

GRIFFON THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

A STRATEGIC PLAN

BY ROSS MUELLER

27 JANUARY - 11 MARCH

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**A STRATEGIC
POLITICS
PLAN**

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GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

A STRATEGIC PLAN BY ROSS MUELLER 27 JANUARY - 11 MARCH

Director Chris Mead

Designer Sophie Fletcher

Lighting Designer Verity Hampson

Sound Designer and Composer Steve Francis

Design Assistant Tyler Hawkins

Stage Manager Grace Nye-Butler

With Briallen Clarke, Matt Day, Justin Smith,
Emele Ugavule

**SBW STABLES THEATRE
27 JANUARY - 11 MARCH**

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Griffin acknowledges the generosity of the Seaborn, Broughton & Walford Foundation in allowing it the use of the SBW Stables Theatre rent free, less outgoings, since 1986.

Executive Summary

A Strategic Plan is a comedy. It tackles pathological behaviour in the workplace and asks the question: what is the value of art? It is dedicated to Georgina Capper for her humour, her love and her strength.

Overview

Nobody gets rich in the not-for-profit (NFP) arts sector. It is a passion industry, relying on professional artists bringing established professional networks and inexhaustible work ethics for the benefit of a fragile organisation. Employees are under-paid, overworked and often unappreciated. This is the current model.

Core Business

Banks do not employ musicians as Directors. Law firms do not seek counsel from visual artists. But the not-for-profit arts sector regularly encourages white-collar wearers to contribute pro-bono to a panel, a committee or a Board to help with the delivery of arts and culture programs. These people involve themselves for a variety of personal and professional reasons.

Specifics

- Pro-bono fundraising and legal services are essential for the salvation and required reporting of a small to medium sized arts enterprise.
- It can look good on your CV to be involved in a Board. It may advance your standing in the community and give an individual a sense of power and influence.
- A professional can bring a whole new skill set to a committee. The objectivity of the outsider can be perfect pitch for a NFP and fertilise the ambitions of the organisation.
- When non-arts advisors become overtly operational they can destroy the very enterprise they were trying to save.

Environment

A Strategic Plan was written during my Masters at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2015. At the same time, George Brandis was dissecting our industry and putting jobs in jeopardy. Companies disappeared overnight. Uncertainty-led programming choices and the visceral division between major companies and independent artists became cavernous.

Conclusion

In 2015 the signs at the bus stops said we were living in an 'Ideas Boom' but moving forward jobs and growth have gone backwards. Poverty cannot be the cost of excellence. Australia needs a new Strategic Plan.

Footnotes

I want to thank Lee Lewis and all at Griffin. Anthony Blair and Harry Baxter. I also want to thank Dr. Raimondo Cortese, Jeremy Cohen, Richard Murphett, Dr Chris Mead, Olivia Satchell, Dom Mercer and the actors at VCA 2015 for their assistance in the development of *A Strategic Plan*.

Schedule A

"The decision handed down in Canberra on budget day in May 2015 astonished everyone with its audacity. Without a hint of warning, Brandis peremptorily moved \$105 million of the Australia Council's funding out of the agency, using it to set up a ministerial slush fund. He gave this the grandiose title of the National Program for Excellence in the Arts. The Australia Council's chair, Rupert Myer, was called at about 5pm on budget day; just hours before Hockey was due to release the budget papers. The agency's CEO, Tony Grybowski, cut short a family holiday in Britain and rushed back to Sydney. The sector was gobsmacked. No one was consulted. No one was even told. Brandis simply announced it in a budget night media release. He was the minister, after all. What allowed Brandis to do this? In a word: power."

