

MEDIA RELEASE

7 May 2024

Sydney Festival appoints new Chair

Sydney Festival today announced Kate Dundas as the Festival's new Chair, succeeding David Kirk who steps down after almost a decade at the helm. Dundas steps into the role after four years as a non-executive Board Member at Sydney Festival.

Recognised for leading transformative change across a range of organisations, Kate brings a wealth of experience to her new role. With a background firmly focused on the media and cultural sectors, including roles as the former Director of ABC Radio and Executive Director of Performing Arts at the Sydney Opera House, she has been instrumental in shaping public policy.

Throughout her executive career she championed audience engagement with the ABC's radio services, including greater access and new programming through podcasting, streaming and the introduction of digital radio.

At the Sydney Opera House, she drove the integrated artistic vision including support for the resident companies and responsibility for technical production, events operations and venue hire. She provided executive leadership to the presenting arm of the Opera House comprising programming teams across Contemporary Performance, Talks and Ideas, Contemporary Music, First Nations, Children and Creative Learning.

Her governmental contributions include serving as Deputy Secretary for Arts and Culture in NSW where she bolstered coordination among cultural institutions and supported their strategic and infrastructure initiatives.

Beyond her executive roles Kate's extensive experience extends to non-executive board positions and consultancy work, focusing on mentoring, governance, and strategic planning. In addition, Kate serves as Deputy Chair of Australia for UNHCR and Deputy Chair of Sydney Writers' Festival.

Commentating on her new position, Kate said, "I am a passionate believer in the importance and centrality of arts and culture to people's everyday lives and society as a whole. It unites us, challenges us, honours our different cultural traditions and in the end, engages and entertains us. I'm profoundly grateful for the opportunity to continue to work with incredibly talented people in delivering what is one of Australia's largest cultural events and a summer highlight in the Sydney calendar. I look forward to working with our key supporters and thank David Kirk for leading the Board so admirably, and my fellow Board members for placing their confidence in me."

Minister for the Arts, John Graham said “The Sydney Festival is a key festival for NSW, bringing opportunities for international and local artists to share their stories and skills with audiences. It sets Sydney alight in summer. Kate Dundas brings to the role a deep understanding of arts and culture, the Sydney Festival and its community.”

Chris Tooher, CEO at Sydney Festival, said “The Festival is approaching a new phase of development. Marked by the appointment of Kate, accompanied by the addition of fresh voices to the Board, and the upcoming recruitment of a new Artistic Director, we stand on the horizon of our 50th-year celebration. This is an exciting time for the organisation as we prepare to craft the next chapter of Sydney Festival's legacy.”

He continued, “As we welcome Kate, I'd also like to extend my thanks and gratitude to David Kirk for his dedication and visionary leadership over the last decade. David's insights and impact in the growth of Sydney Festival will continue to inspire our journey forward.”

David Kirk said “I'm profoundly grateful for the privilege of championing the power of the arts over the last nine years. As I step aside, I do so with unwavering confidence in the Festival's continued ability to inspire, unite, and shape our cultural landscape for generations to come.”

Following the success of the 2024 festival, the 2025 festival will be the final instalment under the artistic reigns of current Festival Director, Olivia Ansell. A global recruitment campaign is currently underway for a new Artistic Director to take the festival into its next chapter of excellence, just in time for its milestone 50th anniversary celebration in 2026.

ENDS

For interview opportunities or further information, contact Nia Jones, Media Advisor at Sydney Festival nia.jones@sydneyfestival.org.au / 0436 100 201.

Notes to Editors:

Kate Dundas Biography: Kate Dundas has forged a career in public policy, media and cultural leadership. Senior roles include Executive Director of Performing Arts at the Sydney Opera House where she led programming, event management, production and venue hire divisions. During her extensive career with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Kate held senior executive roles including Director of ABC Radio, Head of Music Networks and Director People and Culture. She has worked in public policy areas in both state and federal government. Her NSW Government experience includes Deputy Secretary Arts and Culture and two executive roles in the NSW Premier's Department.

Kate is a Board Director of the Sydney Festival, Deputy Chair of Australia for UNHCR and Deputy Chair of the Sydney Writers' Festival. She also works as an Executive Mentor with private clients and as part of McCarthy Mentoring. Additionally, Kate works with on a project basis as a subject matter expert on cultural projects in Australia and overseas. Kate has a Bachelor of Communications, is a Vincent Fairfax Fellow and graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

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