

MELBOURNE FRINGE

Annual Report 2024



EAT your
ART OUT

MELBOURNE
FRINGE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Melbourne Fringe respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live, work, play and gather people together.

We acknowledge that the oldest living culture in the world has been kept alive by a rich and continuing history of storytelling, music, dance, art and language.

We pay our respects to the people of the Kulin Nations and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present, who maintain an enduring spiritual and cultural connection to the land. Sovereignty was never ceded.

MESSAGES



MICHAEL KANTOR

CHAIR

What a year it's been! Melbourne Fringe continues to be a force of creative energy, and I couldn't be prouder of what we've achieved together.

Melbourne Fringe is a launchpad. Every year, we see incredible new artists take their first bold steps onto our stages, experimenting, taking risks, and pushing boundaries in ways that mainstream theatre simply can't. And that's what makes Fringe so vital.

It's a place where artists grow, where connections spark, and where careers take off. The conversations, collaborations, and wild ideas that start here don't just stay here; they ripple out into the wider arts industry. We've seen artists go from a tiny Fringe stage to national tours, major festivals, and beyond.

But just as importantly, Fringe belongs to everyone. It's where audiences and artists meet on equal ground, where diverse voices are heard, and where stories that might not find a home elsewhere can truly shine.

To everyone who performed, attended, supported, or championed Melbourne Fringe this year—thank you. You are the heart of this Festival, and we can't wait to see what next year brings.



SIMON ABRAHAMS

CREATIVE DIRECTOR & CEO

I wanted the 2024 Melbourne Fringe Festival to bring people together through food and art, at a time when the world has never felt more fractured. We invited the people of Melbourne to take a seat at our table for a 20-day art degustation of exciting, rebellious, uplifting, and challenging creative experiences. And boy did they show up, hungry for new perspectives and new stories—the sweet, sharp, salty and bitter. They sat beside their neighbours, to listen and learn and participate. The 2024 Festival helped us imagine a brighter future for Melbourne, demonstrating why art matters, and how a city can respond with optimism and intrigue. I couldn't be prouder of what was created, or more hopeful for what's to come.

EAT YOUR ART OUT: 2024 FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

“THE MELBOURNE FRINGE FESTIVAL *makes JAWS DROP and EYES WIDEN across the city with its UNCONVENTIONAL LINE-UP of INDEPENDENT THEATRE, COMEDY, DRAG, ART, MUSIC and EVENTS.*” *TimeOut*

The 2024 Melbourne Fringe Festival was an invitation to ‘eat your art out’—a chance for Melburnians to come together and feast on a buffet of bold, surprising, and thought-provoking art.

Through our open access platform, which welcomes anyone and everyone to express themselves, we supported **2,708 independent artists and community members** to participate in Victoria’s largest independent arts festival.

They served up a spectacular **462 events** across the city, drawing a total **266,785 attendees**.

Melbourne Fringe happened in **143 venues**, with events spanning **eight artform categories** and activating public spaces including our home at **Trades Hall**, plus **Queen Victoria Market, Fed Square** and more—bringing art to places both expected and unexpected.

The centrepiece artwork of the Festival was our 2024 Civic Commission **COOKED**, which sparked big conversations over an enormous BBQ. This daily artistic activation turned the public grill into a site for film nights, private dinners, fishy performance events, and deep discussions on democracy. More than 2,800 people gathered around **COOKED**, with 500 picking up a pair of tongs to grill over 200kg of sausages.

Our Open Program hosted **406** independent events by **2,267** amateur, emerging, mid-career and established artists, in places and spaces right across Melbourne and Geelong. Closer to home the Festival Hub, decked out floor-to-ceiling in red gingham, quite literally set the table for a multi-story art buffet with **125 events** drawing **40,631 attendees**, while the infamous Club Fringe hosted **9** art parties. The Hub wasn’t just for audiences—it was a home for artists too, hosting Tour Ready networking sessions and Sunday artist drinks to foster community connections. Through the Hub, we provided **\$254,637 in venue subsidies** to **670 Fringe Hub artists**.

This year’s Festival menu served up everything from soysages grilled over open flames to gazpacho warmed by the human body. We saw fairy floss dance through the air, Broadway bangers scream-sung with strangers, teenagers reflecting on their changing bodies and a grandmother speaking about life and death. Concrete blocks were moved in the name of contemporary dance, mattresses danced back, and ancestral voices echoed across time through contemporary music.

The 2024 Melbourne Fringe Festival was a non-stop banquet of groundbreaking independent art made with, by and for the people of Melbourne.

462 EVENTS
74,960 TICKETED ATTENDEES
266,785 TOTAL ATTENDANCE
2,708 ARTISTS
96% ARTIST SATISFACTION RATE
143 VENUES
\$2.8 MILLION PAID TO ARTISTS



OPEN ACCESS PROGRAM: MELBOURNE'S MOST VIBRANT PLATFORM FOR CREATIVE EXPRESSION

“LARGELY A CELEBRATION of the AMAZING ART BORN HERE in VICTORIA, the majority of the events are MADE BY VICTORIAN ARTISTS, making this festival a UNIQUELY MELBURNIAN EXPERIENCE.” *Beat Magazine*

If independent artists are the lifeblood of the Melbourne Fringe Festival (and they are), then the **Open Program** is its beating heart, serving as our city's most exciting, vibrant and ambitious showcase of creative expression. By supporting anyone to independently present their event during the Festival, we create a dynamic platform for diverse voices, artforms, and cultures.

Our Open Program is a space where emerging artists present alongside established and mid-career practitioners—a rare chance to experiment, take risks, and be seen within an ecosystem that fosters mentorship, dialogue, and bold artistic exchange.

And for pioneers who have shaped the independent arts over decades like **Finucane & Smith**, we create opportunities to reach new audiences and sustain a career in the arts. Their **Finucane & Smith's Global Smash Club** celebrated and centred our 2023 Melbourne Fringe Living Legend Moira Finucane, recognising her extraordinary contribution to independent cabaret while also creating opportunities for intergenerational exchange.

Melbourne Fringe Festival's Open Program reflects Melbourne's spirit—made by, with, and for its people. Artists are empowered to share their work without barriers, so that all viewpoints and creative expressions can be represented.

CURATED PROGRAM: BOLD ART HANDPICKED FOR IMPACT

Melbourne Fringe stands apart from other Fringe Festivals by delivering a **Curated Program** alongside the Open Program. The Curated Program increases opportunities for mid-career and established artists, creating points of aspiration and inspiration for all Festival artists, pushing artistic boundaries, and ensuring cultural democracy.

