

The National Voice

2017

An annual analysis of theatre
programming trends



INTRODUCTION

The Australian Writers' Guild's *The National Voice* is an annual survey and analysis of programming trends across 10 of Australia's major theatre companies. Undertaken by the Playwrights' Committee of the Australian Writers' Guild, *The National Voice* is an assessment of how successfully these companies, as artistic leaders in our community, commit to producing the work of Australian playwrights in all its diversity and many forms, and to model equity in programming.

This report, on the programs released for 2017, marks the third issue of *The National Voice*. As well as giving us a snapshot of 2017, by comparing this year's report to those of 2016 and 2015, we can start to get a clearer picture of the trends at play in Australia's theatre culture, insofar as they fall within the report's frame of reference.

In 2017, 95 shows have been surveyed across 10 companies, including the state theatre companies: Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre, State Theatre Company of South Australia and Black Swan State Theatre Company. Also included are Belvoir St Theatre, Malthouse Theatre, Ensemble Theatre, Griffin Theatre Company and La Boite Theatre Company.

For statistical purposes, the research focused on the main stage programs of these companies. Education, independent or profit-share programs that fall outside the main subscription offerings have been excluded from the reports, as have very short stand-up comedy seasons, which augment or accompany main stage programming rather than comprise the company's core business.

As with previous reports, the survey and analysis also focus on gender parity as a key issue.

AWG recognises that theatre is, of course, created through many different processes, and that there are creators of theatrical works who, even when working in a substantially text-based form, might not describe themselves primarily as playwrights. This is ambiguous territory, but the purview of this report is playwrights, and so in years past, while acknowledging works created by a devised process, we have tended to include these works in a different bracket in our statistics. No doubt others might come to a different conclusion about the categorisation of particular works, and we welcome that conversation. (We also acknowledge the limits of our lexicon in lumping numerous different processes into a catch-all phrase such as 'devised', but, for the sake of readability, we press on.)

We also acknowledge that the snapshot is partial, and there is a great deal of brilliant work created by individuals and companies not within the remit of *The National Voice*.

MAIN FINDINGS

In 2017, of the 95 plays to be produced across 10 programs, 52 – or 55% – are by an Australian writer. An additional 2 works are co-devised original works where no writer is specifically credited. This brings the figure of new works by Australian writers or devisors to 54 works (57%). Of these, 45 are original works and 9 are adaptations.

Although 2017 shows a marked increase in Australian-written work compared with 2016, the statistics regarding the amount of original Australian writing are closely comparable to 2015, with a sharp decline in the number of adaptations and a slight increase in original work. This suggests that the decline in the performance of classic texts over the last three years has largely been compensated for by programming original writing from overseas, rather than by an increase in original Australian work. Over the years 2015–2017, the percentages of work programmed with an Australian writer attached (including adaptations but not devised work) were 63%, 50% and 55%.

Similarly, when it comes to gender parity, although 2017 marks a slight improvement on 2016, the figures from this report almost exactly match those from 2015, with a 56/44% male/female split for works with an Australian writer attached (including original works and adaptations but not devised works).

Encouragingly, we note that for the first time, a majority (7 out of 10) of companies have achieved either parity or a plurality of female playwrights.

With regards to international work, there has been a slight improvement in the gender balance of work produced – 25% is written by women, up from 10.5% in 2016.

AWG SAYS

It is encouraging to note the increased programming of Australian writers in 2017 compared to 2016. We also note that 2017 contains the highest number of original works by Australian writers of the last three years, and we welcome this commitment from theatre companies to engaging with the original visions of Australian playwrights.

On the gender findings, it is disappointing to see that despite a great deal of attention being brought to the issue, in real terms we are in effect at a standstill. The Australian Writers' Guild unequivocally believes that gender parity is an achievable goal for the 10 companies surveyed – as it is for all Australian theatre companies. While we recognise that every company might not reach parity every year, we do expect that programming over a broader span of time should be roughly 50/50. When conflated, the statistics over the past three years show the actual ratio at 58.5/41.5.

