

# MEDIA RELEASE

**SYDNEY'S HIGH SUMMER OF ART HAS ARRIVED:  
DISCOVER THRILLING THEATRE, SOARING CIRCUS, LIVE  
MUSIC, AND MORE AT SYDNEY FESTIVAL THIS JANUARY**



L-R: Siegfried & Roy: *The Unauthorised Opera*, *Dark Noon*, *Colour Maze*, *Animal* by Cirque Alfonse

**Embargoed 06.00am AEDT, Friday 3 January 2025**

Sydney Festival opens with a city-wide celebration of art bursting onto the summer calendar from today and running through 26 January. Across 23 action-packed days, taking in 40+ venues and enlisting the talents of hundreds of international and local artists, this year's festival showcases a vibrant takeover of the city that does it best. Sydneysiders and visitors are invited to dive into an exhilarating summer of art, from Parramatta to *The Thirsty Mile* at Walsh Bay,

**Bondi Beach to the Sydney Opera House, with an almost month-long showcase of storytelling, knowledge sharing and cultural immersion.**

Upon opening the 49<sup>th</sup> edition of Sydney Festival for her fourth and final program, **Sydney Festival Director Olivia Ansell**, said: “Sydney Festival is a celebration of creativity, culture and community at its finest. From magic and murder through to birth, destiny and what we leave behind – our 2025 festival edition is rich with diverse themes. This year’s festival hub down at Walsh Bay nods to Oceania with a bold kaleidoscope of color, spirit and energy whilst Parramatta delights with Sydney Symphony under the Stars and Cirque Alfonse from Quebec. Through new Australian commissions, a knockout music program and groundbreaking theatre experiences, over one thousand local and international artists make Sydney Festival a world class cultural destination this summer.”

**The Hon. John Graham, Minister for the Arts**, said: “Once again Sydney Festival will show our city at its absolute best. Over the next three weeks, Sydney’s iconic natural beauty becomes a stage for artists from Australia and around the world to create unforgettable summer nights. The NSW Government is working to bring our city back to life and there is no better time to do that than in summer during the Sydney Festival.”

This morning, the glistening Walsh Bay waterfront is transformed into **The Thirsty Mile** to officially kick off the 2025 Sydney Festival season. Attendees joining the free **Festival Welcome** event will share in a special Welcome to Country by First Nations artist and Cultural Advisor **Uncle Matthew Doyle**, and a warm greeting from **Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC**. Tongan choir **Tapakaki 'ae Fofolang** will also perform, sharing an uplifting performance in response to Visual Artist in Residence **Telly Tuita**’s striking and colour-soaked festival takeover of the precinct.

This year also sees a greater offering for visitors headed down to Walsh Bay with the precinct extending its hours as part of the festival's full-swing takeover by the water. All venues at **The Thirsty Mile** including the **Moonshine Bar** – the festival's buzzy social centerpiece and destination for late night gatherings – are a short walk from the newly opened Barangaroo Metro transport hub.

Later tonight, Quebec’s **Cirque Alfonse** – founded by **Antoine Carabinier-Lépine** and his father **Alain** – present its latest surreal circus experience, **Animal**. The beloved Québécois troupe Cirque Alfonse is an intergenerational rural-raised circus collective who are set to bring daring acrobatics, juggling (everything from eggs to giant cowbells), tap dancing, absurd humour and even a tractor doing wheelies, to Parramatta's Riverside Theatres.

Sydney Festival rings in the new year with a stacked opening weekend of blockbuster events featuring a slew of highly anticipated works and Australian Exclusives. Begin the day at **Colour Maze** down at **The Thirsty Mile**, a joyful large-scale visual art installation for families taking over Pier 2/3. The imaginative play experience inspires children and art-lovers of all ages to get hands-on with visual art and journey through **Telly Tuita**’s “Tongpop” aesthetic. Through creativity and climb, public art experts **Amigo & Amigo** want visitors to bounce and weave their way through a kaleidoscopic 10 room maze and to channel their inner artist. A school holiday must and recommended for ages 2-12.

