

A person wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a white cap, looking upwards. They are standing on a stage, illuminated by several bright spotlights from below, creating a dramatic, high-contrast scene. The background is a warm, golden-yellow color with a textured, slightly grainy appearance.

MERRIGONGX ARTISTS' PROGRAM

Innovative • Independent • In-development

2020

MERRIGONGX

ARTISTS' PROGRAM

Innovative • Independent • In-development

MERRIGONGX is our annual artists' program. It focuses on supporting artists to take creative risks.

MERRIGONGX places artists and their practice at the centre of our community. From in-house creative developments to full-blown public presentations of new work, and everything in between, MERRIGONGX provides independent artists with financial, technical, marketing and artistic resources.

This year we're inviting you to engage with some of our artists, and witness the birth of two extraordinary new works and two development showings, see pages 2 – 9. Artists will also be working in our venues 'under wraps' on exciting projects throughout the year, see pages 10 – 15 for a glimpse into their developments.

**Our 2020
artists include:**

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MCKINNON**

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Artisan Collective

About

The **Artisan Collective** aims to explore the ever-expanding possibilities of theatre. Their work encapsulates cross-disciplinary performance, text based plays, physical theatre, live music performance, sound installation and puppetry. Their latest development work is by founder, writer and performer Ben Pfeiffer and co-developed with director Kirsten von Bibra.

Artist Statement

I'd heard of 'Jumbo the Mighty African Elephant' previously and just happened to flick over to a documentary about him a few years back. I was totally enthralled by his life's journey and began to research the extraordinary relationship Jumbo shared with his long-term carer and companion, Matthew Scott. I felt their fascinating story spoke to so many issues of modern-day relevance: the state of humanity, entitlement, exploitation, fetishisation of otherness and animal conservation. After feeling an instantaneous connection to both Jumbo and Scott, I immediately put pen to paper. The more I wrote, the more I came to understand the immense depth, breadth, heart and potency their tale contained. I believe it will make for an exquisite and breathtaking theatrical experience.

I like my audiences to be immersed in something incredibly intimate and rich, to play with their comprehension of time – making it stretch or contract so that transcendence, both imaginative and emotional, can take place. Under the **Artisan Collective** umbrella, each different project has been rooted in a social justice issue of thematic significance, making the work not only a piece of ethical urgency, but also one that knows its heart and intention intimately.

- Ben Pfeiffer



AN ARTISAN COLLECTIVE PRODUCTION

The Keeper

Development Showing

By Ben Pfeiffer

Follow the story of Jumbo, the Sudanese elephant (1860 - 1885) – said to be the largest ever to walk the earth. Retold through the lens of Jumbo's lifelong companion and carer, Matthew Scott **The Keeper** takes you through Jumbo's incredible journey to become the main attraction of P.T Barnum's '*Greatest Show On Earth*' and the tragic tale of life in and beyond the circus.

A real superstar of the Victorian era is brought to life through puppetry, stunning visuals, theatrical illusion, live songs and showmanship. This true story encourages compassion and understanding of what it means to advocate on behalf of the vulnerable and voiceless.

Director Kirsten von Bibra

23 May, 11am

Bruce Gordon Theatre,
Illawarra Performing Arts Centre

Reserve Your Spot

merrigong.com.au/merrigongx



Lily Hayman

About

Lily Hayman is a theatre maker and performer from Sydney, with a focus on creating works that challenge the notion of audience as a passive spectator in theatre productions.

Artist Statement

The process of creating *Fledgling*, an adaptation of local novelist Joshua Lobb's recent publication *The Flight of Birds*, has been exceptionally collaborative. From the first readings of the original novel, the cast has had a fundamental role in shaping the direction of the text and staging choices. We began by reading aloud from our source material, finding character voices within the narratorial style of the novel and highlighting passages we could bring to life on stage. From there the process became about digging beneath the text and finding ways to stage the incredibly detailed text without words, finding a balancing point between the literary and the theatrical upon which *Fledgling* constantly teeters.

The work grew from a fascination with the ways that we as human beings can drastically influence one another. In the early stages of this project we grappled with questions of politics and collective thought, before slowly honing these interests down into a pointed investigation of the impact of familial value upon the future of this planet, both ecologically and socially. We wanted to create a work that explored the full consequences of our actions upon the world we live in. The work sits in a meeting point between naturalistic drama and ardent surrealism, combining physical theatre and literary text to build a theatrical landscape that is always shifting perspective.

- Lily Hayman



MERRIGONGX
Production
SEE IT!

