

# GENE TREE

Relaxed Performance  
and Access Guide

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# ABOUT GENE TREE

*Gene Tree: Listen. Now. Again* is an interactive performance adventure led by children and teenagers through the nooks and crannies of the Royal Botanic Gardens.

An ode to the planet, children and teenagers ask ‘impossible questions’ about evolution, adaptation and hope. Live music, rhythm and small-scale projections interlace with children’s stories of change and connection to nature. Audiences are invited to take part in small interactive moments: feet on the grass, back against a tree, face in the wind.

The performance runs for 1.5 hours, from 6.30pm-8pm. There is no set interval but there are portions of the work designed to be engaged at your own pace so the ability to take breaks is there.

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide has been developed by Artemis Muñoz with the intention of assisting the audience to mentally prepare for what to expect when they come to see *Gene Tree: Listen. Now. Again*. It has information about all kinds of access but is specifically designed with neurodivergent audiences in mind. If any of this information is not useful to you, you are encouraged to skip or disregard it. This is a lengthy document. It is here to help, not to stress you out. Use the contents page to find what information is relevant to you.

# ACCESS OVERVIEW

## **Auslan**

*Gene Tree* is Auslan interpreted on Sun 6 November and Sat 12 November. Any audience members wishing to engage with the show in Auslan will need to gather together in view of the interpreters at the beginning of the show and then travel in a group for the rest of the work. You will not be able to travel through the Children's Garden as interests you individually and still access this interpretation, you must explore together.

## **Relaxed Performance Principles**

All performances of *Gene Tree* have been created with relaxed performance principles in mind. Relaxed performances are designed to present a show or event in a way that may be friendlier to those with sensory sensitivities and a variety of other disabilities that may not find the social rules around attending the theatre accessible.

*Gene Tree* has a complex sensory palette that is not able to be adapted on account of the environment it is hosted in. That said, the added performance elements do not hugely add to the intensity of the space beyond what is naturally present in the gardens. The nature of the way the audience engages with this work will also provide ample opportunities for the audience to avoid sensorily unsafe or challenging elements and everyone is encouraged to move, stim, pace and/or make noise during the performance in whatever manner helps you to best enjoy the show.

## **Quiet Spaces**

A quiet space is available to use for decompression and self-regulation at any point in the event as needed. For the opening night show, this quiet space will be in the Royal Botanic Gardens' Visitor Centre. For all other shows the quiet space will be in The Baracchi Room.

Whichever room is in use will have signage in English near the event starting point that directs you to the space, as well as have a range of seating options and dividing panels to give you more options for adapting the space to your needs.

There will be some sensory items available in the quiet spaces but we also encourage you to bring and use your own stim toys, headphones or anything else that will help with self-regulating.

Due to how far from either quiet space the show travels in the latter portion of the work, (the part after the group leaves the children's garden) it is recommended you seek assistance from Front of House staff to return to the space if you wish to use it so they can provide assistance with navigation.

Front of House staff will be briefed on how to assist with this in an inoffensive manner and to be prepared for the possibility of non-verbal communication.

## The Baracchi Room

Serving as Gene Tree's main quiet space, the Baracchi Room has cream coloured walls, grey-toned carpet and windows with brown wooden venetian blinds which can be adjusted as desired to alter the amount of light in the space.



To get to the Baracchi Room, you will need to head into the Observatory Building — the cream and burgundy coloured building with the dome — which is near the Visitor Centre.

With your back to the Visitor Centre, this building will be on your right. The door you need to enter is nearest to the outdoor cafe seating and just past the bathrooms. There is ramp access to this door.



Once you have entered through this door you have a short journey through hallways. Head forward until you cannot anymore. Then turn left and continue onwards. The Barrachi Room is the door on your right nearest to where another door would block your path forward.





If you are accessing the quiet space in the first half of the show — any time before the group leaves the Children’s Garden — you will be able to access the Baracchi Room without notifying any members of staff unless you need assistance opening closed doors. Doors will be closed but not locked until after the group has moved on from the Children’s Garden. After this point they may be locked in accordance with the Royal Botanic Gardens’ security protocols.

There will be a Front of House staff member in the vicinity at all times who will be able to let you in but you will need to indicate to someone that you would like to access the space.

## The Visitor Centre

Gene Tree's quiet space on opening night is the Visitor Centre. It has a grey marble-tiled floor, some plants and wooden furnishings as well as two large windows. One will be curtained-off and the other will be diffused by closed blinds.



The Visitor Centre is well signposted and easy to find. With the Shrine of Remembrance behind you, the Visitor Centre is straight past the Observatory Building (cream coloured and with the dome) and the Neutrino Sculpture (giant black ball with silver metallic cage).

It is in a large grey building with lots of green-tinted glass windows. The area set aside for the quiet space is directly to your right once you pass through the automatic doors.