Through the Curated Program we actively create opportunities that elevate independent practice, with commissioning initiatives that invest directly in artists. For artist collectives like **Pony Cam**, who are establishing themselves in the industry, we provide opportunities to scale up their practice with direct commissions that foster ambition and innovation, like their epic performance degustation on class **FEAST**.

By supporting both up-and-coming and established artists side by side, Melbourne Fringe's Curated Program fosters a dynamic space for artists to create bold, career-defining work.

**56 CURATED
PROGRAM EVENTS**

**441 CURATED
PROGRAM ARTISTS**

**124,219 CURATED
PROGRAM ATTENDANCE**





CURATED PROGRAM:

FREE, ACCESSIBLE, AND INCLUSIVE

“COOKED offers up MORE than just a FREE FEED accompanied by ENTERTAINMENT during the COST OF LIVING CRISIS: it’s an OPPORTUNITY to SUBVERT AUSTRALIAN STEREOTYPES while CELEBRATING the CULTURAL TIES that CONNECT US.” Arts Hub, 2024

In 2024, Melbourne Fringe’s commitment to presenting free, accessible and inclusive public art within the Curated Program invited people of all ages to connect through the transformative power of participation.

Long Prawn’s large-scale performance installation, *COOKED*, transformed the familiar ritual of a public barbecue into a vibrant space for art, conversation, and connection. Open every day to the public at **Fed Square**, the project featured **10 open grilling sessions** alongside **8 performances** by **32 artists**, reimagining barbecuing as a platform for cultural exchange and creative expression. Blurring the lines between performance and installation, *COOKED* amplified emerging voices and underrepresented perspectives, offering artists a bold and accessible stage to engage new audiences. With thousands encountering the lively BBQ arena and many more joining in its dynamic programming, *COOKED* demonstrated the power of art to bring people together in unexpected and meaningful ways.

The playful and participatory sculptural musical instrument *Eddy* by **Pulsing Heart** invited audiences to work together to create an evolving, percussive soundscape. A total of **4,416 participants** engaged directly with *Eddy*, while its high-profile location at Fed Square drew over **17,600 people**. The work sparked spontaneous music-making and fostered moments of joy through intergenerational, collaborative play.

Transforming Footscray’s Madder Square into a whimsical wonderland for one night only, *Free Fairy Floss* by **NIOW** delighted audiences of all ages with a breathtaking fusion of acrobatics, music, and sugary spectacle. From soaring above the crowd to the sound of a surprise community choir, NIOW’s dazzling performance was a feel-good celebration of public art’s power to unite, enchant, and inspire.

Performance, food, and community came together on the *Fringe Flavours* showcase stage at the iconic **Queen Victoria Market**. For five Wednesdays in the lead up to and including the Festival period, the Night Markets became a dynamic platform for more than 60 Fringe artists of all backgrounds and experience levels, from emerging talents to established performers, providing not only paid performance opportunities but also space for artists to flyer and promote their shows. This inclusive showcase reinforced our commitment to platforming all artists and ensuring that everyone has a chance to connect with audiences and share their work.

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra’s *Secret Symphony* at **Melbourne Museum** offered Melbourne Fringe audiences perhaps one of the most iconic (and certainly prehistoric) moments of the 2024 Festival—a viola quartet playing the *Jurassic Park* theme in a moodily lit hall alongside a Triceratops skeleton.

CURATED PROGRAM:

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY CONNECTION THROUGH ART

In 2024, Melbourne Fringe fostered community, bringing people of all ages together to experience the profound benefits of arts engagement, to strengthen social ties and to expand the reach of Fringe into the everyday lives of Melburnians.

At the centre of this mission was *The Winner Takes It All* by **The Huxleys**, a vibrant, theatrical exploration of sports through a queer lens, transforming sports venues across the City of Stonnington into glittering stages for performance, photography, and art. Featuring The Huxleys' signature mix of humour, sequins, absurdity, and cheeky eroticism, the project offered a compelling commentary on the complex relationship between queer

communities and sports culture. Over 230 participants—ranging from young adults to the oldest at 74—posed in epic sporting tableaux, snapped by The Huxleys themselves as photographers. By blending humour and critique, the project was not only wildly entertaining but also invited reflection on identity, sport, and community, bridging the gap between artistic expression and community engagement.

"What a brilliant experience. This photoshoot was by far one of the best immersive and participatory Fringe shows that I have ever been part of. You created a warm, inclusive, entertaining, creative space that allowed participants to come into their own. I cannot wait to frame this picture and put it up on my wall as a reminder to always have fun, be silly, fancy and free." The Winner Takes It All participant feedback

Transmission - into the dark by **one step at a time** like this invited audiences on a meditative journey through the streets of Newport, guided by a hand-held transistor radio tuned to a mysterious live broadcast. This mobile, locative theatre experience used sound, place, and nightfall to evoke deep existential and ecological reflections that fostered a profound connection between participants and their environment, bringing to light the unseen forces that shape our world.



ALL ROADS LEAD TO FRINGE: VITAL PATHWAYS FOR ARTISTS

Melbourne Fringe is an artist launchpad, a career accelerator, and a champion of independent artists at every stage. We create vital pathways for artists to develop, take risks, and thrive, whether they're presenting their first-ever show or building on an established practice. From subsidising emerging artists so they can create with reduced financial risk, to commissioning bold new works by artists ready to take the next leap, to celebrating the legacies of our Living Legends, we ensure that artists have the support they need to make extraordinary art.

At the heart of this commitment is our **Festival Hub at Trades Hall**—a fully accessible, low-risk, and heavily subsidised space where artists can present work with financial security. The Hub typically runs at a loss so that we can keep costs low for artists, providing crucial venue subsidies so that more voices can be heard on our stages. In 2024, Melbourne Fringe subsidised venue costs at the Festival Hub to the tune of **\$254,637** reducing financial pressures so artists can focus on experimentation, creativity, and developing their craft.

THE FRINGE FUND

The Fringe Fund is a vital part of this ecosystem, directly supporting pathways for artists while expanding artforms and artistic possibilities. In 2024, the Fringe Fund provided \$794,570 in financial support to artists. By funding risk-taking and experimental projects, the Fringe Fund plays a vital role in sustaining a dynamic arts ecosystem—bridging gaps in traditional funding, fostering talent, and expanding artistic possibilities. Beyond commissioning, the Fringe Fund creates employment pathways and additional revenue streams for artists, ensuring that groundbreaking ideas have the support they need to thrive. Every dollar raised helps us commission, support, and develop independent artists, ensuring Melbourne Fringe remains a space where bold ideas can flourish.

