

# GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by Karen Rodgers, General Manager

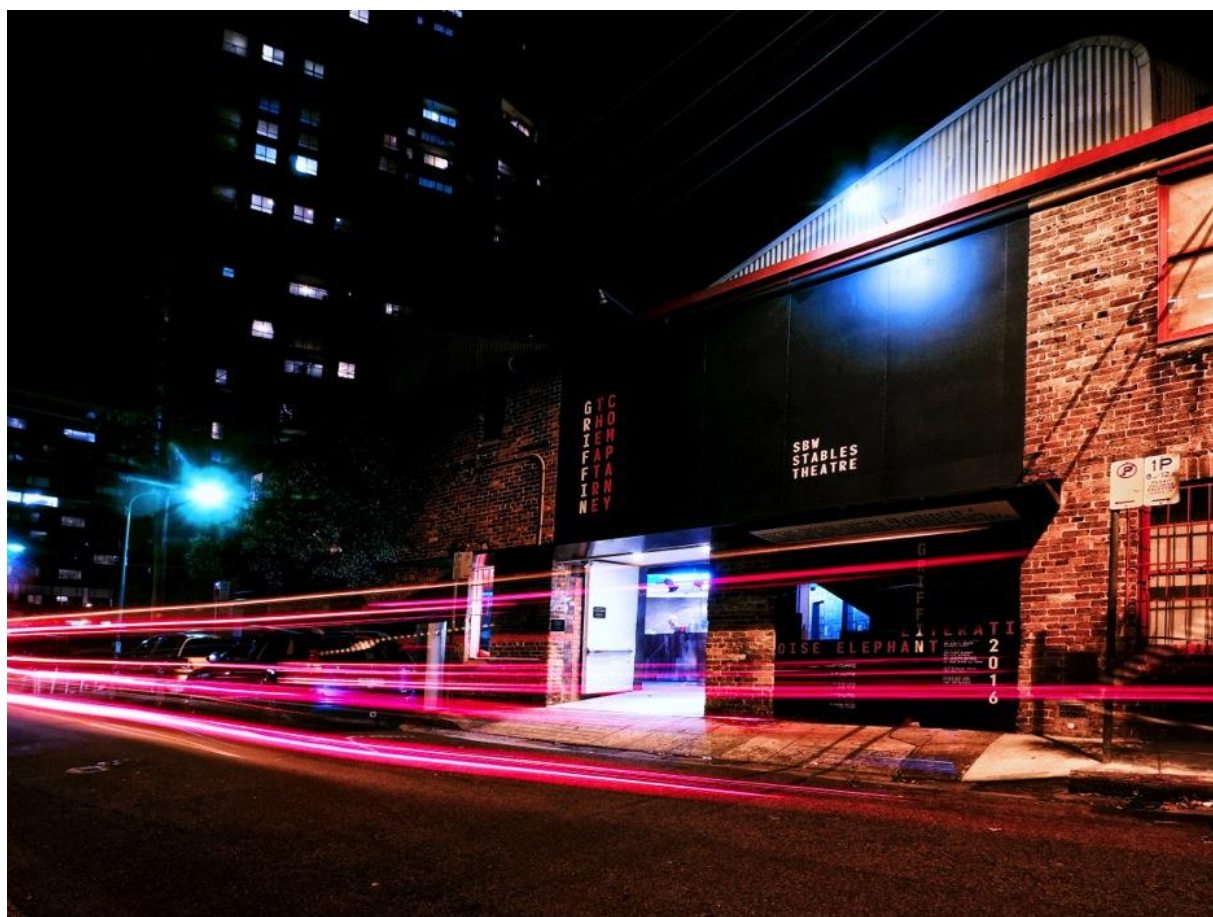


Image: Peter Collie, Urban Walkabout

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## OPERATIONAL REPORT

Griffin's 2016 season was a huge success on many levels. At the SBW Stables Theatre, four of the five Main Season productions exceeded their box office targets and we presented a highly successful coproduction of Justin Fleming's *The Literati* with Bell Shakespeare. We presented three new Australian works as part of Griffin Independent and collaborated for the first time with Tasmania Performs on *As We Forgive* and Powerhouse Youth Theatre on *Tribunal*. Both seasons provided an opportunity for Griffin to work with new companies and welcome new audiences to the Stables. The Sydney theatre community and our audiences have come to expect nothing but excellence from Griffin, and we've exceeded that expectation now in numerous successive seasons of great theatre.

For a second time outside of the Stables we presented the Lysicrates Prize, a playwriting competition that provides opportunities to established writers and introduces new audiences to Australian theatre. A second stage creative development was undertaken for a new work for children, *Cosmic Comics*, supported by the City of Sydney. We also supported the development of David William's *Smurf in Wanderland*, Alana Valentine's *Wayside Bride* and Phil Spencer's *The Smallest Hour*.

All of these projects are indicative of the ambition and relevance of Griffin, and the success of a long-term strategy that will see the company work with the country's most exciting artists to create the best new Australian stories, and reach diverse new audiences.

In 2016, Griffin subscriber numbers reached 1,998 - an increase of 17% on 2015 (1,703). This continues a trend over the past six years, which has seen our subscriber numbers more than triple since 2010. We have also maintained subscriber retention at 67%.

Around 27,500 patrons visited the Stables throughout the year. Importantly, paid attendance remained steady at 70% of capacity for Main Season shows in 2016, with four of these productions exceeding their box office target, while expenditure was contained within budget. Both of the Special Events in the program also exceeded box office targets.

This success was also evident for Griffin Independent productions. Three Independent works were staged in 2016 with the average paid capacity increasing to 60%. The average ticket price was increased slightly to \$28 with a box office average of \$29,000 per production. At the same time, Griffin decreased the cost of providing ticketing services to Independent producers, combining with box office success to significantly increase their net income.

The sponsorship and donations total reached \$875,132 in 2016, representing a 1% decrease to 2014 (\$883,349). Although the company implemented two highly successful development programs during the year, including the End of Financial Year video campaign and a new fundraising initiative titled *Portrait of an Artist* - an event developed as part of the Creative Partnerships Australia Plus 1 funding - the loss of a long term major sponsor meant a slight decrease in the overall development total.