## **Wheelchair Access**

This performance has been labelled by our Wheelchair access consultant Kian Hall as 'assisted wheelchair accessible'. This means that manual wheelchair users will most likely need the assistance of someone pushing their chair in order to access some of this work. This is because there are parts of the route through the gardens where slopes are too steep, the path is too narrow, or the ground is too uneven to easily navigate with a manual chair.

The venue has manual wheelchairs available for those who would like to use one. You may need to switch to a manual wheelchair instead of using your own power chair, depending on what your power chair is capable of.

In general there are some pathways that might pose an issue for those using any sort of mobility aid. For example, some routes cannot be accessed at all and other paths are hazardous, such as the Tea Tree Forest of the Children's Garden which is a dirt pathway affected by root growth and thus a risk of tripping/bogging.



Some paths are also tight which may make turning around difficult if you are in a wheelchair. This could pose a problem for those who may experience things like anxiety, claustrophobia, sensory issues, etc

Kian has developed a route through the gardens that should allow most wheelchair users to experience the majority of the content of the show. It was designed to avoid most of the hazards in the garden and offer alternative viewing points whenever wheelchair or other mobility aid users would not be able to reach the intended viewing position for a portion of the work. This route will be marked with signs and mobility aid users will be provided with a copy of a map of this route to utilise throughout the duration of the show.

This route was tested in a slim-frame power chair. If you have a different mobility device and have questions about the route and how it might work for you please contact the Royal Botanic Gardens via [events@rbg.vic.gov.au](mailto:events@rbg.vic.gov.au) or on [\(03\) 9252 2429](tel:(03)92522429)

# CONTENT NOTES

## **Sensory Notes**

*This section of the guide aims to give you some details about what to expect from the sensory experience of the show.*

*If any part of the design or environment is uncomfortable or unpleasant you are encouraged to move on or to self soothe in whatever manner would make you feel most comfortable.*

As a large-scale, travelling and site specific work, *Gene Tree* has a complex sensory palette. Some of what you experience may be a bit *loud* or *intense*. Some of what you experience may be quite *soft* or *gentle*. Some things will be *predictable*, others *unexpected*. Perhaps some of it will be a nice stim.

## Sounds

There will be live music played by five professional musicians. This music is performed on instruments including double bass, vibraphone, woodwinds (tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone and flute) and percussion (including hand drums, rototoms and toms struck by sticks). It occasionally includes repetitive noises, high pitched noises and potentially loud sounds — depending on your proximity to the musicians.

During your Arrival and in the Children's Garden all music is acoustic but for the final portion of the show around the Central Lake, instruments are amplified.

The young performers also play the Federation handbells (high pitched struck metal instruments) and wooden shakers.

Towards the end there is singing. Two of the singers (a soloist and one singing a harmony line) will have their voices amplified through microphones and speakers and the rest of the children sing acoustically as a group.

There is one pre-recorded soundscape you may encounter in the Children's Garden. The speakers are somewhat but not fully hidden behind large standing stones. The soundscape is made up of recorded children's voices and sample recordings of the same instruments the musicians will be playing live.

In the gardens you may also hear noise from other people in the gardens talking, cars, trams, planes and occasionally helicopters passing as well as the sound of birds and bugs. You may at times hear the voices of performers overlapping with each other as pieces of performance happen at the same time as each other.

Because the performers are young and non-professionals, at times their voices may not have the resonance to travel to you with absolute clarity in the outdoor space. This is okay. This work is designed to still be a whole and pleasant experience even if you don't manage to catch everything.

## Visuals

The visual design of the show features bright colours – mostly in warm tones (reds, yellows, oranges, browns and pinks).

These colours appear in costuming and as part of the set and props. The event staff wear t-shirts in these colours too.

The performance is mostly lit by natural light. There are also many mirrors and glittery things that catch light embedded into the set and props. It is possible that audience members may end up being in direct sunlight or the path of a reflected piece of light but everyone is welcome to move to somewhere more comfortable at any point. The amount of light may also vary because of the weather. There are also a few soft battery operated lights and a few small scale projections of moving light. One of these projections moves quite slowly but the other has a speedier animation.

## Other Sensory Experiences

This is a show that encourages you to interact with your senses perhaps more than other shows usually would. As well as seeing things and listening to things you will also be moving your body through the gardens stimulating your vestibular sense. You might choose to touch a part of the show's design or the environment of the gardens around you. Perhaps you will smell the perfume of a flower or feel the cool temperature of the wind on your skin. You are in an environment that is not as controlled as a traditional performance space like a theatre or concert hall.



This might be exciting but it also could potentially be a lot to process. While the show encourages you to check in with the environment around you, please do not forget to check in with yourself and your needs and to use the Quiet Space if you need to.

