



# MTC WOMEN IN THEATRE PROGRAM 2020 REPORT

*Melbourne's* HOME of **THEATRE**

# OVERVIEW

Entering its eighth year, MTC's Women in Theatre Program is one of the Company's most successful career development initiatives and has supported over 80 female theatre professionals to date. Each year the program continues to address gender imbalance in the arts by breaking down barriers to employment opportunities through industry mentorships, leadership skills development and operational training, mental health and wellbeing support and access a rewarding network of sector experts and program alumnae.

The devastating impacts of COVID-19 on the live performance industry in 2020 and into 2021 have affected many of our 2020 participants and program alumnae. Theatre closures, lock-down restrictions and ineligibility to access Job Keeper have seen their work and incomes, built on life-long craft and commitment, vanish overnight. MTC would like to thank you sincerely for your support and advocacy. Your generosity has provided a vital lifeline to our female artists and theatre-makers, so that the arts sector of tomorrow survives in full parity, representative of diversity and artistic excellence.



*(L-R): 2020 MTC Women in Theatre Participants Briony Dunn, Krystalla Pearce and Tariro Mavondo at 2020 Welcome Drinks Event.*

# 2020 MTC WOMEN IN THEATRE PROGRAM

Last year's 12 Women in Theatre participants came together to commence a bespoke program of workshops, talks, Q&As and professional mentorships. Our participants and mentors were:



**Veronique Benett** – Anouk Van Dijk (Choreographer, Artistic Director)

**Ashlee Clapp** – Darius Kedros (Composer, Sound Designer)

**Briony Dunn** – Sam Strong (Director)

**Emma Gibson** – Jenni Medway (MTC Literary Associate)

**Amy Holley** – Petra Kalive (MTC Associate Director)

**Piper Huynh** – Martina Murray (MTC Director of Artistic Operations, Senior Producer)

**Brynna Lowen** – Bridget Balodis (Director in Residence, Malthouse)

**Katy Maudlin** – Helen Bowden (Producer, Lingo Picutres)

**Tariro Mavondo** – Leti Caceres (Director) and Caroline Stacey (AD, The Street)

**Krystalla Pearce** – Sarah Goodes (MTC Associate Artistic Director)

**Clare Rankine** – Marline Zaibak (Company Manager, Malthouse)

**Jamaica Zuanetti** – Joanna Murray-Smith (Playwright)

Participants travelled from Sydney and across Melbourne, gathering at MTC HQ for their first week of *Salon Sessions* which were able to take place in person in February 2020. These sessions included *Profile Management & Networking*, *Fearless Leadership* and a deep dive into the inner workings of MTC programming and structural organisation. It was a great opportunity for our participants to meet each other, the MTC Executive and Artistic Teams and so many of the Women in Theatre Giving Circle Donors at Welcome Drinks. Participants were also introduced to their mentors, chosen by the individual participant and the program administrators in collaboration, to begin establishing connections and set desired outcomes.

Despite the impact of the ongoing crisis on arts and artists in Victoria, and thanks to the generosity of the Women in Theatre Giving Circle, MTC continued to find imaginative and innovative ways to best support the 2020 cohort in their professional development remotely.

Transitioning to online delivery via Zoom, MTC hosted the second week of *Salon Sessions* in May 2020. Participants learned about the operational aspects of running a large theatre company through *MTC Business Parts 1 and 2* conducted by MTC Department Heads, discussed *Developing New Australian Works* with MTC Literary Associate and program alumna Jenni Medway, explored *Creative Pathways* with MTC Casting and Artistic Team experts, and concluded the week with the first of three *Mental Health and Wellbeing* coaching workshops run by independent Counsellor and Arts Specialist Gabriel Edwards.

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L-R: 2020 WIT Participant Brynna Lowen, MTC Associate Artistic Director and WIT Alumna Petra Kalive, and former MTC Associate Artistic Director Sarah Goodes.





Hosted remotely in October 2020, *Salon Sessions* returned with an additional session focused on *Mental Health and Wellbeing* with Gabriel Edwards, in response to ongoing impacts of the pandemic on the cohort and sector and an opportunity to hear directly from two artists negotiating this in Sarah Ward (performer) and Anna Leibzeit (Sound Designer). The week also included part one of the *Grants, Money and Me* workshop with Auspicious Art's Selene Bateman and part one of the invaluable annual *Pitching and Negotiating Masterclass* hosted by Leadership Consultant Erica Bagshaw.



Our Week Four activities included a third *Mental Health and Wellbeing* session and part two of *Grants, Money and Me* in late 2020, and a further session on *Production and Playing Spaces* with MTC Production Design Coordinator Jacob Battista will be delivered online in early 2021. Part two of the *Pitching and Negotiating Masterclass* will take place remotely on Thursday 25 February to prepare the 2020 cohort for the annual *Pitch Day*, where participants have the opportunity to pitch themselves, their work and their collaborative ideas to MTC Artistic and Operational Executives. The *Pitch Day* is scheduled for Thursday 18 March, currently in-person at MTC Southbank Theatre.