For the year ended 31 December 2016, Griffin generated an operating surplus of \$5,194 (compared to an operating surplus of \$1,552 in 2015). The company's reserves increased from \$284,007 at 31 December 2015 to \$289,201 at 31 December 2016.

Overall, Griffin's turnover reached \$2,866,563 a decrease of 9% on the 2015 year (3,163,830), which had included the one off Major Festival's Initiative funding for *Masquerade*. Griffin's retained earnings of \$258,826 represent 9% of turnover.

In 2017, Griffin is approaching the year with its traditional artistic gusto although applying a higher degree of financial conservatism to ensure a surplus is achieved. A surplus reflects a sustainable business model and the Board and management are conscious of this.

## 2016 OPERATIONS PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

GOAL ONE: PRODUCE THE BEST AUSTRALIAN STORIES		
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Outcome	Target Met
At least three new Australian works premiere in Griffin's annual main season	4	✓+
Invest in five-week rehearsals for all Main Season works	5	✓
Engage nationally with writers and artists	Ongoing	✓
GOAL TWO: LEAD THE CONVERSATION ON AUSTRALIAN PLAYWRITING		
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Outcome	Target Met
Curate a season of at least five Australian works	10	✓+
Engage in at least one coproduction each year	1	✓
Raise the profile of Australian Playwriting by running National playwriting competitions	2	✓
GOAL THREE: REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA		
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Outcome	Target Met
Develop one work per year with a CALD playwright	1	✓
Conduct open auditions annually	1	✓
Develop strategies for Aboriginal employment	Ongoing	!
Develop a Digital Creative Lab to engage national and regional artists	Ongoing	!
GOAL FOUR: MAINTAIN PATHWAYS FOR ARTISTS TO PROFESSIONAL MAINSTAGE PRODUCTION		
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Outcome	Target Met
Provide opportunities for Griffin Studio residents on an annual basis	4	✓
Mentor at least one Affiliate Director on a Main Season Griffin Production	1	x
Produce the Ambassador Program for high school students	1	✓
Create opportunities for emerging theatre makers to present work at The Stables	3	✓
GOAL FIVE: REACH THE WIDEST POSSIBLE AUDIENCE		
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Outcome	Target Met
Increase subscribers annually by 1%	+17%	✓
Increase paid attendance annually by 1% of capacity by the end of 2020	70%	✓
Present one regional or national tour	1	✓
Increase reach of 'owned' digital platforms annually by 2%	Ongoing	!
GOAL SIX: BE THE BEST ARTS BUSINESS IN AUSTRALIA		
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Outcome	Target Met
Review Board Governance Policy (annual)	Achieved	✓
Review staffing performance and organisational structure (annual)	Achieved	✓
Best practice of negotiating and contracting with Artists (audited)	Achieved	✓
Increase donation and cash sponsorship income annually by 2%	-1%	x

## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2016 was the most ambitious year in the history of Griffin Theatre Company. It was the culmination of years of strategizing as to how best deliver new Australian plays to demanding and literate audiences. It was creatively, critically and financially an incredibly successful year. And it was achieved in the midst of an incredibly difficult political and funding environment.

We delivered five new Australian plays successfully to the Main Stage. Every play was supported by five weeks rehearsal. Every play was critically well received. We increased our audiences significantly. We maintained gender parity for lead creatives (10 Playwright and Director opportunities), and for creative teams (24 roles in total), near parity for casting (11 Female roles, 13 Male roles), and enjoyed a dominantly female company structure. One third of the roles onstage were performed by CALD actors, and three lead roles of the 24 were played by Aboriginal actors. None of these diversely cast roles were written with ethnicity specified. Our average cast size is a strong 4.8 actors, which compares very well against the Melbourne Theatre Company average of 5.

Of our plays, the stories ranged from domestic violence in the gay community in *Ladies Day*, to catastrophic climate change in *The Turquoise Elephant*, to the fragmentation of society as great gaps open up between the streets and the penthouses in *Gloria*, to the hypocrisy of the intellectual elite in *The Literati*, and the fluidity of time, action and identity in *Replay*. Our Australian playwrights came from their homes in South Australia, Queensland, Paris, Iceland and (of course one) from Sydney to share their stories with our audience which remains the most diverse and courageous group of theatre goers in the country.

Excitingly we brought the company together with Bell Shakespeare, celebrating the Stables' DNA that exists in both companies. We partnered also with Powerhouse Youth Theatre, and Tasmania Performs. We travelled to Parramatta Riverside cementing that ongoing commitment to connect with Western Sydney. We supported three independent companies as they presented works of Australian writers from around the country.

Our Studio Artists programme again successfully encouraged two new works onto the 2017 slate with Sheridan Harbridge collaborating with Tommy Bradson in *Nosferatutu* and David William's *Smurf In Wonderland* due to make their debut on the Griffin stage as special projects. The outstanding success of this artist development programme is inspiring for the whole country. Plans had been in place for the expansion of this programme but these have been put on hold in the wake of funding cuts.

Many of the plans for the outreach of Griffin to a wider artistic and audience community have been set aside as the company restructures to accommodate the significant reduction to our core funding. Maintaining the excellence of our productions remains the top priority, even as we plan to cut away development and rehearsal time for all Main Stage productions. The situation is not ideal but we have an inventive staff, a small loyal group of donors, an energised board and a pile of great plays awaiting production.

At the end of such a successful year, where we had been hoping to enter a new phase of growth, we will instead be looking to reshape, consolidate and reconsider the future path for the company. The need to make the company more independent of government funding has been made excruciatingly apparent, even as it has never been clearer that this is the theatre company most in need of sustained government investment. The mission of working every year to find, develop and stage the next Australian classic has never been more necessary.