"Fringe is one of the few places left available for artists to test and try out new work. Even rural venues are now programming years in advance and so Fringe was about the only way I could get up a show I wrote this year and see if it worked. I was also deeply appreciative of the support offered by the Artist Services team, and it was of a standard I've never experienced before. I am very grateful for the experience and the ability to receive support from the Fringe Fund, which allowed me to pay my mid-career collaborators a not-totally-insulting fee." Ash Flanders, Fringe Fund supported artist, 2024.

EXTENDING OUR REACH: ACROSS CITIES, ACROSS CULTURES

Melbourne Fringe is a festival without borders. We're pushing boundaries on a global scale, curating the most exciting, genre-defying work from around the world and delivering it to local audiences in more places than Melbourne. Fringe Festivals don't typically do this—but Melbourne Fringe has never been typical. We take risks, forge connections, and ensure that the best independent art—whether from Melbourne, Geelong, Altona or Taipei—has a place to shine.

This year, Melbourne Fringe made its mark right across Greater Melbourne. The City of Stonnington hosted the So Soiree Fringe Garden which showcased a dynamic mix of new works, returning successes, and internationally acclaimed performances. Together with a broad program of successful Open Program events, the Festival helped transformed Prahran into a vibrant hub of artistic expression with a stellar lineup of comedy, cabaret, burlesque, and circus.

In the west, the Festival's Go West program saw a powerful mix of Curated and Open Access works transforming spaces across Footscray, Maribyrnong, Werribee and St Albans, including *FEAST*, the award-winning contemporary dance work *Dream Swamp* by Melanie Lane as part of the XS program, and *Body of Knowledge* by Samara Hersch.

Meanwhile, Geelong Encore extended the Festival's impact regionally, with Tash York concluding her Melbourne Fringe Award-funded regional tour at the Geelong Arts Centre, alongside the nationally acclaimed smash-hit *Wayfinder* by Dancenorth.

Melbourne Fringe also fosters global connections by presenting international perspectives through our Asian Engagement Program. The 2024 Fringe Focus Taiwan program introduced audiences to three thought-provoking works exploring gender identity, empowerment, and evolving feminist discourse. *Girl's Notes* by SU Pin-Wen, *TOMATO* by CHOU Kuan Jou, and SU's striking exhibition *A Radical Nipple* highlighted the extraordinary talent of Taiwan's contemporary art scene. These innovative works provided Melbourne audiences with a window into globally relevant conversations, challenging societal constructs and inspiring local artists with fresh, internationally resonant perspectives. South Korean artist Dudo Wook's *COOKED* residency fused experimental performance, underground cinema, and live sausage-making in *Hot Nights - Indecisive Cinema*. He also led a workshop with APHIDS (in a working florist, no less!), furthering his commitment to unconventional creative exchange.



IMAGE (ABOVE): THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL BY THE HUXLEYS, PHOTO BY DUNCOGRAPHIC
(LEFT): DREAM SWAMP, PHOTO BY GREGORY LORENZUTTI

ACCESS FRINGE AND RADICAL ACCESS: DISMANTLING BARRIERS, EXPANDING INCLUSION

“THE FUNDING from FRINGE enables us to INCREASE the number of ACTORS with DISABILITIES on stage, ensuring our ENTIRE ENSEMBLE is PROMINENTLY FEATURED rather than just a few key members. This FINANCIAL SUPPORT also allows us to be MORE AMBITIOUS in our CREATIVE VISION, ENHANCING the ARTISTIC QUALITY of OUR PROJECT and PRODUCING a more POLISHED and PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE.”

Rollercoaster Theatre, Fringe Fund supported artists, 2024.

Access Fringe affirms our commitment to making Melbourne Fringe more inclusive for artists, audiences, and volunteers. In 2024 our Access team, including identified staff positions across three departments, played a key role in improving accessibility, while our dedicated Access Champion volunteers ensured our volllies could provide meaningful support to those who needed it during the Festival. A standout success was the sensory room at the Festival Hub, offering a calm retreat for audiences and demonstrating the impact of inclusive spaces by providing neurodivergent and sensory-sensitive visitors with a welcoming environment to engage with the Festival comfortably.

Behind the scenes, our Access Advisor developed vital resources, including a new guide to presenting sensory-friendly performances. The Access Fund also continued to remove barriers, supporting Melbourne Fringe artists to make their work more accessible to d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent audiences. Supported services included Auslan interpreters, air filters, fidget toys for neurodiverse audiences, captioning, and the introduction of a traffic light-coloured wristband system for audience interaction.

As part of **Access Fringe**, the artform development program **Radical Access** supports ambitious, genre-defying work that reimagines accessibility, inclusivity, and cultural equity, challenging artists to innovate beyond traditional access services and create bold new models of engagement in the independent arts sector. In 2024 two Radical Access commissions interpreted this provocation in different but equally powerful ways.

In **Notes from a Black Hole**, writer and performer Rowena Hutson explored the journey out of anxiety and depression, in a new work for young adult audiences, collaborating with sensory dramaturg Tom Middleditch to integrate accessibility into each step of the creative process.

Conduit Bodies by dancer, poet, and visual artist Dr Melinda Smith used cutting-edge technology to expand accessibility in performance, employing the use of 'AirSticks', a wearable instrument that translated motion into sound, text, and visuals live on stage. This incredible technology garnered the team a Green Room nomination for Outstanding Technical Achievement in Dance, as well as a nomination for Outstanding Performer for Dr Smith.

Both works exemplify ambitious, genre-defying approaches to accessibility, proving that inclusivity and innovation go hand in hand in the independent arts sector.



IMAGE: CONDUIT BODIES,
PHOTO BY SARAH WALKER



IMAGE: *IN PLACE*, PHOTO BY JACINTA O'KEEFE

DEADLY FRINGE: AMPLIFYING FIRST NATIONS VOICES

In 2024, Deadly Fringe continued its vital role in championing First Nations artists, presenting an outstanding program of commissioned works that spanned music, circus, performance, and an immersive club experience. Across four dynamic projects, more than 1,530 attendees engaged with powerful, self-determined storytelling that showcased the breadth and brilliance of contemporary First Nations artistry.

