

# GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by Karen Rodgers, General Manager



Ursula Yovich in *Diving for Pearls*. Image by Brett Boardman.

## CONTENTS

OPERATIONAL REPORT .....	2
2017 OPERATIONS PERFORMANCE SUMMARY .....	3
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT .....	4
2017 ARTISTIC SUMMARY.....	6
APPENDIX ONE – THE 2017 PROGRAM.....	9

## OPERATIONAL REPORT

Griffin's 2017 season was a huge success on many levels. At the SBW Stables Theatre, we presented three new works and one revival for our Main Season, with the intention of increasing the producing model back to five works over the next two years. All of the Main Season productions exceeded their box office targets and we presented two highly successful co-productions; *The Homosexuals*, a co-production with Malthouse Theatre, and *Rice*, a co-production with Queensland Theatre which also went on to a season at Hothouse Theatre in Albury.

The Main Season in 2017 was complemented by two special events: *Smurf in Wanderland*—a work produced in association with National Theatre of Parramatta—and a sold out cabaret season featuring the legendary Robyn Archer. We presented five new Australian works as part of Griffin Independent including the highly successful season of *Merciless Gods* by Melbourne-based company Little Ones Theatre. All of these seasons provided an opportunity for Griffin to work with new companies and welcome new audiences to the Stables.

2017 also saw a hugely successful return season of Angus Cerini's *The Bleeding Tree*, presented by Sydney Theatre Company at the Wharf, which played to an audience of over 10,500 people, and a national tour of Roald Dahls' *The Witches*, which reached a new audience of over 14,000 families and children. We also toured Paul Capsis' *Angela's Kitchen* to the Malta International Arts Festival.

In 2017, we once again presented the Lysicrates Prize, a playwriting competition that provides opportunities to established writers and introduces new audiences to Australian theatre. We also embarked on a new playwriting prize with the National Theatre of Parramatta and the Lysicrates Foundation, the Martin Lysicrates Prize, a playwriting competition focused on new work for children aged between 8 to 12 years of age.

New audience development initiatives including *Griffin Up Late*, a program utilising the theatre space to present alternative acts such as music, comedy and storytelling, *Scratch*, a new component of the Griffin Studio program, which enabled us to bring six new artists into the company to take part in a development and presentation of new comedy writing, and Script Club, now in its third year, provided vital platforms for artists and a vibrant cultural hub for audiences. We also introduced captioned performances to our Main Season productions, increasing audience accessibility.

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 2017, Griffin subscriber numbers reached 1,929 – a small decrease of 3.5% on 2016 (1,998). We have maintained subscriber retention at 61%.

Around 24,500 patrons visited the Stables throughout the year. Outside of the Stables, Griffin Theatre Company productions reached an audience of over 29,000 people. Importantly, paid attendance increased to 82% of capacity for Main Season shows in 2017, with all four of the Main Season productions exceeding their box office target, while expenditure was contained within budget.

This success was also evident for Griffin Independent productions. Five Independent works were staged in 2017 with the average paid capacity increasing to 61%. Four of the five Independent shows reached box office target with *Merciless Gods* becoming the highest selling Independent work presented in the Stables.

The sponsorship and donations total reached \$949,918 in 2017, representing a 9% increase on 2016 (\$875,132). The company continued to implement development programs throughout the year, including the End of Financial Year campaign and new fundraising initiatives, ensuring continued donor and foundation support. New fundraising and sponsorship opportunities will be investigated with an eye to continue to diversify revenue streams.

For the year ended 31 December 2017, Griffin generated an operating surplus of \$18,290 (compared to an operating surplus of \$4,931 in 2016). The company's reserves increased from \$289,201 at 31 December 2016 to \$307,491 at 31 December 2017.

Overall, Griffin's turnover reached \$2,880,618, an increase of 4% on the 2016 year (2,866,563). Griffin's retained earnings of \$277,116 represent 10% of turnover.

## 2017 OPERATIONS SUMMARY – KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Strategic Directions & Actions	Outcomes
<b>1: Champion</b> the Best Australian Stories	
Curate a season of at least <b>5</b> Australian works	<b>11</b>
Premier at least <b>3</b> new Australian plays in Griffin's annual main season	<b>3</b>
Invest in <b>5</b> -week rehearsals for all Main season works	<b>4 @ 4 weeks</b>
<b>2: Lead</b> artistic thought and conversation	
Engage nationally with writers, artists and audiences	<b>Ongoing</b>
Raise the profile of Australian playwriting by running National playwriting competitions	<b>3</b>
Engage in at least <b>1</b> coproduction each year	<b>3</b>
<b>3: Provide</b> relevant and accessible opportunities	
Produce the Ambassador program for high school students	<b>1</b>
Create opportunities for emerging theatre makers to present work at the Stables	<b>7</b>
Mentor at least <b>1</b> Affiliate Director on a Main Season Griffin Production	<b>0</b>
Provide opportunities for Griffin Studio residents on an annual basis	<b>1</b>
Conduct open auditions annually	<b>1</b>
Develop <b>1</b> work per year with a CALD playwright	<b>1</b>
<b>4: Grow</b> connections and deepen relationships	
Increase subscribers* annually by 1% (* 3 season averaged subscriber numbers)	<b>5%</b>
Increase paid attendance annually by 1% of capacity	<b>12%</b>
Present one regional or national tour	<b>4</b>
Increase reach of 'owned' digital platforms annually by 2%	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>5: Operate</b> an outstanding, sustainable business.	
Review Board Governance Policy (annual)	<b>Achieved</b>
Review staffing performance and organisational structure (annual)	<b>Achieved</b>
Best practice of negotiating and contracting with Artists (audited)	<b>Achieved</b>
Develop strategies for Aboriginal employment	<b>Ongoing</b>
Increase donation and cash sponsorship income annually by 2%	<b>9%</b>