It is highly likely that your experience of the show will be affected by weather in some way or another. Pathways, places to sit and also the plant elements you will move past or through may be wet if it has recently rained. Windy days are possible and may also carry with them greater exposure to the natural perfumes in the gardens, pollen and dust. It may be quite hot or cold on the day you attend. It is recommended that you consider the forecasted weather when planning your attendance to be sure you bring with you anything you need to be comfortable and safe.

The pathways you will take through the gardens are on undulating and uneven ground but the pathways are safe to traverse and there will be maps marking a recommended pathway through the gardens and assistance available for those with mobility aids.

### **Performance and Text Notes**

*The following notes are about who the performers are and what they might say or do during this show. There are no specifics here (that comes later) but the hope is to give you an idea of the type of things you might expect.*

## Performers

The Gene Tree cast is made up of 14 young people from Congress — St Martins' think tank ensemble — aged between 11 and 17 years old and 13 young people from Dandenong Primary School aged between 9 and 12 years old. They are accompanied by five adult musicians.

During this performance, all performers will be wearing casual wear in warm, autumnal colour tones – reds, oranges, yellows, browns and pinks. They are dressed as themselves, not as characters.

## Text

In general the content is light and not likely to be triggering to most people but there is a mention of war and stories about not fitting in. Some may also find that extensive reflection on the environment stirs up emotions or a feeling of discomfort.

The show is designed in such a way as to invite the audience to think both about the environment around them and their own relationship to it — their thoughts and feelings about it. To facilitate this, performers tell stories about nature and their own relationships to it. They also will ask questions and invite the audience to notice or do particular things.

It is expected that you will not get to hear all the text or experience all of the content of the show. *Gene Tree* is about having an experience of your own more than anything else.

## Audience Participation

Because this is a show about engaging with the environment you are in, you may at times be invited to do something by a performer. This is an offer and not a rule. If taking up this provocation would not be good for you you do not have to. While a child or young person may look to you to answer a question, they will quickly move on from those who do not wish to answer. The questions are also a provocation for the audience to internally contemplate. All audience participation is optional and offered to all members of the audience to do together.

Performers may make eye-contact with the audience. You are welcome to disengage with this if this is not something you would find an enjoyable aspect of the performance.

## Performance

Most of what the performers do with their bodies is similar to what people do in their day to day lives. They will sit, stand, walk, raise their arms, hide and occasionally run or dance. Some performers will play instruments. Others will operate hand-held projectors. At one point a performer sits in a tree. This performer is safe and is very comfortable doing this.

Due to the immersive nature of this work, performers may move pretty close to you at times. If you do not want to be close to a performer you are welcome to move away and experience this aspect of the show from a further distance.

