



**THE STRATEGY FOR
MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY
2019 — 2025**



First Peoples Young Artists Program (2018)

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the people of the Kulin Nation, First Peoples of Country on which Southbank Theatre stands. We pay our respects to all First Peoples of the land on which we meet, create and perform, to their ancestors and Elders, and to our shared future.

MTC is a department of the University of Melbourne.



MTC is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria.



MTC is a member of Live Performance Australia and the Australian Major Performing Arts Group.



EVERY GENERATION DESERVES REMARKABLE STORY TELLING TO HELP UNDERSTAND THEIR TIMES

Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) is Melbourne's home of live theatre, producing annual mainstage seasons and education programs, additional productions and co-productions for families and with independent artists, and a raft of industry and community outreach and development initiatives.

Founded in 1953, MTC is the oldest professional theatre company in Australia and one of the largest theatre companies in the English-speaking world. With 180,000 to 250,000 theatre attendances annually and a loyal subscriber base of over 20,000, it is the most subscribed theatre company in the nation.

Live theatre occupies a unique place in society to present performance in and of our time. It is one of the very few live artforms which speak directly with us about ourselves, each other and the world around us, in this 21st Century. It is a current conversation. Unlike the heritage arts (opera, ballet, classical music) which more frequently present repeated, known, historic works, theatre has the unique capacity to consistently be part of society's conversation, in which we gather around a metaphorical campfire to tell new stories, to better understand our own times, and to enrich and improve our world.

Accordingly, this Strategy is designed to take MTC beyond its now 68 year history, to ensure the Company's live storytelling remains vital, relevant and transformative for Australia. It is especially designed to ensure MTC's financial sustainability into the future, and to benefit the wider theatre community of artists and audiences (local, regional and national), including culturally diverse artists and audiences.

This Strategy particularly acknowledges achievements to date, and new directions and opportunities for the future.

Storm Boy (2019); (above) The Architect (2018)





As one of Australia's largest performing arts organisations and a department of the University of Melbourne, MTC has an enduring commitment to fostering the social and cultural engagement of the nation. This is reflected in our mission and vision.

OUR MISSION

To create exceptional theatre, relevant to our times,
for the broadest possible audience.



OUR VISION

To be the leading theatre company in Australia, reflecting the changing world around us and enriching lives in the way only great theatre can.

Shakespeare in Love (2019); (above) Hungry Ghosts (2018)

ACHIEVEMENTS AND HEADWINDS

This Strategy acknowledges achievements to date, the headwinds we face, and opportunities for the future.

The Company's success in recent years has included:

- Annual ticket sales increase from 184,000 in 2015 to between 230,000 and 250,000 per year pre-pandemic
- Regular subscriber numbers in excess of 20,000 annually, in a national and international climate of falling theatre subscriber numbers
- Growth in new subscribers, young subscribers (under 30) and University of Melbourne Theatre Pass purchases
- Low subscriber churn and excellent subscriber retention (80% annually)
- Rising philanthropic support
- Substantial artistic inroads in diversity and inclusion
- Meeting all benchmarks for the NEXT STAGE Writers' Program with the exception of interruptions caused by the pandemic
- Financial survival of the 2020 pandemic and a substantial bounce-back in 2021

Despite this success, the mainstage productions do not break even and we rely on philanthropy, government and University of Melbourne to assure our future. Our cost structure reflects that of a State theatre company and much of our expenditure is designed to fulfil social objectives. >

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2018)



Torch the Place (2020)



Our Strategy responds to the coming decade of significant external change:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the performing arts sector, and changing circumstances around it have required vigorous agility in the digital space, and flexibility in planning, programming and budgeting. It has also impacted our venues and how and where we perform. The ramifications of the pandemic will continue to be felt as vaccination policies fluctuate and as new strains of the virus emerge. Vigilance and responsiveness will be ongoing.
2. MTC is part of the Melbourne Arts Precinct which is seeing unprecedented investment by University of Melbourne (UoM), City of Melbourne and the Victorian Government. MTC is in a prime position to benefit from this investment and to contribute to the success of the Precinct with collaboration with fellow Precinct partners and providing increased food and beverage opportunities.
3. Constraints on MTC’s growth due to limited suitable theatres (current MTC theatres are already at 86% capacity) will be countered by a new vision, which from 2023 will embrace the use of venues separate from the Southbank Theatre and Arts Centre complexes, and from 2024 make use of the new Student Arts and Culture Precinct at the University of Melbourne. Use of additional venues will also provide an opportunity to expand MTC’s artistic aspirations and offerings, and to grow new audiences aligned with such aspirations.