We note that in 2017, for the first time, a majority of companies have achieved parity, and there has been a slight increase in the programming of original work written by women (in line with the increased programming of original work overall). AWG urges theatre companies to build on these modest gains, and commends Queensland Theatre, La Boite Theatre Company, Belvoir St Theatre, Griffin Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, and Black Swan State Theatre Company for making work written by women at least 50% of their program.

THE SURVEY RESULTS

A NOTE ON OUR STATISTICS

These statistics are based on the main stage subscription packages of the companies surveyed. Not taken into consideration are works such as stand-up comedy, independent or education seasons which sit outside the main stage subscription package.

AUSTRALIAN CONTENT

Company	Works in season (Australian and International)	New Aus. works with Aus. writer credited	Aus. Devised works (no writer credited)	Aus. Revival	Total original Aus. works in season	Percentage of original Aus. works in season	Aus. Adapt	Total Aus. works in season	Percentage of Aus. works in season	Percentage of Aus. writer-credited works in season [^]
Sydney Theatre Company +	15	5		2	7	47	2	9	60	60
Melbourne Theatre Company*	11	3			3	27		3	27	27
Queensland Theatre*	9	2		1	3	33.33	2	5	56	56
State Theatre Company SA*	7	2			2	29	2	4	57	57
Black Swan State Theatre Company	8	2		2	4	50	1	5	62.5	62.5
Belvoir St Theatre*	13	6			6	46	1	7	54	54
Malthouse Theatre [^]	12	4	1	1	6	50	1	7	58	50 [^]
Ensemble Theatre	10	4			4	40		4	40	40
Griffin Theatre Company*	4	3		1	4	100		4	100	100
La Boite Theatre Company [^]	6	4	1	1	6	100		6	100	83 [^]
Total	95	35	2	8	45		9	54		

NOTES

*Not included are works in 'add on/extra', stand up comedy, 'independent' or education seasons that sit outside of mainstage subscription packages.

+ Includes in these statistics the *Wharf Revue* as a New Australian Work and a shared writing credit for *Muriel's Wedding*.

[^] Aus. writer-credited work is the total of New Aus. work, Aus. revival and Aus. adaptation, and does not include devised works.

THE SURVEY RESULTS

GENDER – ORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN WORK (NEW, DEvised AND REVIVAL)

Theatre Company	New Aus. works with Aus. writer credited	M / F	Aus. Devised works (no writer credited)	M / F	Aus. Revival	M / F	Total original Aus. works in season	Total M / F (original Aus. works in season)	Percentage M / F (Original Aus. works in season)
Sydney Theatre Company	5	4 / 1			2	2 / 0	7	6 / 1	86 / 14
Melbourne Theatre Company	3	1 / 2					3	1 / 2	33 / 66
Queensland Theatre	2	1 / 1			1	1 / 0	3	2 / 1	66 / 33
State Theatre Company SA	2	0 / 2					2	0 / 2	0 / 100
Black Swan State Theatre Company	2	1 / 1			2	1 / 1	4	2 / 2	50 / 50
Belvoir St Theatre	6	2.5 / 3.5					6	2.5 / 3.5	42 / 58
Malthouse Theatre [^]	4	3 / 1 [^]	1	0 / 0.33 [^]	1	1 / 0	6	4 / 1.33 [^]	66 / 22 [^]
Ensemble Theatre	4	3 / 1					4	3 / 1	75 / 25
Griffin Theatre Company	3	2 / 1			1	0 / 1	4	2 / 2	50 / 50
La Boite Theatre Company*	4	1.5 / 2.5	1	no gender listed*	1	1 / 0	6	2.5 / 2.5	42 / 42*
TOTAL	35	19 / 16	2	0 / 0.33	8	6 / 2	45	25 / 18.33	

NOTES

[^] There is one dance theatre piece by Nicola Gunn which we are crediting as a new female Australian work; a co-credited devised comedy work also has three women credited as creators, one of whom is Australian - hence the 0.33 devised figure. The remaining 0.66 (or 12%) are two female international creators.