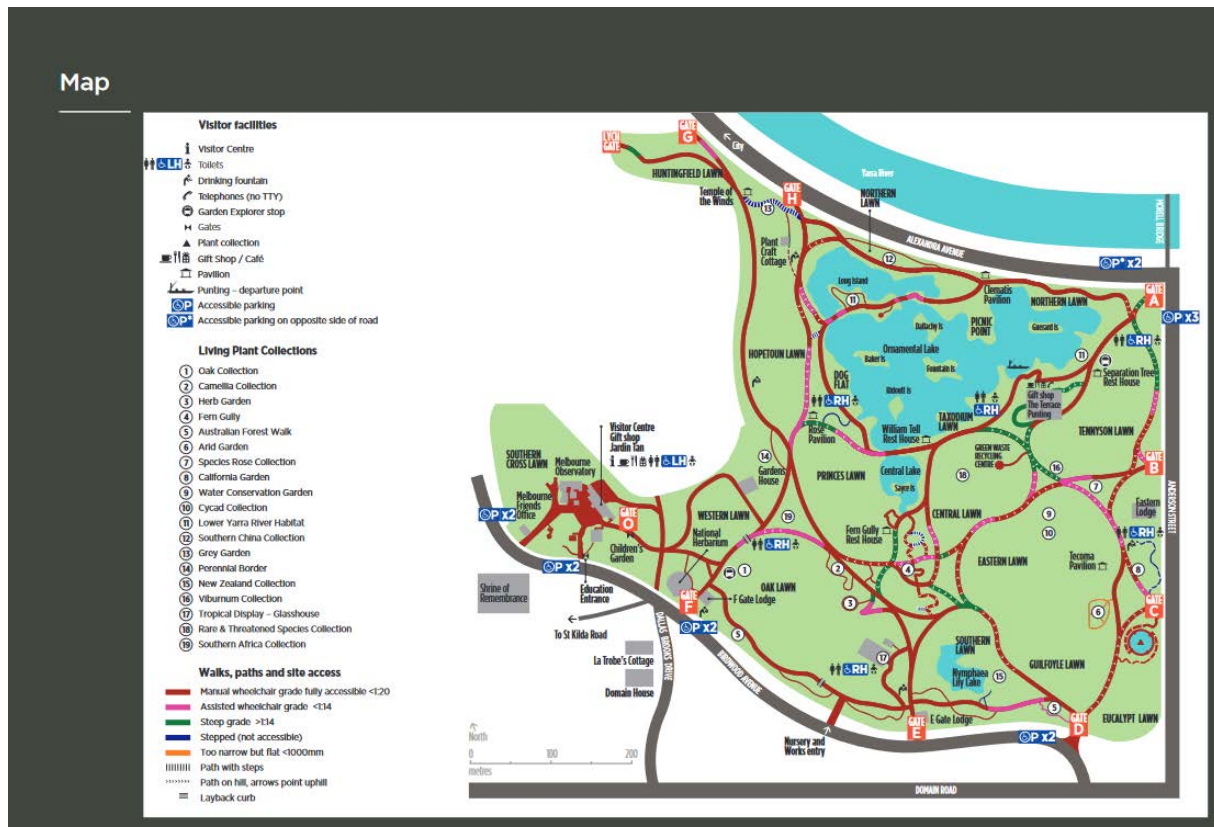
# VENUE INFORMATION

This performance will take place in the Royal Botanic Gardens. It is a show that will require the audience to travel through different parts of the gardens.

## Getting Here

The nearest public transport options are the 605 Bus (get off at the Melbourne Observatory/Birdwood Avenue stop) and the 3/3a, 5, 6, 16, 64, 67 and 72 Trams (get off at Stop 19 Shrine of Remembrance/St Kilda Rd).

Metered parking is available around the vicinity of the gardens for those travelling by car. A number of accessible parking spaces are also available. They can be noted on this map.



## Arrival

You will arrive for the beginning of *Gene Tree* outside the Visitor Centre at Royal Botanic Gardens.



You will then need to show your tickets or give your name to the people working Front of House for this event. Once your booking has been recognised by staff, they will give you a wristband made from Tyvek that will identify you as a part of the *Gene Tree* audience. If wearing this wristband will not be comfortable for you, please keep it on your person so you can show it to staff.



All event staff will be wearing coloured t-shirts in warm colours - which have the name of the show on the front and the logos for St. Martins and the Royal Botanic Gardens on the back. If at any point you have questions about the event these people are the ones to ask. People in these shirts will also give you instructions about how to move through the gardens.



# SHOW DETAILS AND AUDIENCE JOURNEY

*The following portion of the guide goes into detail about the sights, sounds and story you will experience whilst attending Gene Tree. If you would like these things to remain a surprise you are welcome to skip this portion of the guide.*

## **Performance Start**

The performance will begin at 6:30pm so it is recommended that you arrive a little early to get your booking confirmed and allow yourself time to find a comfortable spot near the Neutrino sculpture for the first portion of the performance which runs for approximately 10mins.

The Neutrino sculpture takes the shape of a large black sphere encased in a cage of silver metallic beams.

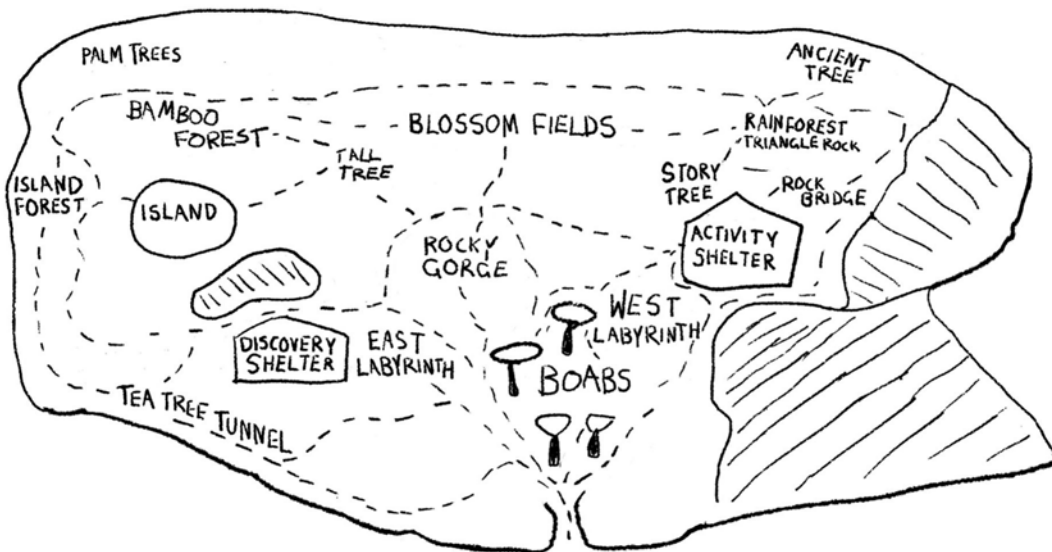


In the first portion of the work, the performers will join you around the Neutrino and verbally offer you provocations to reflect on or act upon, make promises and talk about their experience of their senses.