**Performance Key:** Target Exceeded  Target Met  On-going  Target Unmet 

## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2017 was the year that the first wave of damage caused by the Brandis cuts became apparent. Typically celebratory, the report this year must record the extraordinary achievement by Griffin donors and staff in maintaining the artistic excellence of the company despite painful and damaging decreases in the support the company needs from the Australia Council. Production budgets and operating expenses were reduced, but most significantly we only produced four Main Season shows. Rehearsal periods for those four shows were reduced from five weeks to four weeks. The position of Artistic Associate was cut; an important opportunity for an artist to work within the framework of a professional company was lost. The company restructured to ensure that all necessary functions were still covered despite the staff shortage. The resources previously available to allow travel to see new work and new artists disappeared. It is as bleak as it sounds and the impact will be felt for years.

But. The spirit of the company has not been diminished. If anything, the need for the company in the theatre landscape became even more evident, and the capacity of the company to deliver the best new Australian work to audiences around the country has been sharpened by microscopic attention to costs, elimination of any wasteful processes, and a ruthless focus on our core business.

Every production in our Main Season over-delivered creatively and financially. We made plays better than we ever have—our playwrights and creative teams are happy. Our paying audiences were bigger than ever—audiences are happy. The number of people seeing Griffin work outside the Stables was huge—our reach is increasing. The critical conversation around the work being done at Griffin was rich—the reviews have been great.

Griffin travelled to Victoria. Declan Greene's farce *The Homosexuals or 'Faggots'* was a coproduction with Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre. Scandalizing and stimulating audiences across two states, the Production Partners again made a controversial work possible through their substantial support and belief in freedom of speech.

Griffin work travelled to Queensland. We co-produced Michele Lee's play *Rice* with Queensland theatre. This play also had a successful regional season in Albury at Hothouse Theatre. It won the Queensland Premier's Drama Prize. It won the Victorian Premier's Prize. It was nominated for the Awgie and for the NSW Premier's Nick Enright Award. But most importantly it successfully performed to audiences in two states. This play is not only a success story for Michele Lee but the story of the successful identification, encouragement, and development of her as a new writer through the Storylab program run by Griffin in 2012.

*The Witches* toured magnificently in regional Queensland, Victoria and NSW. *The Bleeding Tree* enjoyed a wildly successful season in Wharf 1 at the Sydney Theatre Company. And spectacularly, our other Helpmann winning play ANGELA'S KITCHEN finally made it to an important and deeply moving season in Malta, a fitting end.

Our Studio Program again delivered two new writers to the Griffin stage in David Williams' *Smurf in Wanderland* which was produced in partnership with the National Theatre of Parramatta, and Sheridan Harbridge's *Nosferatutu*. This initiative continues to be the most successful artist development program in the country. We took the opportunity to reshape the Griffin Studio program, investing further in one Studio artist Phil Spencer and tasking him with using studio resources to cast a wide net out into the writing community to find new comic writing talent for the stage. He created *Scratch* and *Griffin Up Late* and has become the curator Batch Festival, our first Indie theatre festival, which will debut in 2018 at the Stables.

We worked creatively to encourage new audiences to find their way to Griffin in 2017 with the legendary Robyn Archer bringing all her fans and a new excitement about the possibility of the Stables as a great venue for intimate music performances. Narrative stand-up comedians are starting to enjoy the theatre space as a new venue for their unquestionably Australian writing...some of them are even thinking about plays.

We again provided pathways for independent artists towards the mainstage by supporting an Independent season of five Australian works. We also announced to the independent community that we would not be hosting an independent season in the same way for the next couple of years. The Batch Festival program will allow a larger number of more diverse artists into the building, laying the foundations for a greater range of writers in years to

come. Yes, a valuable opportunity for established independent artists will be lost, but opportunities for new voices will be provided. Griffin is signaling strongly to the industry that we are capable of evolving to meet the needs of Australian artists and audiences as the theatre landscape changes.

A new spirit of community has grown in the aftermath of the funding cuts. Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir and Bell Shakespeare have all been incredibly supportive in many ways—sharing space, equipment, expertise and vision. The Griffin Bio box was rebuilt by two of the Bell team! We would not have survived as well as we have without their generosity.

The generosity of our donors has also been overwhelming. The Girgensohn Foundation has stepped forward to underwrite the fifth play in our season for the next three years. An additional amount from this foundation has also allowed the purchase of new lighting and sound equipment in the theatre, not only delighting our designers but substantially reducing our power bill. The Robertson Family Foundation has stepped in to support the Artistic Associate position for 2018 on top of their continuing support for the Griffin Ambassadors program, which goes from strength to strength. I hope they can see the direct and extraordinary impact their contributions are making in the lives the artists and the creative conversation in this country.

