

# MEDIA RELEASE

## SYDNEY FESTIVAL IS HERE AS 24 DAYS OF ART, MUSIC, PERFORMANCE AND SPECTACLE GETS UNDERWAY

Friday 5 January



*Encantado*

Sydney Festival opens today with a city-wide celebration of art bursting into the summer calendar and running through 28 January. Across 24 action-packed days, taking in 50+ venues and enlisting the talents of hundreds of international and local artists, this year's festival is a testament to the creative appetite of Sydney and its culturally curious audiences. Sprawling the city and surrounds, from Parramatta to Bondi Beach, Sydney Festival has something for everyone this January.

Of the festival's kick-off, **Sydney Festival Director Olivia Ansell**, said: "Today's the day: Sydney Festival arrives to deliver a summer of art for local Sydneysiders, international holidaymakers, visiting out-of-towners and digital audiences near and far. This is a program that revels in the unique talents, cultural precincts and attitudes of our city whilst also delivering some of the world's brightest stars to Sydney's doorstep. Drink in *The Thirsty Mile* at the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct – our newest festival hub, experience spellbinding free opera on the harbour, get into a spot of trouble at *Smashed: The Nightcap* and stay all summer long."

**Minister for the Arts John Graham**, said: “Sydney Festival is part of why you want to be in Sydney in January. I look forward to it each year. The festival opens each new year with a burst of cultural expression and creativity that brings people to NSW and fills our summer January nights with music, dancing, performance, tastes and colour. The NSW Government has long been a proud supporter of the Sydney Festival – since 1977 – and this year’s program promises to be another great edition, with something for everyone, from the free programs to the late-night performances.”

This morning, the **Te Aranganui** Māori choir will awaken **Lisa Reihana’s** *Te Wheke-a-Muturangi: The Adversary* in a special Opening Day event at Watermans Cove. The massive water installation – measuring 15 metres in diameter – reimagines the Māori myth of Te Wheke; the giant octopus said to have led Polynesian fisherman Kupe across the water where he discovered Aotearoa New Zealand. **Te Wheke** will continue to watch over the festival right through January, with festival-goers able to take an even closer look via Sydney Harbour Kayaks.

Later tonight, the first of the festival’s many Australian Exclusive events gets underway, with jubilant dance work **Encantado** opening at Sydney Opera House. The brainchild of the Rio de Janeiro-based choreographer, activist and teacher **Lia Rodrigues**, *Encantado* is a wild celebration of nature and our place in it. On stage, 11 dancers transform 140 colourful blankets into shape-shifting costumes and personas in a work that takes inspiration from the very real environmental and spiritual struggles experienced in today’s Brazil.

And even later tonight, Sydney’s new after-hours precinct and festival hub, **The Thirsty Mile** at the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct begins to take shape. Worming its way around Pier 2/3 and **The Thirsty Mile’s** pop-up Moonshine Bar is **Hi-Vis** by British sculptor **Michael Shaw**. Inspired by the shapes of bee abdomens, lungs, intestines and algae and measuring 46-metres long, the work’s neon colours shine bright against the harbour’s waters before beginning to glow after dark. To get the party started, some of the city’s most beloved DJs straight off the airways at FBi Radio perform alongside Shaw’s installation at the **Moonshine Bar** on the first Saturday night of the festival, before American funk and soul artist **Judith Hill** lifts the roof off the festival’s dedicated speakeasy at Sydney Theatre Company on the Sunday evening.

Nearby at Wharf 1 Theatre, there’s a devilishly good time to be had at **The Thirsty Mile’s** resident cabaret show, **Smashed: The Nightcap**. This femme-fronted variety extravaganza features some of Australia’s most über-talented circus, drag and cabaret acts, all appearing under the less-than-watchful eye of host **Victoria Falconer**. Entertaining audiences almost every night of the festival, **Smashed: The Nightcap** will also showcase a line-up of featured guest performers, including the talents of *Drag Race Down Under* breakout star **Kween Kong**, internationally awarded comedy cabaret icon and Berlin boy wonder **Hans** and global drag legend **Courtney Act**, along with other surprise guests.

As the festival continues, more hotspots along **The Thirsty Mile** will come alive with site-specific artworks, eclectic live music, immersive installations and vibrant dance works across the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct, plus curated club nights by electronic music tastemakers **Astral People**, Sydney champions of underground subcultures **WavyLand** and avant garde queer dance floor enthusiasts **CONTROL**.

Come opening weekend, the festival’s hugely popular live music series at the **Brett Whiteley Studios** gets underway with intimate gigs from exceptionally talented Australian singer-songwriter **Jo Davie** and Grammy-winning powerhouse **Judith Hill**. Audiences who may have missed out on tickets can now catch Hill in an additional show at Sydney Theatre Company. Following its Sydney premiere earlier this week, **Kate Miller Heidke’s** new smash-hit musical comedy **BANANALAND**, starring Australian theatre talent-on-the-rise **Max McKenna**, continues over the weekend at Parramatta’s Riverside Theatres.

Next week marks the World Premiere of the much anticipated rock ‘n’ roll stagershow telling of the Warumpi Band story, **Big Name, No Blankets**, directed by theatre legend **Rachael Maza** and produced by **ILBIJERRI Theatre Company**. And a long-forgotten star of Sydney’s days of old will be rediscovered with the World Premiere of **Send for Nellie**, a brand new show about the life of pioneering queer cabaret artist Nellie Small.

An epic free outdoor opera will dock in front of the Australian National Maritime Museum in **Con Costi’s** astonishing outdoor staging of **Il Tabarro**, which sees Puccini’s one-act masterpiece transported to Depression-era Sydney and performed live aboard the Carpentaria Lightship and backed by the **Victorian Opera Chamber Orchestra**.

