

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 5 April 2023

- **SYDNEY FESTIVAL REFLECTS ON 2023 SUCCESS**
- **OLIVIA ANSELL TO LEAD SYDNEY FESTIVAL THROUGH TO 2025**

Sydney Festival organisers have hailed the 2023 festival a resounding success with festival attendance reaching in excess of 420,000. Whilst Festival Director, Olivia Ansell accepts an invitation to extend her tenure through to 2025.

Organisers saw audiences and visitors surge back to the city and its surrounds as they relished the full-scale return of the beloved event after a challenging few years of lockdowns, cancellations and wild weather. With an exhilarating program of live music, performance, visual art and dance, Sydney Festival 2023 proved yet again that there is nowhere like Sydney to experience an exhilarating summer of art.

Across a packed 25-day program, the Festival welcomed **420,234** attendances into theatres, public parks, outdoor spaces, galleries, clubs, swimming pools and hospitality venues alike. The immersive *Frida Kahlo: The Life of an Icon* exhibition, covering 1750 square metres in a major takeover of The Cutaway at Barangaroo, drew returning summer crowds with rave five-star reviews and **86,205** attendees.

The 2023 Festival's emphasis on site-specific programming saw Sydney reimagined anew, from a sandy beachscape in the middle of Sydney Town Hall for the transportive Lithuanian opera-performance work *Sun & Sea*, and a takeover of Martin Place's "mushroom building" (the Commercial Travellers' Association), featuring 16 nights of contemporary music programming in the club's underground bar and an overnight sonic experience in the hotel rooms above.

Sydney Festival also extended its footprint in Western Sydney, with a sellout season for international circus troupe Kalabanté Productions' *Afrique en Cirque* at Riverside Theatres; a commanding portraiture exhibition from Brenda L. Croft titled *Dyin Nura* alongside *Garraigarrang Badu*, the first ever full-length dance work in Dharug language followed by an evening of song from Emma Donovan; and a contemporized *Sydney Symphony Under the Stars* concert in Parramatta Park featuring soloist Mindy Meng Wang and local composer Holly Harrison which attracted close to 10,000 people for a stellar Lunar New Year celebration.

The Festival's role as the largest commissioner of new Australian work continued in 2023, with various major productions including Trans-Tasman collaboration *Hide the Dog*, Stephanie Lake's *Manifesto* and Mary Finsterer's *Antarctica*, performed by Sydney Chamber Opera and Asko|Schönberg, all embarking on their world premiere seasons with the festival's support.

This summer's event also brought some of the brightest global stars to local audiences, from circus auteur James Thierrée to Spain's formidable queen of flamenco Sara Baras; and championed Australian talents to remarkable new heights, with the likes of Hamed Sadeghi, Justine Clarke and Elaine Crombie.

An annual hallmark of the festival is its empowering First Nations focused Blak Out program which this year delivered a phenomenally moving performance of *Vigil: Awaken* on Sydney Harbour – a powerful reawakening of the spirit of Me-Mel, co-directed by Stephen Page AO and Sydney Festival's Artist in Residence, Jacob Nash.

Sydney Festival 2023 in numbers:

25 Days
141 Events
1494 Performances
1091 Artists Employed
309 Arts workers engaged directly by the Festival
64 Venues
53 Free Events
21 New Australian Works
30 World Premieres
20 Australian Exclusives
21 Sydney Festival Commissioned Works
420,234 Total Festival Attendance
86,205 *Frida Kahlo: The Life of an Icon* Attendees

Sydney Festival's CEO, Chris Tooher said: "It was heartening to see audiences, visitors and tourists flock back to Sydney for this year's festival, including local and international artists who brought the city to life again with a rich stimulating cultural program. Our festival has once again proved itself as both an integral summer tourism and visitation driver and a vital promoter of arts and culture in this country. The success of our 2023 festival is a clear sign Sydney is back bigger and better than ever."

Off the back of the hugely successful 2023 event, Sydney Festival Director, Olivia Ansell, has today accepted an invitation from the Festival Board to extend her current contract a further year, taking her tenure at the helm of the festival through to 2025.

Since joining Sydney Festival, Ansell has brokered numerous world-premiere productions, commissioned large-scale Australian work and collaborated with the international cultural community to create and bring incredible world-class festival experiences to Sydney.

Sydney Festival Chair, David Kirk MBE said: "It is an absolute pleasure to follow up

the resounding success of our 2023 event with the fitting news of Olivia's extended tenure. She has a deep passion for Sydney and her experience and creative ambition is a perfect match for where we want to take the festival over the next two years. As is her way, I have no doubt Olivia will create and present an additional two festivals of epic nature. I look forward to seeing her continue to take the artistic reigns at Sydney Festival and seeing her vision for year three and four come to life."

Olivia Ansell also shared her enthusiasm, saying: "I look forward to a continued collaboration with so many formidable artists from Australia and across the globe, sharing authentic stories that can invigorate, enrich and animate our city. The relationship of artist to audience is a delicate love letter, that a festival can humbly scribe. It is an honour to walk beside Sydney Festival's staff, artists, creatives and diverse communities into 2025, as we further forge Sydney Festival's stellar reputation as one of the preeminent international arts festivals and commissioners of new Australian work."

Ansell was named Festival Director in 2021 before leading her first festival in January of 2022. Her initial three-year appointment was to see her in the role through to 2024 with an additional year now contracted for 2025.

Prior to joining Sydney Festival, Ansell spent almost three years as Head of Contemporary Performance at Sydney Opera House. A highly accomplished arts professional with over 20 years' industry experience, Ansell has spanned roles of director, choreographer and performing artist. Her past roles include Initial Conceiver and Co-Executive Producer of the hugely popular immersive experience *Hidden Sydney*, Artistic Director of Sydney Comedy Festival at Sydney Town Hall and Curator of *Kings Bloody Cross* for Vivid Ideas. Ansell was previously named one of Vivid Sydney's Top 100 Creative Catalysts.

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MEDIA KIT

Supporting imagery is available for download [here](#).

NOTES TO EDITOR

- Artistic Director Olivia Ansell has accepted an invitation from the Sydney Festival Board to lead the festival for an additional year (2025)
- Ansell was named Festival Director in 2021 before leading her first festival in January of 2022. Her initial contract ran through to the 2024 festival
- The 2023 Sydney Festival a resounding success with festival attendance reaching in excess of 420,000
- The *Frida Kahlo: The Life of an Icon* exhibition attracted 86,205 attendees
- Sydney Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW and Destination NSW, alongside the City of Sydney, City of Parramatta, as well as Principal Philanthropic supporter Peter Freedman AM and private supporters and corporate sponsors.