

# MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY



# YOUNG ARTISTS WEEK

## Impact Report 2025

SUPPORTED BY

**NEWSBOYS  
FOUNDATION**

ACCOMMODATION PARTNER

  
**QUEST**  
SOUTHBANK

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, create and gather. We pay our respects to all First Nations people, their Elders past and present, and their enduring connections to Country, knowledge and stories.

As a Company we remain committed to the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for voice, truth and treaty.



# CONTENTS

<b>ABOUT THE WEEK</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PROGRAM CONTENT</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>TEAM</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PARTICIPANT RESPONSES</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>PLANS FOR 2026</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>TESTIMONIALS</b>	<b>10</b>

**‘Thank you so much for this opportunity. It is a huge thing for a kid from Mallacoota to be able to attend.’**

**- Family member of 2025 participant**

**‘Thank you so much for giving my son such an amazing opportunity to be part of Young Artists Week, I’m sure he won’t forget this wonderful week! Thank you to all the people involved in hosting this week, you’ve done such a great job!’**

**- Family member of 2025 participant**

# ABOUT THE WEEK

The annual Young Artists Week is a life-changing week of drama workshops at Melbourne Theatre Company for young Victorians aged 14–16 who have limited access to the arts.

Led by professional teaching artists and theatre makers, the program provides young people with an opportunity to develop drama skills, gain confidence, self-awareness and self-expression, while building friendships and a lifelong affinity for theatre. There is no fee to participate, catering is provided, and accommodation is offered to participants and their families/carers from regional Victoria.

The program is intended for students who would not otherwise have access to extracurricular drama opportunities due to economic, geographic or personal barriers. This is facilitated by teaching artists working in the theatre industry and there is a dedicated support artist to assist with student wellbeing throughout the week.

In 2025 we selected 20 young creatives to learn about different areas of the arts industry such as playwriting, design, theatre making and directing. The week culminates with an ensemble performance, devised by the participants, for an invited audience including families, carers and teachers.

## 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

- Accommodation for 10 regional participants and their families at Quest Southbank
- Group screening of the 2025 Education & Families Production, *World Problems* by Emma Mary Hall
- Creative artists as guest facilitators in the workshops
- Creating a final performance combining the week's activities, directed by teaching artists Tahlee Fereday, Sahil Saluja and Alice Qin
- A set design created by students in a workshop with Designer Bianca Pardo

## PROGRAM HISTORY

Melbourne Theatre Company has delivered the Young Artists Week (formerly known as the Youth Scholarship Course) every year – with the exception of 2020 – since it began in 2002. In 2021, the course was delivered online due to COVID.

Over 500 young people have directly experienced this program, and its enduring positive impact has been felt by countless family members, friends, school peers and teachers. The participants' performance on the final day has become a yearly highlight for Melbourne Theatre Company staff and donors.

Teaching artists for the program include directors, actors, designers, and other creative artists and technicians from Melbourne Theatre Company productions. Actor-director Jane Bayly directed the program for many years, and theatre makers Katrina Cornwell and Morgan Rose were co-directors from 2019–2024.

The program format and content continues to be developed and refined, informed by rigorous evaluation of each year's program and participant feedback. The 2025 cohort will return to participate in a Second Act of the program, planned for Saturday, 16 May 2026.