Audience trust in the capacity of Griffin to deliver the best theatre experience of new Australian work in the country has never been greater. The enthusiasm in the acting community for the work of Griffin and the opportunities afforded on the Stables stage is evidenced by the calibre of actors willing to work with us. The overwhelming response to Angus Cerini's play *The Bleeding Tree* as it won The Sydney Theatre Critics Award for Best New Australian Work, The Glug for Best Production, the Awgie, the Premier's Literary Prize, and three Helpmann awards, was like a pile of cherries on top of a really special experience for the company in that production.

Griffin has emerged from a successful yet difficult year smaller, more efficient, more determined and equipped with the knowledge of how to run this company to the best of its capacity so that our audiences continue to receive the best experience of new writing that this country can offer.

## 2016 ARTISTIC SUMMARY

MAIN STAGE PROGRAMME					
	Number of Performances	Total Audience	% Attendance		
			Tickets		Income
			Paid (KPI = 70%)	Total	vs.Target
<b>LADIES DAY</b> BY ALANA VALENTINE 5 FEBRUARY – 26 MARCH	50	3969	60%	76%	92%
<b>REPLAY</b> BY PHILLIP KAVANAGH 2 APRIL – 7 MAY	38	3293	68%	83%	116%
<b>THE LITERATI</b> BY JUSTIN FLEMING 27 MAY – 16 JULY	57	5434	79%	91%	120%
<b>GLORIA</b> BY BENEDICT ANDREWS 26 AUGUST – 8 OCTOBER	47	4913	87%	100%	158%
<b>TURQUOISE ELEPHANT</b> BY STEPHEN CARLETON 14 OCTOBER– 26 NOVEMBER	46	3776	66%	78%	115%
<b>AVERAGE</b>	42	4375	70%	84%	120%
SPECIAL EVENTS					
<b>AS WE FORGIVE</b> BY TOM HOLLOWAY 11 MAY – 21 MAY	12	994	59%	79%	119%
<b>TRIBUNAL</b> CONCEPT BY KAREN THERESE 11 MAY – 21 MAY	10	841	56%	80%	117%

GRIFFIN INDEPENDENT				
Running in parallel to Griffin's own Main Season of Australian plays, Griffin Independent aims to bridge the independent and main stage sectors and to provide independent theatre makers with the best opportunities and support. Griffin provides minimal hire fees for its theatre, artistic and production support, equipment, marketing and publicity support, and ticketing services. In 2016, Griffin Independent co-presented three Australian plays produced by independent teams of artists.				
	Number of Performances	Total Audience	% Attendance	
			Paid	Total
<b>THOMAS MURRAY AND THE UPSIDE DOWN RIVER</b> BY REG CRIBB 13 - 30 JANUARY 2016 Produced by Stone Soup	17	1293	56%	72%
<b>THOSE WHO FALL IN LOVE LIKE ANCHORS DROPPED UPON THE OCEAN FLOOR</b> BY FINEGAN KRUCKEMEYER 20 JULY - 6 AUGUST 2016 Produced by Jo Morris and Renee Newman	17	1282	58%	72%
<b>LIGHTEN UP</b> BY NICHOLAS BROWN AND SAM MCCOOL 30 NOVEMBER - 17 DECEMBER 2016 Produced by Bali Padda	17	1670	71%	94%

## ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

GRIFFIN STUDIO is Griffin's flagship artistic development program. Through a year-long residency with the company, the program establishes clear career pathways for directors, writers and dramaturgs. Each participant is supported in a number of ways including remuneration for their work and the opportunity to develop both short and full-length works.

The 2016 Studio Artists were:

- Sofya Gollan
- Catherine Fargher and Heather Grace Jones
- Sheridan Harbridge
- Phil Spencer

The success of the Studio program is evidenced by the inclusion of 2015 Studio Artist Karen Therese's work *Tribunal*, in the 2016 season and the development of 2015 Studio Artist David William's work *Smurf in Wanderland*.

## WRITING AND SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

**THE GRIFFIN AWARD** recognises an outstanding new play that displays an authentic, inventive and contemporary Australian voice. Judged by a panel of theatre professionals from national submissions, the prestigious award carries a \$10,000 prize for the winner and \$1,000 for each of the four other finalists through the support of Copyright Agency Limited's Cultural Fund. Griffin continued its commitment to accepting and assessing scripts from around the nation with 100 submissions received in 2016. The award in 2016 went to Melissa Reeves for *The Zen of Table Tennis. Turquoise Elephant*, by Stephen Carleton, the winner of the 2015 Griffin Award, was part of the 2016 Main Season program.

**THE LYSICRATES PRIZE** continued in 2016, with almost double the number of submissions as in the previous year, and with a live audience of 450 people. The prize provides opportunities to established writers and introduces new audiences to Australian theatre. The competition is open to professional playwrights, who submit the first act of a new play. The three finalists' entries then receive a week's rehearsal before a staged reading is held before an audience. The audience votes for the winner, who receives a full commission from Griffin (\$12,500) to finish the play. The runners-up receive a cash prize of \$1,000. The Lysicrates Prize is a philanthropic initiative produced in association with The Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney and supported by The Lysicrates Foundation. In 2016, 27 submissions were received. The winner, voted by 450 audience members was Mary Rachel Brown for *Approximate Balance*. One of the shortlisted plays from 2015, Justin Fleming's *The Literati* was performed as part of the 2016 Main Season.

## EDUCATION AND ACCESS

Griffin aims to ensure it remains the most accessible company in Australia for artists. The following initiatives, additional activities and support programs were offered throughout 2016.

### **GRIFFIN AMBASSADORS**

In 2016 this education scheme introduced 62 senior high school students to Griffin – receiving free tickets to productions, reduced price tickets for friends and family, exclusive cast forums and a series of theatre craft workshops. Since 2004, students from across greater Sydney and as far as Wollongong, Goulburn, Dural, Katoomba and Terrigal have participated.

### **SCRIPT CLUB**

In 2016 Griffin continued its Script Club where participants read classic Australian plays then come together for afternoon tea and to engage in a robust round-table discussion led by John McCallum -Theatre Critic for *The Australian* and Senior Lecturer in Theatre at UNSW.