They will then pick up hand bells and rhythmically strike them with mallets. This will make a gentle but high-pitched noise.

From here the performers will proceed to the Children's Garden. You will follow them. Ushers and Front of House staff in the coloured t-shirts will guide you through this and any other wayfinding portions of the show.

## Children's Garden



For this section of the work, the audience and performers will be within the enclosed space of the Children's Garden for 40 minutes. For this portion of the show, you are encouraged to wander as you feel inclined to. It will not be possible to experience everything that happens within the Children's Garden so do not feel like you have to leave a moment behind because you have realised something else is happening.

There are fifteen activated sites within the Children's Garden:



1. Boabs
2. West Labyrinth
3. East Labyrinth
4. Rocky Gorge
5. Tea Tree Tunnel
6. Blossom Fields
7. Tall Tree
8. Island Forest

9. Island
10. Palm Trees
11. Bamboo Forest
12. Story Tree
13. Rock Bridge
14. Discovery Shelter
15. Ancient Tree



Mobiles of coloured acrylic are hung to mark points of interest.

## Boabs



At this site, two musicians will be having a musical dialogue with each other as you enter. They will later move to other parts of the garden to play music there. For anyone entering the Children's Garden, this will be the opening moment.

From here you shall disperse and explore the Children's Gardens at your own pace. Time is unhurried and you are supported to let your curiosity guide you.

## West Labyrinth



Tall thin and colourful acrylic rods sit amongst the bamboo that lines this spiral path of white gravel, lined with grass and surrounded by a woven metallic cord held up by wood poles.

At this site, two young people will be playing a game wherein they ask each other impossible questions — questions without a certain or knowable answer. They will invite you to join them wandering through this labyrinth or just around the gardens in general while contemplating your own impossible questions. Some audience members may be invited to share what they come up with. They play hand bells to start and end this piece and are joined by a walking bass player.

## East Labyrinth



At this site, three performers hide amongst the bushes. They have mirrors on their hands. They raise their arms to the sky - sometimes randomly and sometimes as a group. They then hide again.

Later these performers will move through the gardens and repeat this movement elsewhere.

At this site, a musician plays the steel tongue drum.

## Rocky Gorge



Flat rusty-coloured solid rocks following a curving, mountain-eque shape on one side and a smooth surface on the other. They stand tall on either side of a pathway of white gravel.

Hidden speakers play a soundscape of musical samples and voices. The sampled instruments are double bass, vibraphone, woodwinds (tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone and flute) and percussion (including hand drums, roto toms and toms struck by sticks). The voices express children's affinity with nature.

Reflective material is embedded along the skinny flat side face of each of the rocks in this gorge.



At this site, four young people hide and rest against the rocks. They turn rainsticks and at some point begin to speak text about being a part of nature.

They embody different ideas from the natural world saying they *are* each of these concepts, creatures or things they mention. They turn this idea to the audience and ask what you might be and leave you to reflect on this idea.

## Tea Tree Tunnel



30+ silver and gold acrylic mirrors line the dirt path between two long lines of tea trees, with some reflective spheres there as well.



At this site, a performer searches for a feather and encourages the audience to look for feathers with them.

They tell a story about finding a feather but ultimately letting it go because of what it was making them feel. They ask the audience to reflect on something they have let go of.

While this happens musicians will play either the Mbira or a Bowed Flexatone.

### Blossom Fields





A lawn of green grass with a slight hill nearby some running water. You may hear the musical sounds of a bell alongside a saxophone or mbira.

A performer gazes into a kaleidoscope before playing the bells and asking the audience to join them in what ends up being something like a guided meditation. They invite you to take off your shoes and then give you instructions about what to look at, listen to or do with your body. You can accept these invitations or not. That is entirely up to you.

### Tall Tree



Musicians bow a tune on either the double bass or the flexatone.

One performer leans against a tall tree in the grassy area. They speak from the perspective of the tree. Eventually they notice the audience and ask a series of questions before guiding some audience members to answer. They return to resting against the tree with their eyes closed.

### Island Forest



A collection of tree stumps and a log across the floor. On two of the stumps sit yellow acrylic mirrors. The ground is covered with leaf and mulch properties.

A performer looks through their hands at the environment around them and at the audience. They begin speaking about the stumps around them: comparing them to each other and talking about their relationship in space. They share facts about dandelions and how bugs use them as transportation and then muse about how despite being artificially constructed, the gardens are living.

Musicians play the steel tongue drum. The performer drums upon the stump.

### Island



A sand pit with a segmented disc-shaped mirror placed within. A rope hammock with metallic silver ball connectors hangs above it. The surrounding floor area features artificial grass and sand.

At some point, a performer will sit in the hammock. Some audience members may be invited to join them on the hammock. They tell us a story about rafting with a school group, finding the horizon captivating and wondering what is beyond it.