**'Fun, inspirational, educational.'**

- 2025 participant

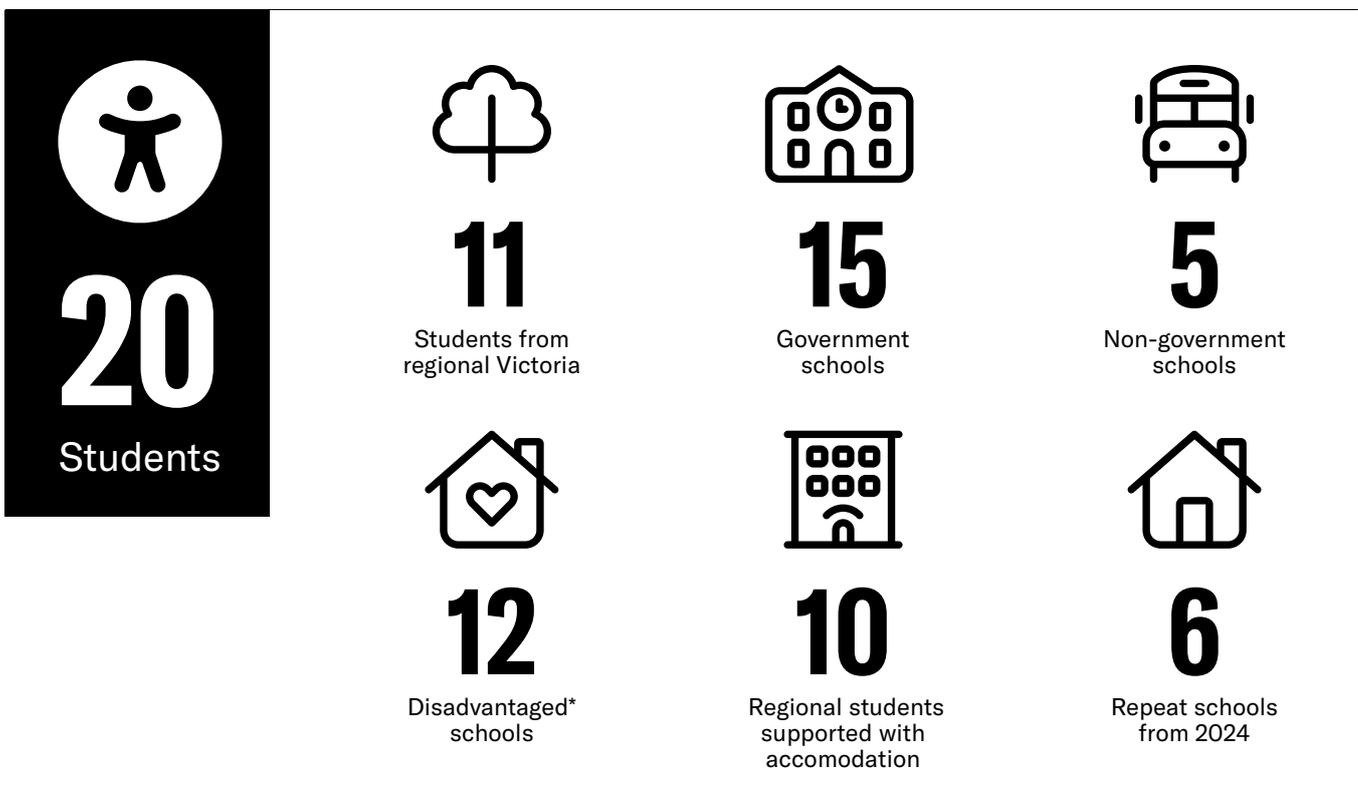
**'It was so phenomenal and  
it should 100% continue.'**

- 2025 participant



# PARTICIPANTS

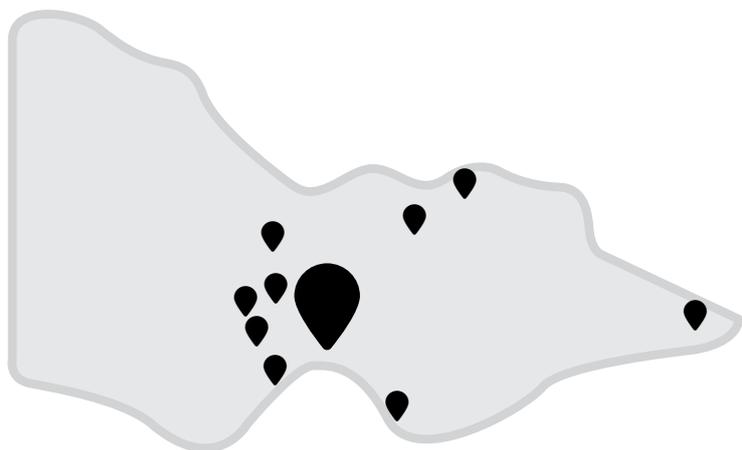
20 students in Victorian secondary schools were selected to participate in the program and one student from 2024 returned this year.



\* Schools with an ICSEA (index of cultural and socio-economic advantage) below 1,000

Students came from across Victoria to participate in the program.

Benalla, Bendigo, Geelong, Inverloch, Kyneton, Mallacoota, Maryborough, Sebastopol, Wodonga



# PROGRAM CONTENT

Melbourne Theatre Company offers a unique opportunity for young people to explore and express their creativity in a week of workshops and hands-on learning experiences.