It started as a difficult year with the cuts and ended as a difficult year, with the revelations about sexual harassment and bullying in the industry forcing all companies to take a long hard look at the damage caused in the past by traditional structures and bad management to significant numbers in our community. A conversation has begun about how the industry needs to change if we are to better care for the individuals who make up this extraordinary profession; it is hard, confronting, necessary and ultimately a big relief to have the issues out in the open.

So Griffin finished 2017 in a much better position than we started from proving our resilience, creative response to challenges, and our deep belief in the mission of the company. The team is stronger, more responsive and more experienced. The audience knows why they come up the hill. The industry knows how important our function is and playwrights are happy that we are continuing to do a good job. We remain dedicated to putting the best new Australian plays onstage for an audience hungry to hear and see themselves as a vital part of the global creative conversation.

## 2017 ARTISTIC SUMMARY

MAIN STAGE PROGRAMME					
	Number of Performances	Total Audience	% Attendance		
			Tickets		Income
			Paid (KPI = 70%)	Total	vs.Target
<b>A STRATEGIC PLAN</b> BY ROSS MUELLER 27 JANUARY – 11 MARCH	45	3604	79%	88%	123%
<b>THE HOMOSEXUALS OR 'FAGGOTS'</b> BY DECLAN GREENE 17 MARCH – 29 APRIL	42	4081	89%	100%	136%
<b>RICE</b> BY MICHELE LEE 21 JULY – 26 AUGUST	39	3133	86%	93%	127%
<b>DIVING FOR PEARLS</b> BY KATHERINE THOMSON 8 SEPTEMBER – 28 OCTOBER	50	4345	75%	94%	115%
<b>AVERAGE</b>	44	3791	82%	94%	125%
SPECIAL EVENTS					
<b>SMURF IN WANDERLAND</b> BY DAVID WILLIAMS 2 MAY – 13 MAY	12	772	43%	61%	61%
<b>ROBYN ARCHER</b> 4 JULY – 15 JULY	9	940	91%	99%	122%

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 2017, Griffin Independent co-presented five Australian plays produced by independent teams of artists.				
	Number of Performances	Total Audience	% Attendance	
			Paid	Total
<b>NOSFERATUTU</b> BY TOMMY BRADSON 7 - 21 JANUARY Presented by Virginia Hyam Productions	15	1231	78%	78%
<b>THE HAM FUNERAL</b> BY PATRICK WHITE 17 MAY – 10 JUNE Presented by Siren Theatre Co	25	1795	59%	68%
<b>SUNSET STRIP</b> BY SUZIE MILLER 14 JUNE – 1 JULY Presented by The Uncertainty Principle	18	1331	54%	70%

<b>MERCILESS GODS</b> BY DAN GIOVANNONI 1 NOVEMBER – 25 NOVEMBER Presented by Little Ones Theatre	23	2168	83%	94%
<b>VIRGINS &amp; COWBOYS</b> BY MORGAN ROSE 30 NOVEMBER – 16 DECEMBER Presented by Motherboard Productions	18	836	32%	44%

## ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

### *Griffin Studio*

The aim of the Studio is to establish career pathways for artists and to further contribute to the canon of great Australian plays developed and staged at Griffin.

In 2017, Griffin trialed a new version of the Studio that saw Phil Spencer (a Studio Artist in 2016) become a Senior Studio Artist for a year. Phil spent two days a week at the company and assisted with programming, script assessment, our Up Late series of events and the Griffin Award. Importantly, he also ran a new component of the Studio Program, titled Scratch, which enabled us to bring six new artists into the company to take part in a development and presentation of new comedy writing.

## 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 with 95 submissions received in 2017. The award in 2017 went to David Finnigan for *Kill Climate Deniers*.

### *The Lysicrates Prize and the Martin Lysicrates Prize*

The Lysicrates 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 are then rehearsed over 3 days before a staged reading is held in front of an audience. The audience votes for the winner, who receives a full commission from Griffin (\$15,000) 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 2017, 27 submissions were received. The winner, voted by the audience members was Melissa Bubnic's *Ghosting the Party*. One of the shortlisted plays from 2017, Nick Coyle's *Feather in the Web* will be performed as part of the 2018 Main Season.

In 2017 we also collaborated with the Lysicrates Foundation and the National Theatre of Parramatta on the Martin Lysicrates Prize. This prize, in the same format as the Lysicrates Prize, celebrates the best new Australian writing for children aged 8-12. The event was held at Riverside Theatres, Parramatta and the audience on the day (only the children in the audience got to vote) voted Katie Pollock's *Summerland* as the winner. Katie received a full commission to complete the script. The two runners-up received a cash prize of \$1,000. This prize provided a great opportunity for Griffin to not only work with the National Theatre of Parramatta but also to develop new work targeted specifically at families and children.

## 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 2017.

### *Griffin Ambassadors*

In 2017 this education scheme introduced 71 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, Bathurst and Terrigal have participated.

### *Script Club*

In 2017 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*.

### *General Auditions*

These were held in October 2017, in order to give new and emerging actors who are passionate about Australian plays access to Griffin.

PRODUCTION ONE

**A STRATEGIC PLAN**  
**BY ROSS MUELLER**

*“Failure is not on the whiteboard.”*

Feel like you’re drowning in paperwork? Beaten by the impenetrable weight of office bureaucracy? Adrift in a sea of jargon? You’re not alone.