**GENERAL AUDITIONS** were held in December 2016, in order to give new and emerging artists who are passionate about Australian plays access to Griffin.

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PRODUCTION ONE

LADIES DAY

BY ALANA VALENTINE

*“Who doesn’t love a man in a dress?”*

It’s Ladies Day at the Broome races and the divinely beautiful Mike is the toast of the track. But amongst the froth and festivity, a brutal act of violence reminds us that life is not just all swishy hemlines, debonair gents and fascinators galore.

Alana Valentine is one of Australia’s best playwrights. Known for her incredibly successful verbatim works, she takes her interviews and research with individuals and communities, and mixes them with a healthy dose of drama. The result is powerful, thought-provoking theatre in which the voices of her protagonists ring absolutely true.

Alana spent months interviewing the gay community of Broome to create a play that asks questions about tolerance, isolation, love, hope and the right to have your story told. Griffin is proud to present the world premiere of Ladies Day -- a vivid, richly evocative play with a big heart, directed by Darren Yap.

**Director** Darren Yap

**Set and Costume Designer** James Browne

**Lighting Designer** Hugh Hamilton

**Sound Designer and Composer** Max Lambert

**Associate Composer and Sound Designer** Roger Lock

**Stage Manager** Cara Woods

**With** Matthew Backer, Wade Briggs, Lucia Mastrantone, Elan Zavelsky

Presented in association with Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Supported by Griffin’s Production Partners Program where remarkable productions are made possible through the support of individual donors. The research and writing of *Ladies Day* was supported by the Literature Fund of the Australia Council for the Arts.

**Previews**

5, 6, 8 – 11 February

**Season**

15 February – 26 March

**Outcomes**

*Ladies Day* was presented at the Stables for a six-week season of 50 performances to an audience of 3969. The show achieved 60% paid attendance and 76% total attendance and achieved 92% of its box office target.

**Critical Response**

“Extraordinarily moving and intelligent...It is a meaty and thoroughly entertaining work.” ***Australian Stage***

“This is a profound investigation into what it means to be truthful in the theatre.” ***The Australian***

“*Ladies Day* walks an intriguing line between fact and fiction, with epic techniques keeping us alive to the contradictions inherent in turning the stuff of real lives into theatre. The effect is deliberately, if gently, jarring.” ***The Sydney Morning Herald***

“Directed by Darren Yap with verve and a clear emphasis on the humanity of the characters, *Ladies Day* becomes greater than the sum of its parts.” ***Stage Noise***



“...Studded with powerful monologues and charged finally with an articular denouement about the enigma of remembered truth, and who has the right to tell what stories.” **Stage Whispers**

“There isn’t a weak link in this cast. All four actors give divine performances that are not to be missed... [Valentine is] giving voice to inhabitants of this world that may not always get the opportunity to speak. And they should, because they have incredible stories should we take the time to listen.” **Theatre Now**

“[In] *Ladies Day*, nothing is more fitting then describing it as hitting, for it gets you. Right there in the feelings...at its core the play has such ‘heart’.” **The AU Review**

“With boisterous and lively direction by Darren Yap...this is a thoughtful and generously entertaining play.” **Daily Review**

“Confronting and funny, brutal and compassionate, Alana Valentine’s *Ladies Day* reaches two important benchmarks of the best theatre: the 100 minute duration seems like half an hour and as the play gets underway we cease to notice actors but see other people.” **South Sydney Herald**

“As far as Valentine is concerned, now is an exciting time for local theatre...Certainly, the anticipation building up around her own play seems to suggest an important cultural shift.” **The Brag**

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## PRODUCTION TWO

### REPLAY

BY PHILLIP KAVANAGH

2 APRIL – 7 MAY

***“I remember. I remember what happened.”***

The past is what you make it.

John saw his brother Michael die. He seems to have forgotten it, until now. His brother Peter saw it too, but remembers things differently. Together, they revisit the past in search of a common truth. But this search has terrifying, unexpected consequences for them both.

Winner of the Patrick White Playwrights’ Award in 2011, Phillip Kavanagh is a playwright of exceptional delicacy. *Replay* is a beautiful meditation on the fluidity of life, childhood nostalgia and the fallibility of collective memory. It reminds us that moments of chance, lost or taken, can determine our destiny.

**Director** Lee Lewis

**Designer** Tobhiyah Stone Feller

**Lighting Designer** Benjamin Brockman

**Composer & Sound Designer** Darryl Wallis

**Stage Manager** Isabella Kerdijk

**With** Jack Finsterer, Alfie Gledhill, Anthony Gooley

Co-commissioned with Playwriting Australia

### Previews

2, 4, 5, 6 April

### Season

9 April – 7 May

### Outcomes

*Replay* was presented at the Stables for a four-week season of 38 performances to an audience of 3299. The show achieved 68% paid attendance and 83% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 116%.

### Critical Response

"Griffin Theatre Company once again supports an imaginative, innovative new work by an Australian playwright."

**Daily Arts Guide**

"Kavanagh's script is at once ethereal and touch – as delicate in its observations of boys' foibles as it is flinty in its understanding where that can lead...*Replay* is a fascinating portrayal of that fragile and deceptive fraud: memory." **StageNoise**

"Memory, time, family, truth: these are all themes that will ensure audience members engage with their experience as it goes beyond the realms of mere entertainment." **The Brag**

"In this delicate new drama, Patrick White Playwrights' Award winner Phillip Kavanagh experiments with form – and time and space – to examine how different people deal with trauma." **Time Out**

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## PRODUCTION THREE

### THE LITERATI

BY JUSTIN FLEMING

AFTER MOLIÈRE'S LES FEMMES SAVANTES

Juliet and Clinton are in love. Guileless, sweet, all-encompassing love. However, love is not without its impediments. Standing in the way of their eternal happiness are Juliet's mother and sister, whose disapproval is of the most high-brow kind.

Griffin is doing a Molière! Why? Because that great Australian playwright, Justin Fleming, has audaciously brought this one screaming into 21st century Australia. It's sassy, it's silly. We love it!