In 2025, the week explored the theme of change. Using script excerpts from source material *World Problems* by Emma Mary Hall as the basis of the course, the students participated in a variety of activities that focused on their own stories and the world problems they care about.

Lead Teaching Artists **Tahlee Fereday** and **Sahil Saluja** directed the week of creating, devising and playmaking in a safe and inclusive environment. While ensuring the participants felt welcome, heard and understood, the team guided the students through the process of creating new work through improvisation and text-based activities that involved music, movement and play.

Professional guest artists who work with Melbourne Theatre Company, conducted workshops with the participants that integrated the stimulus text and helped build toward the final performance. In 2025, four guest artists shared their knowledge and skills with the group. Playwright **Dan Giovannoni** helped the students explore new ideas and write their own unique stories in his playwriting workshop. Set and Costume Designer **Bianca Pardo** facilitated a hands-on activity where students created props that became part of the stage's cosmos backdrop for the final presentation.

The students also practiced their creativity in theatre-maker **Lauren Swain's** workshop by using butchers' paper to make aprons for a Masterchef-style 'plates with memories' activity. And Director **Alice Qin** helped direct the final presentation, complete with stage lighting and music.

## MTC DIGITAL THEATRE SCREENING

On the Wednesday evening, the participants watched a digital recording of last year's Education & Families production, *World Problems* by Emma Mary Hall. This production was performed on the same stage where students were working in 2025. The students were eager to see the production having worked with excerpts from the script during the week.

## PRESENTATION

After a week of learning and creating together, the participants presented their work to an audience of family, carers, teachers and industry professionals from Melbourne Theatre Company. Drawing from the themes of memory and change, their devised ensemble performance was a testament to the hard work of the participants throughout the week.



# TEAM



## **TAHLEE FEREDAY** **Lead Teaching Artist**

Tahlee Fereday is a graduate of Victorian College of the Arts. Her previous performances with Melbourne Theatre Company include *Astroman*, *Cybec Electric* and *First Stage*. Other theatre productions include

*Because the Night*, *Blackie Blackie Brown* (Malthouse Theatre); *Alternative Futures* (Theatre Works); *Love* (Dee & Cornelius) and *Fallen* (She Said Theatre). Tahlee's work in film includes *Foe* and *Blue Canaries*. In television, Tahlee appears in *Fisk* season 2 and *Super Wog* season 2, both for ABC TV. As a First Nations and queer artist, Tahlee is an advocate for representation of minority voices on the mainstage.



## **SAHIL SALUJA** **Lead Teaching Artist**

Sahil Saluja's stage credits include *Melbourne Talam*, *A Long Way Home* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *North Pool* (Lab Theatre Company); *Prehistoric* (Elbow Room); *The Way Out* (Red Stitch Actors'

Theatre); *Emma's House Special* (Spare Productions). Sahil played Suresh in the feature film *The Merger*, from director Mark Greentell, and his TV credits include *Jack Irish*, *Wentworth* and *Halifax: Retribution*. In 2016, Sahil starred in his first major film production, *The Colour of Darkness*, which was written and directed by Girish Makwana and premiered at the 2016 Indian Film Festival Melbourne. For his work in Declan Furber Gillick's *Bighouse Dreaming* (directed by Mark Wilson), he and the cast won Best Performance and Best Ensemble respectively at the Melbourne Fringe Festival and the Green Room Awards. He toured in *Anthem* under the direction of Susie Dee, a collaboration from acclaimed writers Andrew Bovell, Christos Tsiolkas, Melissa Reeves and Patricia Cornelius.



## **SARAH HOSFORD** **Support Artist**

Sarah's passion and dedication to social justice, community arts and youth welfare started in Melbourne working with refugee and migrant youth and communities, leading her to work with remote Northern

Territory Indigenous communities and within urban and rural Mongolia. For 15 years Sarah has worked as a youth centre coordinator, program facilitator, school teacher, youth welfare worker and community engagement worker within many diverse communities. Sarah believes very strongly in the rights for every individual to live without discrimination and to have access to education, health and mental health resources. Sarah believes in the power of holistic, creative and integrative healing approaches with an individual and community – that support and provide resources for self-empowerment and personal change.