Supported by the Deadly Fringe Program Coordinator, this year's program featured:

- *Gikilangangu Wergaia* by Alice Skye, James Howard, and Michael Julian, intertwining experimental music with a profound language revitalisation project. *Gikilangangu Wergaia* won Best Music at the Melbourne Fringe Awards.
- *Digital Echoes* by Aaron Wyatt with Speak Percussion, an innovative concert for viola, percussion, and electronics exploring the transformation of sound across time. *Digital Echoes* was shortlisted for Best Music at the Melbourne Fringe Awards.
- *In Place* by Na Djinang Circus, a groundbreaking fusion of contemporary circus and evocative storytelling. *In Place* won Best Circus at the Melbourne Fringe Awards.
- *Creatures of the Blak Lagoon* by Motherless Collective, a sold-out Club Fringe party blending drag, pop-up performances, DJs, live music, and visual spectacle.

The calibre and impact of Deadly Fringe is undeniable. As a long-term programming commitment that celebrated its eighth birthday in 2024, Deadly Fringe not only commissions exceptional new works but also provides essential production and marketing support, ensuring First Nations artists have the resources to share their stories on their own terms. Over the years, Deadly Fringe has fostered an extraordinary diversity of artistic styles and forms, reflecting the richness of Indigenous cultural expression. The overwhelming audience response to this year's sold-out shows reaffirms the strong and growing appetite for First Nations-led work—and Melbourne Fringe's ongoing commitment to ensuring these voices are heard, supported, and celebrated.

CREATIVE INNOVATION: EXPANDING ARTFORMS

“THIS ANNUAL FESTIVAL *is all about* CHALLENGING YOURSELF
and TRYING NEW THINGS.” *Concrete Playground, 2024*

Melbourne Fringe is committed to expanding artistic boundaries and fostering innovation across diverse artforms. By fostering new artistic languages and supporting artists who take risks, we reinforce Melbourne Fringe as a space where the future of performance takes shape.

A key example of this commitment is the immersive contemporary dance work for children *Dream Swamp* by Melanie Lane, commissioned and presented at The Substation. With two dancers navigating a surreal dreamscape of floating jellyfish, enchanted mushrooms, and magical sea snails, *Dream Swamp* transported young audiences into a world of wonder. The production addressed a gap in Australia’s performing arts landscape—contemporary dance for children—demonstrating the potential for contemporary dance to captivate young audiences and introducing acclaimed choreographers to this space. The work’s interactive finale, where children stepped onto the stage to explore a glowing, bioluminescent garden, exemplified the transformative power of art in fostering engagement and imagination.

This ethos of experimentation extends across our programs. *XS* continues to redefine what contemporary performance for children can be, supporting ambitious works that challenge expectations—in 2024 that included *Best. Party. Ever* by Threshold, which connected grandparents and young people separated by distance through an online Zoom birthday party, as well as *Land of the Lost* by Sue Giles and Hannah Vrijenhoek, an immersive and interactive theatre work for very small children exploring loss.

In its second year, Pulse continued to amplify boundary-pushing performances, showcasing eight incredible works including alt-circus *Apocrypha* by Oozing Future, the breathtaking 3-channel video work *FLAMES DANCED IN THEIR HAIR BUT DID NOT BURN THEM* by Fraught Outfit, and the queering of classical Indian Dance *Temple of Desire* by Karma Dance.

Design Fringe is Melbourne Fringe’s avant-garde art, furniture, and design exhibition that challenges conventions, expands the possibilities of design, and sparks critical conversations about its role in contemporary life. In 2024, *We Have Shared Bread and Salt* at Linden New Art asked designers to rethink how furniture and design can make space for connection, exchange, and cultural meaning. Featuring 60 works by 51 artists, the exhibition showcased radical new approaches to form, function, and storytelling in design. Beyond the exhibition, the public program pushed the artform even further, offering hands-on workshops, professional development, and artist talks that encouraged experimentation and new perspectives. Tactile tours redefined how audiences engage with design, while the Design Fringe Gender Equity Initiative confronted historical biases, advocating for a more inclusive and forward-thinking industry. With 1,630 attendees across nine events, Design Fringe 2024 reinforced its place as a leading platform for bold, innovative, and boundary-pushing design.

“We had funding for creative development, but not for presentation. We had exhausted all other avenues for presentation funding that were on the near-term horizon, and timing is critical.

Because the thing with dance is that if funding doesn’t come soon after development, the work leaves your body. Once it is ‘developed’ and mounted into the minds and bodies of dancers, if we don’t present it within a reasonable timeframe, it leaves our bodies. Fringe came in at just the right time with this cash injection, to help us move this work from the studio to the stage. If not, this work would have remained in the studio, never to be seen. If presentation funding came even just a year later (if at all!), it would be too hard to re-mount the show back into our bodies and take it to the stage.” Govind Pillai (Temple of Desire), Fringe Fund supported artist, 2024.





COMMON ROOMS: WHERE ART LIVES BEYOND THE FESTIVAL

While the Melbourne Fringe Festival brings our community together for a glorious 20 days each year, our venue Fringe Common Rooms stands as our year-round home—a unique space where creativity flourishes every day.

Operating as a cultural enterprise—a commercial venue with artistic goals—Fringe Common Rooms serves as a nexus for artists and community members throughout the year. Its remarkable flexibility allows for affordable rehearsal, creative developments, and community gatherings in a space that

adapts to diverse needs. We subsidise this space through a business model that welcomes weddings, parties, anything into Fringe Common Rooms. In 2024, the space welcomed dance parties, 40ths, book launches, film shoots and gigs.

Fringe Common Room has been carefully created to be a genuinely safe and accessible environment for all our communities, with thoughtful staffing ensuring everyone experiences a culturally welcoming atmosphere. Fringe Common Rooms harnesses our entrepreneurial spirit to embody our commitment to nurturing creativity year-round. There's truly nothing else quite like it in our community.

CHAMPIONING OUR FESTIVAL'S ARTISTS

At the core of Melbourne Fringe's success lies our unwavering commitment to the artists who bring it to life. Through comprehensive support systems and financial investment, we're proud to nurture creative risk-taking year after year.

At each step of their journey to Melbourne Fringe, from conception to debrief, artists can access the expertise of our dedicated Artist Services team. This team offers year-round guidance and resources, ensuring artists have the support they need throughout the entire Festival journey. In 2024 that included everything from updated accessibility guides on the Artist Resource Hub to onsite support sessions at Trades Hall working directly with artists to complete their online registration.