Already extended beyond its initial season, the **A Model Murder** finally takes to the stand with its World Premiere season at Darlinghurst Courthouse. With the story originated by playwright **Melanie Tait** (*The Appleton Ladies’ Potato Race; A Broadcast Coup*) and written and directed by **Sheridan Harbridge** (*44 Sex Acts in One Week*), **A Model Murder** opens Saturday night, exclusively at Sydney Festival. Those lucky enough to have secured a ticket will experience a wickedly funny and immersive recreation of the

titillating true crime story of Shirley Beiger's sensational 20<sup>th</sup> century murder trial. True crime enthusiasts are encouraged to head to the website to join the waitlist for tickets that may become available closer to performance dates.

Curated by Sydney Festival's **Creative Artist in Residence, Jacob Nash**, the 2025 **Blak Out** program works to unite some of the most talented First Nations artists from Australia and abroad to share their powerful stories, challenge perspectives and honour truths. The special month-long program expands its festival footprint with three weekends of conversation and events that celebrate the coming together of people, country, spirit and truths.

Taking place at the Sydney Opera House is the Australian Exclusive staging of Canadian First Nations cultural provocateur **Cliff Cardinal's, *As You Like It or The Land Acknowledgement***. Set to be an evening of Shakespeare like none other, audiences will witness a poignant glimpse of the unvarnished truth of the reconciliation process between Indigenous communities and colonial settlers in Canada. What results is a devastating yet laugh-out-loud examination of land acknowledgements as cultural and political practice.

With a global lens on America's Wild West, **Tue Biering's** breakout Edinburgh hit, ***Dark Noon***, rolls into the Sydney Town Hall. Fresh from a five-star run at New York's St Ann's Warehouse, a phenomenal South African cast flip the script on Hollywood tropes, reimagining the frontier with slapstick humour, satire and breathtaking stagecraft.

Across the harbour, theatre meets activism at ***The Thirsty Mile*** with the opening of ***Antigone in the Amazon*** by award-winning Swiss director **Milo Rau**. In a classical tragedy reimaged at the edge of the rainforest, a group of Brazilian and European actors and musicians portray the environmental endgame unfolding at the edge of the Amazon rainforest.

Nearby, Kamilaroi and Tongan artist **Radical Son** will bring the house down with songs from his newest album *Bilambiyal*, before multi-hyphenate artist and musician **Chela** shares her catchy electro-pop sound. The following night, the voice of inner-Sydney's south, **Perry Keyes**, performs a live cinematic presentation of his sixth LP, *Black & White Town* – an ode to the grit and glory of public housing life in Redfern and Waterloo. And one of R&B's most original new stars, **Yaya Bey**, will take to the City Recital Hall stage with her boundary-pushing blend of neo-soul and funk.

Touted as one of the hottest tickets of the season, ***Siegfried & Roy: The Unauthorised Opera*** enjoys its World Premiere during the festival's second week. Written by composer-librettist **Luke Di Somma** and directed by co-librettist **Constantine Costi**, the modern stage spectacle is inspired by Las Vegas' most infamous and legendary duo, complete with live magic, powerhouse vocals and the pair's show stopping tiger, Mantacore.

Next week also marks the opening of ***William Yang: Milestone***. Celebrating his 80th birthday, the beloved Chinese-Australian visual and performance artist reflects on a remarkable life well-lived with an immersive photography slideshow set against a haunting score by **Elena Kats-Chernin**. The following week, **Annette Shun Wah** sits down with **Yang** and multi-disciplinary artist **Rainbow Chan** (who is also performing at the festival), to discuss artmaking, finding their voices, and paving new paths for Asian Australian storytelling.

Also opening in the second week of the festival is ***MULTIPLE BAD THINGS*** by **Back to Back Theatre** – winners of the 2024 Venice Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Theatre. This provocative new work

hits the Sydney Opera House stage, transforming it into a toneless warehouse at the end of the world wherein three employees wrestle with a seemingly pointless task and struggle to work together.

