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Major investment in independent artists - 21 projects announced as part of MERRIGONGX 2021 independent artists program

Merrigong Theatre Company has today announced 21 independent artists projects making up the **2021 MERRIGONGX Artists' Program**, one of the country's largest independent artist support programs representing an investment of more than \$350,000.

MERRIGONGX is the independent artist program arm of Merrigong Theatre Company - Wollongong's professional theatre company. Now in its fourth year, the 2021 program is the company's biggest yet, providing 21 independent artists and groups with financial, technical, marketing and artistic resources, and representing a significant career pathway for numerous artists and arts practitioners. All of the 21 successful projects include artists with a connection to the Illawarra region.

The 2021 MERRIGONGX program features four diverse new independent productions – *Fledgling* (Lily Hayman), *Sorry, Sorry, Sorry* (Applespiel), *Mount Hopeless* (Ten Tonne Sparrow) and *UFO* (Kirby Medway and Soloman Thomas) – that are set to entertain audiences throughout the year.

Audiences also have the chance to engage with new works in development, including Austinmer Dance Theatre's inaugural *unCOILED eXposed* - the Illawarra's first-ever curated, contemporary dance residency, offering emerging artists the chance to make their choreographic debut – and *The Construct*, a new work by aXis, Circus Monoxide's Artistic Director Zebastian Hunter and Producer Linda Catalano (*Quiet Riot*).

Development will continue on Merrigong Theatre Company commissioned plays, with audiences invited to engage in play readings of the major works announced in 2020, *Storyland* (Catherine McKinnon), *As Luck Would Have It* (Drew Fairley) and *Going Home* (Kirli Saunders).

Behind the scenes developments include works by local artists Alicia Battestini, Darryl Wallis, Emma Saunders, INTRANSIT.CO, Frumpus, Jane Fullerton-Smith, Kay Proudlove, Lhaleska Urdanivia, Neisha Murphy, Rocking Hoist, Rose Maher and Yen Yang.

Additional power to support artists is being placed in the audience's hands – with every show being operated on a 'Pay What You Feel' basis. That means there is no set ticket price. Audience members can reserve their spot for free, and choose their own financial contribution after they've seen the show.

"MERRIGONGX is focussed on how we can support artists through different stages of development. said Simon Hinton, Artistic Director / CEO of Merrigong Theatre Company. "This can involve a public show, but the development of our artists and their work is at the centre of what we do – through financial, technical, marketing and artistic resources."



Leland Kean, Artistic Development Manager at Merrigong Theatre Company said *“The 2021 MERRIGONGX season is the largest and most resourced in the program’s history. In the wake of the COVID19 crisis and the devastating effects on the arts industry, MERRIGONGX provides an important platform of creation through funding and support for independent artists in the Illawarra. The program seeds diverse and innovative new work and feeds an ecology essential to the future health of the arts industry in Australia and the arts in regional Australia.”*

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For more information:

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