

# KEEP US ON STAGE

SUPPORT MTC



MTC  
FOUNDATION



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.

‘I have no doubt that people will come to recognise the value and importance of live performance after time in isolation.’

— MTC DONOR

# Welcome



In 68 years, Melbourne Theatre Company has presented more than 880 mainstage productions alongside important artist development initiatives and education programs. We have never wavered in our commitment to create excellence in all forms of theatrical storytelling, from existing and new

Australian stories to international hits and classics. We approach every production with creativity and a passion to bring inspiring stories to life for the enjoyment and enrichment of the broadest possible audience.

As Australia evolves, so does MTC. Each year, our works introduce new ideas and new ways of looking at our lives and the world around us. MTC Donors have been an integral part of this journey, with us every step of the way, and we could not have done it without them.

Today MTC faces its greatest challenge yet. Our long road to recovery will take many years as we begin to rebuild the Company and ensure the confidence of our audience in returning to the theatre. We have much work to do, and it will take the generosity of the community and the goodwill of our expanding Donor family to ensure that MTC does not merely survive but continues to revive Melbourne with relevant and enriching storytelling of the highest possible standard.

Donations were vital in helping us through the COVID crisis. Our Donors will continue to play a critical role in helping us uphold our responsibility to our audience, to our artists and to future generations of theatre lovers and theatre makers. As we rebuild this iconic institution together, we thank our generous and loyal supporters who help to make it all possible.

**VIRGINIA LOVETT**

Executive Director & Co-CEO

(Left) Nikki Shiels in *Home, I'm Darling* (2020)

Photography: Front cover – Brett Walker, Charlie Kinross, Justin Ridler; Back cover – Justin Ridler. Inside – Jeff Busby, Tim Grey, Charlie Kinross, Justin Ridler, Nick Tranter, Brett Walker, Heath Warwick

‘MTC is such a fabulous company which has really enriched our lives over many years.’

— MTC DONOR



As Chair of the MTC Foundation Board, a director of the Board of Management and a long-time Donor and Subscriber to MTC, I share our audience's passion and commitment to ensuring that MTC remains a vibrant and creative home for artists to thrive.

The outpouring of support and messages we received throughout 2020 buoyed all of our spirits and, most importantly, reminded us of the central role MTC plays in the lives of so

many Victorians. We are incredibly fortunate to have such passionate supporters behind us who are devoted to safeguarding this precious Company and the important work it does.

The entire Foundation Board is committed to ensuring a sustainable future for MTC. Whether you are inspired by staged classics or new commissions, whether you believe in the power of arts education or the importance of fostering Australian talent, or whether you simply do not want the curtain to fall on the state's pre-eminent theatre company, donating to the MTC Foundation is a vital contribution to making what is important to you possible. The trust and investment that you place in us is never taken for granted and every dollar donated makes a genuine difference to the Company and to the cultural landscape of Victoria.

As you read the following stories I encourage you to reflect on what MTC means to you, our community and our state, and consider how you can help keep the Company on stage.

Your support today and over the coming years will be valued for generations to come. Thank you.

**JONATHAN FEDER**

MTC Foundation Chair



# You make the show go on

People are what make MTC so special. It takes skilled professionals with a depth of experience to bring each show to life and to develop the next generation of theatre makers and storytellers.



## COLIN PENN *Props Maker*

I do the strings and the mirrors that make it all work! I've been making props for MTC for over 35 years. I apprenticed as a cabinet maker, and my first fulltime job was building sets in the old Ferrars Street premises in the late 1970s. I make something different every day.



(Above) Colin Penn in the Workshop at MTC, and (right) with Ruby

It could be a chair, a table, fake limbs or a tree. It could be anything. Our job is to make stage props that work, and that can last the run of a production; and also to be able to fix them. They have to be safe and work for the actors.

