

MEDIA RELEASE**EMBARGOED TO: THURSDAY 21 MAY 2020**

Merrigong Theatre Company announces more than \$40,000 in new opportunities and funding for independent artists

Merrigong Theatre Company today announced a major reboot of its **MERRIGONGX** Artists' Program for 2020, with an injection of more than \$40,000 into new projects from independent artists. This reboot comes in response to the COVID-19 crisis and its effect on employment opportunities for performing artists, and is in addition to a range of existing independent artist support that was originally announced for MERRIGONGX in 2020.

Merrigong's Artistic Director / CEO **Simon Hinton** said *"Our industry has been very badly affected by the closure of our venues, and while we are very grateful that the Federal Government's JobKeeper program has allowed Merrigong to keep all of our permanent staff (albeit reduced to 80% of their normal hours) and many of our casual operational staff employed, most artists in our industry do not qualify for this assistance due to the project nature of their employment."*

"That has made it a priority for us as a company to rethink our current programs to ensure that artists are still working to make exciting new theatre, and connecting with community and audiences in our region and beyond," he said.

The reboot allows for a repurposing of funds, to be allocated across three areas:

New commissioned theatre works

Well-known performer and theatre-maker **Drew Fairley**, a Wollongong favourite with long-term connections to our region's performance community, has accepted a commission from Merrigong to undertake the first stage of writing a new work (untitled as yet) inspired by his experience of being stranded as a performer on a cruise ship during the crisis. Drew is currently in week 10 of being stuck onboard a cruise ship, now off the Philippines coast.

Merrigong will also be developing a second new commission in 2020, to be announced.

Callout for new independent artists' projects

\$24,000 is being made available for new projects from artists residing in Wollongong, or with strong links to the Illawarra region. A callout is being made today for expressions of interest from independent artists. Up to 12 new performance project grants of \$2,000 - \$4,000 are available.

There is no specific criteria for these projects; they might be a small-scale project able to be delivered online during the lockdown, the development of something that can be performed to an outdoor or small socially-distanced audience when restrictions on venues begin to lift, or the first development stage of a work for further development and performance in the future. More information and a simple expression of interest form can be found at

merrigong.com.au/merrigongx

MERRIGONGX Digital Tasters

Merrigong will be working with **MERRIGONGX** 2020 artists to produce and release a series of Digital Tasters of new works in development, allowing audiences to experience a glimpse of the works that will excite them when performed in the future. **MERRIGONGX** Digital Tasters are being produced for the following: **Artisan Collective's** *The Keeper*, **Lily Hayman's** *Fledgling*, **Ten Tonne Sparrow's** *Mount Hopeless*, **Catherine McKinnon's** *Storyland*, **Applespiel's** *Sorry, Sorry, Sorry*, **Yen Yang's** *A Practical Guide to Self-Defence*, **Malika Reese's** *Six Women*, and **Neisha Murphy's** *ChaChi*.

Merrigong remains committed to those artists whose projects have been cancelled due to COVID-19, with the effected works to be included in the **MERRIGONGX** 2021 program. These include **Artisan Collective's** *The Keeper* – Development Showing, **Lily Hayman's** *Fledgling*, **Ten Tonne Sparrow's** *Mount Hopeless*, and **Catherine McKinnon's** *Storyland* – Development Showing.

Creative developments that were announced as part of the original **MERRIGONGX 2020** program have been rescheduled for later in 2020, and will take place behind closed doors with only necessary artists in attendance and appropriate safety measures in place. These include **Yen Yang's** *A Practical Guide to Self-Defence*, **Malika Reese's** *Six Women*, and **Neisha Murphy's** *ChaChi*.

Guiding the delivery of the **MERRIGONGX** 2020 reboot is Merrigong's Artistic Development Manager, **Leland Kean**, who said: *"This is a fantastic initiative for local artists. Whilst continuing to support artists already programmed in the **MERRIGONGX** 2020 season, it opens the door for new artists affected by the current crisis. It not only provides them with the opportunity to connect with the community and audiences, but also, most importantly, gives them the chance to continue to develop their practice during this time. I look forward to seeing the fantastic, innovative works that come out of this initiative, continuing what has become the trademark of the **MERRIGONGX** program over the last three years."*

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Edie Watt – 0422 050 691 | ewatt@merrigong.com.au