

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date

St Martins responds to Australia Council's four-year funding decisions

St Martins Youth Theatre faces an uncertain future, following Australia Council's decision to withdraw funding for 2021-2024 to the much-loved and iconic theatre company. In 2020 St Martins celebrates 40 years of nurturing creativity in young people, with a multitude of practicing and high profile artist alumni populating local, national and international arts communities.

St Martins' Artistic Director, Nadja Kostich says: "Australia currently needs to invest more, not less in young people. The future of the arts - and humanity - depends on them. We stand with all youth arts companies to champion the voices of children. We need these young voices to continue to develop, to shout out into the storm, to lead an intrepid chorus." She adds that St Martins has excelled in the past four years, producing over 10 exceptional new works with a suite of partners, presenters and collaborators including: Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne Festival, Melbourne Fringe, The Substation, Dark MoFo, Darwin Festival, Dance Massive, TheatreWorks, Castlemaine State Festival, Fraught Outfit, Minus18, Worawa Aboriginal College and THE RABBLE.

These productions have garnered Fringe and Green Room Awards and ten Green Room Award Nominations, receiving significant audience acclaim, five-star reviews, over a million views online for the Escape Velocity films and featuring on national television.

Two most recent productions have each been made over two years of deep community arts development practice with diverse communities - gender non-conforming young people and First Nations girls from Worawa Aboriginal College. The latter project, *Balit Liwurruk: Strong Girl*, was nominated for a total of six Green Room Awards, and this week received the 2020 Green Room Awards for Ensemble and Director in the Independent Theatre Category.

The company's Chairperson, Elise Margow is proud of this peer recognition. "It demonstrates the success of St Martins' strategy to collaborate with diverse children and teenagers in making performances for adult audiences. In the company's 40th year, St Martin's couldn't be prouder of this artistic track record and our young people. We are astounded by their boldness, their life force, their inversion of social and artistic assumptions and inspired by their perspectives. "

According to St Martins' Executive Director, Kerry O'Sullivan, St Martins is the only performing arts company in Australia working with children that offers a comprehensive Inclusion Program, employing an Inclusion Artist in each workshop and an Inclusion Coordinator as part of our staff. She adds: "Our Outreach Program in St Albans, Dandenong and Prahran Housing Estate works with at-risk children who face barriers to accessing the arts because of cultural, socio-economic or family issues.

"We reach over 200 children in 17 workshops across Melbourne and include neuro-diverse, culturally diverse and gender diverse young people in our programs."

Nadja Kostich, St Martins' Artistic Director acknowledges the company's collaborative process. "The extended St Martins family of staff, children, parents and artists is made up of extraordinary humans and passionate artists who are quickly rising to the immense challenges that Covid19 has presented already.

"In a short space of time, we have reinvented our workshop program to present Term 2 online. We must now also adapt to the loss of our entire venue hire income. Ironically, diversifying our income to avoid leaning on government funding has increased our vulnerability in these conditions. Our sister companies throughout Australia have similarly lost their funding: Barking Gecko, WA; ATYP and Shopfront, NSW; Polyglot, VIC.

"Following the 2015 savaging of the youth arts sector, the effect of the decision to defund the youth arts sector further in this round of funding is brutal and far reaching.

"Furthermore, we are gravely concerned that the most iconic of companies nurturing independent artists, The Blue Room Theatre, WA; Brown's Mart, NT and La Mama, VIC have lost Federal funding. Collectively these are the lifeblood of the sector, producing and developing the innovators, the award winners, the iconoclasts, the disruptors, the ones that make us think outside the square, laugh, cry and imagine.

"Without renewed funding from Australia Council, St Martins and its colleagues now face an uncertain future. We urge the Federal Government to hear us and act now. In crises, from natural disasters to wars, artists repeatedly come to the fore and give generously of themselves to perform, to innovate, to advocate, to imagine new and better worlds. We ask that in this, our industry crisis, within the current world crisis, the Federal Government come to the aid of the arts sector with crucial funding.

"One of the children in our Outreach Program in Dandenong, who is from a refugee background, asked a question which struck us to the core and hits harder now: 'Do we have to have hope to evolve?'

"In calling on a collective hope for our collective evolution, St Martins reaches out to all its allies, the arts community and beyond. Our collective survival depends on it."



Elise Margow, Chairperson
Nadja Kostich, Artistic Director/CoCEO
Kerry O'Sullivan, Executive Director/CoCEO

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