Fledgling

Written and Directed by **Lily Hayman**

Adapted from the novel *The Flight of Birds* by Joshua Lobb

Fledgling explores the generational divide between a parent and their child, and questions what kinds of worlds we leave behind for our children when our time comes to an end. This adaptation stages the deterioration of a father and daughter's relationship alongside the deterioration of the natural environment.

Writer, Director and Sound Designer Lily Hayman

Lighting Designer Sam Read

Production Manager Tyler Fitzpatrick

Cast Claire Gilmour, Jessica Melchert, Benjamin Stonnill and Nick Vagne

13 – 15 August

Thu 13, Fri 14, Sat 15, 7.30pm
Main Auditorium, Wollongong Town Hall

Reserve Your Spot

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Ten Tonne Sparrow

About

Ten Tonne Sparrow is a performance company creating work that uses storytelling, pop-sociology, pop-science and history to talk about the stories we tell about ourselves. Their new work is a tragic comedy rock opera by writers and musicians, Tom Hogan and Elana Stone.

Artist Statement

A musical about Burke & Wills seems a little... on the nose, and is an ambitious undertaking for two, middle class, white, musicians. Most of us know some part of their story, and saying it's a musical certainly conjures up a particular type of show. But it's a story that needs to be told.

It's a musical that's not just about some financially well-endowed white men walking into the desert with a bathtub dreaming of everlasting historical relevance; **Mount Hopeless** is about colonisation, the effects of ignoring the wisdom of the traditional owners of this country, and the repercussions of enforcing your will upon the environment. These themes are front page issues on our newspapers today as our country burns. It's important that we examine our own lives and look at what not to do; Burke & Wills provide us with a list of hilarious examples of exactly how to royally f**k up when navigating this country - with profoundly serious consequences.

The real trick is that it's a comedy. The expedition tends to be depicted as 'unlucky'... but really, it's ridiculous. And we need to start learning how to tell these stories. At the very least, we can stop calling Burke & Wills "explorers".

...And it's not *that* kind of musical.

- Tom Hogan and Elana Stone



MERRIGONG
Production
SEE IT!

TEN TONNE SPARROW PRODUCTION

Mount Hopeless

By Tom Hogan and Elana Stone

A musical tragic comedy based on the story of Burke & Wills. The two idiots are often heralded as tragic heroes, and as symbols of the Australian spirit, rather than a warning tale of exactly not what to do. The songs are joyous, the story has you slapping your forehead, saying "NO, YOU FOOLS!", and underneath it all are some real questions about mateship, biting off more than you can chew, and rewriting history to suit your own narrative.

18 – 20 June

Thu 18, Fri 19, Sat 20, 7.30pm
Bruce Gordon Theatre,
Illawarra Performing Arts Centre

Reserve Your Spot

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Catherine McKinnon

About

Catherine McKinnon is an award-winning writer. Her most recent novel, **Storyland** was published by Harper Collins in 2017, in 2018 it was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award, the Barbara Jefferis Award and the Voss Literary Prize, longlisted for the Indie Book Awards, and was named one of ABC TV's The Book Club's Five of the Best in 2017. Catherine has directed and helped develop many new Australian plays.

Artist Statement

When I work on a play or a novel I need to understand and feel connected to the place the story comes from. **Storyland** involved lots of research: the usual bookish type, reading transcripts and historical records and pouring over old maps; visits to historical museums; interviews with locals and elders of the community; and walks through different locations in the Illawarra.

Some of the stories in **Storyland** are drawn from history and closely follow historical events, others are adventures and speculations into the future. **Storyland** in part broods on fear: what fear does to us, how it creates miscommunication and shapes violence. Also, I want **Storyland** to be an exploration of wonder. What is exciting about the environment around us, the land, the trees, the animals, the people, the weather, the stars, the moon and the fish in the sea. The characters I chose are the 'sidekicks' of history and the future. Ordinary people, but with extraordinary experiences.

- Catherine McKinnon



MERRIGONGX
Development
Showing
SEE IT!

A MERRIGONG THEATRE COMPANY PRODUCTION

Storyland

Development Showing

By Catherine McKinnon

In **Storyland** five 'sidekicks' tell tales of survival and destruction, speaking from the near and distant future and also moving back in time to 1998, 1900, 1882 and 1796. They're not pretty tales and not all are reliable; the characters are separated by time but connected by water that flows from Mount Kembla (*Djenbella*) and Dapto Creek (*Dabroo*) into Mullet Creek (*Bawn*) then Lake Illawarra (*Jubborsay*) before finally trickling out to sea. The stories recount urgent cravings and bungled communications, and are about the deep and abiding need humans have to find connection with each other and the land we live on.