And, it's also a glorious new co-production with Bell Shakespeare, directed by Griffin Artistic Director Lee Lewis, and starring Caroline Brazier, Gareth Davies, Jamie Oxenbould, Kate Mulvany and Miranda Tapsell.

**Director** Lee Lewis

**Co-Composers and Sound Designers** Max Lambert and Roger Lock

**Designer** Sophie Fletcher

**Lighting Designer** Verity Hampson

**Stage Manager** Charlotte Barrett

**With** Caroline Brazier, Gareth Davies, Jamie Oxenbould, Kate Mulvany, Miranda Tapsell

### Previews

27, 28, 30, 31 May

### Season

4 June – 16 July

Co-presented with Bell Shakespeare

### Outcomes

*The Literati* was presented at the Stables for a six-week season of 57 performances to an audience of 5434. The show achieved 79% paid attendance and 91% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 120%.

### Critical Response

"This highly entertaining production achieves something you don't always find in new stagings of Moliere: a mixture of outrageous comedy and tender humanity, side by side, sometimes clashing, but brought together sweetly in the springlike comic ending." **The Australian**

"*The Literati* is exceptional entertainment, made doubly pleasurable at this intimate scale. Don't miss it." **The Sydney Morning Herald**

"Fleming's script is a gem of gymnastic linguistics, peppered with provocations and pleasures, as befits its classical template, astute and acerbic and unabashedly cheeky." **Australian Stage**

"Gareth Davies and Miranda Tapsell are maddening and charming respectively, while Caroline Brazier and Kate Mulvany are gloriously awe-inspiring in their dual high-wire acts – between utterly sublime and utterly silly." **Stage Noise**

"There's a deliciously off-the-wall edge to Mulvany's performance, coupled with impeccable comic timing. You feel like you're watching a master at work." **Time Out Sydney**

"Boasting fine performances, it's Fleming's deftness in adapting the prose which is the real reward here." **ArtsHub**

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## PRODUCTION FOUR

### GLORIA

BY BENEDICT ANDREWS

***"She's a star, still a star, every inch a star."***

Gloria is on the brink of making her triumphant return to the stage. A celebrated actor – a star, a celebrity – she's played every iconic role in the canon of theatrical greats: Nina, Hedda, Hamlet, Clytemnestra. She's burnt into our eyes, our heart, our imaginations.

Playing the real-life survivor of a sadistic crime, Gloria must immerse herself in the horror of her character's reality. As Gloria falls further into the abyss, the unravelling of her mind is reflected by the breakdown of order around her.

Through Gloria, we see a portrait of Australia afraid to acknowledge the widening gaps in our society. A beautifully complex and original work, *Gloria* is at once deeply Australian yet global in its perspective.

Benedict Andrews always dares to take us to the edge of humanity, enthralling audiences with some of the most astonishing and thought-provoking theatre of our time. A role like Gloria demands an exceptional actor – that actor is Marta Dusseldorp. Griffin's own Lee Lewis directs this exhilarating journey.

**Director** Lee Lewis

**Associate Director** Ben Winspear

**Designer** Sophie Fletcher

**Lighting Designer** Luiz Pampolha

**A/V Designer** Toby Knyvett

**Sound Designer** Steve Toulmin

**Photographer and Video Content Designer** Brett Boardman

**Stage Manager** Natalie Moir

**With** Kristy Best, Chloe Bayliss, Marta Dusseldorp, Louis Fontaine, Huw Higginson, Max Phillips, Pierce Wilcox, Meyne Wyatt

### Previews

26, 27, 29-31 August

## Season

1 September – 8 October

## Outcomes

*Gloria* was presented at the Stables for a five-week season of 47 performances to an audience of 4913. The show achieved 87% paid attendance and 100% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 158%.

## Critical Response

“This is a stunning piece of work...Andrews’ script is full of complexities and director Lee Lewis negotiates these brilliantly. As soon as it becomes clear we are not to look for simple narrative coherence, we are set free to take it all in on a visceral level. This is one of her best productions.” ***The Australian***

“Brilliantly played by Marta Dusseldorp...Director Lee Lewis ‘choreography of action and emotion is excellent, with good use made of audio-visuals created by designer Toby Knyvett and videographer Brett Boardman, and Sophie Fletcher’s set module, which takes us from glossy domesticity to grotty green room.” ***Sydney Morning Herald***

“Lewis’ production is strongly inventive, finding the richness and making sense of the play...And watching Dusseldorp blasting through an extraordinarily difficult role in such an intimate setting is both a thrill and a privilege.” ***Daily***

## Review

“Benedict Andrews has written an absorbing and often profound entertainment of ideas and language and images that floats in a production given the tenderest and cleverest treatment by director Lee Lewis...And no wonder people are talking and flocking to it. It is truly amazing.” ***Stage Noise***

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## PRODUCTION FIVE

### THE TURQUOISE ELEPHANT

BY STEPHEN CARLETON

***Meet Augusta Macquarie: Her Excellency, patron of the arts, formidable matriarch, environmental vandal.***

Inside her triple-glazed compound, Augusta shields herself from the catastrophic elements, bathing in the classics and campaigning for the reinstatement of global reliance on fossil fuels. Outside, the world lurches from one environmental cataclysm to the next. Meanwhile, her sister, Olympia, thinks the best way to save endangered species is to eat them. Their niece, Basra, is intent on making a difference – but how? Can you save the world one blog at a time?

Stephen Carleton’s *The Turquoise Elephant* won the 2015 Griffin Award. A shockingly black, black, black political farce, it’s the sort of play that pushes itself into a season – it’s urgent, contemporary and perilously close to being real. From opera on Sydney Harbour to the tiny jewel of the Stables stage, there is nothing director Gale Edwards cannot do. She brings her magic and wry insight to the world premiere of this very funny, clever and wicked new work.