– Ben Eltham, 2016

Ross Mueller

Writer

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

*With the lights out, it's less dangerous
Here we are now, entertain us
I feel stupid and contagious
Here we are now, entertain us
Nirvana, 1991*

I saw 12 plays this week. This is relatively unusual for me, maybe I see three or four plays a week; it is not at all unusual though that this might be possible in a major city. And of course my experience is just a microcosm of what is available to any of us most days of the week: plays, musicals, performances, concerts, galleries, choirs, sculpture classes, poetry readings, live music, more, more than we could ever see, attend, buy a ticket for beckons in most suburbs at almost all hours. Why is this so?

Legendary rock poet Patti Smith recently spoke to the brief 'why do I write?' She didn't know. She nevertheless spoke with candour, humour and charm to the 'how'; she writes because her world is dense with poets, novelists, photographers and musicians both alive and dead, all still restless, urgent, curious and dynamic. And that of course was ultimately her answer to the why: 'because we can't simply live'.

Some reputable theorists argue that we make art primarily in times of excess and surplus, when we have the time and the money. You may immediately refute that with examples of astonishing paintings, poems, novels or plays made at moments of intense suffering or stress. Evolutionary biologists contend that art making is central to the way our brains have developed, to our very being in the world.

This question of the 'why' was taken up in a recent comparison of the London Olympics' opening ceremony with Brexit. Both contained narratives about Britain: one of innovation, culture and inclusion; the other rage and bullish nationalism. These contrasting stories read, for writer Frank Cottrell Boyce, as a clarion call: art and culture, at their core, are fuelled by reckless generosity and artists needed to get busy.

This play by Ross Mueller is about an artist and about artists of the future, but also about management, and managers. Are they fundamentally antithetical? A crippling feeling of opposition has become acute recently because, since WW2, many Western governments supported the arts but, in attempting to ensure public accountability, required artists be managed, submit to assessment, attain key measurable, explain the 'why'. But how do we assess artists? How do we measure art? How do we justify to government that the spend was/is worthwhile? Are the myriad intrinsic benefits enough? Are instrumental benefits meaningful?

Yet still we make art, immerse ourselves in it, are hungry for it, exist because of it.

What I love about this play is that it is about that hunger, a conversation about fear, rage and befuddlement, delight, seduction, joy and ultimately, generosity. It is also funny. And live.

Sounds like a strategic plan to me.

Chris Mead
Director



Ross Mueller

Playwright

Ross Mueller is an Australian writer. Ross' theatre-writing credits include: for Griffin and Sydney Theatre Company: *Concussion*; for Australian Theatre for Young People: *A Town Named War Boy*; for Malthouse: *Construction Of The Human Heart*, *I Can't Even*; for Melbourne Theatre Company: *Cold Light Of Day*, *The Ghost Writer*; for Playbox Theatre: *The Final Days of Johnny Deere*, *No Man's Island*, *Screamsaver*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *ZEBRA!* He has written six plays for ABC Radio National and had two children's books published by Allen and Unwin. Ross has won the New York New Dramatists Playwright Exchange, the Wal Cherry Award for Play of the Year, and was the Australian playwright at the International Residency of the Royal Court Theatre in London in 2002. He has been a mentor for the National Studio, and is currently the Fresh INK tutor for ATYP in Victoria and a freelance columnist.



Chris Mead

Director

Chris specialises in developing new writing. Chris' theatre credits include: for Griffin: *The Modern International Dead*, *Quack*, which won Best New Play, Sydney Theatre Critics' Awards and the WA Premier's Literary Award; for NIDA: *Rare Earth*; for Malthouse: *Walking into the Bigness*, which won Best Performance for VCE Theatre Studies. Chris is Literary Director of Melbourne Theatre Company. Previous positions have included: Curator of the Australian National Playwrights' Conference; Literary Manager of Belvoir; Festival Director, International Festival for Young Playwrights; inaugural Artistic Director of Playwriting Australia; and Literary Manager, and Wharf 2LOUD Producer, of Sydney Theatre Company. Chris has a PhD from Sydney University, is an inaugural Australia Council Dramaturgy Fellow, and was a judge for the Windham Campbell Award (Yale) and part of New Visions New Voices at Washington DC's Kennedy Center. His monograph on institutional racism and outreach strategies was published by Currency House.