In support of the core program of *Salon Sessions*, MTC were keen to make sure that the cohort felt as connected to each other and MTC as possible, and make sure that their experience as part of the program was as valuable as it could be, not being in person. MTC therefore established additional workshops, zoom drinks and personal catch-ups throughout 2020, made possible by your support.

As well as the increase of professionally led coaching as part of our *Mental Health and Wellbeing* sessions, MTC also engaged award-winning Artistic Director Sam Strong to present a workshop on *Creative Leadership*, added a requested discussion on *Diversity and Working Cross-Culturally*, and hosted Zoom and in-person Drinks Catch-ups in August and December.

(Top down) Counsellor Gabriel Edwards, Leadership Consultant Erica Bagshaw and Artistic Director Sam Strong.

# PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK



Being a participant in the MTC Women in Theatre program provided essential guidance, support, motivation and validation for me during this stage of my career. Although I was clear about what I hoped to gain from the program at the outset, the content of the program provided even more than what I had anticipated, opening my eyes to the further potential of myself as an artistic leader. The program staff, guest artists and all of MTC team were generous in helping me work towards my hopes for the program and beyond... I felt tremendous benefit by gaining an inside into main-stage practices, learning how I can adapt these both to my independent practice and roles within small-med organisations. Perhaps more profoundly for myself as a freelance artist I appreciated the psychological security that being attached to an organisation at MTC's level provides. This is incredibly valuable regardless of the COVID-19 era.

In particular I found the Mentoring component of the program, which was a career-trajectory game-changer for me. Regular meetings with my mentor provided highly tailored career guidance that I can implement well beyond the timeline of the program, and an informal mentor/mentee relationship has emerged out of our regular meetings. This means I can manage my career speed-bumps with a friend and outside eye to help sustain me - which I am equally determined to do for others. It helped me coalesce where I currently see my career, assisted in my focussing how I want to progress, and provided me with the pathway, the clarity, and has awakened the guts for me to get there. I cannot say enough how incredibly beneficial being a part of this program has been for me. Thank you MTC team. I will be forever grateful.

***Briony Dunn, Directing Participant 2020/21***

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The Women in Theatre Program has provided invaluable industry knowledge and insight into people's real experiences working in the arts. I have found discussions with the group extremely grounding, connecting all of us to share stories and ways of working. In particular, the mentorship aspect encouraged me to reflect inwards, to discover my strengths, weaknesses and address the trajectory of my career. The session modules provided a practical approach to learning and made catch ups productive and thought provoking. During COVID-19, it was uplifting to still have masterclasses online and be connected. The selected guest speakers, professionals and peers brought truth, honesty and real-life advice that we could apply as individuals.

Through the experience, I solidified my interests and created goals for existing roles and in my own creative practice. I successfully created an Accessibility Action Plan at MICF, and was offered to be in Footscray Community Arts Centre's residency program, RESIDENCE later in the year. I would highly recommend the program to anyone working in the industry as it invites such a wholesome approach to professional development and mentorship.

***Piper Huynh, Executive Management Participant 2020/21***



The Women in Theatre program was a wonderful opportunity to ask questions and learn; not only about Melbourne Theatre Company but also from fellow participants. So much of the program is about sharing knowledge and helping women in theatre advance their careers. I loved the openness of MTC creatives and professionals and that we were all able to have in depth conversations about theatre and its future in Australia. I especially felt supported through a difficult year with Covid, when so much of what we do as theatre makers was put on hold.

My mentor Joanna Murray-Smith was consistently generous in sharing her knowledge and experiences and supporting me and my work as a playwright. I gain a lot from listening to other writers and how they navigate their careers and craft. The one on one meetings with Joanna were a great opportunity develop a rapport and ask questions that I otherwise wouldn't have the chance to ask.

***Jamaica Zuanetti, Playwriting Participant 2020/21***

# WOMEN IN THEATRE ALUMNAE UPDATE

MTC's Director of Artistic Operations and Women in Theatre Program curator **Martina Murray** is proud to have established and managed the initiative from conception, and the incredible, on-going achievements of our alumnae.

*“With multiple years of the program under our belt it’s wonderful to see the career progression of the program’s participants. In 2020, we welcomed Program alumna Petra Kalive as the new MTC Associate Director, and engaged a further seven alumnae in significant creative roles on 2020 productions (before COVID-19 closures). Whilst 2021 is still a work in progress, we are delighted that we have already engaged a number of alumnae across Act One and Two of MTC’s 2021 main stage season.”*

*“Beyond engaging with MTC, it’s thrilling to see alumnae take up key positions or have their work presented at other companies around the country. Witnessing the many and varied pathways that lead from our program beyond the scheduled 12 months is extremely rewarding.”*

With Alumnae working across the country, recent alumnae achievements include:

## **Rachel Chant, 2019 Directing Participant**

Awarded the 2021 Ensemble Theatre’s Sandra Bates Directors Award, whilst continuing her position as Festival Director of Bondi Feast Festival.