**Director** Gale Edwards

**Set Designer** Brian Thomson

**Costume Designer** Emma Vine

**Lighting & AV Designer** Verity Hampson

**Associate Lighting Designer** Daniel Barber

**Sound Designer** Jeremy Silver

**Stage Manager** Karina McKenzie

**With** Catherine Davies, Maggie Dence, Julian Garner, Belinda Giblin, Olivia Rose

## Previews

14, 15, 17-20 October

## Season

21 October – 26 November

## Outcomes

*The Turquoise Elephant* was presented at the Stables for a five-week season of 46 performances to an audience of 3776. The show achieved 66% paid attendance and 78% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 115%.

## Critical Response

"If you want to laugh your way into a downward existential spiral about the way humanity has screwed the world, then *The Turquoise Elephant* is the play for you." **Aussie Theatre**

"A darkly comic piece of absurdist mastery...This is a play that should be seen, heard, and confronted by as many people as possible." **Performing Arts Hub**

"Seductively funny and satisfyingly silly...The show is a visual banquet." **Stage Noise**

"Vivid performances – with Giblin impressing most as the demented Olympia – do much to make *The Turquoise Elephant* feel less like an agit-prop exercise and more like a modern day Moliere." **The Sydney Morning Herald**

"Maggie Dence as Augusta and Belinda Giblin as Olympia are superb creations, commanding in their characterization, hilarious in their hideousness." **Australian Stage**

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## SPECIAL EVENT

**Griffin Theatre Company & Tasmania Performs present**

**AS WE FORGIVE**

**BY TOM HOLLOWAY**

Tom Holloway's writing shines for its subtlety, integrity and grace. One of Australia's most celebrated playwrights, his work has been performed widely, both in Australia and abroad. *As We Forgive* unites Holloway with award-winning director Julian Meyrick and Tasmanian acting legend Robert Jarman. A searing investigation of contemporary morality, this absorbing production examines the motives, methods and meaning of forgiveness.

Accompanied on stage by a lone cellist, Jarman portrays three men at the edges of society trying to come to terms with the events in their lives. Each has a story to tell. Each has a reason for why they behaved as they did. What you'll see is a struggle with the act of forgiveness.

**Director and Dramaturge** Julian Meyrick

**Composer** Raffaele Marcellino

**Lighting Designer** Nicholas Higgins

**Original Production Design** Jill Munro and Julian Meyrick

**Photographs** Lisa Garland

**Cellist** Jack Ward

**With** Robert Jarman

## Preview

11 May

## Season

13 – 21 May

## Outcomes

*As We Forgive* was presented at the Stables for a two-week season of 12 performances to an audience of 994. The show achieved 59% paid attendance and 79% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 119%.

## Critical Response

“... Jarman draws us in like a raconteur at a dinner party, delivering his monologues with naturalism akin to confidences between friends. His stories are spell binding, gut-wrenching, riveting, even as their sentiments are shockingly subversive.” **Arts Hub**

“[Holloway’s] use of language is superb – the speech patterns are natural and as revealing as any of the plot details. Jarman makes the absolute most of it in a nuanced, calm and entirely commanding performance. There’s not a single line which doesn’t ring true in the whole play.” **Daily Review**

“Holloway grants none of these men a name but actor Robert Jarman gives each a distinctive presence through subtle shifts in intonation and posture. Each scene presents us with a fully realized person rather than a character and Jarman is able to bring his audience into something more akin to conversation in this intimate space. His building and releasing of tension – the latter with gentle laughter, quite often – is exemplary.” **The Sydney Morning Herald**

“A beautiful piece of storytelling that shouldn’t be missed.” **Theatre Now**

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## SPECIAL EVENT

**Griffin Theatre Company & Powerhouse Youth Theatre present**

**TRIBUNAL**

**CONCEPT BY KAREN THERESE**

*Tribunal* is an ambitious new participatory performance project that brings together artists, human rights activists, lawyers, young leaders and outlaws. An Australian Truth and Reconciliation Tribunal will be created to interrogate and explore notions of truth and lies around the politically contentious labels of ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’.

Each night, presenters will offer provocations, thoughts and experiences in a performed conversation on issues that directly affect the community of Western Sydney – their perspectives, aspirations and connections to culture, and how these perspectives impact the broader Australian community.

The conversation for *Tribunal* has been instigated by Karen Therese, a 2015 Griffin Studio Artist, and Artistic Director of Powerhouse Youth Theatre (PYT). PYT creates innovative performance and social artistic experiences.

**Concept** Karen Therese

**Creative collaborators/text/performers** Paul Dwyer, Katie Green, Rhonda Rovenor Dixon, Mahdi Mohammadi, Karen Therese, Jawad Yaqoubi, plus guest speakers

**Text Edit** Paul Dwyer

**Outside Eye** Chris Ryan

**Human Rights Lawyer and collaborator** Joe Tan

**Design** Province (Laura Pike and Anne Louise Dadak)

**Sound and Video Design** James Brown

**Lighting Design** Emma Lockhart-Wilson

**Stage Manager** Patrick Howard

**Production Assistant** Grace Partridge

**Season**

12 – 20 August

## Outcomes

*Tribunal* was presented at the Stables for a season of 10 performances to an audience of 841. The show achieved 56% paid attendance and 80% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 117%.

## Critical Response

"*Tribunal* is an extraordinarily affecting performance project...It's a must-see of a very special kind." **Daily Review**

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## GRIFFIN INDEPENDENT

Griffin recognises that it is necessary for the health of the theatre sector to embrace and champion the work of independent companies and individual artists. Our primary means of doing this is *Griffin Independent* – an annual season co-presented with the country's most exciting independent theatre makers.

Running in parallel to Griffin's own Main Season of Australian plays, *Griffin Independent* aims to bridge the independent and main stage sectors and to provide independent theatre makers with the best opportunities and support.

As part of this support, Griffin provides: minimal hire fees for its theatre, artistic and production support, equipment, free marketing and publicity, and ticketing services.

In 2016, *Griffin Independent* co-presented three Australian plays produced by independent teams of artists.

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## GRIFFIN INDEPENDENT – PRODUCTION ONE

### THOMAS MURRAY AND THE UPSIDE DOWN RIVER

BY REG CRIBB

Produced by Stone Soup.