Sat 10 Oct, 11am

Bruce Gordon Theatre, Illawarra Performing Arts Centre

Reserve Your Spot

merrigong.com.au/merrigongx



MADE AT
MERRIGONG

Applespiel

Sorry Sorry Sorry

About

Applespiel evolved out of a shared interest in contemporary performance and a desire to develop a collaborative creative process. The collective makes work that places cultural phenomena and forms outside of those traditionally shown in theatres on to the stage, in order to deconstruct their more unsettling aspects. Applespiel are Simon Binns, Nicole Kennedy, Emma McManus, Mark Rogers, Troy Reid, Joseph Parro, Nathan Harrison, Rachel Roberts and Solomon Thomas.

Artist Statement

Sorry Sorry Sorry is a deep dive into the modern apology. Between football scandals, YouTube confessions and personal shame we investigate what makes an apology meaningful. We're exposed to apologies more than ever before. The internet and 24-hour news cycle provide an immediate method for disseminating a heartfelt (or not) acknowledgement of failure. The 'YouTube apology' has become its own cultural touchpoint, with tropes and stunning examples of how the mixture of internet and competitive 'wokeness' has become a modern ouroboros.

This project requires us to experiment with form, and find the choreography and exhaustion of performed apologies. We're using apologies that are written, performed, broadcast, filmed and edited - we want to bring those processes into a live theatre space in a way that is tangible and reflective. With a range of skills in performance, writing, directing, movement, music and tech, we've worked hard at developing a very open process where these elements will lead us to unexpected places. For this project there's a lot of material to inhabit, a lot of apologies to try on and see how they feel, and what they mean in a performative space.

- Applespiel



Yen Yang

A Practical Guide to Self-Defence

About

Writer/Director **Hung-Yen Yang** is a 'typical' Australian-Chinese: Born and living in Wollongong, Yen is a spicy hotpot of Hakka, Sichuanese and Indonesian descent. He is collaborating with seasoned creatives Stefo Nantsou (Director) and Greg Appel (Filmmaker/Composer).

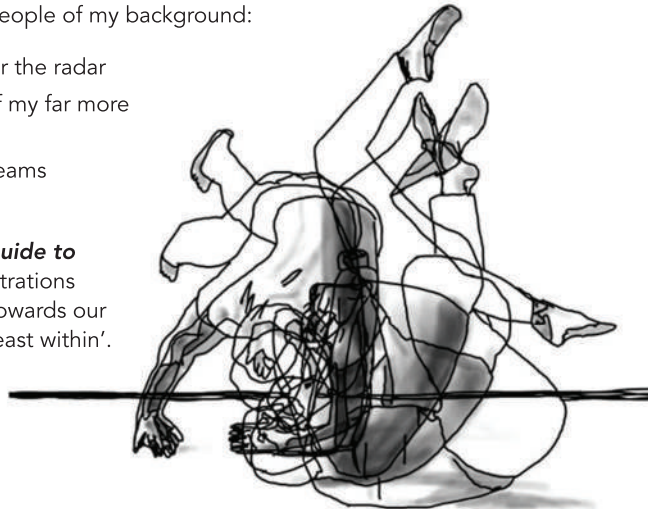
Artist Statement

A Practical Guide to Self-Defence is my account of growing up Asian in 70's/80's Australia. It follows my unlikely transformation from pacifist, asthmatic geek into what one friend described as a 'brutal, fighting machine.' I decided to write this as I lay bedridden from a random act of brutality – being victims of violence is commonplace for us Asian males. My story breaks several taboos and tropes for people of my background:

- Taking on the bullies rather than staying under the radar
- Telling my own story in preference to those of my far more worthy parents'
- Wrestling my immigrant work instinct that screams 'creativity is a luxury you cannot afford!'

Part play, part instructional guide, ***A Practical Guide to Self-Defence*** is sprinkled with practical demonstrations like how to fall and how to punch as we hurtle towards our existential contradiction – 'How to defeat the beast within'.

- Hung-Yen Yang



Malika Reese

Six Women

About

Malika Reese was born in California in the 70's to a white writer and a black writer. Moving to Australia at a young age she travelled between the two countries, also spending time living in Europe and Asia. Malika is a public speaker, comedian, musician, writer and a second-generation songwriter. Her great aunt was Jessie Mae Robinson, who wrote dozens of hit songs covered by the likes of Paul McCartney, Willie Nelson and Elvis Presley.

Artist Statement

Six Women is a stage play about six strong women in my family who were trailblazers in their own way in the United States, before the family moved to Australia to continue carving out new territory. The show is about celebrating perseverance, creativity, tenacity and above all love.

