the permission of her family), and my mother Anandavalli. *Counting and Cracking* is a work of fiction and there is no intention for any of its characters to represent or reference anyone in real life. Nevertheless, real life has occasionally worked its way into the story, as it almost always does.

Anjalendran is an architect and my grandaunt’s son. We sat at his dining table in the first house he built — his own home, in Colombo. Over lamprais and Chindian takeaway we read aloud my great-grandfather’s public articles and private letters. These were bold and confronting missives. Anjalendran’s resulting frank and honest thoughts on our troubled history did not diminish his pride or sense of belonging to Sri Lanka. I continue to be inspired by his fearless approach to a truthful reconciliation with our past.

Anushya took my wife and I to Jaffna before my mother was ready to go back there. To go to Jaffna for the first time is like an exhalation. There is an impossible amount of expectation before your arrival, and then a slow release as you cross over to the peninsula. You witness a region that is re-building and re-imagining itself, and amidst all that you glimpse the remains of the life that your family once had, long ago. The temple they once helped build and now only donate to. Their old home with its new occupiers. It was on this trip that I first started to understand our ancestral homeland and the fullness of the Sri Lankan picture. Anushya guided us through this complexity with endless patience and a quiet, deep intelligence.

My mother did not talk to me about Sri Lanka in any deep way for the first thirty odd years of my life. She had closed her heart to the country. She has witnessed the development of this work – been a quiet presence for many of the research conversations, attended each of the readings and the showings. The process of making this work has changed her. She is reconciling with her homeland, and has started talking about Ceylon again. In doing so, she has made the choice to be vulnerable. I am grateful for that. It is the hard choice, but we are immeasurably better for it, as artistic collaborators on this project, and as mother and son.

*Acknowledgments continue at [belvoir.com.gamechangers](http://belvoir.com.gamechangers)*

## **S. Shakthidharan**

Playwright and Associate Director

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We stand in honor of the first people and our ancestors, acknowledging the land on which we stand is the original homeland of the Lenape people. We honor the generations of stewards, and we pay our respects to the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

# BELVOIR ST THEATRE

**Belvoir St Theatre** is a guest on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation (Australia). This is land where stories have always existed, and people have always gathered. In more recent times many new people, new stories and new languages have arrived, and continue to arrive. Belvoir, officially Company B Ltd, was founded in 1984 by a group of artists and audiences drawn together by the idea that a vibrant, open city needs many spaces to tell its many different stories. Our home is an old factory on a side street in Surry Hills which we share with public housing and two parks. For nearly four decades the company has been sustained by the belief that our basic tasks are to entertain audiences, to represent our society, to give artists the freedom to work, and to share our work as openly as possible. Belvoir's ambition is and always has been to honour the depth and breadth of our place and our history in our work. Each year the company presents an annual season of shows for this now-iconic corner stage. New work and new stories sit at the centre of Belvoir's programming, alongside a mix of reinvented classics and international writing, and a foundational commitment to Indigenous stories. In short, Belvoir is about theatrical invention, an open society, and faith in humanity. Belvoir engages Australia's most prominent and promising theatre-makers. Landmark productions include *Counting and Cracking*, *The Jungle and the Sea*, *The Master and Margarita*, *The Wild Duck*, *FANGIRLS*, *Cloudstreet*, *Barbara and the Camp Dogs*, *The Drover's Wife*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Angels in America*, *Keating!*, *The Sapphires*, and many, many more. Belvoir regularly tours nationally and internationally. Belvoir receives government support for its activities from the Federal Government through Creative Australia and the state government through Create NSW.

**Kurinji** tells global stories that are epic, intimate and communal. Our productions are multi-sensory and immerse our audiences in other worlds. Our process is collaborative, and our work is made through respectful collaboration with real people, in real places. Our home is western Sydney, Australia; the land of the Wangal clan of the Dharug Nation.