Invoking the expansive, isolating beauty of rural Australia, Reg Cribb's epic new play is about a man ravaged by drought, family secrets and love.

The Murray family have been farming the land along the Darling River for five generations. For Tom Murray, it's all he's ever known. When his childhood friends Lucy and Billy reappear, deep friendships are tested, and secrets, long buried, are finally awakened – Tom must make the long journey down-stream to reconcile past wrongs and to fight for his wife.

Reg Cribb is a highly-awarded playwright and screenwriter. His plays *Last Cab to Darwin* and *The Return / Last Train to Freo* have been adapted into feature films and he wrote the screenplay for the award-winning *Bran Nue Dae*.

**Director** Chriss Bendall

**Set and Costume Designer** Dann Barber

**Composer and Sound Designer** Kingsley Reeve

**Lighting Designer** Alexander Berlage

**Stage Manager** Ruth Horsfall

**Co-Producers** Pippa Bailey and Chris Bendall

**With** Grant Cartwright, Vanessa Downing, Nicholas Papademetriou, Francesca Savige, Bjorn Stewart

## Previews

13 – 14 January

## Season

16 – 30 January

## Outcome

In its three-week season, with 17 performances, *Thomas Murray* played to an audience of 1293, achieving 56% paid attendance and 72% total attendance.

## Critical Response

"Big sky. Big river. Big betrayal. Big secrets exposed as the river recedes. *Thomas Murray* is a lot of play for your money...Chris Bendall's direction is imaginative, fluent in its handling of the play's temporal shifts and notably physical. Designer Dann Barber's wooden ramp of a stage has all kinds of surprises built into it. Kingsley Reeve's sound design twangs and shimmers." ***Sydney Morning Herald***

"Reg Cribb is a writer whose imagination catches fire when presented with the everyday dramas and dreams of 'ordinary' Australians...The play is a rich exploration of character and story. The language crackles with humour, bitterness and authenticity." ***Stage Noise***

"Grant Cartwright as Thomas Murray is wonderful. Understated, focused and riveting to watch...The production was well conceptualized and lovingly created, under the direction of Chris Bendall, weaving clever design, soundscape, choreography and lighting into the storytelling to create scale in a scaled down space." ***Australian Stage***

"*Thomas Murray and the Upside Down River* is an important and interesting work that explores the secrets and lies retained for generations along with society's mistreatment and prejudice of the original landowners. It is well executed, retaining a good pace and honesty with a blend of humour and hurt." ***Broadway World***

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## GRIFFIN INDEPENDENT – PRODUCTION TWO

### THOSE WHO FALL IN LOVE LIKE ANCHORS DROPPED UPON THE OCEAN FLOOR

BY FINEGAN KRUCKEMEYER

Produced by Jo Morris and Renee Newman.

Time. It slows when you're in love.

Stopping you dead in your tracks, when you first catch sight of her. Stretching for an eternity, as you wait for that phone call. Speeding up and evaporating over an afternoon together. Beating so quickly it just might burst.

*Those Who Fall in Love Like Anchors Dropped Upon the Ocean Floor* is a love story that transcends time – moving from a Cold War Russian submarine, through a Parisian street, to an Appalachian snow field. It follows four stories and eleven characters as they navigate that timeless act of falling in love.

Utterly charming, quirky and funny, *Those Who Fall in Love Like Anchors Dropped Upon the Ocean Floor* is written by multi award-winning playwright Finegan Kruckemeyer and comes to Griffin direct from two sell-out, critically acclaimed Perth seasons.

**Director** Adam Mitchell

**Set and Costume Designer** India Mehta

**Lighting Designer** Chris Donnelly

**Sound Designer** Ben Collins

**Producers** Jo Morris and Renee Newman

**With** Jo Morris, Ben Mortley, Renee Newman

## Previews

20, 21 July

## Season

23 July – 6 August



## Outcome

In its three-week season, with 17 performances, *Those Who Fall In Love* played to an audience of 1282, achieving 58% paid attendance and 72% total attendance.

## Critical Response

"Krukemeyer's script is also wonderfully poetic and philosophical, and as you would expect from someone who writes for children so often, it is also whimsical and full of imagination." **AU Review**

"*Those Who Fall In Love Like Anchors Dropped Upon The Ocean Floor* is entertaining, thoughtful and thought-provoking, the best kind of theatre to go and see with friends." **ArtsHub**

"It has an evocative and poetic script by Finegan Kruckemeyer that was well directed by Adam Mitchell and superbly handled by its cast." **Perth Theatre Reviews**

"A deliberately charming exercise in storytelling..." **Sydney Morning Herald**

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## GRIFFIN INDEPENDENT – PRODUCTION THREE

### LIGHTEN UP

BY NICHOLAS BROWN AND SAM MCCOOL

Produced by Bali Padda

In Australia, we like 'em blonde and bronzed. In India, it's 'fair and lovely'. What happens if you're stuck in between?

John Green is an Anglo-Indian Australian actor who dreams of being cast in his favourite soap, 'Bondi Parade'. The problem is, his coloured contacts can't hide the fact that his skin is more brown than white. Meanwhile, his skin bleaching mum, Bronwyn, is adamant that he should be procreating with a blonde, white Aussie woman to rid the family of any sign of their ethnic heritage. You guess who he falls in love with.

This very funny play by actor (and Bollywood leading-man) Nicholas Brown and comedian Sam McCool tells a universal tale of identity, cultural assimilation and bleaching your bits.

**Director** Shane Anthony

**Set and Costume Designer** Tobhiyah Stone Feller

**Lighting Designer** Christopher Page

**Stage Manager** Lauren Tulloh

**Producer** Bali Padda

**With** Katie Beckett, Nicholas Brown, Vivienne Garrett, Julie Goss, Sam McCool, Bishanyia Vincent

### Previews

30 November, 1 December

### Season

3 – 17 December

## Outcome

In its three-week season, with 17 performances, *Lighten Up* played to an audience of 1670 achieving 71% paid attendance and 94% total attendance.

