

LA MAMA THEATRE RESPONDS TO FOUR YEAR FUNDING OUTCOMES

On Friday afternoon, La Mama Theatre learned that our application for four-year funding from the Australia Council for the Arts was rejected, despite being previously advised that we were in the top 30% of applications following the Expression of Interest process in 2019.

We are not alone in this: colleagues across the country, including The Blue Room Theatre in Perth, Browns Mart Theatre in Darwin, Polyglot here in Melbourne and Australian Theatre for Young People in Sydney – all of whom play a vital role in supporting the development of new Australian work and new Australian artists – have also been defunded. We stand with them in solidarity and support.

At a time when the Australian cultural sector is in lockdown because of the coronavirus, with so many artists impacted and vulnerable, we fear that defunding the organisations who best support grassroots artistic creation will have a significant impact on the future of Australia's cultural life.

Furthermore in this new climate, in order for the theatre industry to recover fully at all levels, we fear that cutting the funding of a company whose sole aim is 'to remove financial barriers for artists in order to foster, nurture, and facilitate the creation of new Australian work...', may be a grave error of judgement, provoking a ripple that will be felt well beyond the walls of La Mama.

La Mama has been funded for 50 years, and active for almost 53 years. We are devastated by the sudden loss of our four-year funding by the Australia Council – especially given that we are still in the process of recovering from the fire that gutted our Carlton home on 19 May 2018.

Thanks to the generous support of Creative Victoria, an alliance of philanthropic organisations and the La Mama community who collectively raised the \$3.2 million required to rebuild our theatre last year, we are slowly recovering from the fire: we hope we can recover from this latest blow in a similar fashion.

La Mama was established in 1967 and has been the home of new Australian theatre for over 52 years. We have presented almost 3000 shows across our 52 years to date. In the last three years alone (2017-2019, most of which we were operating out of one of our two venues) we have supported 410 productions, the vast majority of which are new Australian works and worked with more than 4000 independent Australian artists. In 2019 alone, La Mama shepherded 95 Australian playwrights through to a performance outcome of their work.

The withdrawal of our Australia Council funding means that our support for these artists is challenged – as is our support of migrant and refugee communities through the La Mama Access program, and our regional tours through the La Mama Mobile program. It is also important to note that we support a diversity of artists across all ages, cultures, gender identities and sexualities as well as neuro-diverse artists and artists with intellectual and physical disabilities. Even without Australia Council support, we are committed to supporting such artists now and in the future.

Nor is La Mama's excellence restricted to the work we present on our stages. The sector's respect for La Mama is indicated by the plaudits garnered by our staff and executive in recent years.

- In March 2018, our CEO Liz Jones was presented with the Australia Council Award for Theatre at Carriageworks in Sydney.
- In July 2019, CEO Liz Jones was also presented with the Sue Natrass Award for exceptional service to the live performance industry at the Helpmann Awards Ceremony at The Arts Centre Melbourne.
- In March 2020 our chairperson Richard Watts was presented with the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award Facilitators Prize.
- Also in March 2020, La Mama's co-CEO Caitlin Dullard was announced as the recipient of the Green Room Awards Association's Geoffrey Milne Award for Outstanding Contribution to Independent Theatre. The ceremony will take place online this Monday 6 April.

La Mama received no warning that our funding was under threat – indeed, we believe we were over-delivering in terms of our obligations to the Australian arts community and as regards the taxpayer-funded support we have previously received from the Australia Council.

We will be doing everything we can to recover in order to support the next generation of Australian theatre-makers and are forever grateful to our community for their continued strength, support and love.

Viva La Mama!

Signed by:

Liz Jones, Artistic Director & co-CEO

Caitlin Dullard, Company Manager & co-CEO

Richard Watts, Chair, Committee of Management

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