### Palm Trees



One performer holding a hand projector uses it to project the image of a moth slowly flapping its wings onto the trees and the palms of their hands. They will approach audience members with the offer of projecting that same moth image onto their hands. As they do this they will tell a story about the moth and adaptation.

Musicians play the flute or the bowed flexatone. The performers rest against the trees or on a log facing away from the audience.

### Bamboo Forest



Bamboo shoots wearing colourful lycra sleeves in pinks, oranges and golds. Performers strike the bamboo with mallets whilst a musician plays the flute.

The performers repeat a list of words and share two stories. The first story comes out of the concept of mutation and feeds into the performer speaking about their dyspraxia and being proud of what makes them different. The second story comes out of the concept of transcription and feeds into the performer expressing a small grief at the fact that true experience cannot really be captured.

### Story Tree



A tree with some limbs wrapped in silver sequined cloth.  
Musicians replicate heartbeats on the bass or mbira.

A performer sits in the tree and talks about how their heartbeat changes based on how they are feeling and what is happening. They share an anecdote about learning to accept feedback.

### Rock Bridge



Rocks piled upon each other to a height on two sides of a white loose gravel path. Resting on both stacks a long flat rock sits over the path giving the impression of a bridge.

A musician plays the saxophone or flute. Performers sit on the rocks next to luminous warm coloured orbs.

They talk about the uncrushable nature of pebbles and times that they too felt that they were uncrushable.

They rest leaning on the rocks at the end of their scene.

### Discovery Shelter



Musicians play bowed bass, saxophone or mbria as a performer projects an animated shape onto the walls and roof of the shelter as well as the hands of both themselves and audience members.



The performer tells the story of a microscopic ball of sludge evolving through time to eventually become human.

### Ancient Tree



A large tree with a cavern within its shape by the roots. Inside and in front of the hollow of the tree sit large disc mirrors. A glowing white orb sits there also.

Musicians play a heartbeat on the mbira. A bell is rung.

Young people sit in the tree with their eyes closed. They move out in front of it and talk about not fitting in, finding one's place

and ultimately the concept of change. They invite the audience to think about personal experiences of change and share them if they are comfortable.

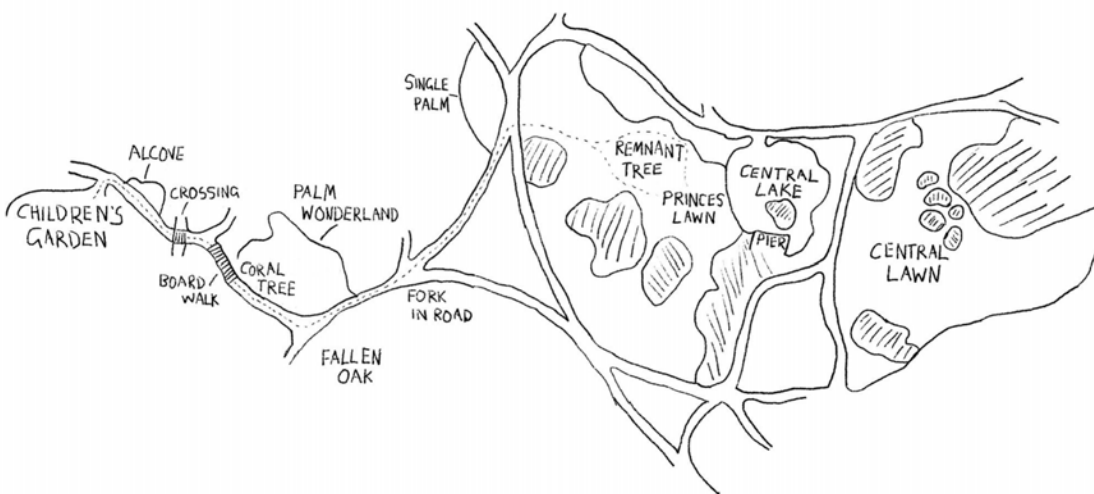
## Transition

A musical interlude indicates the beginning of a transition point. The performers throughout the garden begin to play their bells in response. They tell the audience that it's time to move on and begin to process out of the gardens.

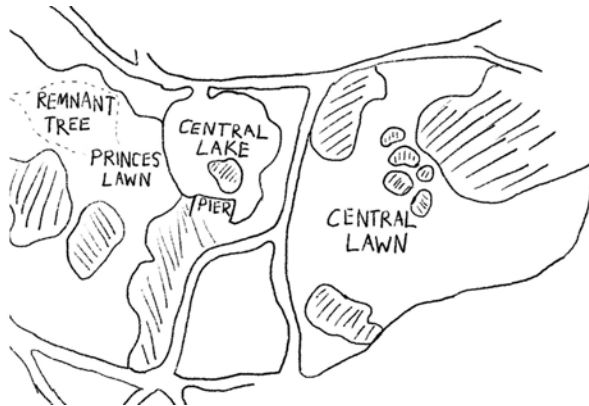
Musicians play drums and the flute as the young performers continue playing their bells. The audience follows into the procession.