And the Festival's live music takeover of the ACO Neilson gets rolling with a jazz-centric showcase, including performances by Cuban superstar **Harold López-Nussa**; multifaceted Norwegian guitarist and composer **LILJA** and Berlin-based trumpeter **Konstantin Döben** and his band **Conic Rose**, amongst other local artists and overseas guests.

The festival's later weeks will reimagine the ACO Neilson again with a second week of contemporary music programming featuring Irish songman **David Keenan**, Brooklyn-based multi-hyphenate **SUO**, local music legends **Deborah Conway** and **Willy Zygiel**, First Nations singer-songwriter on-the-rise **Kee'ahn** and New York's indie-folk hope **Julie Byrne**, to name a few.

Week three at the ACO Neilson then transforms for **Temperament**, a week-long celebration and deconstruction of JS Bach involving an exceptional program of local and international artists and ensembles co-curated by multi-instrumentalist **Benjamin Skepper**.

The live music offering continues over at the Sydney Opera House with a performance from the singular queen of sitar **Anoushka Shankar**, who will also later appear alongside **William Barton**, **Aunty Delmae Barton** and **Véronique Serret** at the festival's beloved free outdoor concert at Parramatta Park, **Sydney Symphony Under the Stars: Pictures in the Sky**. **Michael Griffiths** then pays tribute to the **Pet Shop Boys** in **It's a Sin: Songs of Love and Shame**, a deeply personal celebration of the band's music and its influence on Michael's life and loves.

Festival-goers need not travel far to get a taste of Southeast Asia with the Seymour Centre presenting a series of works celebrating the artistry and stories of Australia's neighbours. Opening in the festival's second week is **White Gold**, a mesmerising Cambodian circus show by **Phare**, a unique contemporary circus sprung from a non-profit NGO. And Indonesia's **Papermoon Puppet Theatre** arrive in Sydney for the first time to present **A Bucket of Beetles**, an all-ages story about coming of age, bugs and magical adventures. Later in the month, the Seymour Centre also hosts intercultural dance group **Marrugeku** as they present **Mutiara**, a choreographic truth telling about Broome's harsh history of pearl shelling, and the Australian Exclusive run of **The Chosen Haram**, a pumping circus theatre work brimming with visual flair, high energy and dazzling acrobatics. The Seymour Centre's outdoor courtyard will also come alive with 12 days and nights of free music, food and fun with a pop-up **Bayan Market**.

Running through 28 January, further highlights from across the program include the mind-bending **Are we not drawn onward to new erA** by acclaimed Belgian theatre innovators **Ontroerend Goed**; a cutting-edge contemporary dance double-bill of **Skid** by **Damien Jalet** and **SAABA** from **Sharon Eyal** from the prestigious, forward-thinking **GöteborgsOperans Danskompani** (Sweden); an investigation into the very nature of investigation in multimedia murder mystery **Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World**; the riotous Edinburgh Fringe standout **Ode to Joy (How Gordon got to go to the nasty pig party)**; and the genre-busting production of **Orpheus & Eurydice** by **Opera Australia** and the trailblazing artists of **Circa**.

There's no stopping the music this January with performances from New York glamour-puss chanteuse **Rizo**, soaring Irish vocalist **Lisa O'Neill**, a Kate Bush-inspired cabaret concert sans Kate Bush in **An Evening Without Kate Bush**, Australia's own **Courtney Barnett** in a special two-part performance at City Recital Hall and a closing night celebration featuring acclaimed South African DJ **Mo'Nique (Ntshepe TsekereBopape)** and guests.

The festival also presents a plethora of free activities and events throughout the month, from a pair of seafaring musicians whose boat doubles as their stage in **Arka Kinari** to House of **Fast Fashion's** sustainability-minded fashion parade at Tumbalong Park. There is also roaming four-metre-high **Seagulls** by **Snuff Puppets** and acrobatic storytelling by **Queensland's Arc Circus Co.** with **Living Sculptures: How the Birds got their Colours** popping up across beaches and parks in Cronulla, Bondi, Manly and Parramatta through to Tumbalong Park. This year the festival's annual reflection and vigil ceremony is imbued with a sense of youthful hope in **Vigil: The Future feat. Marliya Choir** at Barangaroo Headland on 25 January.

And for those who might not be able to attend the festival in-person, **Sydney Festival AT HOME** brings specially produced free on demand and live content to audiences everywhere. Enjoy livestreams of **Il Tabarro** and **Vigil: The Future feat. Marliya Choir**; catch on demand performances such as **How the Birds Got Their Colours** on Bondi Beach and **Tim Freedman** in concert; and see the inspiration behind Force Majeure's **Gurr Era Op** and Warumpi Band stagemusical **Big Name, No Blankets**.

– ENDS –

### **NOTES TO EDITOR**

- Sydney Festival runs 5-28 January 2024
- Tickets on sale now
- For a complete summary of this year's program strands including all free events and venues visit [sydneyfestival.org.au](https://sydneyfestival.org.au)

### **MEDIA KIT**

Imagery, B-roll and media sheets available [here](#)

### **ABOUT SYDNEY FESTIVAL**

Sydney Festival is one of Australia's largest international arts festivals, with a stellar reputation for bold, inventive and intelligent programming. Its vibrancy reflects the confidence, creativity and vigour of one of the world's most beautiful cities. Under the curation of Festival Director Olivia Ansell, the Festival's mission is to deliver an exhilarating summer of art, drawing stories from Sydney's 65,000-year history through to its contemporary zeitgeist. Sydney Festival stages the world's best artists whilst nurturing its homegrown talent; many of Australia's most memorable theatrical productions have stemmed from its premieres and commissions. The buzz of summer wouldn't be the same without the Festival's spectacular installations, immersive experiences and live events splashed across Sydney each January.