

# MTC announces NEXT STAGE Writers' Program: a \$4.6 million initiative for Australian playwrights

Melbourne Theatre Company today launched its **NEXT STAGE Writers' Program**, a **\$4.6 million investment in Australian writers** funded by the visionary donors of MTC's Playwrights Giving Circle and Melbourne Theatre Company.

The innovative five-year program introduces the most rigorous playwright commissioning and development process ever undertaken by MTC, setting a new benchmark for play development in Australia that will enhance the fabric, and legacy, of Australian live storytelling.

**NEXT STAGE** will provide a total of **50 opportunities for Australian writers**, consisting of residencies and commissions across the five years of the program. It will also see an increase in resources dedicated to workshopping and developing plays from drafts through to production to ensure that they have been afforded every level of creative scrutiny and artistic support in making the finest possible work.

The program will ensure a **minimum of 35 new play commissions**, with flexibility in commissioning fees to allow writers additional time and resources to write; and up to **15 writer-in-residence opportunities** for playwrights to embed themselves in the Company for up to three years.

**MTC Artistic Director Brett Sheehy AO** said, 'Our intention for **NEXT STAGE** is quite simple – to better support Australian writers. However, the program is remarkable not simply for the significant increase in the annual number of commissions we will undertake, but for the meaningful length of engagement between writers and MTC. **NEXT STAGE** allows us to provide more opportunities for more writers, with better funding and deeper relationships with the Company.'

In the first year of the program, there will be seven commissioned writers and three writers-in-residence.

The inaugural **NEXT STAGE** commissioned writers have been confirmed with Angus Cerini, Patricia Cornelius, Michael Gow, Benjamin Law, Joanna Murray-Smith, Leah Purcell and Ellen van Neerven under commission to begin work on new plays.

Residencies will be offered for up to three years, with writers receiving an annual stipend, office resources, Company support, regular meetings with the Artistic team and integration with all aspects of MTC's operations including programming. Applications for the three inaugural **NEXT STAGE** residencies will open on Friday 16 June 2017.

**NEXT STAGE** is a pivotal shift in the playwright development and commissioning landscape, providing extra resources and funding specifically focused on nurturing writers and their craft. \$2.3 million of the funding has been donated by MTC's Playwrights Giving Circle, matched by a \$2.3 million investment from MTC.

**MTC Chair Terry Moran AC** said, 'Since our earliest days, Melbourne Theatre Company has been the birthplace of some truly iconic Australian plays. Thanks to generous investment from MTC's Playwrights Giving Circle, **NEXT STAGE** will take this legacy to a new level with greater resources, time and opportunities dedicated to supporting writers and their work.'

As part of the program, a national group of advisors has been established with whom MTC will consult about writers of promise from a range of creative disciplines. The group represents experts from a broad cross section of performance and literary fields and includes Tony Ayres, David Berthold, Lee Lewis, Rachael Maza, Kate Mulvany, Simon Phillips and Morry Schwartz.

**Brett Sheehy** said, 'By investing in our writers, giving them the time and support needed to realise their ideas as fully developed plays, **NEXT STAGE** will have a significant role in helping to build a canon of great Australian works. And generations of Australians will reap the benefits.'

MTC's **NEXT STAGE** Writers' Program commences in July 2017.

## Media Contacts

Rosie Shepherdson-Cullen  
PR & Communications Manager  
03 8688 0944  
r.shepherdson-cullen@mtc.com.

Georgia Fox  
Publicist  
03 8688 0945  
g.fox@mtc.com.au



MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne



## NEXT STAGE Program Structure

Each year of the program will comprise of residencies and commissions.

### RESIDENCIES

Across five years, MTC will have writer-in-residence opportunities for up to 15 writers who have a background in playwriting, show enormous promise and would benefit from specific experience of, and writing for, a major company's mainstage.

These residencies will be for up to three years, with writers receiving an annual stipend, office resources, company support, regular meetings with the Artistic team and integration with all aspects of MTC's operations including the programming and production decision-making processes.

In the second year of residency, these writers will go on to be commissioned to write one full play.

Residencies will be available by application only. Applications for the 2017 Residencies open on Friday 16 June.

[mtc.com.au/nextstage](http://mtc.com.au/nextstage)

### COMMISSIONS

Commissions will be available for writers who have had experience writing for a major theatre company. MTC will also commission writers and artists of calibre from allied media, embracing a diversity of ideas and talent while maintaining our commitment to our audience and MTC's programming priorities. MTC will have the flexibility for larger commissioning fees to assist writers in creating works of greater scale and vision, or works that require research elements in their development.

By the end of the five-year program, 34 writers will each be commissioned to write one full play, and some may be invited to undertake a second commission within the Company. A minimum of 35 plays will be commissioned throughout the duration of NEXT STAGE.

In selecting writers to join the NEXT STAGE program, MTC will consult its group of advisors from various fields about writers of promise and ability.

## 2017 NEXT STAGE Writers

### COMMISSIONS

Angus Cerini  
Patricia Cornelius  
Michael Gow  
Benjamin Law  
Joanna Murray-Smith  
Leah Purcell  
Ellen van Neerven

### RESIDENCIES

Successful applicants will be announced in July 2017.

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[r.shepherdson-cullen@mtc.com](mailto:r.shepherdson-cullen@mtc.com)

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## MTC Playwrights Giving Circle

This landmark program has been made possible by the visionary donors of MTC's Playwrights Giving Circle who have invested \$2.3 million in NEXT STAGE, complimenting \$2.3 million contributed by Melbourne Theatre Company.

**Louise Myer and Martyn Myer AO, Maureen Wheeler AO and Tony Wheeler AO, Christine Brown Bequest Naomi Milgrom AO, Allan Myers AC QC and Maria Myers AC, Tony Burgess and Janine Burgess Dr Andrew McAliece and Dr Richard Simmie, Larry and Petra Kamener**



## NEXT STAGE Advisors

MTC will consult with a group of national advisors from various performance and literary fields to discuss writers of promise and ability, including those working in media or literary genres other than theatre.

**Tony Ayres** Producer, director and co-founder of Matchbox Pictures

**David Berthold** Artistic Director, Brisbane Festival

**Lee Lewis** Artistic Director, Griffin Theatre Company

**Rachael Maza** Artistic Director, Ilbijerri Theatre Company

**Kate Mulvany** Actor and playwright

**Simon Phillips** Director, former Artistic Director of MTC

**Morry Schwartz** Publisher, Schwartz Media

NEXT STAGE also consults with the Australian Writers' Guild and Playwriting Australia; some NEXT STAGE play developments will be delivered in partnership with Playwriting Australia.

MTC would like to thank the University of Melbourne's Business Projects Services for its assistance in designing the NEXT STAGE model.

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