

SYDNEY FESTIVAL INTRODUCES 50TH ANNIVERSARY PROGRAM: A MULTI-GENERATIONAL CELEBRATION OF CULTURE AND COMMUNITY



Thursday 6th November 2025

Sydney Festival marks its 50th anniversary in January 2026 with a diverse city-wide program that honours five decades of cultural transformation and looks ahead to the next generation of artistic innovation. From 8-25 January, Sydney becomes a playground of imagination, with bold theatre, dance, music, visual arts and immersive experiences taking over historic venues, pop-up spaces and unexpected corners of the city.

As new **Festival Director Kris Nelson** takes the helm, the 2026 program is a multi-generational celebration of how we gather, learn, play and pass stories on. From **Virginia Gay**'s mother-daughter roller derby comedy **Mama Does Derby** to **Dear Son**, a moving exchange of letters between First Nations fathers and sons, and intergenerational jam sessions led by legendary American musician **Lonnie Holley**, this January the festival uses culture as a catalyst for connection.

The festival's beloved First Nations-led **Blak Out** program also returns with **Jacob Nash** delivering his final program as **Creative Artist in Residence**. Beginning with the installation of **Lucy Simpson**'s sculptures at Barangaroo Reserve on the festival's opening day, to the annual **Vigil** ceremony at its conclusion, the month of January will be alive with music, dance and storytelling that honours the fullness of Blak identity.

And while it might be summer holidays, class is in session with **Summer School** – Sydney Festival's expansive program of talks, performances and participatory experiences curated by **Artistic Associate Nithya Nagarajan**, diving deeper into the ideas pulsing through this year's program. Across galleries, pools, funeral homes and alleys, audiences, thinkers, artists and communities are invited to listen, question and create, turning the city into a classroom for collective discovery.

To coincide with the festival's official 2026 program launch, audiences can nab the best seats in the house as part of the limited **\$49 Early Bird** offer across the entire program until **29 November** (or until allocations are sold out). It's a golden anniversary gift to festival lovers, making it easier than ever to book early, see more and enjoy the best of Sydney Festival 2026 without breaking the budget.

In introducing his first program to the world, **Festival Director Kris Nelson**, said: "Inspired by the complexity of our global city, this edition brings leading international and Australian artists whose performances will resonate with everyone. In honour of our 50th, it's a festival full of intergenerational experiences too. Over the next four years, my vision is to create festivals that transform us – shaping not just the shows we present, but how Sydneysiders experience art, and inspiring us to imagine the future of this great city together."

Minister for the Arts, Music and Night-time Economy. The Hon. John Graham said: "The Sydney Festival is clearly not getting shy about its 50th birthday! Right as Sydney hits the peak of summer, this amazing program will create big colourful nights, where anything feels possible. I'm particularly excited about the big opening night event on Hickson Road. Part movie set, part Argentinian street celebration – I honestly don't know how it will unfold, but I'll definitely be there to find out!"

Minister for Jobs and Tourism, Steve Kamper, said: "Sydney Festival is the nation's largest international arts and cultural event and a highlight of the NSW major events calendar. Summer in Sydney just wouldn't be the same without it and next year will be particularly special as we celebrate its 50th anniversary. For half a century, Sydney Festival has enriched our state's vibrant arts and cultural scene and provided a significant boost to our visitor economy by showcasing NSW as Australia's leading destination for world-class cultural experiences."

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

Action cinema spills into the streets of Walsh Bay across the festival's first Saturday with **Live at Hickson Road: Efectos Especiales**, supported by Transport for NSW. Created by filmmaker **Alejo Mogueillansky** of trailblazing Argentinian independent cinema collective **El Pampero Cine** together with choreographer **Luciana Acuña** of experimental Argentinian dance and theatre makers **Grupo Krapp**, this free outdoor event is part street performance, part live movie shoot with spectators serving as both extras and eyewitnesses to the fleeting beauty of art made on the run. The street takeover continues with live music, transforming Hickson Road into a vibrant place to dance, eat and gather.