## DAN GIOVANNONI Guest Artist

Dan Giovannoni lives and works in Narrm/Melbourne. He is a Writer in Residence at Melbourne Theatre Company as part of the NEXT STAGE Writers' Program. Dan's plays for families, young

people and adults have been produced across Australia in theatres, school halls, parks, tents and even a barn outside of Hobart. His plays include *Feathers*, *The Great Un-Wondering of Wilbur Whittaker*, *SLAP. BANG. KISS.*, *HOUSE*, *Mad as a Cute Snake* and *Cut Snake* (both with Amelia Chandos Evans), *Air Race*, *Bambert's Book of Lost Stories*, *Jurassica*, and two adaptations of Christos Tsiolkas' writing, *Merciless Gods* and *Loaded*. His first picture book, *HOUSE* (named after his play of the same name) is available now through Fremantle Press. He has won three Green Room Association awards, a Helpmann Award, an AWGIE, and twice been shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards.



## LAUREN SWAIN Guest Artist

Lauren Swain is a proud Dabee Wiradjuri person also with mixed settler heritage. She grew up in a rural town in the mountains of Ngarigo Country (Cooma, NSW), and is now based in the big smoke

of Naarm (Melbourne). Lauren's upbringing in a small town but in a big family, underpins a multidisciplinary artistic practice grounded in community consciousness, care and working with what you've got. Lauren has spent many days building imaginary worlds in the back paddock, rummaging through the recycling bin for costume materials and putting on theatre shows in the lounge room with her cousins (little did Lauren know this would be the foundations of their practice as a theatre maker for years to come). Lauren is an artist with Polyglot Theatre Co and Bloomshed Theatre Co. She is also the program producer for the Australian First Nations Circus and Physical Theatre Circle and can be found teaching devising skills at the VCA, University of Melbourne.



## BIANCA PARDO Guest Artist

Bianca is a passionate Melbourne/Naarm-based designer and maker. She has worked in set and costume roles on *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *En Masse*, *Interior*

(Rawcus); *One Day in September* (Perryman Theatre Company); *Guys and Dolls*, *Passing Strange* (Antipodes Theatre Company); *Hamilton* (Michael Cassel Group); *TakeBack!* (Multicultural Arts Victoria), *Ngarnk: Giver of Life* (La Mama/YIRRAMBOI Festival); *Fucking A*, *Mad Forest* (Victorian College of the Arts); *L'Oréal For Women in Science* and *Kenworth's Legacy* (Moo Motion). She was awarded the Orloff Family Charitable Trust Scholarship in 2018 and was nominated for two Green Room Awards for her *Guys and Dolls* design. Throughout 2024, Bianca completed the Besen Family Artist Program at the Malthouse Theatre with placements on *The Hate Race* and *Fuck Christmas*. She is thrilled to be continuing in the Future Creatives Program at Melbourne Theatre Company in 2025.



## ALICE QIN Guest Artist

Alice Qin is a Melbourne-based theatre maker, actor, and educator, with an interest in lifting voices from undervalued communities into a theatrical context. With Melbourne Theatre Company, she was the

Assistant Director on *The Lifespan of a Fact* and *Golden Shield*. She has directed *Security* (Darebin Arts Speakeasy) and she was the directing mentor on the award-winning 落叶归根 (Luò yè guī gēn) *Getting Home* (Melbourne Fringe). She was the directing placement for the Besen Family Artist Program at Malthouse Theatre in 2021, working on *Monsters* and *S.S. Metaphor*. As a performer, her Australian credits include *A Resourceful Hero Struggling against Incredible Odds* (Rawcus/Midsumma Festival); *The Enlightenment of the Siddhartha Gautama Buddha* and *the Encounter with the Monkey King*, *Great Sage Equal of Heaven* (Elbow Room); *Mad as a Cute Snake* (Theatre Works); *Atomic* and *Little Emperors* (Malthouse Theatre). As a workshop artist with a focus on inclusion support, she has worked with St Martins Youth Arts, Western Edge, House of Muchness and Polyglot Theatre.

# PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

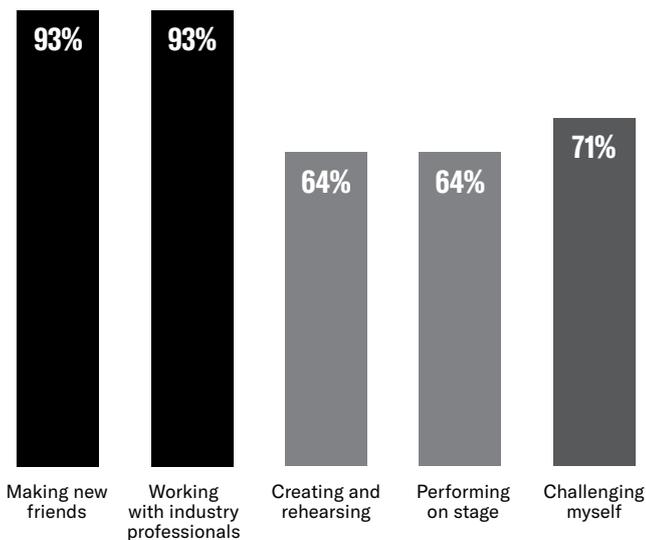
At the end of the week, we asked the participants to complete a short survey regarding their experience of the program. Their responses are outlined below.

100% of participant responses answered yes to:

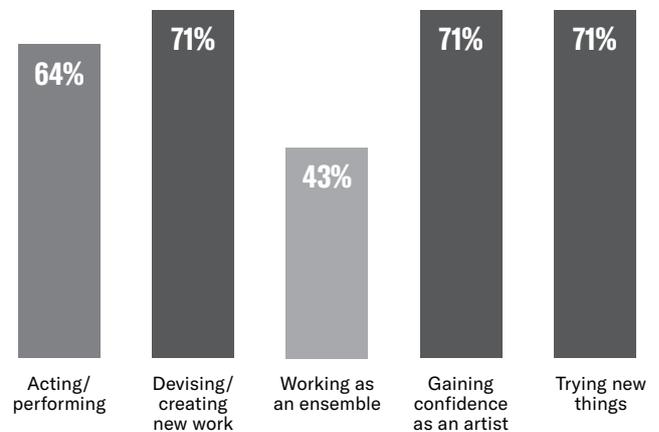
- Did the program meet your expectations?
- Did you feel supported by the staff?
- Did the teaching artists present the content in an easy-to-understand way?
- Do you feel like you have gained something from the program?



What was the best part of the week?



What skills, if any, will you take away from this week?



# PLANS FOR 2026

Melbourne Theatre Company intends to offer the Young Artists Week again in 2026.

The following points reflect learnings from the 2025 program:

- Involve more artists who work with Melbourne Theatre Company to demystify and highlight career pathways in the performing arts
- Based on participant feedback, offer more opportunities to refine performance skills
- Strengthen connections between workshop learning and the final presentation at the end of the week

## SECOND ACT

This year's cohort will participate in a 'second act' of the program, thanks to generous funding received from the Newsboys Foundation. Planned for Saturday, 16 May 2026, and facilitated by the same core team, the participants will be invited back to Melbourne Theatre Company for a tour of our production headquarters, and a drama workshop with a guest artist.

The students will also see the Season 2026 Education & Families production, *Shoelace Chaser* by Madelaine Nunn, directed by Liv Satchell. This will be presented at the Lawler at Southbank Theatre – the same venue where Young Artists Week was held in 2025.

Dinner will be provided and the students from regional Victoria, who stayed at Quest Southbank in 2025, will once again be offered a room – free of charge – to support their participation.



# TESTIMONIALS

**‘Fun, inclusive, informative.’**

– 2025 Participant

**‘Really amazing experience, everyone was extremely nice.’**

– 2025 Participant

**‘Supportive, light, engaging.’**

– 2025 Participant

**‘I enjoyed everything so much. The teaching artists were so kind and fit in so well with us and that really quickly made such a cool community in such a short amount of time. The actual learning was so engaging – not once did I find myself getting sick of the week.’**

– 2025 Participant

## **'Optimistic for future!'**

– 2025 Audience member

**'Young people inspiring each other for the things they love and enjoy.'**

– 2025 Audience member

**'A great opportunity to practice putting herself out there, to be vulnerable and receiving positive feedback and support in response.'**