## **Procession**

This next part of the work happens while everyone travels from the Children's Garden to the Central Lake. This should take about 15 minutes.



When the group reaches the *Fork in the Road* the audience and the performers will take the left path as the musicians take the right. The performers will take a different path but the audience group will split to walk down either side of the *Remnant Tree* to finally gather together on the Princes Lawn.



There are cushions and mats arranged on the lawn that you may choose to sit on if you desire. Alternatively there are benches. You are also welcome to stand or remain in your wheelchair.



By this time the sun may be setting. The sun sets around 8pm and coincides with the end of the performance.

### **Central Lake**

Looking out from Princes Lawn you should see Central Lake. The section of the work that follows runs for about 20 minutes.



Musicians will place themselves on the far left and right side of Princes Lawn by the banks of the lake. They perform amplified alongside two singers. One soloist and another singing harmony.

The song they sing is from the perspective of earth: declaring that they are unstoppable, uncrushable and changing. Others join them in song without amplification.

Then, the young people cross to the other side of the lake. On the Central Lawn the performers move in choreography: reminiscent of a tree crown, trunk and roots which then transforms into two interlacing DNA spirals. They sing.

*Uncrushable,  
Unstoppable.  
I can change,  
I changed,  
I can change again.*

## **Show Ends**

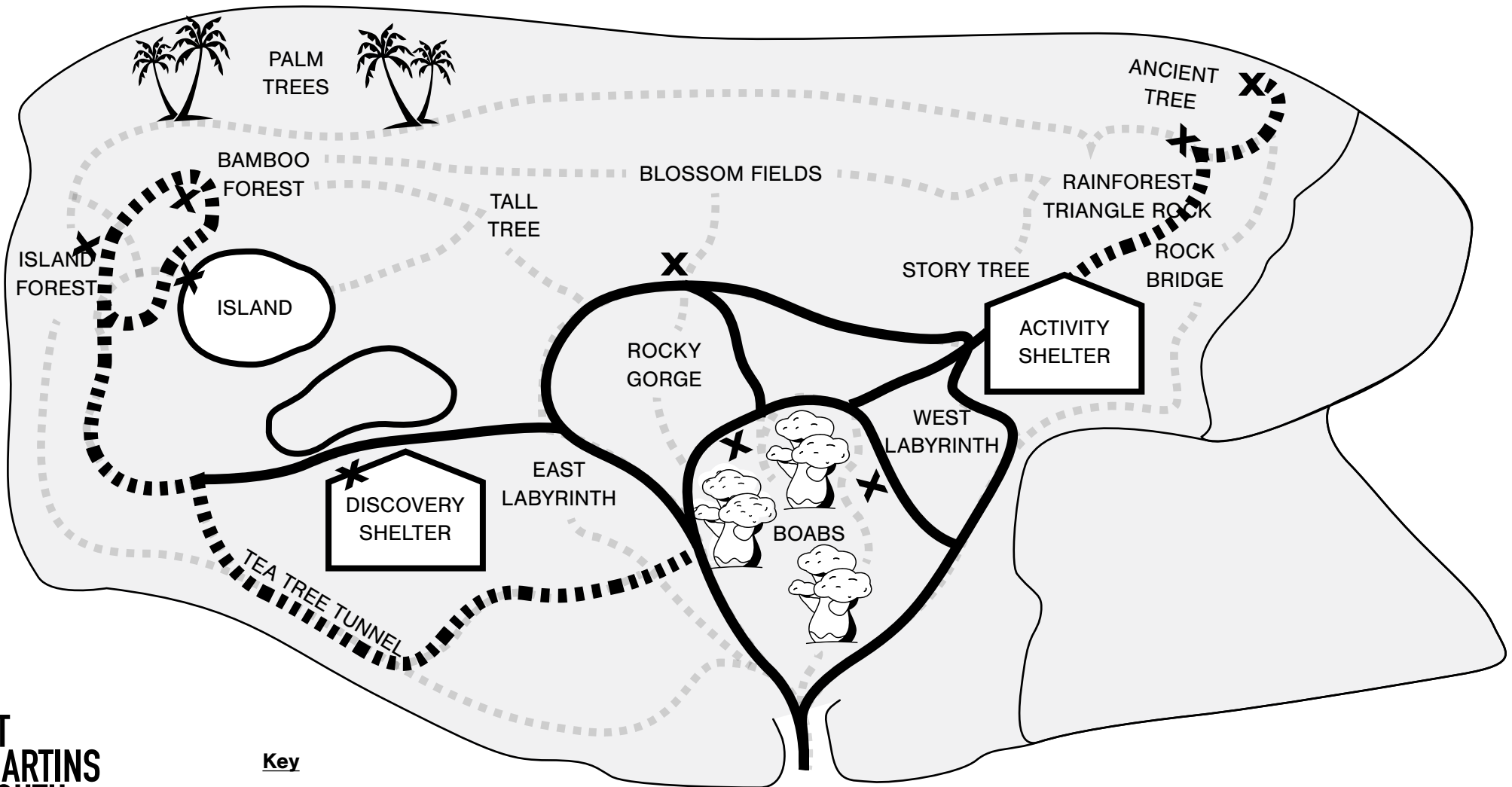
When the performance is over, the audience travel back together to the Visitor Centre and exit. It is now after eight — the expected time for sunset — so you will leave the Gardens in low light (but not darkness).