A crowning achievement of contemporary theatre, **LACRIMA** unveils the hidden human stories stitched into the world's most celebrated gown. As the Princess of England prepares to marry, designers and artisans across continents race to create a dress destined for history – from Parisian ateliers and the lacemakers of Normandy to embroiderers in Mumbai. In this Australian Premiere production, acclaimed French director and playwright **Caroline Guiela Nguyen** fuses meticulous research with cinematic scale and theatrical intimacy. Performed in French, Tamil, English and sign language with surtitles, **LACRIMA** is a breathtaking three-hour story of beauty, labour and belonging.

Also at the Roslyn Packer Theatre, **Nowhere** is an intricate and playful solo show by actor and activist **Khalid Abdalla** (*United 93*, *The Kite Runner*, *The Crown*) from UK producing company **Fuel** (*Barber Shop Chronicles*) that takes the audience on a surprising journey into Abdalla's own history, set against a cartography of seismic world events. From the histories of colonialism and decolonisation; friendship and loss; protests and uprising against regimes across the world; to the violence in Gaza following the events of October 7th 2023, Khalid brings together the personal and the political in an act of anti-biography that asks how we got here and how we find agency amidst the mazes of history.

Internationally acclaimed sculptor **Julia Phillips** presents her thought-provoking public artwork **Observer, Observed** in Darling Harbour for its international debut, following a celebrated year-long installation on New York City's High Line. A pair of custom-made bronze binoculars invite passers-by to take in the view – but with a twist: a hidden camera broadcasts live footage of their eyes to a nearby screen. Blurring the line between watcher and watched, **Observer, Observed** transforms a simple act of sightseeing into a striking reflection on surveillance, consent and the politics of spectatorship in the digital age.

A major new commission for Sydney Festival in 2026, **Mama Does Derby** takes over Sydney Town Hall, converting the iconic civic space into a full-scale roller derby track for a heartwarming and action-packed World Premiere work by **Virginia Gay** (*Calamity Jane*) and Windmill's **Clare Watson**. The show follows Billie, 16, and her mum as they navigate a new life in a regional town – and the sweaty, chaotic and rebellious world of roller

derby. Blending theatre, sport, live music and immersive spectacle, **Mama Does Derby** is a hilarious and heartfelt celebration of resilience, reinvention and the bonds that hold a family together.

The beloved **Sydney Symphony Under the Stars** will take center stage in a spectacular new location in 2026: Tumbalong Park at Darling Harbour. Taking place over the festival's middle weekend on Saturday 17 January, this special 50th anniversary edition promises an unforgettable evening of music and community, bringing together festivalgoers under the stars in one of Sydney's most iconic waterfront precincts. This year, *Sydney Symphony Under the Stars* honours Sydney Festival's long legacy, with the **Sydney Symphony Orchestra** celebrating its 50 year history through music and pictures.

London's most lovable party band, **Hot Chip**, return to the Sydney Opera House for two unforgettable nights of euphoric indie-dance brilliance. Celebrating 25 years together, the genre-defying quintet bring **Joy In Repetition** – a career-spanning live show that transforms melancholy into joy and dancefloors into shared catharsis. Steeped in classic house and shimmering synth-pop, and anchored by frontman Alexis Taylor's unmistakable voice, Hot Chip promise a high-voltage celebration of rhythm, resilience and connection.

BLAK OUT

On the occasion of the Festival's 50th anniversary, the **Blak Out** program stands as a powerful reminder that we gather because we must – it's who we are. Over three weeks, the city will pulse with stories of resilience and brilliance under the curatorship of **Jacob Nash**, who shares his final program as **Sydney Festival Creative Artist in Residence**.

At the heart of the 2026 Blak Out program is **HELD**, a series of commissioned sculptural works on Barrangaroo's Stargazer's Lawn by Yuwaalaraay Wirringgaa woman **Lucy Simpson**. Honouring earth and fire, sky and sea Country, these unique vessels will welcome all who gather throughout the length of the festival.

Later, the artworks will provide the setting for **Vigil: Belong**, the festival's shared closing ceremony held each year on 25 January. At sunset, sacred smoke will rise from Barrangaroo as celebrated musician and writer **Nardi Simpson** – and sister to artist **Lucy Simpson** – leads singers from every generation in four songs that map our musical ancestry. Tending the fires throughout this unique gathering and maintaining the bridge between earth and sky will be **Uncle Matthew Doyle**.