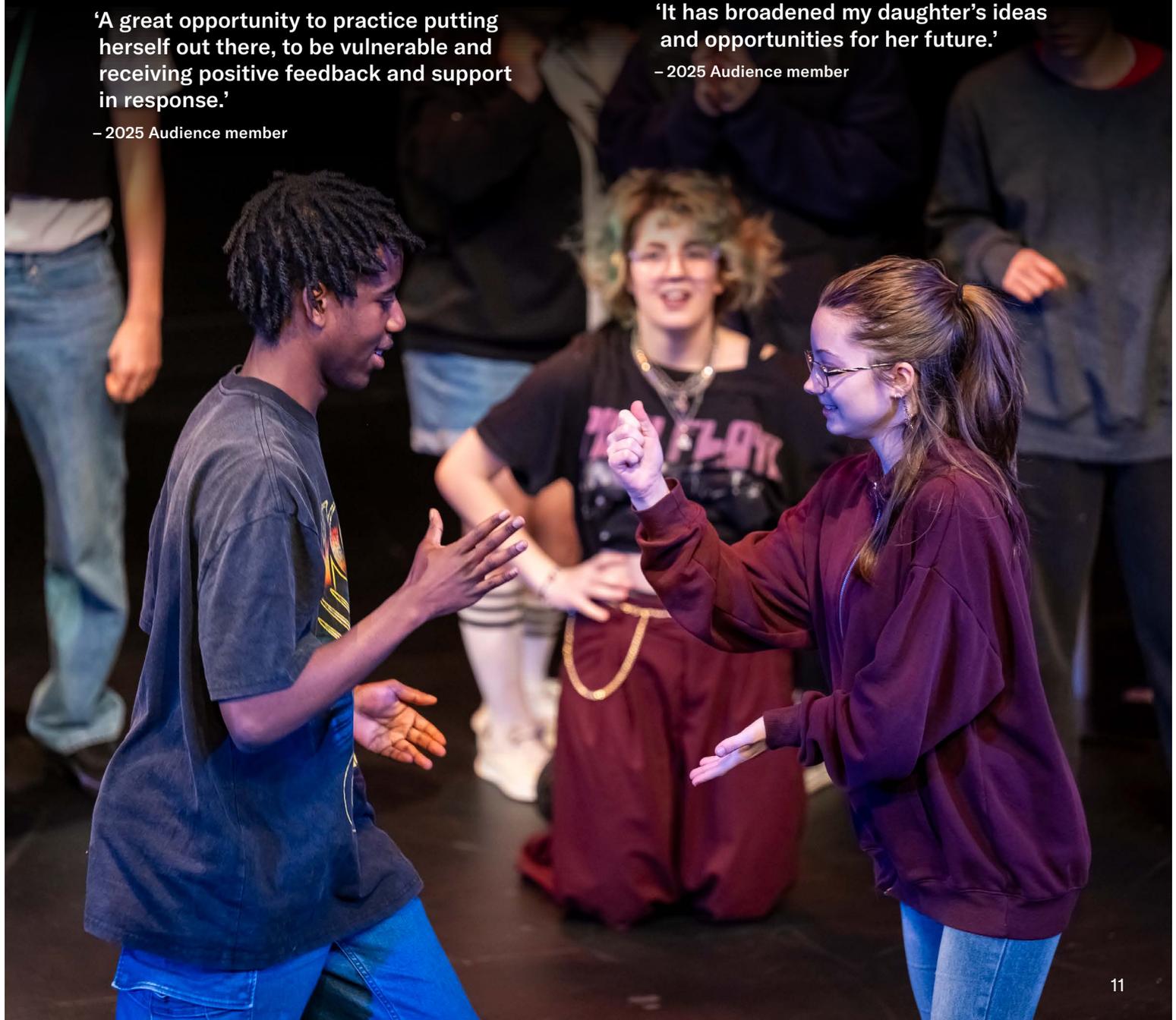
– 2025 Audience member

**'Loved it and the opportunity and thank you for sponsors and Quest.'**

– 2025 Audience member

**'It has broadened my daughter's ideas and opportunities for her future.'**

– 2025 Audience member



MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY  
EDUCATION & FAMILIES

252 Sturt St  
Southbank VIC 3006  
03 8688 0974

SOUTHBANK THEATRE

140 Southbank Blvd  
Southbank VIC 3006  
03 8688 0800

education@mtc.com.au  
mtc.com.au/education

Photography by Tiffany Garvie

MELBOURNE  
THEATRE COMPANY



SUPPORTED BY

**NEWSBOYS  
FOUNDATION**

ACCOMMODATION PARTNER

**QUEST**  
SOUTHBANK

MTC IS A DEPARTMENT  
OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF MELBOURNE



MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY IS ASSISTED BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT THROUGH  
CREATIVE AUSTRALIA, ITS PRINCIPAL ARTS INVESTMENT AND ADVISORY BODY, AND BY THE  
STATE GOVERNMENT OF VICTORIA THROUGH CREATIVE VICTORIA.

