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**Aboriginal actors racially abused in Melbourne; A group of Aboriginal actors say they were refused service by four Melbourne taxis and racially abused on a tram within a 24-hour period.**

Morris, Madeleine;  
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A group of Aboriginal actors say they were refused service by four Melbourne taxis and racially abused on a tram within a 24-hour period.

Actor Jada Alberts, one of the cast members of the production *The Shadow King*, says four booked taxis drove away after rehearsals at the Malthouse Theatre on Monday night.

A group of Alberts's fellow actors was waiting outside Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre to collect taxis to take them the couple of kilometres to their hotel.

"So it was my sister Raddaway and her, some of her family. They've gone to get a cab and Nina, one of the general managers at the Malthouse, she's booked a series of cabs and as one would rock up they would then say 'No, we can't go that distance' and then drive away," she said.

"Raddaway's gone and spoken to Nina and said 'Listen those cabs you've called aren't stopping and aren't letting us in - [they're] looking at us and taking off. So can you help us?'

"She's called another cab that cab's given some sort of excuse, and then she's hailed one off the side of the road - this is number four cab [and] he stops.

"As she goes to usher in the company in the vehicle, the cab driver gets a look at them and says 'No, no, can't do it, sorry' and drives away."

Alberts says she eventually found a taxi and jumped in without speaking to the driver.

The next day, the group took a tram to the theatre and were racially abused.

"He then said 'You Aboriginal people don't exist in this country. You should go. You don't even have tickets'," she said.

"I know that it's not a usual occurrence, but for those things to happen within the space of 24 hours was just pretty heartbreaking for all of us to have to deal with," she said.

Last year a Melbourne taxi driver refused to pick up award-winning Indigenous singer Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, and there have been several recent incidents of racial abuse on Melbourne trains.

'Short fare refusal'

The taxi company at the centre of this latest incident, Silvertop, is not commenting this morning, other than to say it is investigating.

But David Samuel, the chief executive of the Victorian Taxi Association, says that the fact were refused four times indicates there might be another explanation.

"The problem that is plaguing the industry at the moment ... is short fare refusal, rather than those individuals being refused on the basis of race," he said.

"At the moment I really don't want to speculate on it because it is a very divisive issue. I would like to give my industry the benefit of the doubt.

"Melbourne taxi drivers aren't racist. In fact the vast majority come from overseas jurisdictions. I think that to say that we're not a culturally diverse and culturally understanding industry would be stretching the truth a little bit."

But Rachel Maza, an actress and artistic director with the, Ilbjerri Theatre Company, dismissed that suggestion.

"This would be absolutely normal practice and this is across the country. This would definitely be the same in Perth, in Sydney - everywhere," she said.

"In fact, what's unusual about this is that it's hit the news."

Maza says the experience is so common that there is a well-known manoeuvre used by Indigenous Australians to make sure taxis do not drive off.

"The paler, skinniest [person] is the one who stands out and hails the taxi," she said.

"When the taxi pulls up [and] opens the door, then the others quickly come out from the doorway and then it's too late the taxi can't drive off.

"This is all very normal and every day."