## **Romanie Harper, 2019 Design Participant**

Received notable acclaim for her impressive tennis court set design for *Sunshine Super Girl*, seen at the 2021 Sydney Festival. Amongst various projects, 2021 also sees a Romanie collaborate with fellow alumnae Rachel Lee and Emily Collyer on Red Stitch Theatre’s *Single Ladies*.

## **Emily Sheehan, 2019 Playwriting Participant**

Emily’s play *Hell’s Canyon* has been listed for the 2021 VCE Theatre Studies Unit 3 and Unit 4 playlist and will receive a regional tour produced by Regional Arts Victoria.



**Clemmence Williams, 2019 Sound Design Participant**

Sound Designer and Composer for Sydney Theatre Company's critically acclaimed production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

**Kat Chan, 2018 Design Participant**

Costume Designer for MTC's 2020 production of *Torch the Place* along with a 2021 MTC production yet to be announced.

**Tahli Corin, 2018 Artistic Director Participant**

In 2020, Tahli pivoted her company *Threshold* online to create two internationally acclaimed online experiences for families during lockdown, receiving write ups in the New York Times, Early Arts UK and five stars in Ireland Business Post.

**Laura Makin, 2018 Production Management Participant**

Takes up full time position as Production Manager at Sydney Theatre Company.

**Keziah Warner, 2018 Dramaturgy Participant**

Announced in May 2020 as the winner of Sydney Theatre Company's prestigious Patrick White Playwrights Award.

**Mary Rachel Brown, 2017 Playwright Participant**

Mary's play *The Dapto Chaser* was broadcasted by the ABC and made available via iView (2020)

**Clare McKenzie, 2017 Executive Management Participant**

Announced as Executive Director of PHOTO – International Festival of Photography, commencing January 2021.

**Amelia Lever-Davidson, 2016 Lighting Participant**

Amelia was the Lighting Designer for MTC's production of *Torch the Place* in 2020 and following months of dark theatres, was most recently the lighting designer for Belvoir's 2020/21 landmark production of *My Brilliant Career*.

**Natasha Phillips, 2016 Emerging Producer Participant**

Was announced in January 2021 as the Victorian Producer for national producing company Performing Lines.



*Sunshine Super Girl – 2021 Sydney Festival*



*The Picture of Dorian Gray - STC*



*My Brilliant Career – Belvoir*



*Torch the Place - MTC*

# THE FUTURE



*MTC WIT Technical Design Stream Alumna Clare Springett and actor Nadine Garner.*

Given the difficult and isolating circumstances of the 2020 Women in Theatre Program, MTC have extended program activity in 2021 solely for last year's cohort. This will allow the group to come together in person, pitch live with MTC Artistic and Operation Executives and feel first-hand the inner workings of the State theatre company.

2020 also saw MTC working closely with program alumnae, who are now more than ever in need of support, connections and creative collaborations.

We have decided therefore to postpone any additional participants of the core program in 2021 and introduce new opportunities for increased networking, leaning and skills development across our entire program alumnae.

With such a significant gap in employment opportunity between male and female technical creatives, MTC will continue its Technical Design Stream this year, with two placements on offer to mid-career sound and lighting artists. The participants will be assigned to mainstage productions throughout the design to production period, enabling hands-on knowledge sharing between MTC experts, experienced designers, and the participants. This exposure to staging professional theatre in large-scale venues, with state of the art technology and experienced crews, will provide the participants with the knowledge base and expertise to assist in their taking on future Technical Creative Design roles.

We look forward to being in touch with the Women in Theatre Giving Circle to engage with the 2021 program and participants as soon as possible.



# THANK YOU

At MTC we passionately believe that all arts practitioners irrespective of their race, background and/or gender should have the opportunity to develop rewarding and fruitful careers, and are determined to ensure that steps towards parity continue in spite of these challenges.

It is only thanks to your wonderful support that we are able to continue towards this vision, and evolve our Women in Theatre Program in response to the changing implications of the pandemic, coupled with the needs of our current cohort and alumnae.

Thank you for joining us on this important journey:

Amanda and Mark Derham

Christine Gilbertson

Charles and Cornelia Goode Foundation

Jane Hodder

Janette Kendall

Kim and Peter Monk

Leigh O'Neill

Prof Hannah Piterman

Richard and Debra Tegoni

Marion Webster OAM

Anonymous



*MTC Women in Theatre Alumna Clemence Williams in rehearsal for Heisenberg at MTC HQ.*

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Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the First Peoples of Country on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand. We pay our respects to all of Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors and Elders, and to our shared future.



The image features a dark, low-angle photograph of a building's facade, characterized by a complex, geometric pattern of white structural beams. The beams form various polygons, with a large, irregular shape in the center that serves as a backdrop for the text. The overall tone is dark and moody, with the white lines of the architecture providing a strong contrast.

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