

Sydney Festival 2015

Australia's leading summer arts festival

The 39th Sydney Festival concluded this morning with the *Ferrython*, one of Australia's most popular and iconic free events, celebrating Sydney's love for the harbour and its commuter ferries.

Running from 8 to 26 January, the Festival showcased 974 artists from 30 countries who performed in 179 free and ticketed events across greater Sydney, captivating locals and visitors alike. The well-received program resulted in a financially successful edition, with 136 sold-out performances. The estimated total Festival attendance sits at half a million visitors across the free and ticketed program.

New Australian work featured strongly at Sydney Festival 2015. The world premiere of *Masquerade* by Kate Mulvany enchanted audiences aged nine to 90. Kate Champion's provocative final work with Force Majeure, *Nothing to Lose* sold out six performances at Carriageworks, challenging our preconceptions of the bigger body. Composer David Chisholm and his collaborators premiered *The Experiment*, a haunting musical monodrama. Indigenous choreographer Vicki Van Hout premiered *Long Grass*, whilst in Western Sydney, three new works explored original use of space: *Disco Dome*, *BANKSTOWN: LIVE* and *PUNCTURE*. A Festival highlight for many, *Endings* by Tamara Saulwick provided an immersive experience that stayed with audiences long after they left the theatre.

The 2015 program presented a number of large-scale works, bringing to Sydney some of the world's greatest artists in theatre, dance, and music. James Thierrée returned to Sydney Festival with *Tabac Rouge*, which set the tone for the Festival receiving four and five star reviews and sell-out performances.

Other popular events in the ticketed program included both small and large-scale projects, from intimate discoveries with *Kiss & Cry* by Charleroi Danse to the one-woman musical storytelling performance of *UKCHUK-GA Pansori Mother Courage*. The Chitrasena Dance Company masterpiece, *Dancing for the Gods*, visited Australia for the first time in 40 years and Roysten Abel's visually and sonically exciting work featured 12 Kerala drummers in *The Kitchen*. The About An Hour program at the Seymour Centre engaged audiences with 9 ticketed events across 5 days.

Sydney Festival is proud of its 85 free projects making up almost half of the total program. Two popular public installations were *Higher Ground*, Maser's colourful art installation, and *Waterfall Swing*, the large scale summertime playset in Darling Harbour. The Festival Village in Hyde Park again proved most popular with a ticketed program of thrilling circus and cabaret shows, free activities and almost 40 contemporary music performances.

Sydney Festival presented another robust, dynamic and ambitious program of theatre, dance, and music in Parramatta. Parramatta Opening Party, headlined by Paul Kelly in his new collaborative project *The Merri Soul Sessions*, kicked off proceedings in a joyous street celebration on and around Centenary Square. Sydney Festival Parramatta was bigger than ever in 2015, with not one but two extra performances of the Festival hit *Far From Folsom* programmed at Parramatta Gaol.

Music took centre stage in 2015 with some of the globe's most exciting artists of our generation taking over Sydney's stages. Despite a wet opening weekend, audiences flocked to the popular Summer Sounds in the Domain concert to hear the samba sounds of Brazil's superstar Seu Jorge in his Australian debut performance.

The music program featured more than 60 acts from contemporary, classical, experimental and world music genres. Unique festival projects included the organ and video project *Darkness and Light* by Lynette Walworth and Bernard Foccroulle, whilst the futuristic grooves of Nigerian synth pioneer William Onyeabor had audiences on their feet in *Atomic Bomb! The Music of William Onyeabor*. Symphony in The Domain featured ARIA-award winning William Barton performing on didgeridoo alongside the Sydney Symphony bringing the city together in a cultural and communal celebration.

In a special highlight, *Beat the Drum: celebrating 40 years of triple j* gave audiences the chance to celebrate four decades of passionate support for the best in Australian music in a sell-out event in The Domain.

The Festival continues to attract arts industry professionals from around Australia and the world, with Sydney Festival hosting the Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals' Development Site for New Australian Work, and the fourth Australian Theatre Forum.

Sydney Festival 2015 was made possible through the generous core and special funding from its principal stakeholders the NSW Government - supporting the Festival through Arts NSW and Destination NSW - alongside the City of Sydney and the Parramatta City Council. The Festival continued its partnership with principal sponsor The Star and leadership partner China Southern Airlines. Sydney Festival acknowledges the increased and ongoing support of many private donors including our Directors' Circle and Associate Producers.

The 2015 Festival was the third Sydney Festival to be directed by Lieven Bertels, who will continue to lead Sydney Festival into the 40th anniversary year in 2016.

Lieven Bertels says: *"We were privileged to premiere so many great new works and presented one of the most diverse Festivals Sydney has ever seen, with our Festival Village a true meeting place for all. Due credit to the artists bringing us their creativity and skills, and to the amazing team of over 100 dedicated professionals in the Sydney Festival team who, assisted by hundreds of volunteers, made our 39th Sydney Festival a truly special one."*

The Sydney Festival Annual Review will be published in April.

sydneyfestival.org.au/

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