In reimagining the corroboree for a new generation, acclaimed choreographer **Joel Bray** invites audiences of all ages to move together under the stars for a heart-pounding dance ritual on Sydney Harbour. Created in collaboration with Wiradjuri Elders and community, **Garabari** transforms the Northern Broadwalk of the Sydney Opera House into a massive open-air dance floor complete with ethereal costumes by Wiradjuri designer **Denni Francisco** (Ngali), driving beats by **Byron Scullin** and immersive projections by **Katie Sfetkidis**.

Indigenous dance company **Jannawi Dance Clan** will bring their most ambitious work yet to Sydney Opera House with the World Premiere of **Garrigarrang Badu**. Created by artistic director **Peta Strachan** in collaboration with the all-female company, the performance serves as a powerful act of cultural continuation in celebration of Dharug Country and the vital role of women in carrying culture.

Redfern Renaissance celebrates the revolutionary art and activism of the 1970s National Black Theatre. Curated by Wiradjuri Yuin actor **Angeline Penrith**, the program features performance readings and conversations honouring trailblazers Bob Maza, Robert Merritt, Paul and Isabel Coe, Gary Foley, and Gary Williams. Born from street performances and protest, the original theatre became a powerful hub of Blak activism and a catalyst for First Nations rights. **Redfern Renaissance** reignites that spirit – keeping the legacy of this groundbreaking movement alive for today's audiences.

Thomas Mayo's groundbreaking work **Dear Son** arrives at Belvoir Theatre for Sydney Festival, bringing to life intimate reflections from twelve renowned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, including **Stan Grant**, **Troy Cassar-Daley** and **John Liddle**. Originally collected in Mayo's eponymous book, the letters honour the traditions, wisdom, and diverse expressions of masculinity within the world's oldest living cultures, challenging stereotypes and celebrating fatherhood. Now, acclaimed theatre-makers **Isaac Drandic** (37, *Dear Brother*) and **John Harvey** (*Spear, Black Ties*) adapt these powerful reflections for the stage, weaving music, dance and story.

Bangarra Dance Theatre's *The Bogong's Song: A Call to Country* invites children and families on a magical journey into the Dreaming, where a brother and sister follow an elusive Bogong Moth and uncover the secrets of Country. Created by **Yolande Brown** and **Chenoe Deemal**, this enchanting new work blends storytelling, shadow puppetry, dance and song, exploring connection, healing and the importance of even the smallest creatures. Featuring **Benjin Maza** and **Tjilala Brown-Roberts**, ***The Bogong's Song*** offers young audiences a

warm-hearted, immersive experience that sparks wonder and reflection.

Emma Donovan shares her commanding voice and stage presence at City Recital Hall with ***Take Me to the River***, a tribute to the soul classics that shaped her music and the memories of a generation. Reimagining songs made famous by legends such as Al Green, Aretha Franklin and Ann Peebles, Donovan infuses each piece with her own spirit and story. From soaring anthems to tender ballads, this powerful evening is tribute to the timeless soul music of year's past.

In a high-voltage collision of rock, drag and Blak pride, **A Night of Rock & Roll** with **Bogan Villea** – the outrageous alter ego of First Nations LGBTQ+ performer **Ben Graetz** – lights up STC's Wharf 1 Theatre. With guest performances from some of Australia's finest singers, dancers and drag artists, the show is a wild celebration that fuses the energy of AC/DC with the flamboyance of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

As part of this year's expansive musical line-up at **ACO On The Pier**, Sydney Festival will play host to "the Queen of the Bandaral Ngadu Delta," Gooniyandi and Walmatjarri Elder **Kankawa Nagarra**. Since discovering the blues at 40, the now 80-year-old singer-songwriter has released four albums, toured the world – including supporting Hugh Jackman on Broadway – and won the Australian Music Prize for her stunning 2024 album, *Wirlmarni*.

One of Australia's most commanding voices, **Ursula Yovich** steps into the spotlight with a world-premiere tribute to the High Priestess of Soul, Nina Simone. Backed by her exceptional live band, Yovich brings her trademark warmth, wit and fire to Simone's most iconic songs — from fierce anthems of freedom to tender expressions of love and loss. More than a tribute, this is a conversation across generations and continents, where Yovich channels Simone's spirit and defiant joy to reflect the power, resilience and hope that still resonate today.