Andrew, former rock muso and new CEO of youth music organization, STACCATO, was parachuted in to save the company from oblivion. Mission accomplished, he’s setting his sights on implementing a bold, new strategic plan. But the Board has unanimously scrapped the plan and neglected to tell Andrew, leaving him adrift in a world of KPIs, performance reviews and a General Manager who refuses to return from his holiday in Thailand.

*A Strategic Plan* is Geelong-based playwright Ross Mueller’s contemporary satire about office life, arts funding and the perils of following your heart. Hilarious, pointed and painfully observant, it’s sure to cut close to the bone for anyone who’s ever tried to make a difference at work.

**Director** Chris Mead

**Set and Costume Designer** Sophie Fletcher

**Lighting Designer** Verity Hampson

**Sound Designer and Composer** Steve Francis

**Stage Manager** Grace Nye-Butler

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

*A Strategic Plan* was supported by Playwriting Australia, through the National Script Workshop 2016.

**Previews**

27 January – 1 February

**Season**

4 February – 11 March

**Outcomes**

*A Strategic Plan* was presented at the Stables for a six-week season of 45 performances to an audience of 3604. The show achieved 79% paid attendance and 88% total attendance and exceeded its box office target by 123%.

**Critical Response**

“...a painfully well-observed comedy....the casting of this production is faultless.” **Daily Review**

“Past and present bleed into each other under Mueller’s deft structural hand. Cheeky fourth-wall-breaking moments and visual motifs ease us from scene to scene, and director Chris Mead negotiates these transitions effectively... [The] script is laugh out loud funny, but it’s also savagely angry” **Time Out**

“Chris Mead’s direction brings it all together with a rhythm that alternates between frantic confrontation scenes and sudden uplifting moments of quiet appreciation for what artists actually give us.” **The Australian**

“Mueller’s workplace comedy is a piercingly funny yet delicately observed satire on the state of the arts.” **The Age**

“*A Strategic Plan* is aided in its execution by sparkling performances from the four actors...collectively they keep the show on the road and are all terrific.” **StageNoise**

## PRODUCTION TWO

### THE HOMOSEXUALS OR 'FAGGOTS'

BY DECLAN GREENE

17 MARCH – 29 APRIL

*"Who cares about being PC?"*

*"I might as well just have fun, right?"*

Gay newlyweds Warren and Kim have it all – a small dog, a joint gym membership and a 20sqm apartment with stunning views. But in 2017 if you offend the wrong person, your life will go straight down the Twitter-toilet. So, on the night of Mardi Gras, when caught wearing a compromising costume, Kim's got to think fast. How will he placate an angry radical-queer academic who already loathes gay men? Lies, lies and more lies. Throw in an Instagram affair, a missing baggie of cocaine, and a burglar (naturally), and you've got a very Potts Point version of a classic farcem laced with black-comic political intrigue.

Director Lee Lewis reunites with Declan Greene (*Summertime in the Garden of Eden, Eight Gigabytes of Hardcore Pornography*) to venture where many fear to tread, as Declan asks some extraordinarily difficult questions of his own community: White Gay Men. How was marriage ordained as the #1 LGBTIQ issue of our time? Why do some colours in the rainbow flag get to shine brighter than others? And when was it, exactly, that gay men stopped throwing bottles and started buying Prosecco?

*The Homosexuals* is very funny. It's potentially very offensive. But one thing's certain – it'll be the talking point of our season.

**Director** Lee Lewis

**Designer** Marg Horwell

**Lighting Designer** Trent Suidgeest

**Composer & Sound Designer** Steve Toulmin

**Assistant to the Director** Charles O'Grady

**Stage Manager** Rhianne Perrie

**With** Mama Alto, Simon Burke, Simon Corfield, Genevieve Lemon, Lincoln Younes

Presented by Griffin Theatre Company in association with Malthouse Theatre

#### Previews

17 – 21 March

#### Season

24 March – 29 April

#### Outcomes

*The Homosexuals* was presented at the Stables for a six-week season of 42 performances to an audience of 4081. The show achieved 89% paid attendance and 100% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 136%.

#### Critical Response

"It's a refreshingly urgent piece of new Australian writing; not only has it taken the temperature of the current socio-political climate (it's like a Twitter timeline come to excruciating life); it's also relentlessly funny..." ★★★★★ *Time Out Sydney*

"There is, as the saying goes, something to annoy almost everyone." ★★★★★ *Daily Review*

"... It's laugh-out-loud theatre that works because everything comes together just so: Greene's smart, finely tuned writing; Lee Lewis' direction, which shows wisdom and precision; Marg Horwell's set, an apartment that somehow makes a virtue of its awkward, compact layout partially in-the-round; and a wonderful cast that embraces the vices and virtues of their characters, and reveal keen comic timing..." ★★★★★ *Limelight Magazine*

“...The dialogue is as precise as a door slamming. You should be offended, but suddenly find, in spite of yourself, you’re louding out loud at moments that should make you cringe.” **Stage Noise**

“...The show is rowdy, rude and ridiculous, but each of its uproarious manoeuvres is meticulously informed by the progressive politics that burns at its core...” **Suzy Goes See**

## PRODUCTION THREE

### RICE

BY MICHELE LEE

21 JULY – 26 AUGUST

*“My Diduma wanted me to be a CEO. First female Indian CEO in Australia.”*

Michele Lee is an important emerging voice in contemporary Australian writing. Ambitious in form and idea, her observations on race, gender and power can be both sharp and tender. With *Rice*, Michele sets the personal politics of two women against the politics of global food production.

