

MEDIA RELEASE

SYDNEY FESTIVAL EXPANDS FREE PROGRAM: A SUMMER OF ART AWAITS

Wednesday 13 December



Te Wheke-a-Muturangi: The Adversary by Lisa Reihana

Boosting an already bumper line-up, Sydney Festival continues to expand its free events offering this January with some fresh new additions to the line-up and more details revealed for what to see and do this summer. Running 5-28 January, the stacked 2024 program invites Sydney audiences to see their city differently and even take to the stage as part of the festival.

The traditional Māori sounds of the **Te Aranganui** choir will mark the festival's official opening, with a special performance and Welcome to Country from Muruwari man **Matt Doyle** by the waterfront on Friday 5 January. Sharing the stories of their ancestors, the choir will herald the arrival of *Te Wheke-a-Muturangi: The Adversary*, artist **Lisa Reihana's** majestic installation in Watermans Cove near Barangaroo ferry wharf. Using over 1,000 pieces of fabric, Reihana has created a vibrant inflatable character of Te Wheke, who according to Māori mythology, is the giant octopus chased by legendary Polynesian fisherman Kupe, who some say was the first to discover Aotearoa New Zealand. During January, festival-goers can also hit the water and get up close to the artwork via a kayak tour from Sydney Harbour Kayaks.

Another up close festival experience will see volunteer participants hit the City Recital Hall stage alongside virtuoso musician **Genevieve Lacey** and renowned dancer-choreographer **Stephanie Lake**. Participants won't require any dance experience, with *Soliloquy* designed to totally subvert the hierarchy of a traditional music concert presentation. Under the guidance of Lake and director **Gideon Obarzanek**, dancers will create a hypnotic

on-stage performance around Lacey as she performs Telemann's extraordinary *Twelve Fantasias for Solo Flute*. Volunteers can register their interest via the Sydney Festival website.

The alluring line-up for Seymour Centre's **Banyan Nights** program has been revealed. With works like *Mutiara*, a deep dive into Broome's pearling history by intercultural dance company **Marrugeku**; **White Gold** from Cambodian circus act **Phare** and exquisite puppetry for the whole family in *A Bucket of Beetles* (Indonesia) being shared onstage, the Seymour Centre's outdoor courtyard will be transformed to celebrate the rich culture of Cambodia and its neighbours. The Southeast Asian market square will feature a delicious food truck, tuk tuks, crafting workshops, lanterns and live entertainment from **Maggie Tra**, **Pho the Girls**, **Suara Indonesian Dance Troupe**, **Alisha K**, **Marcus Whale**, **Blanche**, and a curated evening with **Dyan Tai + friends** and **Rainbow Chan**.

Of the Festival's free program, **Sydney Festival Director Olivia Ansell** said: "Whether you're hitting the spotlight as part of *Soliloquy* or strutting the runway in *House of Fast Fashion*, Sydney Festival is famous for its free offerings each summer. Experience world class opera by the harbour, check out The *Thirsty Mile*'s larger than life Moonshine Bar or catch a dreamtime circus across our beaches and parks. Your presence completes the festival. Just beware of those pesky four-metre-high seagulls!"

Registrations will shortly open the festival's epic free production of *Il Tabarro*, staged harbourside aboard the Carpentaria Lightship at the Australian National Maritime Museum. Maverick director **Constantine Costi** transports Puccini's one-act operatic masterpiece to 1930s Depression-era Sydney, while conductor **Simon Bruckard** leads a cast of exceptional Australian talent and a live orchestra for an unmissable performance under the stars.

In a unique festival collaboration, the **Marliya Choir** has joined the annual *Vigil* event held on the Stargazer Lawn of Barangaroo Headland on 25 January. For this year's ceremony, the group of young Indigenous singers from Cairns will sing existing songs from their **Spinifex Gum** works, performed in traditional language that recognise land, water and communities alongside a brand-new commission for *Vigil: The Future* feat. **Marliya Choir**. Working closely with the festival, choir members have been asked to reflect on how they see the future Australia they want to live in, with their answers shared in song and in the night sky above Sydney through a spectacular drone experience.

