

THE NEW STRATEGY FOR MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

PLEASE NOTE: SECTIONS OF THIS STRATEGY
ARE SUBJECT TO GOVERNMENT FUNDING

EVERY GENERATION DESERVES REMARKABLE STORYTELLING TO HELP UNDERSTAND THEIR TIMES

Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) is Melbourne's home of live theatre, producing annual mainstage seasons and education programs, additional productions and co-productions for families, productions with independent artists, and a raft of industry and community outreach and development initiatives.

Founded in 1953, MTC is the longest running professional theatre company in Australia and one of the largest theatre companies in the English-speaking world, with a loyal audience of over 22,000 subscribers and from 200,000 to 250,000 theatre attendances annually.

In 2013 MTC underwent its most significant changes in decades with the appointment of a new artistic and management team, ushering in a five year era marked by:

- an increased commitment to produce more, and better resource, Australian plays
- establishing the most expansive and ambitious playwright development program in Australia's history
- increased international touring
- showcasing the finest international theatre productions on Melbourne's stages
- establishing Australia's first dedicated 'Women in Theatre' Program
- expanding education and family productions and programs
- reflecting diversity in the stories it stages, the artists telling those stories, and the audiences engaging with those stories
- a strong relationship with Melbourne independent theatre artists and companies, evidenced by MTC's landmark NEON independent theatre festivals, the ongoing NEON NEXT program of commissioning and developing new works with independent artists, co-productions with the small to medium sector, and associated initiatives and employment opportunities



These changes have all been undertaken with no additional government assistance, but with a generous willingness by donors and philanthropists to consider and support these new ideas for theatre in contemporary society.

As a result, MTC is now better equipped to reflect our society and the changing nature of theatre for our times, but more needs to be done. This 'New Strategy for Melbourne Theatre Company' is in many ways a 'New Vision for Theatre in Australia' as it articulates these necessary advances.

Live theatre occupies a unique place in society to present performance in and of our time. It is one of the very few live artforms which speak directly with us about ourselves, each other and the world around us, in this 21st Century. It is a current conversation. Unlike the heritage arts (opera, ballet, classical music) which more frequently present repeated, known, historic works; theatre has the unique capacity to consistently be part of society's conversation, in which we gather around a metaphorical campfire to tell new stories, to better understand our own times, and enrich and improve our world.

Accordingly, this Strategy is designed to take MTC beyond its now 65 year history to ensure the Company's live storytelling remains vital, relevant and transformative for Australia. It is especially designed to ensure MTC's financial sustainability into the future, and to benefit the wider theatre community of artists and audiences (local, regional and national), including culturally diverse artists and audiences.

The execution of this Strategy now depends on governments recognising theatre's importance in telling our stories, and supporting Australia's flagship theatre companies with the same vigour and fiscal generosity with which it has long supported Australia's flagship heritage arts companies. This is not the case at present.

If such additional support is not forthcoming, MTC will be limited to pursue its traditional 'business-as-usual' operations of the past, with its historic annual menu of 11 mainstage plays, an education program, various cost-neutral outreach and development programs, combined with current limited cast sizes and limited rehearsal periods.



Jasper Jones

'BUSINESS-AS-USUAL' ANNUAL ACTIVITIES OVER FIVE YEARS

1	The MTC annual mainstage program of 11 productions
2	An Education production annually, presented at Southbank Theatre and then on tour to regional Victorian venues, with additional educational activities
3	NEXT STAGE Writers' Program (for the duration of the Program's first five years of funding)
4	The Women in Theatre Program
5	The Diversity, Access and Inclusion Program
6	Cast size averages of five to six actors
7	Standard rehearsal periods of four weeks (five for new Australian works)



Our Purpose, Vision and Mission all reflect our societal role as our tribe's storytellers. Those telling our stories (from creative artists to theatre workers), and the audiences witnessing those stories, will always reflect the diversity of society in this 21st Century.