Nisha is a high-flying young executive at Australia’s largest producer of rice — precocious, headstrong and determined to become Australia’s first female Indian CEO. She’s presently closing in on a secret deal with the Indian government, which will place her company at the centre of India’s rice distribution. Working late every night, Nisha encounters Yvette, the ‘Chinese cleaner’ of her office building. As the nights wear on, she soon realises that Yvette has more to offer than merely clearing away her dishes. The two form a powerful, if unlikely, bond as they navigate the complexities of their lives.

*Rice* won Michele Lee the Queensland Premier’s Drama Award 2016-2017. Helpmann Award-winning director Lee Lewis directs this insightful new work.

**Director** Lee Lewis

**Designer** Renee Mulder

**Lighting Designer** Jason Glenwright

**Composer & AV Designer** Wil Hughes

**Associate Sound Designer** Tony Brumpton

**With** Kristy Best, Hsiao-Ling Tang

### Previews

21 – 25 July

### Season

28 July – 26 August

Presented by Griffin Theatre Company and Queensland Theatre

### Outcomes

*Rice* was presented at the Stables for a five-week season of 39 performances to an audience of 3133. The show achieved 86% paid attendance and 93% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 127%.

### Critical Response

“Superbly acted by Best and Tang with joy, relish and stage chemistry, the direction from Griffin’s Lee Lewis is pinpoint.” **The Australian**

“[A] powerful and tender interrogation of race, gender, and the vastly different relationship that migrants of varying generations have with Australia.” **Hush Hush Biz**

“Director Lee Lewis brings great clarity to the play and an approach that puts these two characters’ emotional lives ahead of all the corporate speak...Kristy Best and Hsiao-Ling Tang drive the action of the play forth with extraordinary energy, slipping in and out of characters faultlessly while still tracing the arcs of Nisha and Yvette with great integrity.” **Daily Review**

“This production of *Rice* has so many grains of truth about the messiness of life and addresses them honestly, humanly and, often, hilariously.” **Australian Stage Online**

## PRODUCTION FOUR

### DIVING FOR PEARLS BY KATHERINE THOMSON

**“Never in my life has the right thing happened at the right time.”**

Katherine Thomson’s story about aspiration and reinvention is one of the great Australian plays. Set in Wollongong during the economic rationalism of the late ‘80s, *Diving for Pearls* remains startlingly relevant—the political decisions of that time planted the seeds of divide we continue to witness between those with opportunity, and those without.

With the town she grew up in changing all around her, Barbara is determined to change with it. Dreaming of a way out, she sets her sights on landing a job at one of the new resorts popping up all over town. Meanwhile, her partner Den is having change forced upon him. The steelworks he’s worked at his whole life has been sold and Den must reinvent himself to survive. The arrival of Barbara’s daughter, Verge, just might be the thing that tips Barbara and Den over the edge.

Helpmann Award-winning actor, the great Ursula Yovich stars as Barbara, a character as significant in the history of Australian theatre as Willy Loman is in America’s.

**Director** Darren Yap

**Set & Costume Designer** James Browne

**Lighting Designer** Benjamin Brockman

**Composition & Sound Design** Max Lambert & Roger Lock

**Stage Manager** Cara Woods

**With** Steve Rodgers, Ebony Vagulans, Ursula Yovich, Jack Finsterer, Michelle Doake

### Previews

8 – 12 September

### Season

15 September – 28 October

### Outcomes

*Diving for Pearls* was presented at the Stables for a seven-week season of 50 performances to an audience of 4345. The show achieved 75% paid attendance and 94% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 115%.

### Critical Response

“This play is a classic for a reason: it captures a truth of regional struggle and treats it with respect and concern. It’s a play for anyone with a social conscience.” ★★★★★ **Time Out**

“If you’ve ever read it or studied it, you’ll know *Diving for Pearls* is one of those plays that leaps off the page. This production has it shaking you by the shoulders.” ★★★★★ **Sydney Morning Herald**

“Ursula Yovich and Steve Rodgers are perfectly matched as Barbara and Den: both completely fearless actors unafraid to show us their characters’ vulnerabilities and ugliness.” ★★★★★ *Daily Review*

“It’s hard to think of two actors who could play Barbara and Den better than Yovich and Rodgers. Thomson has written the characters with great tenderness but absolutely no sentimentality, and Yovich and Rodgers bring them to beautiful life, warts and all.” ★★★★★ *Limelight Magazine*

## SPECIAL EVENT

**Griffin Theatre Company & National Theatre of Parramatta**

**SMURF IN WANDERLAND**

**BY DAVID WILLIAMS**

David Williams – acclaimed documentary theatre maker, writer and football fanatic – is the ‘Smurf’. For the uninitiated, ‘Smurf’ is the nickname given to a Sydney Football Club fan.