Sailing into Sydney early next year, global seafarers **Arka Kinari** will dock at Campbell's Cove for their harbourside season in January. Across three nights, their sailing vessel will be transformed into a stage for a free multimedia performance from duo **Grey Filastine** (US) and **Nova Ruth** (Indonesia). Combining synthy post-folk beats and cinematic visual artistry, the pair explore the potential of a radically different future after the carbon economy, one that promotes resilience and encourages re-engagement with the sea.

The festival's sprawling free program also includes roving appearances from the cheeky **Snuff Puppets Seagulls** who'll be causing havoc across Tumbalong Park, *The Thirsty Mile*, Bondi Beach and Circular Quay this summer. And the acrobatic storytelling of *Living Sculptures: How the Birds got their Colours* will see pop-up outdoor performances from Queensland's **Arc Circus Co.** at Tumbalong Park, Parramatta Square's Dharug Circle, South Cronulla Beach, South Steyne Beach Manly and Sydney's iconic Bondi Beach. Performances at Tumbalong Park and Dharug Circle Parramatta will also include free **Weaving Workshops** after the circus show.

There are plenty more free festival events and performances throughout January, including the beloved starlit summer concert, *Sydney Symphony Under the Stars* at Parramatta Park; a fashionable takeover of Tumbalong Park in *House of Fast Fashion* and a lecture by multidisciplinary artist and composer **DJ Mo Laudi** at Artspace, along with much more.

MORE MUSIC, DANCE AND LATE NIGHTS

New events and shows have been added to the festival's ticketed program, including a second, larger standalone gig from Grammy-winning singer-songwriter **Judith Hill** at Sydney Theatre Company on Sunday 7 January. As featured in the Oscar-winning documentary film, *20 Feet from Stardom*, Hill has spent decades touring alongside the likes of Elton John, Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson. Performing with her stellar live band, Judith will share her stunning blend of smokey blues, funk, hip-hop and soul with local audiences.

And the nighttime line-up for the festival's hub has been announced, with curated events by electronic music tastemakers **Astral People**, Sydney champions of underground subcultures **WavyLand** and avant garde queer

dance floor enthusiasts **CONTROL** for some *Late Nights at the Thirsty Mile*. The full swing festival takeover of the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct is a cheeky nod to the wharves' working history and a fierce nod forward to what audiences are thirsty to see change. For the first time ever, all eight Walsh Bay arts venues will be activated with a packed program on stage and off.

Meanwhile, over at the *Thirsty Mile's* Moonshine Bar, art meets music and dance in **Sculptured Riddims**, led by artist and educator **Azzam Mohamed**. Across three themed nights, dance artists share their creative responses to **Michael Shaw's** *Hi-Vis* installation, with a celebration of retro moves and grooves at night one's **Disco House**, before a high-energy hip-hop block party at **Street Fusion** and an explosive burst of Afro dance and drumming for the final evening's **Can You Afro?**

Earlybirds can then shake off the night with waterside **Sunrise Yoga** accompanied by blissed-out beats from the festival's in-house DJ down at **The Thirsty Mile**. Led by movement artist and teacher **Jazz Luna**, the classes will take inspiration from each of the main chakras (energy centres), offering a challenging, energising flow in a salute to the new year and new beginnings.

– ENDS –

NOTES TO EDITOR

- Sydney Festival runs 5-28 January 2024
- For details of the Festival's full free program, visit sydneyfestival.org.au/explore
- Judith Hill's additional performance is scheduled Sunday 7 January at Wharf 1, Sydney Theatre Company. Tickets are on sale now
- *Il Tabarro* is free, but registration is required to attend. Registration opens on Thursday 14 December via the Sydney Festival website
- Details and dates for *Seagulls* and *Living Sculptures: How the Birds got their Colours'* roving performances can be found via the Sydney Festival website
- The participant callout for *Soliloquy* is available via sydneyfestival.org.au/stories/soliloquy-participant-recruitment
- Visit sydneyfestival.org.au for more details and tickets and tickets

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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.