Belvoir wishes to thank our generous supporters who made this production possible. For a full listing, visit: [belvoir.com.au/gamechangers](http://belvoir.com.au/gamechangers)

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# NYU SKIRBALL

**NYU Skirball** holds close James Baldwin's dictum that "artists are here to disturb the peace." Our mission is to present adventurous, transdisciplinary work that inspires yet provokes, confirms yet confounds, and entertains yet upends. We proudly embrace renegade artists who surprise, productions that blur aesthetic boundaries, and thought-leaders who are courageous, outrageous, and mind-blowing.

A roster of international artistic visionaries command our stage, often with North American or World Premieres, including directors Milo Rau and Toshiki Okada; choreographers Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Florentina Holzinger, and Faustin Linyekula; composers Du Yun, George Lewis, and John Zorn; the theatre ensembles Druid, Elevator Repair Service, Forced Entertainment, Gob Squad, Wooster Group, and Teatro La ReSentida; along with the dance companies A.I.M by Kyle Abraham, Big Dance Theater, and Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance. Eminent scholars, authors, and thought-leaders headline our events and have included Kwame Anthony Appiah, Judith Butler, David Chalmers, Angela Davis, Zadie Smith, and Slavoj Žižek.

Our public engagement programming aligns with the University's academic mission, blending cutting-edge live art with practical, experiential learning opportunities. Through artist talks, workshops, scholarly essays, and public events, we foster encounters with boundary-pushing art forms, enhance critical thinking, nurture imaginations, and use the performing arts as a vital tool for education, research, and lifelong learning.

We are NYU's largest classroom. We want to feed your head.

## NYU SKIRBALL MEMBERSHIP

NYU Skirball Members receive discounted tickets to productions, events, pre-sale opportunities, exclusive invitations, and special access to innovative artists, academics, and thought-leaders. More importantly, members support programs that bring a broad range of cutting-edge performances to New York City. Memberships start at \$75. Please visit [nyuskirball.org](http://nyuskirball.org) to join, make a donation, or learn more.

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Photo: Pia Johnson

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##### **Milo Rau: *Antigone in the Amazon***

September 27 & 28 | North American Premiere  
Director Milo Rau returns to NYU Skirball with a groundbreaking production where ancient myth meets modern-day activism.

##### **Miet Warlop: *One Song***

October 3-5 | US Premiere  
Hailed by *The New York Times* as one of the “Top European Productions of 2022,” *One Song*, the latest work by acclaimed transdisciplinary artist Miet Warlop, makes its U.S. premiere.

##### **Builders Association: *Atlas Drugged***

October 25-27 | World Premiere  
Just in time for the election, Ayn Rand’s benzedrine rants meet artificial intelligence in *Atlas Drugged*, the Builders newest technologically infused work.

##### **The Civilians: *Sex Variants***

November 14-24 | World Premiere  
The Civilians examine the intimate lives of Depression-era queers in this kaleidoscopic musical fantasia adapted from the 1941 text *Sex Variants*, a “medical study” of LGBT+ sexuality. Featuring original songs by Martha Redbone, Stephen Trask, and the late Michael Friedman.

##### **Nature Theater of Oklahoma: *No President***

December 5-7 | North American Premiere  
Nature Theater of Oklahoma makes a long-awaited return to NYC with a furious, over-the-top, tightly choreographed political grotesque that draws from everything on offer — all to a reordered recording of Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker*.

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# THE PUBLIC THEATER

**The Public Theater** continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public's wide breadth of programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New York City's five boroughs, Public Works, Public Shakespeare Initiative, and Joe's Pub. Since premiering *HAIR* in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musicals *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Suffs* by Shaina Taub, and *Hell's Kitchen* by Alicia Keys and Kristoffer Diaz. Their programs and productions can also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 64 Tony Awards, 194 Obie Awards, 62 Drama Desk Awards, 61 Lortel Awards, 36 Outer Critic Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 65 AUDELCO Awards, six Antonyo Awards, and six Pulitzer Prizes.

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