OUR PURPOSE

Every generation deserves remarkable storytelling to help understand their times

OUR MISSION

To create excellence in all forms of theatrical storytelling – including existing and new Australian stories, international hits and classics – with imagination and passion in order to entertain, challenge, inspire and grow audiences

OUR VISION

To be the best theatre company in Australia at telling stories relevant to audiences in the 21st Century and so lead the national cultural conversation

THE STRATEGY

As Victoria's state theatre company, MTC's Strategy reflects and responds to the dynamics of Victoria's future, which will be marked by:

GROWING POPULATION

GROWING DIVERSITY

GROWING INNOVATION

This Strategy charts a clear course to build on MTC's enviable foundations and usher in the next era in MTC's evolution. MTC's goals for the next five years are to:

- reach new audiences in addition to our existing loyal subscribers and audiences
 - develop the next generation of home-grown theatrical talent
 - vigorously support our writers in developing and staging new stories of excellence, including those of epic vision – as David Williamson said, 'polished, incisive plays about our here and now' – and developing new plays potentially for all theatre companies – local, regional and national – not just for MTC
 - invest substantially in the development of Indigenous works
 - continue to work with the independent and small-to-medium theatre sectors to strengthen and enhance them
 - use new technologies to enhance our offerings beyond Melbourne to regional Victoria, and to national and international audiences
 - implement a digital strategy which includes children, so that young people's ubiquitous 'screen culture' can be their introduction to theatre and cultural awareness
- mentor and nurture regional theatre makers to strengthen and enhance the wider cultural community
 - continue to inspire theatre-makers and theatre-goers with an 'extraordinary' work staged biennially
 - expand and extend revenue streams

These are not 'business as usual' goals. They are deliberately ambitious to enable MTC to maintain and grow its relevance, to support the national theatrical landscape, and to tell the stories that will enable diverse generations to understand their times, now and in the future.

These additional goals are appropriate for this stage of MTC's growth and evolution. Achieving these goals will require significant support from government along with support secured from the private sector and corporate Australia. Alongside these supporters, MTC will do its part. Australia's flagship theatre companies provide a unique opportunity to enhance the contemporary Australian society and are an under-utilised resource. MTC will grow and challenge itself to build on the last five years and ensure the next five years are foundational for the future, pushing against the trend across theatre companies of underdeveloped Australian stories, diminishing programs, decreasing cast sizes, and shrinking rehearsal periods.

'MTC has been my home as a playwright for a long time now. I love the company, it's a kind of family to me.'

JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH (WRITER)

A STRATEGY BUILT ON FIVE KEY PILLARS

This Strategy is built on five key pillars. These pillars inform every decision and choice made by MTC – artistically, operationally, socially and politically. These are our commitments.

EXCELLENCE

In every aspect of our producing theatre and our operations we are as good as it gets.

This commitment is supported by developing our playwrights and plays to unprecedented levels of outstanding, enduring quality, and ensuring our productions feature the best available artists, creative teams and craftsmanship.

RELEVANCE

We are relevant to the lives of audiences and artists in this 21st Century.

This commitment is made for all our productions whether they be contemporary works directly about our world or classic works presented through a lens relevant to our lives in the 21st Century. The stories we tell and the way in which we tell them will resonate with Australian audiences and society of the times in which they are presented, now and in the future. This relevance will extend to the breadth of diversity of our citizens and of our geographic genus.

INNOVATION

We innovate in theatrical practice and all our operational endeavours.

This commitment drives our on stage and offstage activities, whether it be innovation in writing, technical innovation in telling stories in ways which remain current, or innovation in operational models for in-house management.

REACH

We speak to our existing audiences and continually reach out to new and future audiences.

This commitment will see our productions enjoy increased attendances and a growing appreciation of theatre in the wider community, as well as establishing digital platforms to expand our orbit beyond the auditoria in which we stage our work. In creating enduring works for the Australian canon, we will also reach into new territories as further stagings of the plays we generate speak to new and unimagined audiences.

SUSTAINABILITY

We plan and execute strategies which expand and extends our revenue streams to ensure our survival and growth into the future.