For 2009's *Realism*, we made a coffin that had to collapse to reveal that the body had disappeared at just the right moment. It took around 15 attempts to make that work. Creating the full, double-storey *Home, I'm Darling* house was a recent highlight. We don't make them often. The challenge was working out how all the fittings worked in the 1950s. Even when we made it we didn't know how the hinges worked! But you feel proud when you see the finished set put together.

I love working with the people I work with. I like my job. That's your goal in life: come to work, do your job, enjoy it. And do it with quality. Sometimes it's stressful, but the job itself is fabulous. We've just got to put the show on.

## Paws in Production

MTC is dog-friendly workplace. Colin's dog Ruby comes with him to work every day (and before her, Lady and Princess). Each new cast has their photo taken with Colin's dog. 'Dogs are a big part of my life. It's a real honour to be able to take your dog to work with you. The actors love it. One of the best things I've heard said is "I've been missing my dog so much and there's a dog here and I feel so much better."' When Miriam Margoyles was rehearsing for *Lady in the Van*, for instance, she would always have 10 minutes to pet and play with Ruby before the rehearsal day started.'



## TANSY ELSO *Scenic Artist*

I work as part of MTC's Scenic Art Department. Our role it is to paint, finish and transform the many props and scenic elements that form the theatrical world of an MTC production. We work closely with designers, stage managers and other production departments to realise the requirements of a set design. Working from a model and plans and in consultation with the design team, we apply texture, colour, glazes and decorative finishes to raw and 'needy' set and prop elements so that they match the designer's vision.

I was lucky enough to start my career in the department through a work experience opportunity while studying theatre production at university. Although that was 20 years ago, the learning has never really stopped because every production, prop or scenery piece presents a new set of technical or creative challenges.

MTC provides a great base for so many people to develop skills and bring ideas to the audience. It is a place that seeks the highest quality and employs staff that have unique skills to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. There is a great sense of achievement in seeing these skills displayed up on stage for the benefit and enjoyment of an audience.

Collaboration and teamwork are at the core of the behind-the-scenes experience of theatre. Every element of a production and its staging has



been created by this process: the same process that creates a successful community. As a member of the production team, I get to be part of the innovation, creativity and persistence that turns ideas and imagination into life.

**'MTC is a place that seeks the highest quality and employs staff that have unique skills to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.'**





Phillip Rhodes; (left) Christie Whelan Browne wearing one of Phillip's creations in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2011)

‘I see MTC as representing some sort of vanguard. I think we serve the future ... we also represent a certain quality of making, and I see us as upholding the standard.’

## PHILLIP RHODES

### Milliner

I first became involved with MTC around 2007, on *The Glass Soldier*. My background was in fashion millinery. I was at the ballet for a short time as the head milliner. And then I had my own concern for a while: I used to do shows and I used to do fashion. At MTC, I'm "Phillip from hats". However, I'm also responsible for collating the jewellery, so I've had people say I'm a "props something or other" but I don't take kindly to that! I still see myself as a milliner.

Being part of the Company is a big deal. You're all working together on the same project, towards something. Before I started with MTC, I went on a tour of the theatre with a friend who was working here. As we walked through, people said hi to him and

they knew who he was, and what he did. I remember thinking that the road I was on was a much lonelier road and the road of belonging to something was much greater.

I see MTC as representing some sort of vanguard. I think we serve the future by giving younger designers, creatives and practitioners the opportunity to learn, to have something made. I think we also represent a certain quality of making, and I see us as upholding the standard. And MTC provides opportunities for professional development, which for a milliner are fairly limited – this is the only theatrical millinery room left in Melbourne; and it's probably one of only two left in the country. ■

## Keep us on stage

Philanthropic support is essential on MTC's road to recovery.

Only through donations and private support will the Company return to a position of strength to create work for the hundreds of creative professionals whose livelihoods depend on us every year.

Learn more and donate online at [mtc.com.au/support](https://mtc.com.au/support)

# Life-changing support

The life-changing work of MTC has been a consistent highlight of Virginia Gay's career.

*Cyrano* plays at Southbank Theatre from 31 July—4 September.