During the 2013-14 A League football season, Williams, a long-suffering Sydney FC fan, frequented Western Sydney Wanderers’ games on their home turf in Parramatta. Kitted out in his sky-blue Sydney FC jersey, Williams-the-Smurf stuck out like a sore thumb amongst the sea of red and black. His presence caused bewilderment and banter, but none of the hooliganism that’s come to be associated with the game – he didn’t need to fear for his life.

*Smurf in Wanderland* is one man’s insightful and hilarious examination of football, tribalism, belonging and identity. It’s also a passionate defence of the fan – exploring what it means to be a fan, the demonisation of fans and the artificial wedge that has been created between Sydney and its western suburbs.

**Director** Lee Lewis

**Set & Costume Designer** Charles Davis

**Lighting Designer** Luiz Pampolha

**Sound Designer & Composer** James Brown

**Dramaturg** Kate Worsley

**With** David Williams

### Preview

2 May

### Season

4 – 13 May

### Outcomes

*Smurf in Wanderland* was presented at the Stables for a two-week season of 12 performances to an audience of 772. The show achieved 43% paid attendance and 61% total attendance, and achieved 61% of its box office target.

### Critical Response

“What Williams has created, and performs so well, is a gentle and often very funny meditation on the culture of football fandom, and on the broader connections between identity and place...Williams has such narrative skill and is so thoughtful that the result ranges very widely and is completely involving.” *The Australian*

“As a performer, Williams is charismatic and engaging, with a determination that forbids our attention from straying.” *Suzy Goes See*

“Insightful, deeply researched and expertly delivered, David Williams’ *Smurf in Wanderland* offers 90 minutes of political, demographic and personal perspectives on the round ball game in Australia.” *Time Out*

## SPECIAL EVENT

### ROBYN ARCHER

#### ***Nights of song, satire and storytelling by one of Australia's best.***

From London's West End to Berlin to her hometown of Adelaide, Archer's virtuosity and interpretation of the cabaret repertoire is legendary. Robyn Archer and her musicians bring to life music from the classic cabaret repertoire—from Paris' Le Chat Noir to 1930's Nazi Germany to the songs that shaped America. A passionate journey through Archer's eyes of the mood and events of those eras, it's also a reminder of how music holds us together across time.

Robyn Archer performs three different shows on the intimate Stables stage:

#### ***Que Reste T'il (What Remains?)***

Featuring a selection of "pungent, roistering songs from the French archive" (The Barefoot Review), Archer leads us through the intimate nightclubs of Paris in the 1880s and the origins of cabaret, including rare works by Aristide Bruant and French greats Piaf, Trenet and Brel.

#### ***Dancing on the Volcano***

Archer draws on the songs and poetry created during that period of turmoil between the two world wars – songs that retain all of their bite and relevance today. Darkly humorous and satirical, many composers of that time were forced to flee Germany. Brecht, Weill and Hollaender feature in this stirring set.

#### ***The (Other) Great American Songbook***

A portrait of America over time, through song, which covers everything from the Civil War and the Great Depression, to many of its citizens' favourite vices. Archer delights with an epic range of song, including music by Bob Dylan, Pink and the odd Broadway hit.

**With** Robyn Archer

**Accompanied by** Michael Morley (Piano) and George Butrumlis (Accordion)

**Lighting Designer** Daniel Barber

#### **Season**

4 – 15 July

#### **Outcomes**

*Robyn Archer* was presented at the Stables for a season of 9 performances to an audience of 940. The show achieved 91% paid attendance and 99% total attendance, and exceeded its box office target by 122%.

## 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 in 2017 was *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 2017, *Griffin Independent* co-presented five Australian plays produced by independent teams of artists.

**NOSFERATUTU OR 'BLEEDING AT THE BALLET'**

**BY TOMMY BRADSON**

**Produced by Virginia Hyam Productions.**

Part-vaudeville, part-cabaret, part-blood-bath, *Nosferatutu* is a musical meditation on art, beauty and solitude through the ages, in an orgy of bloodletting.

A ballet is about to begin. Backstage the dancer stretches. An usher closes the door and the lights make their slow descent to darkness. The air is electric, and the audience – hungry for show. The applause begins, and somewhere near the front, clapping so hard his hands hurt, is a vampire.

From the minds and mouths of multi-award winning raconteurs Sheridan Harbridge and Tommy Bradson, *Nosferatutu* is an outrageous and wild ride across the most sublime arias in history, gargled through a cocktail of human haematoma.

**Director** Sheridan Harbridge

**Designer** Ashisha Cunningham

**Lighting Designer** Alex Berlage

**Musical Direction** Steven Kreamer

**Musicians** Sally Schinckel-Brown, Olga Solar

**Dancer** Brandyn Kaczmarczyk

**With** Tommy Bradson, Sheridan Harbridge

**Previews**

7 – 10 January

**Season**

12 – 21 January

**Outcome**

In its two-week season, with 15 performances, *Nosferatutu* played to an audience of 1231, achieving 78% paid attendance and 78% total attendance.