‘There is a way of attracting audiences for the major theatre companies. It’s to program polished, incisive plays about our here and now ... to my knowledge there is only one major company pursuing such a policy. And that’s the Melbourne Theatre Company.’

DAVID WILLIAMSON (WRITER)

This commitment sees strategies to:

- increase attendances at Australian plays through their development into works of excellence and long-standing appeal
- expand our food and beverage offerings and facilities for the broader public and visitors to the Southbank Cultural Precinct, and broaden our engagement with citizens, both theatre-goers and non-theatre-goers
- develop digital platforms to enable engagement beyond the purchase of a ticket to a performance, and connect with young audiences unable or unwilling to attend a theatre production
- reflect our city's and our nation's membership of the global village through responsive programming from other cultures and countries
- enhance, support and develop the independent and small-to-medium theatre sectors through engagement beyond MTC's mainstage activities
- grow an appreciation of theatre and cultural engagement in our society with programs specifically targeting families
- improve the quality of productions with more flexible (extended) rehearsal periods
- combat constricting cast sizes with an eventual return to cast sizes of two decades ago, enabling not only the telling of more epic new stories, but enabling the classic canon to be performed by Australian theatre companies as written (this is currently not the case in Australia; only the artforms of orchestral music, ballet and opera, through significant government support, can employ the number of artists required to perform the classic canon as written/composed in their artforms)

'More than my career, MTC has played a huge role in my learning process.'

RASHMA N. KALSIE (WRITER)



Melbourne Talam

DELIVERING OUR VISION OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS

With an overarching commitment to excellence and diversity, we will deliver our vision through eight strategic ambitions, all of them designed to engender a love of theatre and a greater acceptance of live performance across the community, and to enhance Australia’s cultural landscape.

Behind these ambitions will sit Implementation Strategies for each.

	STRATEGIC AMBITIONS	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
1	Implement the NEXT STAGE Writers’ Program, which will see MTC as a home of the nation’s finest stage writing, and as a birthplace of new works of excellence for the entire Australian theatre landscape	<p>FINANCIAL Growth in attendances to Australian plays, resulting in an increase in box office revenue.</p> <p>CULTURAL Plays generated by MTC being staged on other platforms, for regional, national and international audiences.</p> <p>SOCIETAL Clear reflection of societal diversity on our stages and in our audiences, and increased relevance of theatre to our citizens.</p>
2	<p>Redevelop Southbank Theatre to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enrich the Southbank visitor experience and resident liveability within the precinct achieve greater engagement with the broader community enhance the Southbank Cultural Precinct profile improve the economic and financial sustainability of MTC 	<p>FINANCIAL Growth in revenue from food and beverage activities at Southbank Theatre.</p> <p>CULTURAL Increased engagement with the community, including providing an entry point and access for non-arts-goers to begin to engage with a cultural organisation.</p> <p>SOCIETAL Increased awareness in society of the value and joy of cultural engagement, and embracing culturally diverse citizens.</p>
3	Build in-house digital content and develop a regular regional presence through such content, ensuring increased engagement regionally, but also locally, nationally and internationally	<p>FINANCIAL Growth in revenue generated from digital platforms carrying MTC content. Quantifiable penetration into new markets beyond MTC’s theatres.</p> <p>CULTURAL Quantifiable provision of quality cultural experiences to broad and diverse audiences beyond current theatre attendees.</p> <p>SOCIETAL Greater appreciation of theatre and cultural engagement. Embedding of the benefits and joy of cultural engagement in young people.</p>