The diversity and breadth of artists participating in the Festival continued to evolve. While **emerging artists remain the majority (53% in 2024)**, we saw a significant increase in mid-career (27%) and established artists (17%), reflecting the Festival's appeal to artists at all stages of their creative careers. Age trends show that the **25-34 artist group remains dominant (205 artists)**, but

the 35-44 bracket is growing (127 artists), along with a 60% increase in lead artists aged 55+ in 2024. This highlights a broadening of creative voices at Melbourne Fringe.

Diversity and inclusion efforts have also made strides—Culturally and Linguistically Diverse artists made up 25% of 2024 participants, while People of Colour representation rose to 19%. Participation by d/Deaf and Disabled artists remained strong at 13%. Self-identification increased in 2024, particularly among Disabled, Neurodiverse, and gender-diverse artists.

With our highest-ever **artist satisfaction rating of 96%**, particularly for artist wellbeing, Melbourne Fringe remains a dynamic, inclusive platform, strengthening both the Festival and the wider cultural landscape.

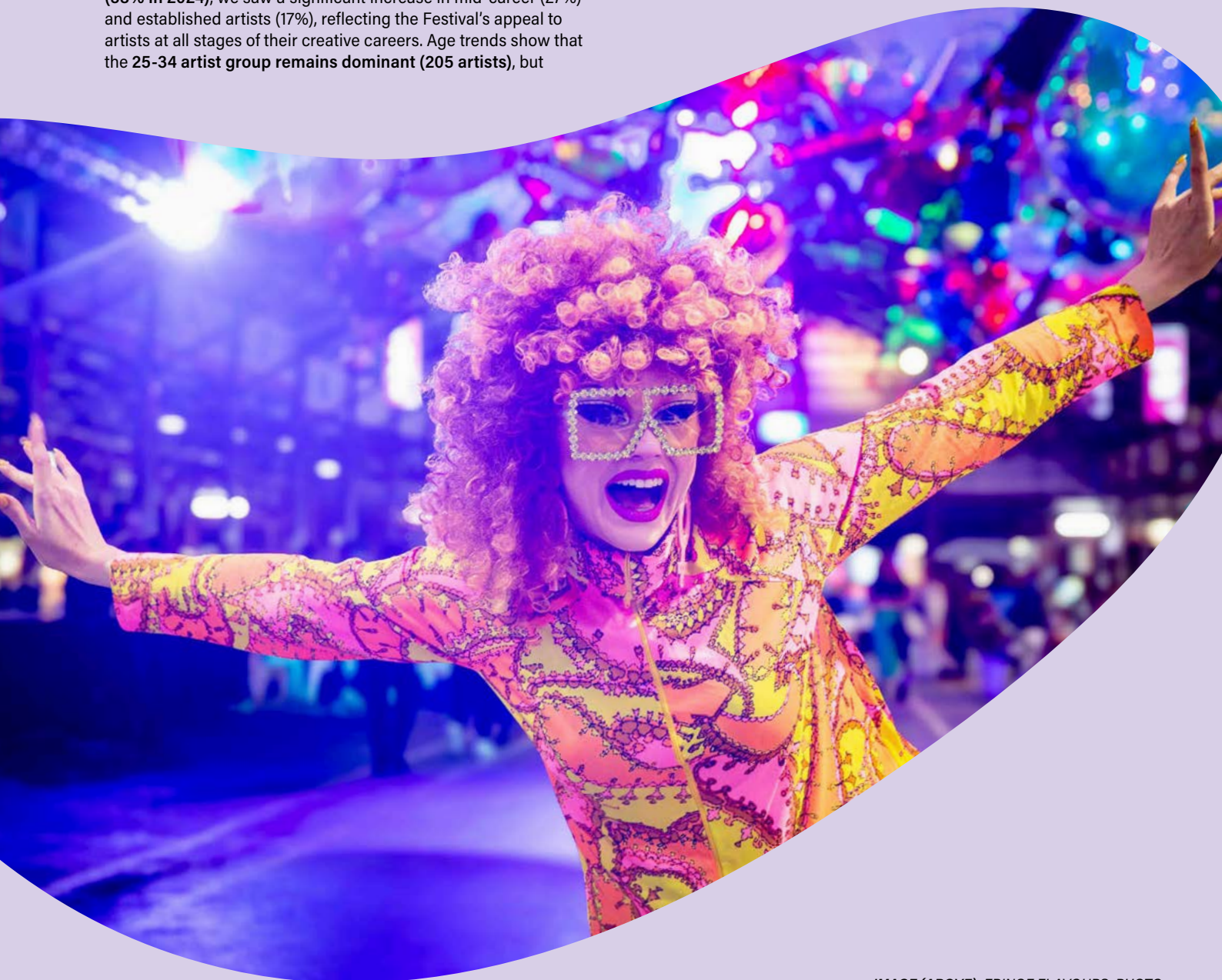


IMAGE (ABOVE): FRINGE FLAVOURS, PHOTO BY TOM NOBLE CREATIVE
(RIGHT): CLUB FRINGE: A GRAND BAZAAR, PHOTO BY CARLIN AND CAMERA

OUR 2024 AUDIENCE STORY:

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

In 2024, we welcomed an incredible **266,785 people** to experience Melbourne Fringe. From ticketed shows to free community gatherings, we created opportunities for audiences to connect, celebrate, and be inspired.

With **74,960 ticketed attendees** and **175,390 people enjoying free events**, accessibility remained at the heart of our programming. Our average ticket price of \$27.49 ensured affordability, while ticketing initiatives like Blak Tix—offering discounted tickets for First Nations audiences—and Pay More offers—which allows those who can to contribute extra—helped make events more inclusive while providing additional support to artists. Our Hub Club membership program also provided a 25% discount on Festival Hub tickets, making participation even easier.

As captured in our post-Festival Audience Survey, the 2024 Melbourne Fringe Festival received overwhelmingly positive feedback from audiences. Attendees felt that the Festival significantly enriched Melbourne's cultural life, encouraged bold artistic risks, and had a positive impact on their wellbeing. **93%** of respondents agreed that the Festival offered a valuable cultural contribution, and **86%** felt it positively impacted their wellbeing. An impressive **94%** of attendees reported having a positive experience.

"In today's world the Fringe Festival was exactly what I needed over the last weekend. I had been feeling flat and came out with a big smile on my face, even buying some merch from the show. It was the first time I saw the act that I chose by the way ... and I will be sure to attend more of their shows in the future." 2024 Audience Feedback

When asked to rate the likelihood of recommending the Melbourne Fringe Festival program to a friend or colleague, **72%** of respondents rated it 9 or 10, resulting in a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of **63**. This reflects strong audience loyalty and a high likelihood of attendees recommending the Festival to others.