**Critical Response**

"*Nosferatutu* is just the kind of silly, madcap fun a dramaphile needs...On one level it's nonsense and hijinks, on another it's deconstructing theatre, the vampire and dance genres, storytelling, even gender. If you have a sacred cow, the show wants to slay it (and drink its blood)." **Time Out**

"On stage, Bradson is an enchanting performer, a Frankenstein monster assembled from our memories of Rowan Atkinson and Marc Almond at their respective best. He wields a kind of magic that is bizarre and confusing, but mostly, it is transportative, taking us effortlessly away to, well, anywhere else but here." **Suzy Goes See**

"Whey-faced, eyes picked out in kohl, and fitted with needle-like fangs, Bradson creates a compelling tragic-comic figure in Kelvin, whose neurotic monologuing comes at you with the force of a fire hose." **Jason Blake**

"Bradson is a revelation of character, song and improvisational talent...Harbridge demonstrates spectacular talent for roping in the unexpected, and the more finessed components of physical comedy." **Broadway World**

**THE HAM FUNERAL**

**BY PATRICK WHITE**

**Produced by Siren Theatre Co.**

In a gothic inner-city boarding house, a naïve young poet is drawn into the fetid world of the basement-dwelling landlord and his wife, the hauntingly grotesque Mr and Mrs Lusty.

When her husband drops dead suddenly, Mrs Lusty announces a lavish funeral feast in his honour. Driven by her relentless appetite, she attempts to seduce the poet, drawing him into a dangerous sexual game with comically tragic consequences.

Written in 1948 by Australia's only Nobel Laureate for Literature, Patrick White, *The Ham Funeral* is one of the most intriguingly original plays in Australian theatre history. Part vaudeville, part lyric poem, and part gothic drama, it is an unnervingly dark and vulgar investigation of the human condition.

**Director** Kate Gaul

**Assistant Directors** Sally Dulson, Phaedra Nicolaidis

**Designer** Jasmine Christie

**Lighting Designer** Harley TA Kemp

**Composer & Sound Designer** Nate Edmondson

**Vocal Coach** Carmen Lysiak

**Publicist** Emma Jones

**With** Andy Dexterity, Eliza Logan, Carmen Lysiak, Johnny Nasser, Jane Phegan, Sebastian Robinson, Jenny Wu

**Previews**

17, 18 May

**Season**

20 May – 10 June

**Outcome**

In its three-week season, with 25 performances, *The Ham Funeral* played to an audience of 1795, achieving 58% paid attendance and 68% total attendance.

**Critical Response**

"This is an entertaining, imaginative, first-rate and crystal clear production of one of the most idiosyncratic plays ever written by an Australian playwright." ★★★★★ *Daily Review*

"If you hunger for experimentation and innovation on stage, then it's the right play for you. And if seeing it staged in 2017 serves as a jolt of inspiration to all the Australian writers who are cooking up freaky, challenging ideas, then even better..." ★★★★★ *Time Out*

"This is a fabulous production of this at times grotesque, mythological, symbolic, challenging and grippingly dynamic play." ★★★★★ *Arts Hub*

"Gleefully infectious, the wonderful cast looks and feels to be made up of all those voted most likely to run off and join the circus. Idiosyncratic and profoundly eccentric, we are persuaded to relate to the show in a manner that is perhaps unusual for many." *Suzy Goes See*

"Gaul's direction is vibrant, funny, punchy, and brutal, with some serious undercurrents of pathos and loss." *Sydney Arts Guide*

"This is a glorious production." *Stage Noise*

**SUNSET STRIP**

**BY SUZIE MILLER**

**Produced by The Uncertainty Principle**

*“There is no value in life except what you choose to place upon it and no happiness in any place except what you bring to it yourself.”* – Henry David Thoreau

At *Sunset Strip* the only people left are those who couldn't leave. Arriving home after a bout of chemotherapy to this once thriving summer hot-spot, Caroline finds the lake completely dried up, the holiday-makers long gone.

Yet her younger sister, the ever-optimistic Phoebe, remains doggedly hopeful. Between a stint in rehab, caring for her demented Dad (who has a penchant for training goldfish) and losing her kids temporarily to DOCS, Phoebe has managed to find love in Teddy, a local fallen fella with a big heart. And now that Caroline is back, Phoebe is determined to make life fabulous.

Suzie Miller (*Caress/Ache*) returns to the Stables to examine all manners of love, family dysfunction and making the best of shitty situations and prosthetic breasts. Directed by Anthony Skuse, *Sunset Strip* finds the humour in tragedy and creates an unlikely path for humanity to triumph.

**Director** Anthony Skuse

**Producers** Kate Armstrong-Smith, Laurence Rosier Staines

**Designer** Emma Vine

**Lighting** Verity Hampson

**Sound** Benjamin Freeman

**With** Emma Jackson, Simon Lyndon, Lex Marinos, Georgina Symes

**Previews**

14, 15 June

**Season**

17 June – 1 July

**Outcome**

In its two-week season, with 18 performances, *Sunset Strip* played to an audience of 1331 achieving 54% paid attendance and 70% total attendance.

**Critical Response**

“Miller dangles the prospect of happiness like a lure on a fishing line. We can't help but lunge at it when confronted with characters as warmly realised as these.” *Sydney Morning Herald*

“The relationship between the sisters is exquisitely wrought by Suzie Miller and equally finely calibrated by director Anthony Skuse.” *Stage Noise*

“Each character is thoroughly formed, with a rich backstory and authentic heart. Director Anthony Skuse has cast the play perfectly, and then allowed the actors the freedom to render the characters with a realism usually reserved for the screen.” *The AU Review*

“Miller's detailing of that delicate balance, between joy and pain in how they love, is full of tenderness, subtle but powerful. Their interchanges are nuanced, splendidly complex, and always with a gentle, familiar ring that will remind us of our own homes. When families talk, it is what we say between the lines that matters most, and *Sunset Strip's* sensitive explication of those dynamics, is what makes it feel like every person's story.” *Suzu Goes See*

**MERCILESS GODS**

**BY DAN GIOVANNONI**

**Based on the book by Christos Tsiolkas**

**Produced by Little Ones Theatre**

From migrant camps to pill-popping hipster dinner parties, from prison cells to gay saunas and porn shoots, *Merciless Gods* is a vicious and tender portrait of contemporary Australian society, capturing the haunting aspects of the human psyche.