DANCE

Known internationally as the enfant terrible of Seoul, celebrated South Korean choreographer **Eun-Me Ahn** brings her kaleidoscopic, world-renowned vision to Sydney in a rare opportunity to witness one of Asia's most influential avant-garde artists in Australia. Performed by eight dynamic dancers and featuring more than 90 dazzling costumes designed by Ahn herself, ***Post-Orientalist Express*** transforms traditions from Okinawa, Bali and Manila into a vivid, audacious and satirical exploration of Asian cultures.

Making a return to Sydney Festival for the first time since 2018's powerful *Beast*, **Dan Daw** takes us back to where it all began: a working-class Aussie childhood and the start of his long journey towards becoming an internationally celebrated, proudly queer and disabled dance artist. In the Australian Exclusive staging of ***EXXY*** (slang for "expensive"), Daw is joined by three extraordinary performers who move like him. Together, they echo, mirror and multiply his presence, conjuring the tantalising possibility of blending in after a lifetime of standing out.

Alessandro Sciarroni ensures the continuation of the nearly lost Italian dance ritual Polka Chinata in ***Save the Last Dance for Me***, transforming the early 1900s courtship polka into a breathtaking contemporary performance. Once performed only by men to dazzle potential partners, the steps were nearly forgotten until Sciarroni, along with dance master **Giancarlo Stagni**, revived and reimagined them. Audiences can experience this remarkable work across the city: among the Italian community at Leichhardt Town Hall, along Dancer's Alley where young TikTokers strut their stuff, and within the iconic Sydney Town Hall, showcasing its versatility and enduring resonance across cultures and spaces.

After the success of 2025's *Katma*, dancer **Azzam Mohamed** and composer **Jack Prest** are back with ***Echo Mapping***, a captivating sound-movement duet that surveys the cathartic power of music embodied. Featuring Prest's textural live score alongside Mohamed's voice and movement, the performance at Sydney Town Hall creates new frequencies in real time. Stripped back with no sets or costumes, staged in the round for an intimate audience experience, ***Echo Mapping*** is a dynamic, provocative exploration of melody, motion and emotion.

Sisa-Sisa is a powerful double-bill of deeply personal dance solos by **Alfira O'Sullivan** and **Murtala**, grounded in Indonesian culture and set to an original score by **Gondrong Gunarto**. In *Gelumbang Raya*, Murtala reflects on his experiences volunteering after the 2004 Aceh tsunami, transforming trauma and resilience into a shared act of remembrance. In *Jejak & Bisik*, O'Sullivan unpicks fertility, perimenopause and the shifting female body.

CABARET & THEATRE

Taking over the Sydney Opera House with an 18-piece ensemble in his flashiest, funniest and most fearless endeavour yet, **Reuben Kaye** is bigger and better than ever in ***enGORGEd***. For one night only, the fiery, filthy and fabulous comedian bares all, blending razor-sharp storytelling with powerhouse vocals and diva-worthy anthems. No topic is off-limits for this unapologetic cabaret superstar.

Created by Dublin trailblazers **THISISPOPBABY**, **WAKE** reimagines the traditional Irish wake with breakdancing, tap, aerial artistry, slam poetry and live music for a riotous celebration of endings, beginnings and community. Hailed as “a raucous, pole-dancing rollercoaster” (*The Guardian*) and “Riverdance for club queens” (*The Irish Times*), **WAKE** fuses history and modernity, delivering a high-energy variety show that has wowed audiences the world over and follows their 2018 Sydney Festival hit, *RIOT*.

Joining **Ben Graetz**’s bogan-tastic ***A Night of Rock and Roll with Bogan Villea***, and **Ursula Yovich**’s tribute to the legendary Nina Simone, Sydney Theatre Company’s Wharf 1 Theatre becomes home to four exceptional cabaret productions, showcasing some of the finest local and international performers.

Following sold-out runs at Joe’s Pub and Soho Theatre, New York cabaret trailblazer **Salty Brine** visits Australia for the first time bringing a new chapter of his cult-hit series ***Living Record Collection*** to Wharf 1. In ***Bigmouth Strikes Again (The Smiths Show)***, Brine melds The Smiths’ 1981 album *The Queen Is Dead*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and his own lived experience for a bravura mash-up of high drama, indie rock and memoir topped off with a delicious dollop of camp.