Virginia Gay is one of Australia's most beloved stage and screen actors, with many MTC shows under her belt. In 2021 she will debut her joyous, hope-filled adaptation of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* at Southbank Theatre, and play the title role herself. And while her other role, as writer, is not new to her, it's one that is especially close to her heart with this play, which grew out of the isolation and lack of human connection that was 2020. The fact that it is premiering at MTC in 2021 is beyond thrilling to her.

‘What I love so much, and what I think is really important about what MTC does, is that they put on classics, but classics that are interrogated and investigated; but they are also so committed to new Australian work.’ And as much as Gay adores acting, she has so much more that she wants to write. ‘So if this show, if this year of writing, works for me then my whole life will be different. My whole future will be different.’

The support of Donors is vital to Australian writers hoping for such life-changing opportunities. ‘That support allows the Company to take risks on new voices,’ Gay says, ‘and allows it to cultivate those voices. That's the way we get great Australian theatre: by people backing these scrappy kids who wrote a play – and I could not be more grateful for it.’

Donations help MTC change lives both on and off stage, Gay says, and she's also grateful for the onstage opportunities she's had with MTC. Among her highlights are *The Beast* (2013), despite the oodles of fake blood requiring her ‘to rush for the limited amount of hot water backstage at every interval’, and perfecting puppetry as a ‘nightmare squid god’ in *Vivid White* (2017). Gay's acting debut with the Company was in *On the Production of Monsters* in 2012. ‘That was such a wonderful introduction to MTC,’ she says, ‘because Clare Watson is such a phenomenal creator, and the fact that she's now running Black Swan is a terrific endorsement of exactly how well MTC picks talent and helps mature talent and then, hopefully, reaps the benefits of that.’ ■



Virginia Gay, with James Saunders (below) in *On the Production of Monsters* (2012)





# A dramatic education



(Above)  
Brodi Purtill

Brodi Purtill decided in year 7 that she was going to be a drama teacher. Recently completing a Bachelor of Arts in Drama and Sociology with a Distinction and now midway through a Masters in Teaching at Deakin, she's well on her way to achieving her dream.

A proud Muti-Muti woman who grew up in Swan Hill, Purtill didn't let her school's lack of a drama program stop her. 'My school didn't have a drama program until I got into senior school and made us have drama,' she says with a laugh.

The theatrical situation at her school was so dire that during a meeting with the careers advisor in year 11, Purtill was asked what her backup plan was while the aspiring paediatric neurologist beside her wasn't questioned. 'They asked me: what's your backup if you don't become a drama teacher? I said "I don't have one, I'll be a drama teacher." But they didn't ask the other girl, and she was like "you're saying it's easier for me to be a paediatric neurologist than it is for her to be a teacher?!"'

**'My school really didn't want me to do [work experience] in Melbourne; they wanted me to do it in Swan Hill. But I was going to Melbourne, whether they liked it or not!'**

Taking the first step towards making her dream a reality, in 2016 Purtill completed work experience with Melbourne Theatre Company. She initially applied without her school's permission. 'My school really didn't want me to do it in Melbourne; they wanted me to do it in Swan Hill. But I told them that I was doing it!' She bypassed the careers office when they queried her application, telling them she didn't need their signature and going straight to the principal instead. 'I was going to Melbourne, whether they liked it or not!'

Purtill spent her work experience week with the Company on Young Jean Lee's *Straight White Men*, directed by Sarah Giles. 'That was really cool,' she says. 'I got to sit in on all the rehearsals for the week. I even got my own little mug – that I still have – with my name on it! I just got to see the whole experience.'

She enjoyed it so much that a few months later she returned to participate in the Betty Amsden Youth Scholarship Course, a week-long intensive drama workshop run annually by MTC Education for students with limited access to drama programs. The course is aimed at students aged 13 to 17, and

Purtill was the oldest of her cohort – 'I was only allowed in the Scholarship by one day!' – but she's still in contact with many of those she participated with.