Multi award-winning Christos Tsiolkas is one of the most significant writers in Australia. This first ever stage adaptation of his short story collection, *Merciless Gods*, takes you deep into worlds both strange and familiar, introducing you to characters who will never let you go and situations that will haunt you forever.

Told from diverse cultural perspectives, *Merciless Gods* by award-winning playwright Dan Giovannoni is urgent, dirty, glorious theatre.

**Director** Stephen Nicolazzo

**Set & Costume Designer** Eugyeene Teh

**Lighting Designer** Katie Sfetkidis

**Sound Designer** Daniel Nixon

**Dramaturg** Chris Mead

**Producer** Jo Porter

**Production Manager** Bec Poulter

**Stage Manager** Brianna-Lee Wade

**With** Paul Blenheim, Brigid Gallacher, Sapidah Kian, Peter Paltos, Charles Purcell, Jennifer Vuletic

**Previews**

1, 2 November

**Season**

4 – 25 November

**Outcome**

In its three-week season, with 23 performances, *Merciless Gods* played to an audience of 2168, achieving 83% paid attendance and 94% total attendance.

**Critical Response**

“Brutal and tender at the same time...and un sentimentally queer in its storytelling approach as well as its content. It’s a harsh theatrical landscape, but a lyrical one: the language is dazzling – insidious and vicious and suddenly gentle but never sweet...” ★★★★★ *The Guardian*

“The cast is superb across the board.” ★★★★★ *Daily Review*

“Dan Giovannoni’s script is talented and Nicolazzo directs charged performances...Neither flinch from the disgust and discomfort, nor the piercing of delusion Tsiolkas demands. Though not for the squeamish or easily offended, *Merciless Gods* is compelling, confronting theatre.” ★★★★★ *The Age*

“Director Stephen Nicolazzo continues to cement his reputation as one of Melbourne’s - and dare I say, Australia’s – most dynamic and creatively assured theatre makers...every gesture of this production finds a hard-won, supremely accomplished equilibrium between the beautiful and the barbaric.” ★★★★★½ *The Music*

“A striking and fearless affair...Sharp staging, evocative direction, a powerhouse script, and a troupe of performers all at the top of their game...this is provocative contemporary theatre at its best.” ★★★★★½ *The Lowdown Under*

“...Those who fall under its dark spell will leave feeling elated.” *Sydney Morning Herald*

“Occasionally the most powerful moments in theatre can happen silently in the dark, listening to the breathing around you and the occasional sniff. *Merciless Gods* has one of these rare moments, at the end of a heartbreaking piece about families, friends and lovers.” *Theatre Now*

## GRIFFIN INDEPENDENT – PRODUCTION FIVE

### VIRGINS & COWBOYS

BY MORGAN ROSE

Produced by Motherboard Productions

A sitcom-reject, set in cyberspace, *Virgins & Cowboys* is a play about a 20-something dude stuck in a dead-end job who meets two women online, both of whom are virgins. As he sets out on a bizarre self-assigned mission to ‘be the one who...’, the internet, the past, the future, and the stage smash together and everything crumbles around him. This twisted and timely premise is used to examine a demographic of people spat out of the other end of the information age—those in a futile and relentless pursuit of happiness.

Combining Morgan Rose’s darkly comedic social commentary with Dave Sleswick’s bold and colourful direction, *Virgins & Cowboys* brings together a talented ensemble cast in this non-hero’s journey. Off the back of a critically acclaimed Melbourne season, this work is a current, dangerous and unapologetic bon voyage to the patriarchy.

**Director** Dave Sleswick

**Set & Costume Designer** Yvette Turnbull

**Lighting Designer** Lisa Mibus

**Sound Designer** Liam Barton

**Producer** Natasha Phillips

**Stage Manager** Kate Brennen

**With** Katrina Cornwell, James Deeth, Penelope Harpham, Kieran Law, George Lingard

### Previews

30 November

### Season

2 – 16 December

### Outcome

In its two-week season, with 18 performances, *Virgins & Cowboys* played to an audience of 836, achieving 32% paid attendance and 44% total attendance.

### Critical Response

“From the opening moment, this fast-paced, incisive script seizes attention...Playwright Rose is a strong emerging female voice. She has delivered a gutsy and ambitious tale of coming of age when the rules of sexual engagement have shifted and deep human connection eludes.” *Sydney Morning Herald*

“The cast is splendid. Uniformly and cohesively vivacious, each actor brings a sense of luxuriant depth to the discussions that they facilitate.” *Suzy Goes See*

“...Morgan Rose’s black comedy is markedly original stuff, demonstrating a reluctance to conform to conventional story arcs and certainties.” *Audrey Journal*