MONASH UNIVERSITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM:

A FIRST STEP INTO THE ARTS INDUSTRY

Melbourne Fringe's Monash University internship program continues to be a vital stepping stone for emerging arts professionals. Since 2020, this partnership has provided Monash University students with hands-on experience interning across marketing, theatre production, stage management, arts administration and more. In 2024, 14 students completed 16 placements, gaining valuable industry skills and insights.

Interns valued the program's inclusive environment, supportive mentorship, and real-world learning opportunities. From developing technical skills to understanding professional work culture, they report their experience was both rewarding and transformative. This program reaffirms our commitment to nurturing the next generation of artists and arts professionals.

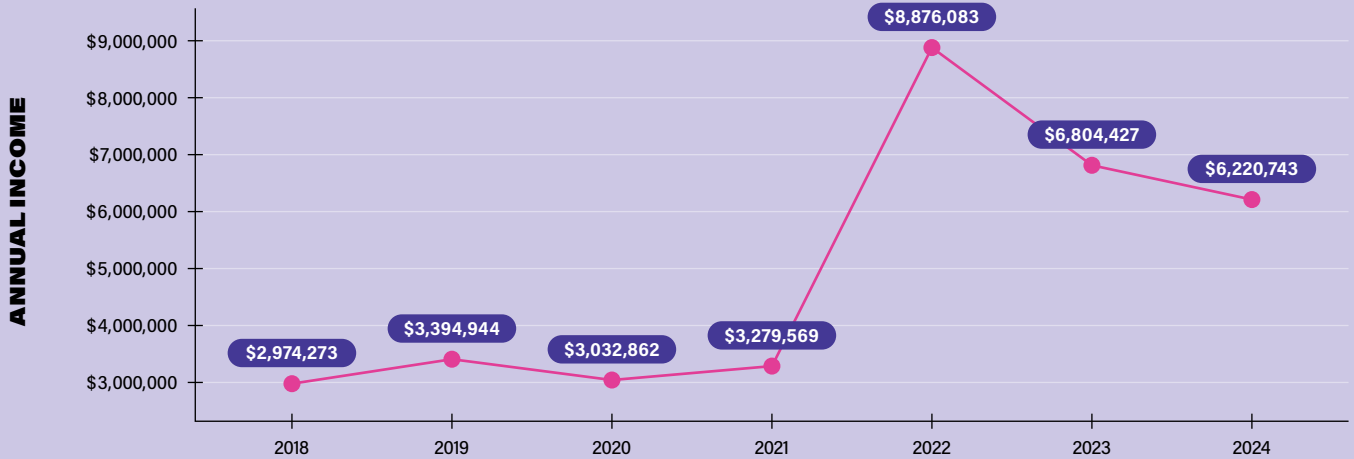
MONASH INTERN CASE STUDY: KELSEY

During her final year of a Bachelor of Media and Communications, Kelsey completed an internship with the Development team at Melbourne Fringe, eager to gain professional experience and understand the fundraising process. "My main goal was to get to know the fundraising process from beginning to end," she explained. As an international student, she was also keen to learn about Australian workplace culture. At Melbourne Fringe, Kelsey worked on the end-of-financial-year campaign, assisting

with donor communications, content creation, and writing her first grant application. "It was a really interesting process... quite challenging but I find it really fun," she said. She valued Melbourne Fringe's inclusive culture and felt truly welcomed. "I always felt like a part of the organisation, not just a short-term intern." The experience boosted her confidence and helped her secure a place in a Masters program in Strategic Communications Management at Monash University.

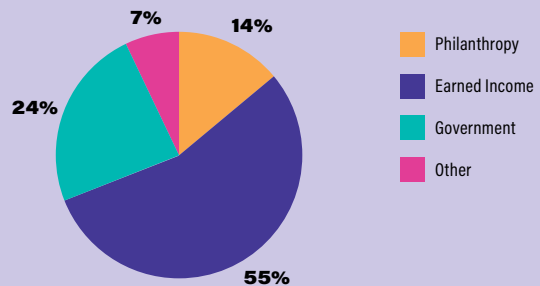
FINANCES

Melbourne Fringe’s income has stabilised at around \$6 million—double the pre-pandemic income of around \$3 million—as a range of post-pandemic temporary funding measures have all come to an end.



Earned income (primarily ticket sales, venue hires and bar sales) has increased to 55% of total income, underscoring our success in bolstering revenue from audience engagement and commercial activities. Philanthropy continues to be a strong driver of activity, representing 14% of income and funding important initiatives that would otherwise be impossible, particularly through programs such as Deadly Fringe and Radical Access.

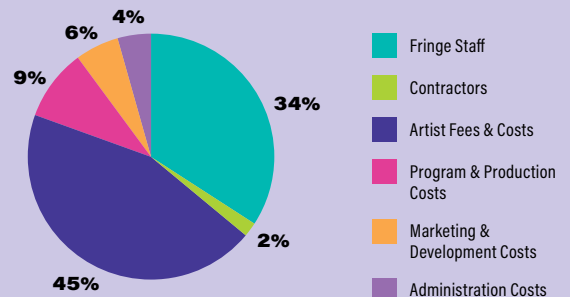
INCOME BREAKDOWN



Payments to artists continue to be the largest proportion of expenditure, accounting for over 45% of outgoings, demonstrating our steadfast focus on supporting artistic talent.

Continued growth in operating and delivery costs across the sector also impacted Melbourne Fringe, with costs exceeding income and the organisation drawing on reserves with a deficit figure over \$300,000. This is an essential and strategic investment in the organisation’s future, as we continue to seek growth in Government and philanthropic investment while optimising operational efficiencies for the coming years.

EXPENSE BREAKDOWN



Melbourne Fringe continues to demonstrate resilience through challenging economic conditions, maintaining our focus on supporting local artists and delivering strong benefits back to the people of Victoria.

DEMONSTRATING IMPACT THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE MODEL

In 2024, we strengthened our business model and collaborated with Connell Griffin to assess our economic and cultural impact. Our work continues to build Melbourne’s reputation as a global city, positioning the independent arts as central to the city’s cultural life, driving visitation and cultural tourism. Data from 2023 showed our activities generated ~\$23 million in economic activity for Victoria, delivering \$11 in economic value-add for every \$1 received from the State. As a major funder of artists, the financial support we distribute to artists through commissions, artist fees and ticket sales actively supports creative jobs and career pathways that underpin a thriving arts sector in Victoria.