A funny, raw and heartfelt exploration of life’s unpredictable twists, ***Bad Hand*** marks the cabaret debut of theatre and screen star **Natalie Abbott** (*Muriel’s Wedding the Musical*, ABC’s *Aftertaste*). Taking a big-hearted musical journey through grief and heartbreak, Abbott’s show features a soundtrack that traverses Rodgers & Hammerstein to Tina Arena. Dedicated to Abbott’s late partner, ***Bad Hand*** invites audiences to laugh, cry, and take a punt on love and life – because if life’s a gamble, you might as well play to win.

Winner of the Total Theatre Award at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, **BURGERZ** has been a sell-out sensation worldwide since 2018. Performance artist **Travis Alabanza** turns a transphobic attack into a hilarious, heartbreaking and unflinchingly powerful exploration of resilience. Part performance, part manifesto, **BURGERZ** blends sharp wit, immersive storytelling and biting social commentary. Marking ten years since that unforgettable moment on London’s Waterloo Bridge, it reaffirms its place as a timely and globally acclaimed work this January at Sydney Festival.

LIVE MUSIC

Leading the festival’s return to ACO On The Pier is visionary American artist, **Lonnie Holley**. A multi-disciplinary creator whose work spans drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, performance, music and film, Holley has released seven albums, including 2025’s *Tonky* and 2023’s *Oh Me Oh My*, featuring collaborations with Michael Stipe, Bon Iver and Sharon Van Etten. In Sydney, his music and lyrics – always improvised – will evolve nightly, joined by AMP - winning musician, singer-songwriter, and elder **Kankawa Nagarra** for one special performance and Sydney’s own jazz and neo soul star **Yasmina Sadiki** for another, creating a unique local-international collaboration for each performance.

Other exciting musical guests taking their turn about the ACO include: Mongolian jazz singer **Enji** who mesmerises with her ethereal voice, blending the urtiin duu long-song tradition with acoustic jazz improvisation in an immersive, otherworldly performance; Mexican Indigenous hip-hop powerhouse **Mare Advertencia** comes to Australia for the first time with her politically charged rap, joined by Noongar sensation **INKABEE**, delivering high-energy, socially conscious performances that span Mexico, Australia and beyond; Persian-Aotearoan genre-defier **CHAI** electrifies the stage with her fusion of hip-hop, R&B, pop, electronica and Persian instrumentation, showcasing her acclaimed debut album *Safar*; and Australian R&B innovator **Milan Ring** transforms The Neilson into an intimate lie-down sonic experience, blending voice, guitar, electronics and Australian field recordings to explore the liminal space between grief and release.

Over at City Recital Hall, a series of Sydney Festival gigs will feature some of the world’s most exciting artists. UK singer-songwriter **Paris Paloma** has quickly become one of contemporary music’s most compelling feminist voices. Following the release of her debut album *Cacophony* and building on the cultural impact of her Gold-certified 2023 hit *Labour*, which garnered over 11 billion social media views, Paloma is celebrated for immersive, community-driven performances. Turning each concert into spaces of connection, defiance and joy, she has earned praise as the “natural successor to Florence + the Machine” and a new-generation Kate Bush (*The Guardian*).

Raised between Saudi Arabia, Japan and the UK, DJ-producer **Nooriyah** is renowned for her bouncy, high-energy sets that showcase the sounds of the SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) region. Mixing the likes of Arabian pop, Jersey Club, Afrobeats, amapiano and trap into a sound that’s all her own, Nooriyah is known for her iconic Boiler Room session and recent blazing features at Glastonbury and Coachella. Also joining her for an

unforgettable night for Third Culture Kids and music-lovers is Palestinian American curator, **DJ Habibeats**, for the TikTok sensation and founder of Habibi's House's first time on Australian shores

South London trailblazer **Raf-Saperra** brings his fearless fusion of Punjabi folk, pop and rap to Sydney for the first time. Blending the sounds of his Punjabi heritage with UK garage, drill and Afrobeats, Saperra has become one of Britain's most electrifying new exports since his breakout hit *N.L.S. (Nach Le Soniye)* and acclaimed mixtape *Ruff Around the Edges*. Fresh from signing to Nas's Mass Appeal label, he arrives at Sydney Festival riding a wave of global acclaim and a bold new EP, *Renaissance* – proof that the future of British-Asian music is already here.

