

Sydney Festival 2016

Australia's leading summer arts festival



Photo: Symphony in The Domain photo credit Jamie Williams

The 40th Sydney Festival concluded yesterday with a full day of events and activities on Australia Day.

Running from 7 to 26 January, Sydney Festival celebrated its 40th anniversary and the fourth and final year for Festival Director **Lieven Bertels**. The Festival showcased 902 artists from 22 countries who performed in 157 free and ticketed events across greater Sydney, captivating locals and visitors alike.

The well-received program resulted in a financially successful edition, with 114 sold-out performances. Public acclaim for the Festival was matched by critical praise with 32 of our projects attracting 4 and 5-star reviews in local and international media. Despite inclement weather over the January period, attendances were strong across the free and ticketed program and are anticipated to be consistent with previous festivals around the half a million mark.

Sydney Festival launched its 40th anniversary year with a special October season of *Desdemona* based on Shakespeare's *Othello*. For the first time, Sydney Festival opened to audiences outside of its summer Festival dates with the powerful performance re-imagined by Nobel Prize laureate **Toni Morrison**, Malian singer songwriter **Rokia Traoré** and acclaimed stage director **Peter Sellars**.

In celebration of the Festival's 40 years, London based-photographer **Eva Vermandel** brought its history to life with an evocative series of portraits of artists, staff, volunteers and audience members scattered throughout the city in the special free installation *40 Portraits*.

The 2016 program saw 11 world premieres, 20 Australian premieres and 8 Australian exclusive works, bringing to Sydney some of the world's greatest artists in opera, theatre, dance, and music. Acclaimed choreographer **Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker** returned to Australia with her company **Rosas** to present her earliest choreography *Fase Four Moments to the Music of Steve Reich*, and major dance concert work *Vortex Temporum*, with both performances receiving four and five star reviews and praise by audiences and press alike.

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Sydney Festival 2016 was a celebration of international and Australian creativity, with Lieven Bertels' priorities as Festival Director of the past four festivals well-articulated in his final Festival program. In addition to some of the biggest international names coming to Sydney in Australian debut performances, 2016 saw an emphasis on local and international talent coming together for exquisite collaborations. **Sydney Chamber Opera** teamed up with European director **Pierre Audi** in *Passion*, a 21st century retelling of Monteverdi's *l'Orfeo* by French composer **Pascal Dusapin** whilst Australian singer-songwriter **Kate Miller-Heidke** performed the enigmatic title role in the interactive song cycle *The Book of Sand*, created by **Michel van der Aa** as a digital accessible work available Australia wide.

Taking part over the closing week of the Festival, **Anima Eterna Brugge** performed Australia's first ever Beethoven symphonic marathon on period instruments. Taking place over five consecutive evenings, Beethoven's exuberant Ninth Symphony raised the roof of the Sydney Opera House in a grand finale performance on January 25 with Sydney's own **Australian Brandenburg Choir**.

Other popular events in the ticketed program included both international and home-grown work, from the centrepiece theatre work *Woyzeck* by Germany's **Thalia Theatre Hamburg** to the world premiere of *Meow Meow's Little Mermaid*, which opened to outstanding reviews. The magical storytelling theatre work *The Object Lesson* made its Australian debut in a sell-out season, whilst **Mammalian Diving Reflex's** group of local over 65's wowed audiences in *All The Sex I've Ever Had* – with extra performances added for both events.

The diverse music program thrilled audiences with Australia's enigmatic **Dirty Three** getting back together for one of their very last performances in a special Festival show; and **Joanna Newsom** returning to Sydney in her first Australian show in five years to launch her new album *Divers* at the Sydney Opera House. The Meriton Festival Village in Hyde Park again proved most popular with a ticketed program of circus, comedy and cabaret shows, as well as over 20 contemporary music performances.

Sydney Festival is proud of its 89 free events, making up over half of the total program. A spectacular free performance from **The Flaming Lips** kicked off the opening weekend of the Festival at the famous Summer Sounds in The Domain concert. The psychedelic band entertained thousands with frequent costume changes, confetti cannons, video projections, balloons, a dazzling lighting show and front-man **Wayne Coyne** surfing the crowd in an oversized hamster ball.

People of all ages were invited to help French artist **Olivier Grossetête** build a temporary city in Darling Harbour and at Sydney's new creative precinct, the Cutaway at Barangaroo Reserve, in one of the largest community participation events presented in the Festival's history. The people of Sydney helped create eleven monumental cardboard buildings for the epic installation *The Ephemeral City* inside the Cutaway precinct before destroying the city on Australia Day in a spectacular destruction curated by the French artist.

In 2016, the Festival included important Indigenous projects: **Stephen Page's** directorial debut feature film *SPEAR* by **Bangarra Dance Theatre**; the major recent work by Broome's internationally acclaimed dance-theatre company **Marrugeku**, *Cut the Sky*; and the special backyard theatre work *Fire Bucket*, featuring the stories of Aboriginal elder and Bidjambul man **Uncle Wes Marne**, whilst the stories and dance of *Djuki Mala* received well-deserved standing ovations.

Sydney Festival proudly presented a dedicated Parramatta program, this time extending events to run for the full three weeks of the Festival. A new Festival hub at Prince Alfred Square presented a program of free events and a large scale fairground like no other, with the captivating *Arquitectura de Feria* delighting audiences. Parramatta was also host to the Australian premiere performance of the international family show *La Verita* at Riverside Theatres whilst audiences were treated to a special season of **David Grieg's** extraordinary play *The Events* at Granville Town Hall.

As a tribute to the passing of one of the greatest figures of modern music, Sydney Festival's free DJ sets at

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Meriton Festival Village celebrated the life and music of David Bowie. Fans from far and wide came together to listen to the greatest hits of the legendary, other-worldly performer in an impromptu event at the Festival.

Sydney Festival 2016 was made possible through the generous core and special funding from its principal stakeholders the NSW Government - supporting the Festival through Arts NSW, Barangaroo Delivery Authority and Destination NSW - alongside the City of Sydney and Parramatta City Council. The Festival continued its partnership with principal sponsor The Star and leadership partner China Southern Airlines. Sydney Festival acknowledges the increased and ongoing support of many private donors who play a vital role in making sure the Festival continues to present a vibrant and audacious arts program.

The 2016 Festival was the fourth Sydney Festival to be directed by Lieven Bertels, who will take up the new position of Artistic Director of Leeuwarden Fryslân 2018 – Cultural Capital of Europe.

During Lieven's four year tenure Sydney Festival commissioned and/or premiered over 40 new Australian works. Seven of these were made in the framework of the Confederation of Australian Festivals (CAIAF) through the Major Festivals Initiative (MFI) and went on to tour Australia after their Sydney Festival debut including *Meow Meow's Little Mermaid*, *Am I*, *Masquerade*, *Secret River* and *Black Diggers*, which was seen by over 34,000 people across the country during its national tour.

Lieven Bertels says: *"I feel privileged to have shared such special moments with Sydneysiders and the many visitors from interstate and overseas that came to discover our program. I'm proud to leave the Festival in good financial health and with an exciting artistic future ahead under incoming director Wesley Enoch. I'm forever grateful to the Sydney Festival Board of Directors, to our public stakeholders, sponsors and donors, and especially to our dedicated and hard-working team, who make Sydney the world's most wonderful city in summer."*

The Sydney Festival Annual Review will be published in April.

When Thursday 7 January - Tuesday 26 January 2016

sydneyfestival.org.au/

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