* One of the Australian works in La Boite's season is a devised group work, hence there is no gender listed. This accounts for the remaining 16% in the percentage of M/F listed

THE SURVEY RESULTS

GENDER – AUSTRALIAN WORK (NEW, DEvised, REVIVAL AND ADAPTATION)

Theatre Company	Total original Aus. works in season	M / F	Aus. Adapt	M / F	Total Aus. works in season	M / F	Percentage M / F (All Aus. Work in season)	Total Aus. Works with Aus. Writer credited [^]	M / F	Percentage M / F (All Aus. Writer-credited work in season)
Sydney Theatre Company	7	6 / 1	2	1.5 / 0.5	9	7.5 / 1.5	83 / 17	9	7.5 / 1.5	83 / 17
Melbourne Theatre Company	3	1 / 2			3	1 / 2	33 / 66	3	1 / 2	33 / 66
Queensland Theatre	3	2 / 1	2	0.5 / 1.5	5	2.5 / 2.5	50 / 50	5	2.5 / 2.5	50 / 50
State Theatre Company SA	2	0 / 2	2	1 / 1	4	1 / 3	25 / 75	4	1 / 3	25 / 75
Black Swan State Theatre Company	4	2 / 2	1	0 / 1	5	2 / 3	40 / 60	5	2 / 3	40 / 60
Belvoir St Theatre	6	2.5 / 3.5	1	0 / 1	7	2.5 / 4.5	36 / 64	7	2.5 / 4.5	36 / 64
Malthouse Theatre [^]	6	4 / 1.33 [^]	1	1 / 0	7	5 / 1.33	71 / 19 [^]	6	5 / 1	83 / 17 [^]
Ensemble Theatre	4	3 / 1			4	3 / 1	75 / 25	4	3 / 1	75 / 25
Griffin Theatre Company	4	2 / 2			4	2 / 2	50 / 50	4	2 / 2	50 / 50
La Boite Theatre Company [^]	6	2.5 / 2.5			6	2.5 / 2.5	42 / 42 [^]	5	2.5 / 2.5	50 / 50 [^]
	45	25 / 18.33	9	4 / 5	54	29 / 23.33		52	29 / 23	

NOTES

[^] Aus. writer-credited work is the total of New Aus. work, Aus. revival and Aus. adaptation, and does not include devised works

QUICK GUIDE TO STATISTICS

Total no. productions	95
Total % of Aus. work with an Aus. writer credited	52 out of 95 = 55%
Total % Aus work (inc. devised work)	54 out of 95 = 57%

		M	F	No writer/gender
Total Original Aus Works				
Total % of Aus. work with an Aus. writer credited	45	25	18	1
Total Adaptations by Aus. Writers	9	4	5	

Total number of International works programmed	41
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INDIVIDUAL COMPANY REPORTS

Each of the companies has two paragraphs attributed to them. The first analyses the company's programming of Australian playwrights in their 2017 season; the second documents gender equity choices within this cohort of Australian playwrights.

Companies are presented in order of their programming of Australian-authored work, from highest to lowest.

GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY

Griffin's 2017 season of four Australian works constitutes three premiers and one revival, bringing to 100% their commitment to Australian writers and writing. This is Griffin's third surveyed year in a row of all-Australian programming.

Griffin has reached 2017 gender parity with a 50/50 ratio of female to male writers.

LA BOITE THEATRE COMPANY

Of La Boite's six works programmed for 2017, five are new Australian works (four of which are writer-led and one of which is group-devised), with one Australian revival. This puts La Boite's commitment to Australian writers at 83% of their 2017 season. Three of the six new works are driven by CaLD writers and/or devisors.