Having performed at venues including New York's Carnegie Hall, Grammy-nominated Tibetan artist **Tenzin Choegyal** takes up residence at Bankstown Arts Centre for two shows. On the first night, he is joined by acclaimed multi-instrumentalist, singer, and dancer **Tenzin Kunsang** for an evening of meditative mantras, folk tunes, spoken word and sublime flute solos, infused with Tibetan wisdom. On the second night, our Tibetan guest teams up with rising Western Sydney star **Wytchings**, blending the melodies of Choegyal's album *Whispering Sky* with electronic synths in a transcendent, intergenerational collaboration exploring impermanence, compassion and the cycle of life.

Undercurrent takes over Riverside Live at Phive with three nights celebrating the bold, boundary-pushing sounds of Western Sydney aimed at amplifying the trailblazers and next wave of artists shaping the region's vibrant cultural scene. **Subterranean Vibes** spotlights the city's electronic underground, **Moana Underground** showcases Pasifika hip hop, R&B and contemporary Island sounds, and **Glow Tide** delivers a queer-led celebration of dancefloor liberation, powerhouse vocals and expressive performance.

Along with the return of **Sydney Symphony Under the Stars**, Sydney Festival and the **Sydney Symphony Orchestra** are doubling down with **Disco Never Dies** at the Hordern Pavilion – a glittering celebration of mirror balls, sequins and platform shoes. Featuring some of the country's finest vocalists, this unforgettable night will have audiences dancing to the hits of ABBA, Earth, Wind & Fire, The Bee Gees and more.

OPERA, IMMERSIVE AND VISUAL ARTS

Blending ancient ritual with cutting-edge technology, **Opera for the Dead** 祭歌 by guzheng virtuoso **Mindy Meng Wang** and experimental sound designer **Monica Lim** is a powerful, multi-sensory journey through grief, remembrance and transformation. Drawing inspiration from Chinese mourning traditions, the work surrounds audiences with live music, electronic soundscapes, movement and light. As the space shifts between stage, cinema and dance floor, visitors are invited to move freely through an ever-changing world of sound and shadow.

Prepare for a theatrical experience like no other with **asses.masses** from Canadian artists **Patrick Blenkarn** and **Milton Lim** – a seven-hour, multiplayer video game played live by the audience. Taking turns at the controls, players lead a herd of rebellious digital donkeys on a mission to reclaim their job, all while navigating a wild mash-up of gaming genres. With intervals, snacks and plenty of crowd banter, the show is entirely shaped by the audience – they decide how the game plays out. Part communal game night with hundreds of friends and part unforgettable movie marathon, this irreverent, communal adventure fuses bawdy humour, sharp social satire and interactive gameplay into a fun new vision of live theatre.

Garage Party throws open the doors to the Blacktown Arts Centre for a two-day backyard celebration of community, creativity and Pasifika pride. Artists **Sione Monu** and **Salote Tawale** transform the space into a vibrant garage installation – think corrugated iron, tarps, lavalava and fairy lights – inspired by the beloved social hubs of Pasifika homes. The weekend also features karaoke and live music from Western Sydney greats, **Edith Amituana'i**'s dazzling *Siren Boyz* performed with local youth, hands-on art workshops and a family photo booth where visitors can pose in their White Sunday best.

Puccini's beloved final opera **Turandot**, famous for the iconic aria *Nessun Dorma*, is given a bold and refreshing interpretation by critically acclaimed director and choreographer **Ann Yee**. This monumental new staging by **Opera Australia** and **Opera Consortium** at Sydney Opera House blasts a complex classic into the modern era with daring and verve.

SUMMER SCHOOL

This summer, curiosity takes centre stage at Sydney Festival's **Summer School** – an energising program of talks, ideas and experiences curated by **Sydney Festival Artistic Associate Nithya Nagarajan**. Building on and exploring the many themes and stories embedded in this year's festival program, **Summer School** turns up the volume on learning, participation and joyful disruption. Get up close with local and international artists, explore the creative process through hands-on activities and roll up your sleeves in interactive workshops.