Purtill also remains in contact with her peers from MTC's First Peoples Young Artists Program (FPYAP), which she joined in 2017. Working with teaching artists Sermsah Bin Saad and Lenka Vanderboom, Purtill and seven other young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people devised and produced their own show, *Darklight*, which they showcased at Southbank Theatre's Lawler studio. Purtill stage-managed that production, and has since returned to do the same for the participants in both 2018 and 2019 as well. 'I still see those guys a lot,' she says.

Indeed, the bonds forged through these programs have proved so strong they've carried over to Bark Theatre Company, a not-for-profit Purtill founded with a focus 'on providing a safe space for young people to create, learn and network'. It's testament to her belief that the benefit of these programs goes beyond education and experience and into creating networks and building a sense of community. 'It's really nice to have those connections with people who are similar to you and have similar interests to you, but have also had the same barriers as you getting into the arts,' she says. 'It's good to have all that support from everyone. And having the other participants come and do stuff for my own theatre company, to make sure that we're giving each other support and jobs when we have jobs to give – that is really nice.'

This year, taking the next steps towards making her drama teaching dream a reality, Purtill will help coordinate the First Peoples Young Artists Program. She has also started working casually for MTC's Education Department. It's clear that when Brodi Purtill decides she's going to do something, she won't let anything stand in her way. ■

MTC's work experience program is supported by the Education Giving Circle. The First Peoples Young Artists Program is a partnership with the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development and YIRRAMBOI, and is enabled by The John & Myriam Wylie Foundation. The Betty Amsden Youth Scholarship Course is made possible with the support of the Betty Amsden Foundation.

## Inspiring our youth through theatre

MTC Education seeks to create free, or affordable, meaningful access to theatre for all young people regardless of cultural, financial or geographical circumstances.



Time and again, we receive feedback that our award-winning programs have had a profound and lasting impact on the lives of the students who have been able to take part. Right now we have an opportunity to use the arts to help inspire and empower young Australians.

Despite the impact of the COVID crisis on arts and education in Victoria, MTC Education has continued to find imaginative ways to support Victorian students and young people in their learning and development, and to provide inspiring and nurturing theatre experiences remotely. This has included innovative learning activities enhancing the theatre experience, and an ever-expanding suite of digital content and virtual workshops which make MTC Education a world-leading program.

In response to demand from schools and requests from the Department of Education, we are constantly working to produce more online resources and create further opportunities for remote engagement. As a result, we are now able to reach more and more varied and isolated communities.

We cannot wait to welcome school groups back to the theatre, but for now our focus is on programs that will have the ability to work both in-person and digitally.

More so than ever, it is vital that MTC can use its education programs to reach the next generation of makers, writers, stage managers and audience members. It is only through donor support that this will be possible, ensuring the evolving needs of students, teachers and young people are met as they battle the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, inequality and isolation.

To direct your support to MTC Education and be part of the Education Giving Circle visit [mtc.com.au/donate](https://mtc.com.au/donate) or call the Philanthropy team on 03 8688 0954.



# A gift to MTC's future



The late Robert Dunster left a gift to Melbourne Theatre Company when he passed away in 2018, in honour of his longstanding relationship with the Company from its very beginnings.

Robert's connection to MTC began through his friendship with the late John Sumner AO CBE, who founded the Company in 1953 to present repertory seasons of the world's best plays at the Union Theatre at the University of Melbourne.

An architecture student at the University, 'Robert, fascinated by all aspects of theatre, offered to do posters for productions at that time,' Robert's wife, Judy Dunster, said.

'In return, John helped him to put together a brief for a professional theatre, such as the Company would have loved to be able to afford, which Robert used for an assignment and then as resource material when he went on to study theatres and opera houses in Europe.'

Though Robert never designed a theatre, he and a friend did enter the competition to design the Sydney Opera House and placed 'what they fondly termed "equal fourth",' Judy explained.

Having since been a loyal MTC Subscriber who 'rarely missed a production', Robert decided to leave a donation to MTC at Judy's suggestion shortly before he died in 2018, in recognition of over 60 years of theatrical pleasure, starting with his friendship with John Sumner.