The inspiration to start writing this story was when I first heard the story of my great Aunt Jessie Mae and all that she had accomplished, yet learning that she had been forgotten from history. It made me want to share her story and honour her. Also, learning about the almost too incredible to be true story of my Grandmother's Great Grandmother Winnie and how she helped to found a town. A huge thing to do as a (former) slave.

These are stories that can be learned from and are relatable, yet one of a kind. The fact that these incredible stories all belong in one family, shines a light on the library that each family may possess.

- Malika Reese



Neisha Murphy

ChaChi

About

Neisha Murphy is a vibrant director and variety entertainer who has spent the last 19 years of her life dedicated to performance. She graduated from Charles Sturt University with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications and holds a Diploma of Circus Arts from New Zealand. Her performance style blends a unique mix of physical bravado and character vulnerability, and she endeavours to make her work entertaining, fun, gut-wrenching and completely unforgettable.

Artist Statement

ChaChi is a show about the journey of a baby girl growing up into the performer she was destined to become. She is surrounded and influenced by a group of circus misfits who also happen to be her chosen family. It mixes storytelling, gender, contemporary circus feats and daredevil stunts with vaudevillian comedy. It has a strong emphasis on the experimental, visual nature of set structures weaved with physical performance and contains a gallery of diverse and eccentric characters.

The push for me to begin developing this idea was a friend passing away and seeing the circus community come together to support each other. I began to look closer at this amazingly diverse group of individuals and took inspiration from their uniqueness, strength and compassion.

We each have our own strength and mine is that I am ridiculously interested in the subtleties of relationships. I love intersecting how people and objects connect and how to portray and convey meaning through these choices and actions.

- Neisha Murphy



Crimson Rosella

Dead Horse Gap

About

Based on the boundlessly beautiful far south coast of NSW, **Crimson Rosella Creative Adventures** brings together extraordinary local and visiting musicians and theatre makers to create compelling live performance experiences for our community and the world. **Crimson Rosella** exists to make and share life-affirming performances. Our purpose is to find and tell stories (big and small) that celebrate our shared humanity in imaginative, bold and sometimes eccentric ways through music, theatre, words, images and ideas.

Artist Statement

Dead Horse Gap is a dark trippy Western revelling in black humour, odd characters and surreal twists. Loosely inspired by Jim Jarmusch's iconic 1995 film *Dead Man*, it tells of the strange journey and mysterious disappearance of photographer Charlie Chaste in the fictional frontier town of Dead Horse Gap on the far south coast of NSW - a part of the continent that was indeed 'the end of the line' during its troubled settlement in the late 18th century. Here local stories abound of lawless encounters between the dregs, throwbacks and opportunists of the British colonial system - a desperate world of whalers, runaways and fortune-seekers hopelessly unequal to the wilderness surrounding them.

The radically different backgrounds of Lindy Hume, songwriter Heath Cullen and Leland Kean have enabled us to create a new mode of contemporary music theatre storytelling, inform exploration and extend the work's scope beyond any individual style. We seek to create a contemporary theatre vernacular embedded in an authentic experience of regional Australia.

- **Crimson Rosella**



re:group

New Work Development

About

Carly Young, Jackson Davis, Steve Wilson-Alexander, and Solomon Thomas are **re:group** performance collective: a multidisciplinary group of artists based in Hobart, Wollongong and Sydney. Inspired by the highs and lows of pop culture, we make ambitious, large-scale, live cinematic performances that are deliberately accessible and formally rigorous.

Artist Statement

Our development process involves rigorously studying genre specific film language, narrative and cinematography to develop a screenplay for the stage. We storyboard each scene, identifying the framing and camera placement, and place this form within the constraints of live theatre. By developing a meticulous choreography, performers then double as editors, cinematographers and film crew, rushing across the stage to achieve visual synergy on the screen. The end result is 'the making of a movie', where the audience watch a film as it is performed, edited and screened in real time.

We have made two previous works that we now refer to as live cinema, *Lovely* (PACT, 2014) and *Route Dash Niner: Part II* (Merrigong, 2016). Our latest project explores the viability of relationships as we age, the sustainability of collective arts practices in Australia, and the next incoming wave of automation in industry. Our source materials are iconic movies, scenes and clichés. We deal in nostalgia, but not in order to grift you - we hold up the shortcomings and sadness of sentimentality, along with the warm and the playful. Our work is rigorous and accessible, complex and inclusive.

- re:group



The Strangeways Ensemble

About

Comprising seven members, **The Strangeways Ensemble** is Merrigong's permanent company of professional actors perceived to have intellectual disability, and Wollongong's only professional theatre ensemble. Formalised in 2018 after Merrigong's second professional work with the group, *The Outside Man*, **The Strangeways Ensemble** was created from long-term participants of Merrigong and The Disability Trust's Altogether Drama Program. The Ensemble meet every Friday to rehearse and develop skills, as well as engaging in a number of week-long intensive workshops with some of the country's leading theatre artists and companies.