4	<p>Present at least one 'extraordinary' work biennially, being either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an epic Australian work of national significance, • an imported international production or • a significant cross-artform co-production or co-presentation 	<p>FINANCIAL Growth in attendances to 'extraordinary' work resulting in an increase in box office revenue.</p> <p>CULTURAL Quantifiable exposure of the local artistic community to the possibility of epic visions, to 'best practice' and innovations being implemented in other cultures and countries, and to the benefits of using other artform practices to enhance theatre productions.</p> <p>SOCIETAL Enhancement of citizens' appreciation of theatre beyond regular drama productions. Celebration of and reaping the benefits of cultural exchange. Exposure of citizens to the highest quality international theatre. Breaking down of citizens' prejudices against particular artforms through exposure to cross-artform productions.</p>
5	<p>Maintain a close relationship and production arrangement with the independent and small-to-medium theatre landscapes, and with University of Melbourne and the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, occasionally presenting independent artists in productions or co-productions</p>	<p>FINANCIAL Expansion of the audience pool beyond regular MTC theatre-goers to independent theatre-goers and other cultural attendees, resulting in an increase in box office revenue.</p> <p>CULTURAL Engagement with the wider cultural and academic communities in the collaborative pursuit of artistic endeavours. Ongoing regeneration of MTC itself with new, emerging and diverse artistic voices. Movement of artists more freely from company to company, platform to platform, raising the critical mass of high quality cultural activities.</p> <p>SOCIETAL Demolishing of silos between companies and artforms, resulting in a more accessible cultural landscape for all citizens, and ensuring the arts better reflect the diversity of our society.</p>
6	<p>Present family theatre annually in productions or co-productions</p>	<p>FINANCIAL Attendance to productions by audiences who would not attend other productions, resulting in an increase in box office revenue.</p> <p>CULTURAL Enhancement of family engagement with cultural activities. Embedding of an appreciation of cultural engagement in the breadth of children's experiences.</p> <p>SOCIETAL Provision of a platform for families to engage with each other and the broader community.</p>

7	Adopt flexible rehearsal periods of up to five weeks on all productions, depending on a production's needs	<p>FINANCIAL Growth in attendances to all plays as MTC's reputation for quality rises, resulting in an increase in box office revenue.</p> <p>CULTURAL Enhancement of MTC's, Melbourne's and Victoria's reputations for theatrical and cultural excellence.</p> <p>SOCIETAL Quantifiable provision of higher quality cultural experiences to broad and diverse audiences, and increased appreciation of theatre as a quality and desirable artform for all.</p>
8	Restore cast sizes to 2005 levels of an average of nine actors over five years	<p>FINANCIAL Growth in attendances to plays as MTC's reputation as a platform for epic work and work of scale rises (eg audiences to large commercial musicals respond to scale), resulting in an increase in box office revenue.</p> <p>CULTURAL Enhancement of MTC's, Melbourne's and Victoria's reputations for theatrical and cultural excellence, and increased relevance of theatre as an artform which can tackle any issue, including those requiring scale or an epic vision.</p> <p>Ability to present for Australian citizens the great works of the international dramatic canon, as written, without destructive cutting, bastardising, doubling or tripling roles. This canon includes the greatest works of Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Shaw, Goethe, Brecht and dozens of stage masterpieces through history.</p> <p>Nationally, affording the artform of theatre the same luxury given to the heritage arts companies to perform history's canonical works as written/composed in each artistic genre.</p> <p>SOCIETAL Enhancement of appreciation of theatre as a place in which a broad variety of stories are told, from the intimate to the epic, and greater relevance for society when stories can tackle any issue, no matter how epic.</p>

'I always can't wait to come back to MTC. It feels like home.'

PAMELA RABE (ACTOR)

HOW OUR KEY PILLARS WILL SUPPORT OUR STRATEGIC AMBITIONS

STRATEGIC AMBITION		EXCELLENCE	RELEVANCE	INNOVATION	REACH	SUSTAINABILITY
1	NEXT STAGE	X	X	X	X	X
2	SOUTHBANK THEATRE RE-DEVELOPMENT	X			X	X
3	DIGITAL CONTENT	X	X	X	X	X
4	EXTRAORDINARY PRODUCTIONS	X	X	X	X	
5	RELATIONSHIP WITH INDEPENDENT, SMALL-TO-MEDIUM, AND ACADEMIC LANDSCAPES	X	X	X	X	X
6	FAMILY PRODUCTIONS	X	X		X	X
7	FLEXIBLE REHEARSAL PERIODS	X		X		
8	LARGER AVERAGE CAST SIZES	X		X		



The Father

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