For physical feats of a different stripe, there's ***Air Time*** at Chippendale's Seymour Centre, a spectacular street-style performance that showcases BMXers, skaters, dancers and parkourists at their most awesome and unpredictable. Then, the Australian premiere of ***BullyBully***, from Netherlands company **Maas theater en dans**, follows two childish grown-ups whose quarrels and duelling songs have hilarious results. Think *West Side Story*, but with more tantrums.

Later this month, several World Premiering seasons get underway in the festival's curated dance program. Not to be missed is **Stephanie Lake's** cathartic new work, ***The Chronicles***, which explores the cycles of life and the inevitability of change. Pulsing with energy and sensuality, twelve incredible dancers meet a masterful electro-acoustic score by **Robin Fox**, which blends driving rhythms with the live ethereal sounds of the **Sydney Children's Choir**. In ***AFTERWORLD***, the visionary choreography of **Sue Healey** is combined with the innovative compositions of **Laurence Pike**. Five incredible dancers appear alongside the ethereal film presence of the late **Eileen Kramer** as Eurydice in her final dance performance. Directed by **Azzam Mohamed** (*Sculptured Riddims*, Sydney Festival 2024), **KATMA** has the audience on their feet with an immersive dancefloor performance inspired by the frenetic energy of both the Sudanese and Australian dance scenes.

Over the next three weeks, ***The Thirsty Mile's Moonshine Bar*** becomes the city's ultimate harbourside hangout with **12 nights of free live music** from some of the city's favourite acts and DJs. Slinging feel-good grooves, full-throttle floor-fillers and everything in between, the eclectic line-up speaks to the full Sydney Festival program, including a First Nations takeover, queer pop kick-ons, Oceanic sounds and an epic weekend of soul, funk, Afro-beats and old-school jams.

The live music offering continues with **Rufus Wainwright's** sold-out show at the Sydney Opera House, while over at City Recital Hall **Cash Savage and The Last Drinks** is joined by the game-changing Malyangapa Barkindji rapper **BARKAA** in a potent combination of Savage's bruising post-punk rock and **BARKAA's** powerful hip hop energy as the 'new matriarch of Australian rap.' A festival favourite, **Emma Pask** reprises her celebrated Latin jazz album ***Cosita Divina*** on its 10th anniversary accompanied by a vibrant 12-piece Latin jazz orchestra.

Then injecting an eclectic run of live cabaret gigs at Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf 1 Theatre, audiences can experience a blockbuster roster of powerhouse performances featuring **Christie Whelan-Browne's** deeply personal cabaret with ***Life in Plastic***; Australian star of stage and screen, **Rachael Beck's** ***In Her Own Words***, an anecdotal and revealing celebration of inspiring female stories from well-known figures; and **Katie Noonan's** special music tribute to Jeff Buckley's 1994 masterpiece, ***Grace***.

Other fresh sounds from around the globe take to the stage all festival long as part of the ***Future Frequencies*** lineup. Punjabi-Australian vocalist and dancer **Parvyn** will draw in audiences with her fusion of traditional sounds and modern stylings; acclaimed Canadian Filipina keyboardist **Mary Ancheta** crafts genre-defying jazz, electro-funk; and **Astral People** present their ***Ode to Inspiration*** series across two nights featuring Sydney's own **Setwun & The Soulstronauts** and Melbourne singer, songwriter **Allysha Joy** who will both reinterpret trailblazers Roy Ayers and Roberta Flack respectively.

Festivalgoers can also enjoy one of Iceland's most prodigious artists, the multi-instrumentalist **JFDR**, or from Ukraine via Berlin comes Ganna Gryniva – aka **GANNA** – a multi-talented singer and composer from the European jazz scene. Over from Bristol, DJ and saxophonist Pete Cunningham's **Ishmael**

**Ensemble** brings their left-field dub and electronic sensibilities to ***The Thirsty Mile***, while East London's Isle Of Dogs, **Hak Baker** – who has swiftly earned iconoclastic status with his genre-scuffing “G-folk” sound – will perform later in the festival for his Australian debut.