4. MTC’s reach will also be greatly enhanced by our new Digital Strategy which will see quality filming, streaming and on-demand access to selected MTC productions, as well as other expanded offerings in the digital space.

This Strategy looks to modest audience and revenue growth goals because of the need to bring performance spaces online, and to accommodate the possible closure of Art Centre Melbourne for refurbishment of venues used by MTC, over the next five years.

This Strategy incorporates engagement with the University of Melbourne to develop and promote its cultural assets.

This Strategy acknowledges the challenge to address the increasing diversity of our society, and to ensure MTC’s stories speak to the different communities which comprise Australia, to help better understand each other.

And finally, this Strategy recognises the need to adopt greater flexibility in venues, target audiences and ticket pricing, given the impact of the pandemic.

A STRATEGY BUILT ON SIX KEY VALUES

This Strategy is built on six key values. These values inform every decision and choice made by MTC – artistically, operationally, socially and politically. These are our values:

1. EXCELLENCE

In every aspect of our producing theatre and our operations we are as good as it gets.

2. RELEVANCE

We are relevant to the lives of audiences and artists in this 21st Century.

3. INNOVATION

We innovate in theatrical practice and all our operational endeavours, recognising that innovation requires risk and sometimes failure.

4. GROWTH

We expand our audience reach by presenting great theatre to as much of humanity as possible.

5. SUSTAINABILITY

We plan and execute strategies which expand and extend our revenue streams and carefully manage our cost structures to ensure our survival and growth into the future.

6. INCLUSION

We celebrate inclusion to honour and reflect the diversity of our society through the stories we tell, and the artists who tell them, to ensure MTC is one of the principal storytellers for all Australians.



Golden Shield (2019)

DELIVERING OUR VISION OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS

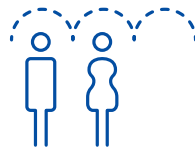
With an overarching commitment to excellence and inclusion, we will deliver our vision through five strategic goals, all of them designed to engender a love of theatre and a greater acceptance of live performance across the community, and to enhance Australia’s cultural landscape.

Behind these goals will sit operating plans for each. These goals are:



1.

To develop the artistic capability of the Company and enhance the community



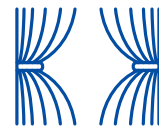
2.

Strengthen and grow audience base



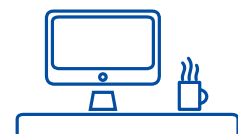
3.

Increase MTC’s financial security



4.

Build and strengthen the Company’s identity as an asset of the University of Melbourne and facilitate MTC’s integration as a key component of the University’s Cultural Commons platform



5.

Achieve a harmonious and efficient workplace

Jasper Jones (2016); (above) The Odd Couple (2016)



OUR PRIORITIES



To meet the objectives of our Strategy, MTC will invest in the following major initiatives:

- Increase our digital capability to reach new audiences and explore models for distribution of content
- Further develop new writing and the creation of works with local, national and international presentation potential
- Strengthen our relationship with the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Fine Arts and Music in particular the Victorian College of the Arts
- Develop an annual occupancy agreement for use of venues at the University of Melbourne's Student Arts and Culture Precinct
- Strengthen our relationships with the Melbourne Arts Precinct partners to capitalise on the growth of the Precinct
- Explore the on-going use of other venues outside the Melbourne Arts Precinct
- Increase the resources devoted to advocacy and fundraising

Furthermore, the Company will continue its commitment to:

- inclusion, new writers and access
- strengthening its relationship with the University of Melbourne
- investing in MTC's production capabilities

HOW WE WILL DEFINE SUCCESS



- A substantial increase in audiences (digital & live) over five years
- Increased revenue from theatre assets and adoption of more flexible cost structures
- An annual increase in diversity of artists engaged by MTC
- MTC is the theatre company preferred by the best artists and staff