Sophie Fletcher

Designer

Sophie's theatre credits include, as Set and Costume Designer: for Griffin: *Caress/Ache*, *Emerald City*, *Gloria*; for Griffin and Bell Shakespeare: *The Literati*; for Belvoir: *This Heaven*; for Darlinghurst Theatre Company: *Broken*. As Design Assistant: for Belvoir: *Babyteeth*, *Every Breath*, *Peter Pan*; for Melbourne Theatre Company: *Miss Julie*; for Opera Australia: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Ring Cycle*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Gross und Klein*, *The Maids*, *Waiting for Godot*. Her film credits include, as Costume Designer: for Whitefalk Films: *Florence Has Left the Building* and as Production and Costume Designer: for Whitefalk Films: *How to Get Clean*, *Measuring The Jump*, *Shadow Self* and *Trespass*.



Verity Hampson

Lighting Designer

Verity's theatre credits include, for Griffin: *The Turquoise Elephant, Angela's Kitchen, Beached, The Bleeding Tree, The Boys, The Bull, the Moon and the Coronet of Stars, The Floating World*; for Griffin and Bell Shakespeare: *The Literati*; for Bell Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; for Belvoir: *The Drover's Wife, The Blind Giant is Dancing, Ivanov, Is This Thing On?, Small and Tired, Ruby's Wish*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark, Little Mercy, Machinal*, for which she won the Sydney Theatre Award for Best Mainstage Lighting Design. Verity's television credits include: for ABC: *Live at the Basement, The Roast*. She is a NIDA graduate with over 10 years' experience as a lighting and projection designer. Verity was awarded the Mike Walsh Fellowship in 2012, which took her to Broadway to work with Tony Award-winning projection designers 59 Productions.



Steve Francis

Sound Designer and Composer

Steve's theatre credits include, for Griffin: *A Rabbit for Kim Jong-il, The Bull, the Moon and the Coronet of Stars, Between Two Waves, Speaking in Tongues, Strange Attractor, This Year's Ashes*; for Bell Shakespeare: *Hamlet, Henry V*; for Belvoir: *Angels in America, Babyteeth, Baghdad Wedding, Capricornia, Gulpillil, Keating!, Paul, Parramatta Girls, Ruben Guthrie*; for Melbourne Theatre Company: *The Weir, The Sublime*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *After Dinner, The Battle of Waterloo, Disgraced, The Hanging, The Long Way Home, Mojo, Rabbit, The Removalists, Sex with Strangers, Switzerland, Travelling North, Tusk Tusk*. Steve's dance credits include, for The Australian Ballet: *Totem*; for Bangarra Dance Theatre: *Boomerang, Belong, Bush, Corroboree, Lore, Skin, True Stories, Walkabout*. His compositions for film include, for ABC: *The Turning and Stories I Want To Tell You In Person*. Steve's awards include the 2003 and 2012 Helpmann Awards for Best Original Score, and the 2003 award for Best New Australian Work; he won a Sydney Theatre Award in 2011 and 2014.



Tyler Hawkins

Design Assistant

Tyler's theatre credits include, as Costume, Set and AV Designer: for NIDA: *#KillAllMen*, *The Olympians*. As Costume Assistant: for STC: *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Costume Assistant and Wig Stylist: for Belvoir: *The Wizard of Oz*. Art Finishing: for Belvoir: *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Tyler's film credits include: as Costume Designer: *Brown Lips*; as Costume Assistant: *Eaglehawk*, *Saint Lo*; as Costume and Set Assistant: *Measuring the Jump*; as Production Designer: 'Pyramid' by Twin Caverns.