At the festival's tail-end, Murrawarri-Filipino rapper-drummer **DOBBY** – fresh off his very first ARIA win for Best World Album – weaves hip-hop and immersive storytelling to rally against the exploitation of the Murray-Darling Basin with a hotly anticipated performance of his powerful debut album, *WARRANGU; River Story*.

Meanwhile, over at Barangaroo Reserve, ***Vigil: Gunyah*** is a gathering space led, curated and designed by and for First Nations peoples, communities and allies. In addition to three weeks of conversations, workshops and performances, a soundscape from composer and sound designer **Brendon Boney** will fill the space as an invitation for all.

Across various formats, ***Plant a Promise*** is a multi-disciplinary work which weaves together Indigenous knowledge and environmental science to share the importance of caring for Country. Conceived by choreographer and playwright **Henrietta Baird**, the World Premiere production is presented in four parts: a moving dance performance held at Bangarra's Studio Theatre, a Baya (fire) installation by the water at ***The Thirsty Mile***, a free native grass planting workshop at Royal Botanic Gardens, and yarns hosted at Barangaroo Reserve as part of ***Vigil: Gunyah***.

On the evening of 25 January, ***Vigil: Truths*** focuses on being heard, sharing knowledge and presenting First Nations visions for the future. At its core is the act of listening – listening to the many voices that will resonate across the land and waters on this night. This year, the festival's annual reflection and vigil ceremony is curated by ARIA and NIMA award-winning hip-hop group **3%** – made up of proud First Nations artists **Dallas Woods**, **Nooky** and **Angus Field** – who are set to play a never-before-seen performance, stripped-back, and focused on empowering story-telling and the hard-hitting questions that lead to positive change.

Throughout the festival season there are free events aplenty, from grown-up fun to entertainment for the whole family. For the busy art-makers, the popular **Hive Festival** returns to the **Art Gallery of New South Wales** and the **Leo Kelly Blacktown Arts Centre** for days brimming with activities, playful performances and immersive fun. For the festival flaneur, ***Stories From Here*** is an audio walking tour that invites the culturally curious to see Bankstown through young people's eyes. And for the family that loves classical music and fireworks equally, the much-loved ***Sydney Symphony Under the Stars*** takes to **Parramatta Park** once again, with Egyptian-Australian oud virtuoso **Joseph Tawadros AM** performing a selection of his finest works. The perfect starlit concert for rolling out a picnic basket and staying up past bedtime.

In true circus style, the aerial experts at **Sydney Trapeze School** will bring their jaw-dropping best to Darling Harbour during the day for two free daily ***Swing!*** shows. Bring the family to marvel at their acrobatic daredevilry, take a leap of faith with ticketed trapeze lessons, or stay grounded with free drop-in circus skills workshops on offer all festival long.

Meanwhile, down at the Bondi Pavilion courtyard, visitors will be awed by ***The Whale***, a spectacular large-scale artwork suspended in space and designed by **Leon Hendroff**. The interactive creation from Fremantle's **Spare Parts Puppet Theatre** celebrates the beauty of whales and their vital role in our ecosystem. With both storytelling and an enchanting original score, audiences will be transported on a sonic journey of migration and myth.

To stir the spirit and inspire some deep discussions about the environment and sustainability, make a beeline to the World Premiere of **What We Leave Behind** located at the Museum of Contemporary Art's Tallawoladah Lawn. From art and architecture collective **Cave Urban**, in collaboration with Sydney Festival, this participatory installation poses the question: What do we want to leave behind? Passerbys are encouraged to share messages of hope which will then be woven into the unique bamboo installation.

Further free highlights include ground-breaking Pacific-led exhibition **Re-Stor(y)ing Oceania**, immersive video and sound installation showcase **Enigma** and the third edition of the **Bankstown Biennale**, titled **Same Same/Different**, which celebrates multiculturalism and co-existence through art.

– ENDS –

#### NOTES TO EDITOR

- Sydney Festival runs 4-26 January 2025
- Tickets for all shows on sale now
- Visit [sydneyfestival.org.au](https://sydneyfestival.org.au) for more details

#### MEDIA CENTRE

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

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**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.