\$23 MILLION ECONOMY RETURN FOR VICTORIA
\$11 ECONOMIC VALUE-ADD FOR EVERY \$1 RECEIVED FROM THE STATE

MELBOURNE FRINGE FESTIVAL AWARDS

BEST IN CATEGORY AWARDS

Best Cabaret
Madame Martha's Hush Cabaret

Best Circus
In Place

Best Comedy
*C*N'T*

Best Dance & Physical Theatre
Dancing in Infinite Worlds

Best Experimental
I'm Ready to Talk Now

Best Music
Gikilangangu Wergaia

Best Theatre
Running Into the Sun

Best Visual Arts & Film
FLAMES DANCED IN THEIR HAIR BUT DID NOT BURN THEM

Best Kids
Dream Swamp

Best Words & Ideas
Borrow a Brick for Contact Listening

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT AWARDS

Artform Shaker, supported by Theatre Network Australia
Shitbag

Change Maker Award, supported by Theatre Network Australia
Oliver Ayres, I'm Ready to Talk Now

Best Emerging Indigenous Artist, supported by Wilin Centre (VCA & MCM)
Maggie Church-Kopp, In Place

Best Emerging Producer, supported by MILKE
Ryan Stewart

Market Ready Award, supported by Regional Arts Victoria
Marcus Ryan - Eat, Pray, Walk

Headroom Award, supported by RISING
The Bloom

Emerging Company Incubator Award, supported by Monash's Faculty of Arts
Running into The Sun

Outstanding Newcomer, supported by Auspicious Arts
Bisexual Intellectuals

Geelong Creative Development Award, supported by Geelong Arts Centre
KINDER

Comedy New Work Award, supported by Melbourne International Comedy Festival
Robyn Reynolds is on trial

New Writing Award, supported by Melbourne Theatre Company
Ballkids (or, scenes from a friendship)

TOURING AWARDS

WA Touring Award, supported by FRINGE WORLD Festival
a scary thing happened by the CAMPFIRE

SA Touring Award, supported by Adelaide Fringe
Transmission - into the dark

New Zealand Touring Award, supported by New Zealand Fringe
Assigned Magician at Birth

NSW Touring Award, supported by Sydney Fringe
Twenty Million Thousand Leagues Under the Sea

QLD Touring Award, supported by Brisbane Comedy Festival
A Night with Cherry Vinyl

Edinburgh Touring Award, supported by Summerhall
Shitbag

DESIGN FRINGE AWARDS

Best in Furniture
Turning the Grid (I and II) by Britt Salt

Best in Lighting
Crux (Quintet and Trio) by Richard Greenacre

Best in Object Design
Sobremesa Cup Set by Makushla Harper

Best Experimental
The Comforter by Evie Rosa

Best Bespoke Design
Botanica Exotica: Unknown Civilisations #2 by Eugenie Kawabata

AUTHENTIC DESIGN ALLIANCE Design Futures Award 2024
Loom Lounge by Carl Broesen

SPECIAL AWARDS

Access & Inclusion Award
Flies on What-If Island

Best Work By An Emerging Artist
Black Girl Rising

Director's Choice Award
Temple of Desire

Industry Trivia All-Star Champion Award
Arts Centre Melbourne

Crowd Pleaser Award
Business and Pleasure

Sound and Technical Excellence Award, supported by Front of House Productions
CON 2077

Spirit of the Fringe
Weave: The Solos

Venue of the Year
La Mama

Melbourne Fringe Living Legend
Yumi Umiuare

SPOTLIGHT ON A LIVING LEGEND

Yumi Umiuare's visionary work has inspired and elevated the Melbourne Fringe community, making her a deserving recipient of the 2024 Melbourne Fringe Living Legend Award. Born in Japan, Yumi is an established Butoh dancer, choreographer, and creator of Butoh Cabaret. After touring with the pioneering Japanese Butoh company DaiRakudakan, she moved to Melbourne in 1993, where she has spent 30 years shaping and evolving her distinctive style. Her works, renowned for evoking visceral emotions and exploring cultural identities with humour, have been showcased in festivals across Australia, Japan, Europe, New Zealand, Southeast Asia, and South America.

A true innovator, Yumi's creation of Butoh Cabaret—a genre exploring cultural identities through narrative and abstraction—has become a cornerstone of contemporary Butoh.

Through her innovative work and international collaborations, Yumi has challenged traditional notions of what Butoh is and how it can be performed and has helped to broaden its scope both locally and abroad. Yumi's commitment to exploring new forms of expression and collaboration has kept Butoh relevant and exciting in the 21st century.



MELBOURNE FRINGE STAFF

Creative Director & CEO - *Simon Abrahams*

Head of Programming & Deputy Creative Director - *Danny Delahunty*

Executive Director & Deputy CEO (from March) - *Marline Zaibak*

Head of Development - *Miranda Borman*

Company Manager (to July) and Head of Audience & Digital (from August) - *Louise Richardson*