## Critical Response

"Its refreshing approach makes for exciting theatre...The cast is wonderfully accomplished, and tremendously likeable." **Suzy Goes See**

"In challenging ideas about colour and culture, the playwrights have created a broad channel to navigate the rips and reefs of political correctness and the submerged perils of prejudice...The target is definitely hit." **Australian Stage**

“This production’s greatest strength is the synergy of the cast, and the infectious passion they have for the story.”

**ArtsHub**

“This work has the passion of authenticity that reflects the lived experience of both these writers’ lives – their Australian Indian experience. That they still have a sense of humour about it all is why the work is especially arresting. It has a cultural generosity.” **Kevin Jackson**

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## ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

### GRIFFIN STUDIO

Griffin Studio is our flagship artistic development program. Through a year-long residency with the company, the program establishes clear career pathways for directors, writers and dramaturgs. It’s an invaluable experience for artists to come together to hone their craft, gain vital experience inside a company and develop new work.

In 2016 the Studio Artists were:

#### Sofya Gollan

Sofya is an award-winning director and writer of documentary and drama films, her films having screened in international festivals in Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, UK, US and Australia. Her latest film, *Preservation*, screened worldwide and was nominated for three AFI Awards, including Best Director and Best Screenplay. An acting graduate of National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), she also holds a Masters in Directing (AFTRS). Sofya has also worked as a commissioned playwright.

#### Catherine Fargher & Heather Grace Jones

Catherine is an AWGIE award-winning scriptwriter for radio, theatre and trans-media. Recent projects include *The Merchant: A Sydney Document* (Bell Shakespeare) and *The Dr Egg Adventures*. Heather Grace is a writer, broadcaster and NGO worker. She has co-edited two books including *Sperm Wars* for ABC, performed monologues and has worked in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Alice Springs. They have collaborated previously on the Motherload project and Club Bent.

#### Sheridan Harbridge

Sheridan is a writer and NIDA acting graduate. Her musicals, *Songs for the Fallen* and *Mrs. Bang*, appeared in Adelaide Cabaret, Sydney and Brisbane Festivals, Edinburgh Fringe and Poland’s Festival of Song. Her acting work includes *The Beast*, *The Speechmaker*, *North by Northwest* (MTC), *Jump for Jordan* (Griffin Theatre Company), *Hip Bone Sticking Out* (Big hArt), *Gaybies* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company) and Jim Sharman’s *Andy X*.

#### Phil Spencer

Phil is a writer, performer and creative producer. Since graduating from the University of Glasgow, he has worked professionally as a theatre maker and artistic director in the UK and Australia. Phil is co-artistic director of Sydney-based Tin Shed Theatre Company and is also a regular contributor to events such as Story Club, ABC’s Radiotonic and the Sydney Writers’ Festival.

Each participant is supported in a number of ways including remuneration for their work, and the opportunity to develop short and full-length work.

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## WRITING AND SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

### GRIFFIN AWARD

The Griffin Award recognises an outstanding new play that displays an authentic, inventive and contemporary Australian voice. Judged by a panel of theatre professionals from national submissions, the prestigious award carries a \$10,000 prize for the winner and \$1,000 for each of the four other finalists through the support of Copyright Agency Limited’s Cultural Fund.

Griffin continued its commitment to accepting and assessing scripts from around the nation, awarding its 2016 Griffin Award for new playwriting to Melissa Reeves for *The Zen of Table Tennis*.

### THE LYSICRATES PRIZE

The Lysicrates Prize, a new playwriting competition which saw its inaugural year in 2015, continued in 2016. The prize provides opportunities to established writers and introduces new audiences to Australian theatre.

The competition is open to professional playwrights, who submit the first act of a new play. The three finalists' entries then receive a week's rehearsal before a staged reading is held before a live audience. The audience votes for the winner, who receives a full commission from Griffin (\$12,500) to finish the play. The runners-up receive a cash prize of \$1,000.

The 2016 competition was a wonderful success, with Mary Rachel Brown's *Approximate Balance* winning first prize. 2016 saw almost double the number of submissions than in the previous year, and the three finalists' plays were performed to a live audience of 450 people.

The Lysicrates Prize is a philanthropic initiative produced in association with The Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney and supported by The Lysicrates Foundation.

### COMMISSIONS & SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

In addition to writing developed through Griffin Studio resident artists and new works read and workshopped for the following year's season, Griffin continued to commission Australian writers to deliver new works.

Working closely with playwrights to bring their scripts to life is at the heart of our mission. Writers Declan Greene, Michele Lee, Steve Rodgers and Mary Rachel Brown (2016) were under commission in 2016, and in 2017 we continue to work with these and other writers to nurture new plays for the coming years.

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## EDUCATION & ACCESS

### ACCESS SCHEMES

Griffin aims to ensure it remains the most accessible company in Australia for artists. The following initiatives, additional activities and support programs were offered throughout 2016.

- **Griffin Ambassadors:** This program continues to be a fundamental and treasured part of the company's growth. In 2016 this education scheme introduced 66 senior high school students to Griffin - receiving free tickets to productions, reduced price tickets for friends and family, exclusive cast forums and a series of theatre craft workshops. Since 2004, students from across greater Sydney and as far as Wollongong, Goulburn, Dural, Katoomba and Terrigal have participated.
- **Script Club:** In 2016 Griffin continued its Script Club – just like a regular book club, but with a twist: rather than books, participants rediscover classic Australian plays. After reading the scripts, members get together for afternoon tea and a robust round-table discussion led by John McCallum - Theatre Critic for *The Australian* and Senior Lecturer in Theatre at UNSW.

*"There are many great plays in the Australian repertoire that have, mysteriously, been more or less forgotten. They still have a lot in them to excite us and to say to us, and they ought to be revived. The Script Club highlights four of these each year. It is like a tasting menu (there are many more). When you read an old play you should always ask, 'What's in it for us, now?' That is what we will be asking."* – John McCallum.

- **General auditions:** Held in December 2016.