

Media Release



MERRIGONG OFFERS AUDIENCES AN EXCITING EXPLORATION OF CONNECTION WITH THEIR 2023 SEASON

Merrigong Theatre Company launched its 2023 season at Illawarra Performing Arts Centre on Tuesday, unveiling an exciting new year of theatre. Audiences will be treated to a diverse range of extraordinary performances, with two world premieres, a blockbuster musical play breathtaking action, heart-warming stories, two First Nations productions, family shows and more!

The 2023 season features 11 new, national and international mainstage theatre shows, telling stories and inviting the audience to connect with diverse voices, stories and energy.

Opening the season is New Zealand's Indian Ink Theatre Company's production ***Guru of Chai*** by Justin Lewis and Jacob Rajan. This outrageously funny and heartbreakingly beautiful romantic thriller about a chai-wallah (tea-seller), sees Jacob bring to life his famous Guru character to life channelling 17 characters.

Coming directly from its Australian premiere as part of Sydney WorldPride 2023 at Riverside's National Theatre of Parramatta, the Broadway hit, and Tony Award®-winning play ***Choir Boy*** hits the stage. Written by Tarell Alvin McCraney (an Oscar®-winner for his *Moonlight* screenplay), ***Choir Boy*** is the gripping story of a battle between identity and community, filled with stunning *a capella* singing.

Branch Nebula's ***Air Time*** will have its World Premiere here in Wollongong. This adrenaline-pumping new work is a stunning display of air-born mastery within a vista of colours, light, and shadows. Skate ramps will tower over the audience, propelling BMXers, skaters, dancers and parkourists with extreme speed and height to push the boundaries in this magnificent piece of experimental performance art.

The first of two First Nations work, acclaimed First Nations contemporary dance company, Karul Projects, based on Minjungbal Country (Northern NSW /South East Qld) will perform ***SILENCE***. Through powerful choreography from company co-founder Thomas E.S. Kelly, and dynamic live percussion from Jhindu-Pedro Lawrie, SILENCE breaks the silence, pulling unresolved conversations from under the rug and slamming them back on the table.

Wollongong-based performance collective, and now nationally recognised, re:group's ***Coil*** endeared itself to audiences at the Sydney Opera House. Now this captivatingly clever and entertaining work is set to take Wollongong back to the glory days of video stores – before they were killed by streaming.

Directed by the award-winning Darren Yap (*Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam, Diving for Pearls, Letters to Lindy*), the gripping and controversial novel that catapulted Colleen McCullough to international fame, **Tim**, has been sensitively adapted for the stage by acclaimed playwright Tim McGarry.

After its World Premiere at Belvoir St Theatre, **Miss Peony** is the brand-new comedy from Michelle Law, the writer of the smash hit *Single Asian Female*. Starring a dynamic cast led by Michelle Law, this production focuses a razor-sharp eye on the world of beauty pageants in this coming-of-age comedy about what happens when the ghosts of generations past come back to haunt you.

Merrigong's permanent company of neuro-diverse actors and Wollongong's only professional theatre ensemble, The Strangeways Ensemble will premiere their stunningly original new show ***Something that Happened***.

The second of the First Nations works in the 2023 Season is Muruwari playwright Jane Harrison's ***The Visitors***, from Sydney Theatre Company and Moogahlin Performing Arts, NSW's leading First People's Performing Arts Company. After its Sydney Theatre Award-winning premiere at the 2020 Sydney Festival, ***The Visitors*** will be reworked into a brand-new production directed by one of Australia's most celebrated directors, Quandamooka man Wesley Enoch. ***The Visitors*** is at once a riveting, deeply researched insight into one of the most impactful and painful days in Australia's history, and a hugely entertaining study of how communities respond to change and the unknown.

The acclaimed **Spiegelent Wollongong** will return in June with the continued support of Federal Government RISE funding. The season will include the exhilarating, ***Le Coup***, a tribute to old-school funfairs from Chelsea McGuffin and Co, creator of world class circus shows including *Scotch and Soda*.

Rescheduled from our 2022 Season, proving the course of true love never did run smooth, Shakespeare's ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** will launch Merrigong's brand-new Shakespeare in the Garden program.

"In the last few years, we've all experienced isolation, and it's been a reminder of how fundamental it is to our human experience to connect beyond our own personal experience – to discover and interact with others, and in doing so to come to a greater understanding of our own selves." Says Simon Hinton, Artistic Director / CEO of Merrigong Theatre Company. *"Our 2023 Season offers just this opportunity – it's an eclectic mix of theatrical experiences that invite you to connect with diverse voices, stories and energy. We'll be reminded that it's not just the story that matters, but who tells it."*

The Illawarra Performing Arts Centre will undergo a major refurbishment project in the first half of the year, with performances moved to The Wollongong Town Hall, utilising a unique seating arrangement to deliver an intimate theatrical experience. The refurbishment project at IPAC allows vibrant, refreshed interiors, improved accessibility for all, a new air conditioning and heating system, and brand-new theatre seats.

Full program is available from 6.45pm Tue 15 Nov, 2022:

<http://www.merrigong.com.au/season2023>

ENDS.

For further information and interviews

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Hi Res images available:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/bqmx0h11k2exglz9zolf1/h?dl=0&rlkey=uiy38kpsp01zpuq88ufpzlo7u>

Our company's name 'Merrigong' reflects the Dharawal word for the Illawarra region's distinctive escarpment, a landmark of supreme cultural importance.

This name serves as a constant reminder that our venues rest on unceded First Nations land.

In all that we do, Merrigong Theatre Company seeks to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, seas and skies, and to show respect to all First Nations people who call our region home.