Head of Marketing (to August 2024) - *Casselly Main*

General Manager (to March) - *Toby Sullivan*

Access Advisor - *Carly Findlay*

Interim Access Advisor (April–October) - *Tom Middleditch*

Artists & Venues Liaison - *Samar Uraizee*

Associate Producer (Curated Program) - *Subashini Weir*

Business and Finance Manager (from November) - *Sarah Rafferty*

Content Creator and Graphic Designer - *Chiara Gabrielli*

Development Coordinator - *Amelia Saward*

Development Events Coordinator - *Maddy Blenkinsop*

Executive Assistant - *Kaho Chow*

Festival Hub Duty Manager - *Bonnie Perry*

Grant & Copy Writer - *Dan Giovannoni*

Marketing Assistant - *Lizzy Carmine*

Marketing Campaigns Manager - *Emma Shaw*

Producer (Curated Program) - *Harriet Wallace-Mead*

Producer (Hub) - *Matt Hirst*

Production Coordinators - *Zachary Mangan, Brooklyn Pace*

Production Manager (Festival Hub) - *Jess Dunn*

Production Manager (Curated Program) - *Genevieve Cizevskis*

IMAGE: MELBOURNE FRINGE STAFF 2024, PHOTO BY TOM NOBLE



Program Coordinator (Artists and Venues) - *Dani Leever*

Program Coordinator (Deadly Fringe) - *Peta Duncan*

Program Manager (Independent Arts) - *Jason Marsiglia*

Sales & Events Coordinator (Common Rooms) - *Jade Smith*

Senior Producer (Curated Program) - *Eilysh Toose*

Strategic Initiatives Manager - *Pauline Cady*

Ticketing Coordinator - *Georgie Donohue*

Ticketing Coordinator - *China Paul*

Ticketing Liaison - *Rachel Hanley*

Venue Operations Manager - *Abbie Potter*

Volunteers Coordinator - *Rebecca Sutherland*

CONSULTANTS

Bookkeeping & Finance - *John Paxinos & Associates Pty Ltd*

Creative Agency - *Little Rocket*

CRM & Data Analyst - *Ciaran Frame*

Development Systems Consultant - *Caitlin McNaughton*

IT Support - *MaxIT*

Marketing Agency - *Bolster*

Publicists - *Zilla & Brook*

Research and Evaluation Consultants - *Culture Counts*

Risk Management Consultant - *Elucidate Consulting*

Registration System - *Eventotron*

Ticketing - *Red61*

Website Developers and Designers - *efront and Design by Wolf*

MELBOURNE FRINGE BOARD

Chair - *Michael Kantor*

Deputy Chair - *Stephanie Hamilton*

Treasurer - *Liz Chappell (from March)*

Company Secretary - *Louise Goh*

Director - *Feyi Akindoyeni*

Director - *Joel Bray*

Director - *Paige X. Cho (from December)*

Director - *Kirsty Ellem*

Director - *Michael Hyde*

Director - *Felix Moon*

Director - *Rupert Sherwood*



**15 FULL-TIME
EQUIVALENT STAFF**

121 EMPLOYEES

**211 VOLUNTEERS,
2509 VOLUNTEER
HOURS**

**4 IDENTIFIED POSITIONS
FOR FIRST NATIONS AND
D/DEAF OR DISABLED
STAFF**

OUR BFF'S (BEST FRINGE FRIENDS)

MELBOURNE FRINGE IS A **NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATION WITH A SUPPORT TEAM WE LOVE AS MUCH AS OUR MUMS. WE COULDN'T MAKE THE FESTIVAL HAPPEN WITHOUT OUR AMAZING DONORS, SO THANKS. YOU'RE THE BEST, CHUCK OUT THE REST.**

\$20,000+ CHAMPION

The Beeton Family Fund, a sub-fund of the Australian Communities Foundation
Daniel Besen AM
The Hansen Little Foundation
Michael Kantor
Craig Semple
Anonymous (1)

\$10,000+ CHEERLEADER

Julie Kantor
Phlyssa Koshland
Monica Lim and Konfir Kabo
Dr Jenepher Martin
Rupert Myer AO and Annabel Myer
Angela Wheelton OAM DSJ and Paul Wheelton AM KSJ
Anonymous (2)

\$5,000+ COMPANION

Monica and Sam Abrahams
John and Lorraine Bates
Cowen Family Foundation
Ron and Margaret Dobell Foundation
Rosemary Forbes and Ian Hocking
Anna Foley and Dashiell Gantner
David Hanrahan
Harris Family Foundation

\$2,500+ CONSPIRATOR

Susanne Dahn, a giving fund in the APS Foundation
Jane Bate and Eryl Morgan
Vallejo Gantner
Michael Jankie and Vivienne Poznanski
Silvia Kantor
Persephone Foundation
Rosemary Walls

\$1,000+ COLLABORATOR

Simon Bedford
Sally Browne Fund, a sub-fund of the Australian Communities Foundation
Jason Craig
Carmen's Kitchen
Paul Gonzalez
Damien Hodgkinson
Snowe Li
Maggie Maguire OAM (of MOGGS, a sub-fund of Australian Communities Foundation)
Melissa McShane
Fiona Menzies
Arpad Mihaly

Filanthy Nalpantidis
Promotix / Freetix Pty Ltd
Luciana Ramos and Luke Sinclair
Christopher Reed
Anne Runhardt and Glenn Reindel
Rupert and Jacky Sherwood
Toby Sullivan
Leonard Vary AM
Pinky Watson

\$500+ CONFIDANTE

Feyi Akindoyeni
Sarah Austin and Nick Verginis
Sheryl Bryce
Marie-Laure Claisse Garrett
Eloise Curry
Graeme Gherashe
Jacob Grainer
Ian Greer
Louise Goh
Helen Hambling
Stephanie Hamilton
Tania Keeghan
Robyn Lansdowne
Jenny Levi and Peter Levi OAM
Virginia Lovett and Rose Hiscock
Marie-Line Lussiana
Pete Manasantivongs
Melinda Martin
Eliza Metcalfe
Kaylene O'Neill
Juanita Pope
Anne-Louise Sarks
Lynne Sherwood
Fiona Sweet

\$200+ COMRADE

Julia Adams
Frankie Airey and Stephen Solly
Olivia Allen
Stephen Armstrong
Tom Ballard
Nicole Beyer
Nicole Birrell
Michelle Buxton
Greg Castle
Richard Chambers
Melinda Clarke
Will Dawson
Helen Donnard
Helen and Matt Franzl
Sue Giles AM and Ian Pidd
Rinske Ginsberg

Kerri Glasscock
Hilary Glow
Emer Harrington
Jerry Hodgins
Jackson Hrbek
Mike Hyde
Nico Keeghan
Richard King AM and Andrea King
Nicky Klempfner and Marcus O'Reilly
Karen Large
Benjamin Lee and Llewellyn Reynders
Daniel Leighton
Sonia Lindsay
Sam McMillan
Caitlin McNaughton
Shaun Miller
Felix Moon
Jason Murphy
Sharon Nathani
Mark Pazolli
Vanessa Pigrum
Julian Pocock
Luanne Poh
James Ralston
David Ritchie
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Natalie Scott
Katrina Sedgwick OAM
Emily Sexton
Andrea Stahel
Tim Stitz and Petra Kalive
Kate Sulan
Cameron Swann
Liz and Kevin Walsh
Julia White
Claire Wilcock
Anonymous (1)

FRINGE COMMUNITY - UP TO \$200

We would also like to thank all of our wonderful community of donors that give so generously. Thanks for your ongoing support. You're all legends.

DEAD FRINGERS' SOCIETY

Thank you to Mark and Tamara Boldiston, and Melissa McShane for their generous bequests to Melbourne Fringe.

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MELBOURNE
GRIN
E