La Boite has again achieved an equitable 50/50 ratio of gender parity across their writer-credited Australian season.

BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY

Black Swan's 2017 season features eight productions: two of them new Australian works, two Australian revivals and one adaptation employing an Australian writer. This brings Black Swan's commitment to Australian writers up to 62.5% for 2017.

Of these five opportunities for Australian writers, three go to female writers – positioning Black Swan's commitment to female writers at 60% of their Australian programming, a very significant increase from their 8% in 2016.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (STC)

Of the 15 works programmed across STC's 2017 season, five are new Australian plays and two are Australian revivals. STC is also engaging with Australian playwrights towards two adaptations, bringing to 60% STC's commitment to Australian-penned works in their 2017 programming.

Across their 2017 season, 83% of writing opportunities go to male Australian writers, with the remaining 17% going to female playwrights – making STC the second lowest performing Australian theatre company in terms of achieving gender parity across the 10 main 2017 seasons.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA (STCSA)

Of seven works programmed for 2017, two from STCSA's season are new Australian works, with an additional two adaptations employing Australian writers, bringing to 57% STCSA's 2017 commitment to Australian playwrights.

Of the above, three female playwrights and one male playwright are employed – creating a gender ratio of 75% to 25%, respectively. This result represents the highest ratio of Australian female playwrights programmed of any of the surveyed companies.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE (QT)

QT has nine works in its main stage program in 2017, two of which are new Australian plays, one an Australian revival and two adaptations employing an Australian writer – bringing to 56% their percentage of works with an Australian playwright attached.

Of the above, 50% of QT's main stage season engage female playwrights, with the other 50% of opportunities going to male writers. This is the first time QT has achieved gender parity since The National Voice was first compiled in 2015.

BELVOIR ST THEATRE

Belvoir's 2017 season features 13 shows – six of which are new Australian works, with one adaptation of an extant work employing an Australian writer. In summary, Belvoir's commitment to Australian writers constitutes 54% of their total 2017 programming.

Including the adaptation, 64% of Belvoir's programming employs female playwrights, with their male counterparts receiving the remaining 36% of opportunities – achieving gender parity at Belvoir for 2017.

ENSEMBLE THEATRE

Ensemble has ten programmed works for 2017, four of which are new Australian plays – bringing their commitment to Australian writers to an overall 40% for 2017.

Seventy-five per cent of Ensemble's opportunities for Australian playwrights go to males, with the remaining 25% going to females. This shows a decrease from Ensemble's 2016 programming choices.

MALTHOUSE THEATRE

Of 12 programmed plays, four within the 2017 Malthouse season give opportunities to new Australian writing, with one Australian revival and one Australian adaptation. There is a devised comedy piece by one Australian female creator and two International female creators. Including the devised piece, the Australian content of Malthouse's season is 58%, with 50% being writer-credited.

Of the four Australian works where there is a credited writer, three are written by males and one is written by a female (a dance theatre piece by Nicola Gunn that we are crediting as a new female Australian work) – resulting in a 17% commitment to female Australian writers in 2017. Including the devised piece, the quotient of female-credited Australian work at Malthouse this year rises to just 19%. This is a marked drop from 2016, when 37.5% of the Malthouse season offered professional opportunities to female playwrights.

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (MTC)

Of 11 works programmed, MTC's 2017 season contains three new Australian plays, bringing to 27% MTC's commitment to engaging with Australian playwrights. This is statistically the lowest of all 10 surveyed companies, but does represent a small increase from 2016.

Sixty-six per cent (or two) of these Australian works are penned by female writers, with the remaining play (33% of MTC's Australian season) being written by a male.

IN CONCLUSION

In addition to the 10 companies surveyed as part of this representative sample, we thank and commend independent, regional and small-to-medium theatre companies across the nation for their commitment to Australian work, and wish everyone success in 2017.