Part exhibition, part meeting place and part creative act of connection, **Conflictorium** invites audiences to lean into their differences. Created by Indian collective **Conflictorium** – a group of artists, mediators, filmmakers, and peacebuilders – this interactive museum of conflict transforms Carriageworks Bay 19 into a living archive of community experience. Through creative prompts, sensory installations and participatory activities, visitors are encouraged to share stories, spark dialogue and explore how conflict can become a pathway to empathy, understanding and repair.

Two of Sydney's most daring queer-run organisations, **Life Rites** and **Queer PowerPoint**, join forces for a bold, site-specific collaboration that transforms a working funeral home into an unforgettable performance space. After residencies at **Life Rites** in Hurstville, queer artists from across Sydney will share their discoveries about life, death and everything in between through **Queer PowerPoint's** signature mix of insight, humour and heart. Using Microsoft's most mundane tool to probe life's greatest mystery, this immersive event allows audiences to sit with discomfort, celebrate curiosity and find light in one of life's last great taboos.

The **Wansolmoana Lunar Assembly** invites women and children to a night of reflection, renewal and spiritual connection at Sydney's historic McIver's Ladies Baths, one of the world's last remaining women-only ocean pools. Led by Tongan Australian performance artist **Latai Taumoepeau**, this durational ceremony blends meditation, music and water-based rituals to celebrate feminine sovereignty and collective power. A low-sensory, accessible session will also be held at the Malabar Ocean Pools.

YOUNG AUDIENCES

In a world where kids are constantly told what they can and can't read, watch or say, **The Censor** will flip the script at Australian Theatre For Young People, Rebel Theatre. Created by award-winning theatre-makers **Cassandra Fumi** and **Vidya Rajan** with an ensemble of young collaborators, this bold new work hands over the power — and the microphone — to children. In their theatre, the kids make the rules. Equal parts playful and provocative, **The Censor** invites audiences of all ages to listen, question and reimagine who really gets to decide what's appropriate.

Dive into **WAVERIDER**, a breathtaking new outdoor performance from physical theatre legends **Legs On The Wall**. Staged on a giant inflatable wave at the iconic Bondi Pavilion, this family-friendly spectacle fuses surf culture, acrobatics and ocean adventure into a high-energy celebration of Australia's love affair with the sea. After the show, the wave transforms into a playful seaside installation for all to enjoy, making **WAVERIDER** the ultimate summer experience.

In the little bike shop at the end of town, a world of adventure awaits. Two boys and their bikes travel the world in a show that conjures play from the everyday and where anything is possible. Created by Ireland's **Branar**, presented by **Sydney Opera House** and performed by **Miquel Barceló** and **Moisés Mas García**, **Rothar** is a joyful production that celebrates the places your imagination can take you.

Blending live performance, music and technology, **Garden of Sound** by **Voxstep** invites children and families into an enchanting world where movement makes music at Riverside Live at Phive. Following two gardeners, Dag and Dug, as they try to restore their sonic garden to its full symphonic bloom, this innovative work uses motion capture and a game engine to transform every gesture into sound. Part performance and part interactive playground, **Garden of Sound** offers a joyful, hands-on exploration of creativity where audiences are invited to step on stage and play their part in the music-making.

Reflecting the festival's spirit of creativity and connection, Sydney Festival's 2026 brand has been developed in collaboration with artist **Nadia Odum**. Odum's practice explores how we move through and make sense of the city, translating its patterns and movements into vibrant, abstract forms. Featured in this year's visual identity, *Cumulative Choreography* (2023) embodies the energy of Sydney in motion – a city shaped by people, play and possibility.

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITOR

- Sydney Festival runs 8-25 January 2026
- The 2026 program is the first under the direction of Festival Director Kris Nelson • Tickets for all shows on sale from 9.00am AEDT Thursday 6 November 2025
- To celebrate the festival's 50th anniversary, early bird tickets priced at \$49 will be available for A Reserve seats and General Admission across all ticketed shows
- The special early bird offer is strictly limited and runs through to Saturday 29 November (or until allocation exhausted)
- Visit sydneyfestival.org.au for more details

MEDIA CENTRE

Imagery and B-roll 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.