You are welcome to use the quiet space after the show to decompress if you need.

# Gene Tree:

Listen. Now. Again

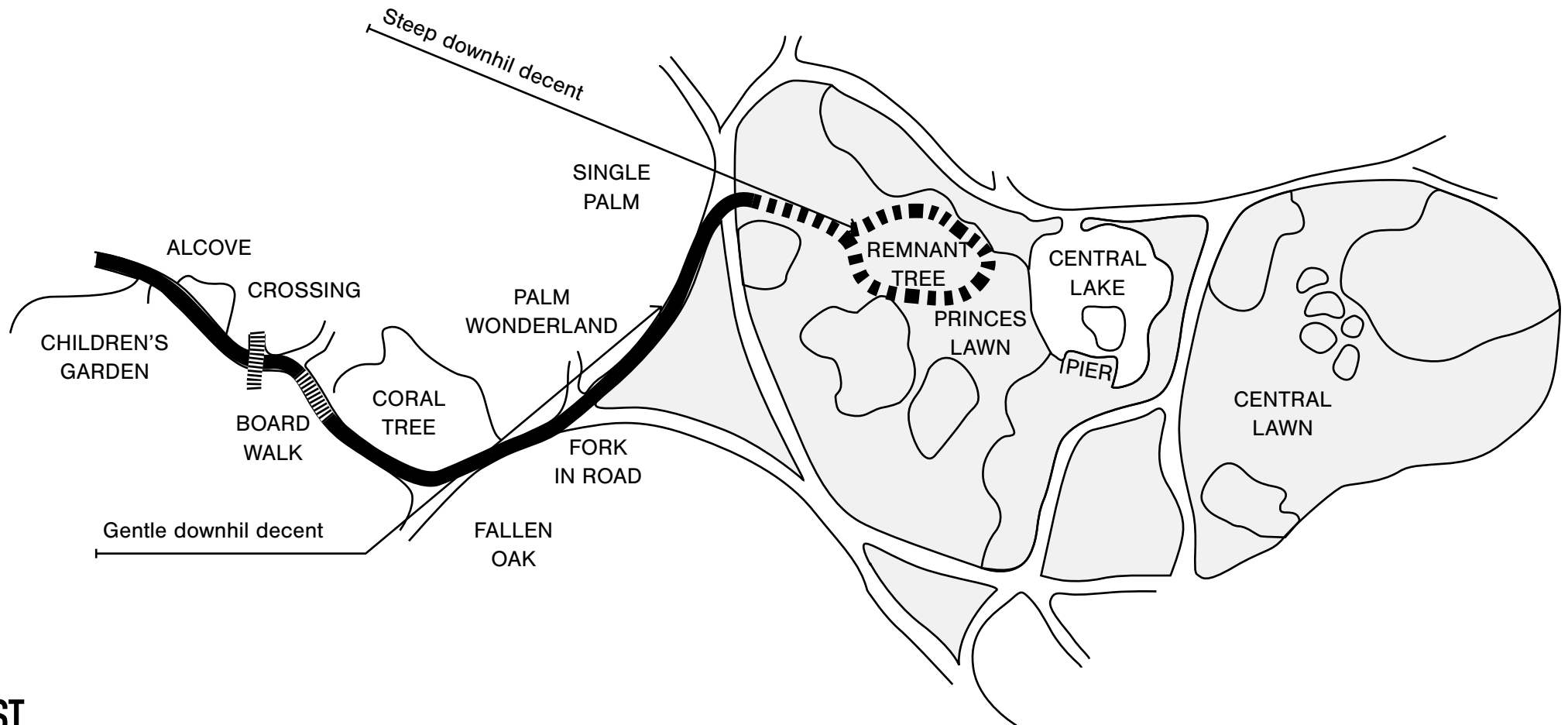
## ACCESS MAP: THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN



# Gene Tree:




Listen. Now. Again

**ACCESS MAP:  
PROCESSION**



**ST  
MARTINS  
YOUTH  
ARTS  
CENTRE**

**Key**

-  Even path – suggested route for wheelchair users (gentle downhill decent)
-  Uneven path – suggested route for wheelchair users (steep downhill decent)
-  Board walk