Premiering in 2020, their new show **Trash Talk** explores justice in the workplace for people working in Australian Disability Enterprises. Devised with Director Anne-Louise Rentell, and drawing on a hyper-real aesthetic inspired by professional wrestling, **Trash Talk** takes a gladiatorial approach to human rights and our universal desire for respect and dignity. An unflinching and unmissable start to the Merrigong 2020 Season, the work also toured to Riverside Theatres, Parramatta in February.

Trash Talk is the third original, mainstage work produced by Merrigong Theatre Company in association with The Disability Trust, following *The Man Who Dreamt the Stars* (2014) and *The Outside Man* (2017) in association with The Disability Trust. Their next mainstage work will commence development this year for presentation in 2023.



Made From Scratch

A multi-artform performance night offering artists space and support to test new ideas in front of a live audience. Here, experimentation is key.

The beauty of **Made From Scratch** is you get to experience a little bit of everything. These events will showcase new works from local artists across performance, film, stand-up comedy, poetry, music, cabaret, circus and anything in between.

Got an idea for an act?

Contact artistic@merrigong.com.au

Sat 7 Mar, 7.30pm

Sat 30 May, 7.30pm

Sat 15 Aug, 7.30pm

Sat 5 Dec, 7.30pm

The Music Lounge,
Wollongong Town Hall

Reserve Your Spot merrigong.com.au/merrigongx

MADE AT
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MERRIGONG PLAYWRIGHTS' PROGRAM

Merrigong has a long history of developing and producing new work by some of Australia's most celebrated playwrights. The Merrigong Playwrights' Program invests in the next generation of storytellers. As a part of our increased support for independent and emerging artists, this new initiative provides long-term mentoring for those with an interest in writing for the stage.

Merrigong is dedicated to leading from the regions and nurturing the next generation of creative thinkers in Australia. Through regular meetings over the course of the year, the Merrigong Playwrights' Program aims to create a space where writers are encouraged to rigorously articulate their ideas in a safe and supportive group of peers. We want to give writers the confidence to dream big and dazzle us with trailblazing new work.

This program is open to anyone aged 18 and above with an interest in writing for theatre. We are committed to providing an inclusive culture and program where all our artists are valued and recognised for their unique qualities, ideas and perspectives. We encourage applications from Indigenous Australians, people with disability, people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, mature age workers and LGBTQIA people.

We call for artists' expressions of interest at the start of each New Year.
For more info visit merrigong.com.au/for-artists



HOW TO ENGAGE

Merrigong is committed to supporting the development and presentation of the work of independent artists through new and established performance platforms and development opportunities.

Opportunities for independent artists/groups include;

- **Space**
- **Creative Development**
- **Development Showings**

The application process for Space, Creative Development and Development Showings are through the MERRIGONGX application process and are selected and curated by Merrigong's artistic team, along with an external industry professional, and in consultation with the artist/group. Applications take place on an annual basis from July with successful applicants informed in December.

Visit merrigong.com.au/for-artists to learn more about the application process.



1

**RESERVE
YOUR X SPOT
FOR FREE**

2

**COME
SEE THE
SHOW**

3

**PAY
WHAT YOU
FEEL**

For MERRIGONGX events this year, we're trialling something new.

There is no set ticket price. Instead, we're asking you to simply reserve a spot, show up, then pay what you feel the performance is worth afterwards.

After the show, we'll send you an email asking how much you want to pay. You choose the amount based on your experience and your circumstances. There is no minimum amount (you can even choose \$0!).

If you don't show up on the night and forget to let us know, please be aware that you will be charged a \$20 no show fee.

Please note that all artists are paid a guaranteed fee. If audience contributions are greater, then the artist will receive more.

Reserve Your Spot

merrigong.com.au/merrigongx

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 this land, and to show respect to all First Nations people who call our region home.

Venues

Illawarra Performing Arts Centre, 32 Burelli Street, Wollongong

Wollongong Town Hall, Corner of Crown and Kembla Streets, Wollongong

Thank you

.....
Merrigong Theatre Company's major funding partners



Merrigong Theatre Company manages IPAC & Wollongong Town Hall on behalf of its major funding partner, Wollongong City Council.



The Strangeways Ensemble

Dead Horse Gap



Thyne Reid
FOUNDATION



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ARTISTS' PROGRAM
Innovative • Independent • In-development

merrigong.com.au

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