Grace Nye-Butler

Stage Manager

This is Grace's first production with Griffin. Grace's theatre credits include: for Bell Shakespeare (national tours): *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Henry V*; for Belvoir: *Stories I Want To Tell You In Person*; as Assistant Stage Manager: for Belvoir: *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Corranderrk*, *Elektra / Orestes* and *Medea*. Grace graduated from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) with an Advanced Diploma of Stage Management. She has also worked for Black Swan State Theatre Company, Speigleworld, Pacific Opera, Sydney Festival and RockCorps.



Briallen Clarke

Linda / Leanne

Briallen's theatre credits include: as a performer: for Griffin: *Hollywood Ending*; for Darlinghurst Theatre Company: *All My Sons*, *The Lunch Hour*, *The Young Tycoons*; for Ensemble Theatre: *Clybourne Park*; for Melbourne Art Centre: *Dreamsong*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Hay Fever*; for Old Fitzroy Theatre: *Pork Stiletto*; as Producer: for Australian Theatre for Young People: *Stop Kiss*. Her television credits include: as actor: Nine Network: *Doctor Doctor*; as writer and a performer: for ABC: *Freshblood*. Briallen graduated from the National Institute of Dramatic Art in 2010.



Matt Day

Simon / Perkins

A Strategic Plan is Matt's first production with Griffin. His theatre credits include: for Melbourne Theatre Company: *North by Northwest*, *Scarlett O'Hara at the Crimson Parrot*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *Fred*, *Six Degrees of Separation*, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*. Matt's film credits include: Dance Academy: *The Comeback*, *Dating the Enemy*, *Doing Time for Patsy Cline*, *Kiss or Kill*, *Love and Other Catastrophies*, *My Year Without Sex*, *Muggers*, *Muriel's Wedding*, *Scoop*, *The Sugar Factory*, *Sweet Country*, *Touch*. His television credits include: *A Country Practice*, *And Starring Pancho Villa*, *The Beast*, *The Blitz: London's Longest Night*, *The Commander: The Devil You Know*, *Green-Eyed Monster*, *Hell Has Harbour Views*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Informant*, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, *The Love of Lionel's Life*, *My Brother Jack*, *The Outlaw Michael Howe*, *Paper Giants: The Birth of Cleo*, *Rake*, *Shackleton*, *The Snowy River: The McGregor Saga*, *Tangle* and *Underbelly: The Golden Mile*.



Justin Smith

Andrew

Justin's theatre credits include: for Griffin: *Clark in Sarajevo*, *The Floating World*, *The New Electric Ballroom*; for Bell Shakespeare: *Just Macbeth*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *R and J*, *The Winter's Tale*; for Belvoir: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Svetlana in Slingbacks*; for Sydney Theatre Company: *A Flea in Her Ear*, *Arcadia*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Ruby Moon*, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*. Justin's musical theatre credits include: *Billy Elliot: The Musical*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Rent*, *Tick Tick Boom*. His television credits include: *Backberner*, *Bastard Boys*, *Deadline Gallipoli*, *Devil's Playground*, *Howzat! Kerry Packer's War*, *My Place*, *Queen Kat Carmel* and *St Jude*, *Secret City*, *Spirited*, *Stingers*, *The Straits*, *Tricky Business*, *Underbelly: Badness*, *White Collar Blue*. Justin's film credits include: *Angst*, *Around the Block*, *Being Venice*, *Burning Man*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *Sleeping Beauty*. In 2017 he will appear in *Pirates of The Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*.



Emele Ugavule

Jill

A Strategic Plan is Emele's first production with Griffin. Emele's theatre credits include: for Belvoir: *Twelfth Night*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*; for NIDA: *In the Blood*, *The Light in the Piazza*, *Woyzeck*, *Kasimir & Karoline*, *Sunday in the Park with George*; for Parade Theatre: *The Olympians*. Her television acting credits include: for ABC and Playmaker Media: *The Code*. She produced the AV series, *The Places We Call Home*, for Pacific Islanders in Communications, Cowbird & PBS, and has co-produced and directed independent music videos. Emele will perform as part of her collective Black Birds in the Joan's 2017 season. She is a 2014 graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art.