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Embargoed: 11.00am AEST, Tuesday 24 September 2024

KRIS NELSON NAMED FESTIVAL DIRECTOR FOR SYDNEY FESTIVAL 2026 - 2029

Kris Nelson will assume the role of Festival Director for Sydney Festival from 2026 to 2029, leading the festival into its milestone 50th edition in 2026.

The Sydney Festival Board shared the exciting news today, with Nelson joining the fold following a six-and-a-half year stint as Artistic Director and CEO at the prestigious London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT).

Sydney Festival Chair, Kate Dundas, said: "We are delighted to announce Kris Nelson as the new Festival Director of Sydney Festival. Kris' impressive leadership at LIFT, alongside his vast international experience, makes him an exceptional fit for Sydney Festival. His innovative approach to programming, commitment to diverse voices, and deep understanding of both artists and audiences will ensure that Sydney Festival continues to thrive as a dynamic and inspiring cultural event. We look forward to the bold and exciting vision Kris will bring as we embark on this next chapter."

Nelson was named incoming Festival Director after an extensive global search which saw over 100 individuals express interest in the role. The Canadian migrant is set to relocate to Australia later this year after more than a decade spent living and working in the UK and Ireland.

As Artistic Director and CEO of LIFT, Nelson was responsible for the biennial festival program of international performance in London. Held every second June and taking place across numerous venues, LIFT has drawn international acclaim for its brave stagings of contemporary, political and experimental theatre. Nelson's dynamic programs as Artistic Director and CEO with LIFT featured the likes of 24-hour theatrical phenomenon *The Second Woman* by Sydney's own Randall and Breckon, named *The Guardian's* top theatre pick of 2023, and past Sydney Festival favourite, the indoor beachside opera work, *Sun & Sea*. He also commissioned premieres of several globally successful British works including *I Am From Reykjavik* by Sonia Hughes and

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The Making of Pinocchio by Cade & MacAskill. In 2021, Nelson lead LIFT to launch Concept Touring, an innovative platform designed to explore sustainable forms of international collaboration with little to no travel; it led to Nassim Soleimanpour and Omar Elerian's LIFT 2024 hit, *ECHO (Every Cold-Hearted Oxygen)*.

Ahead of his move to Sydney, **Kris Nelson** said: "Becoming Festival Director of Sydney Festival is a tremendous opportunity. I love Sydney Festival's DNA – it's truly one of the world's greats. It's a festival that originates new ideas and ways of seeing the world as it shares powerful, daring and joyful performing arts with audiences across the city. I've long been inspired by the ambition, diversity and talent in the Australian cultural sector, and I love the festival's ability to empower Australian artists to create their boldest and best. Sydney is an exciting world city – vibrant, sophisticated and multicultural. I can't wait to make it my home and lead the team to create future-facing festivals that shape the times and resonate with audiences in every corner of the city."

Originally from Saskatoon in Canada, Nelson has spent over a decade working internationally in arts and cultural events and is no stranger to making his mark on a new city through his bold curation. While cutting his teeth working as a freelance curator and producer on festivals across Canada including Vancouver's PuSh International Performing Arts Festival and the roving Magnetic North Theatre Festival, Nelson also championed the works of experimental Canadian theatre and dance companies via his own Montréal-based touring agency, Anonym Productions. Nelson later relocated to Ireland where he served as Festival Director of the Dublin Fringe Festival from 2013 to 2017, Ireland's largest multi-disciplinary arts festival and one of the few curated fringe events in the world.

Current **Sydney Festival Director Olivia Ansell** will unveil the 2025 program – her fourth and final in the role – late next month. In the meantime, she has shared her delight at Kris' appointment: "I'm thrilled for Kris and for Sydney. I'm excited to see the next evolution of the festival unfold, with a great collaborator like Kris at the helm."

The full Sydney Festival 2025 program will be made public on Wednesday 30 October with the festival running 4-26 January. The World Premiere of *Siegfried & Roy: The Unauthorised Opera*;

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a one-off performance from Rufus Wainwright at Sydney Opera House; and US singer-songwriter Jalen Ngonda's debut Sydney shows have already been announced.

Kris Nelson will present his first program in January 2026.

Sydney Festival will announce its 2025 program, curated by Olivia Ansell, on 30 October 2025.

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Kris Nelson bio: Kris Nelson has a 20+ year career as a festival maker, curator, producer and theatre artist. His commitment to festival-making, innovative and daring artistic work and cultural mobility has led him to work across the world in some of the planet's most exciting contexts. Kris was Artistic Director/CEO of LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) from 2018-2024. His LIFT milestones include steering LIFT through the pandemic, leading the biennale to two festival editions in 2022 and 2024, with presentations of *Sun & Sea* (Lapelyte/Grainynte/Barzdziucaite), as well as works by Marlene Monteiro Freitas, Nadia Beugré, Cliff Cardinal, Chiara Bersani and others. In 2023, LIFT co-presented *The Second Woman* (Breckon/Randall), a mesmerising 24-hour performance starring Ruth Wilson with the Young Vic. He commissioned and co-produced world and UK premieres from British artists Sonia Hughes, Cade & MacAskill and Clean Break and leading international artists The Nest Collective, Nassim Soleimanpour/Omar Elerian, Janaina Leite and Lara Duarte and more. With a lifelong commitment to artist's mobility and internationalism, Kris launched the Concept Touring initiative, a new commissioning programme for international collaboration with little to no travel (2021). Kris was Festival Director of Dublin Fringe Festival, Ireland's largest multi-disciplinary arts festival, from 2013-2017, guiding hundreds of artists towards world

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premieres. He founded the innovative Canadian performing arts touring agency, Antonym. From 2008-2013, Antonym secured tours and co-productions in over 45 cities on 4 continents for artists such as Theatre Replacement, Public Recordings and 2boys.tv. Kris initiated innovative curatorial platforms like PushOFF with Joyce Rosario (Vancouver) and Spark (Montreal) connecting artists to international touring opportunities. Kris was Encounters Curator for Magnetic North Theatre Festival and has been a dramaturg for theatres across Canada.

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.

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. In 2026 Sydney Festival will celebrate its 50th anniversary.