'There was no question in Robert's mind that any donation he made to MTC must be directed to the MTC Endowment Fund where it would contribute to the long term financial security of the company.'

Robert's generosity will continue his decades of enjoyment spent with MTC from the Company's very foundation and ensure his love of theatre is shared by generations to come. ■

## Ensure the curtain never falls

If MTC has played an important role in your life, we invite you to play a role in its future.

Bequests provide for the future of Melbourne Theatre Company and by remembering MTC in your will, you are giving the gift of inspiring arts experiences and opportunities to generations to come. Unless otherwise directed, bequests received will be invested in MTC's Endowment Fund and the income earned will continue to contribute to a strong and artistically vibrant future for the Company.

MTC has established the Legacy Circle to honour and thank individuals who leave a bequest to the Company in their will. Public acknowledgement can inspire others to remember us in their wills, but if anonymity is your preference, this will be respected. We understand and appreciate that the decision to leave a bequest is a very personal one. If you are considering, or have already, included a legacy gift to MTC in your will, please contact us.

For more information or a confidential discussion please contact Chris Walters, Annual Giving Manager, on 03 8688 0938 or [c.walters@mtc.com.au](mailto:c.walters@mtc.com.au). Learn more at [mtc.com.au/legacy](http://mtc.com.au/legacy)

(Above)  
Robert Dunster

# The joy of giving

Meet Margaret Sahhar AM and her daughter, Edwina – two of three generations to support Melbourne Theatre Company.



(Left) Margaret Sahhar AM, Dr Stan Sahhar, Edwina Sahhar and James Macken

Edwin and Nan Peatt, Margaret's parents, supported MTC from its first days as the Union Theatre Repertory Company back in 1953 and have a seat dedicated to their memory in the Summer. Their MTC legacy continues through Margaret and Edwina, who have both attended MTC plays from a young age and have become Subscribers and Donors themselves.

'The impact of live theatre reinforced my love of the arts and literature – I went on to study English Literature at the University of Melbourne,' Margaret said.

'I enjoy the sheer excellence and diversity of the plays. Not every play is my favourite but I always leave the theatre feeling stimulated and involved.'

Some of the most memorable performances for Margaret include *Queen Lear* (2012), *Private Lives* (2014), *Ladies in Black* (2016), *Twelfth Night* (2018) and *Home, I'm Darling* (2020).

'MTC has been such a positive part of my life for so many years so I was drawn to donating,' Margaret said.

Edwina also supports MTC through philanthropy and explained, 'When I realised how much I got out of going to a season of MTC plays – the different emotions, diversity of ideas and perspectives – I felt compelled to give back.'

'One of my early treasures, which I still have, is an MTC programme for *Cinderella* from 1980 which had Jane Scali, Noel Ferrier and Frederick Parslow in it.

'MTC has been such a positive part of my life for so many years so I was drawn to donating.'


My parents took me to this when I was about four years old. I think this is the first MTC production that I went to.'

For both Margaret and Edwina, there is a unique pleasure in giving to MTC. 'I definitely feel joy from giving to MTC. But what I get back is so much more – the experience of sitting in a theatre and waiting to see where a play is going to take you and how you feel at the end, followed by the discussions afterwards with friends,' Edwina said.

Margaret explained, 'there is definitely a sense of joy – joy in supporting such an impressive theatre company and pride in being a small part of it. Joy in enabling the growth of the company which reaches out to so many people young and old. Joy in being a part of a group that is committed to promoting excellence and growth and diversity of opinions through the chosen plays. Pride that my home state continues to maintain such a first-rate theatre company that continues to grow.'

Margaret and Edwina's continued relationship with MTC, originating with the late Edwin and Nan, demonstrates how the power of theatre and the shared experience of live storytelling transcends time and the joy of giving can be shared across generations. ■





‘MTC means the  
world to all of us who  
love live theatre.’

— MTC DONOR

## Contact us

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[mtc.com.au/support](http://mtc.com.au/support)

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