

AUSTRALIAN WRITERS' GUILD

THE NATIONAL VOICE 2018



AN ANNUAL ANALYSIS OF
THEATRE PROGRAMMING TRENDS



INTRODUCTION

The National Voice is an annual survey and analysis of programming trends across 10 of Australia's major theatre companies. Conducted by the Australian Writers' Guild playwrights committee, it aims to assess the commitment of these companies, as artistic leaders in our community, to programming the work of Australian playwrights in all its diversity and forms.

In 2018, 94 shows were surveyed across the 10 companies, which include each state's theatre company – Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre, State Theatre Company of South Australia and Blake Swan State Theatre Company – as well as Belvoir St Theatre, Malthouse Theatre, Ensemble Theatre, Griffin Theatre Company and La Boite Theatre Company.

For statistical purposes, the research focuses 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 report, 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 focuses on the Australian-written content of each season, paying particular attention to new and original Australian works while also mapping trends in revivals and adaptations. As a matter of interest in line with previous years, gender parity across Australian written-content has also been surveyed.

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 reports 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.

Finally, we acknowledge that this snapshot is partial and that there is a great deal of brilliant work created by individuals and companies not within the remit of *The National Voice*. We applaud their work in creating engaging, stimulating and entertaining theatre and encourage them – alongside the 10 companies surveyed – to continue to embrace, nurture and program original works by Australian playwrights.



MAIN FINDINGS

There are 94 plays to be staged across the main seasons of the 10 largest theatre companies in Australia in 2018, with 58 works – or 62% – by an Australian playwright. This is up on 2017's figures, where 52 works (55%) were by an Australian playwright.

An additional two works are co-devised original works where no playwright is specifically credited, as well as one Australian adaptation with no playwright credited. This brings the total number of Australian works (written or devised) to 61 (65%). Of these, 44 are original works, including 40 new works and 4 revivals, and 17 are adaptations.

Over the years 2015–2018, the percentages of work programmed with an Australian playwright attached (including adaptations by not devised work) were 63%, 50%, 55% and 62% respectively.

2018 shows an overall increase in the number of Australian-written works compared with 2016 and 2017, however it marks a slight decline in the number of original Australian works programmed from last year (45 in 2017 and 44 in 2018), with an increased number of adaptations accounting for the additional Australian-written works this year.

While this is a point of difference to 2017, the number of adaptations in 2018 remains similar to those of 2015 and 2016, indicating an overall trend towards adaptations making up approximately 30% of Australian-written seasons and 18% of seasons overall.

Australian revivals remain a small part of the overall seasons with 4 programmed in 2018. This is in line with the average over the last four years, however marks a drop in revivals from 2017 where 8 were programmed. Of interest, all 4 revivals in 2018 were written by Australian male playwrights.

Encouragingly, we note that 8 of the 10 theatre companies have at least 50% Australian-written content in their season, with five sitting between 70 and 80%. Ensemble Theatre and Melbourne Theatre Company remain the exceptions, with 40% and 18% respectively.

When looking exclusively at original Australian-written work in a season, 5 of the 10 theatre companies have at least 50% original Australian content.

Griffin Theatre Company and La Boite Theatre Company come out on top with 100% of their 2018 seasons new and original Australian content.



GENDER PARITY

In 2018 all 10 theatre companies achieved gender parity or better across their Australian season, however we note that in some instances this is more a reflection of the low number of Australian works in the season (see MTC and Ensemble).

Of the 58 plays with an Australian credited playwright, 36 works (62%) were by an Australian female playwright, with the remaining 22 works (38%) by male playwrights.

This trend is consistent across original Australian work and adaptations, with 28.5 (65%) of the 44 original Australian works and 9 (52%) of the 17 adaptations by an Australian female playwright.

When we look at the gender split across original Australian work in the 2018 season, 8 of the 10 companies have achieved gender parity or better, with Ensemble Theatre and Melbourne Theatre Company both falling behind. This is in part due to there being only two Australian works in Melbourne Theatre Company's 2018 season, one of which is an adaptation and not included in these numbers.

An additional 3 works (2 original and 1 adaptation) had no writer credited but were given a 50/50 gender split when looking at statistics across all 61 Australian plays in a season.



AWG SAYS

We are pleased to again note the increased programming of Australian playwrights in 2018 compared with the previous two years, with 62% of the overall seasons written by Australian playwrights. This marks a return to numbers we saw in 2015, the first year of *The National Voice*, and a noticeable increase from 2016 when numbers dropped to 50%.


Of interest is that this jump in Australian-written work is not a result of an increase in original Australian work, but rather is due to the number of Australian adaptations programmed, which bounced back to numbers similar to 2015 and 2016. The number of original Australian works remains consistent with 2017, which could suggest a stagnancy in how many original works companies are willing to program in a single year, and a hesitancy from companies to take a chance on increasing the number of new voices in a season.

2018 does, however, see the second highest number of original works by Australian playwrights since *The National Voice* began, with 44 original works programmed following the 45 we saw last year. While we recognise the increase over the last few years, and the complexities involved in programming a balanced theatre season, we continue to encourage theatre companies to look at the successes of bold and original Australian works and to further their commitment to programming new works in years to come.

When averaged over the four years covered by *National Voice* reporting, original Australian-written works make up only 42% of the Australian seasons. As *The National Voice* noted back in 2015, it is challenging to sustain a viable practice as a playwright when less than 50% of the work programmed by the 10 main theatre companies are original Australian plays. Further to this, it is concerning that there are only on average 5 Australian revivals per year, indicating a disconnect between Australia's rich theatre history and a continued life for these works on the stage.

AWG strongly believes that Australian theatre is served best when the unique, complex stories of our past, our present and our people are told through the original voices of our playwrights, placed at the forefront of our main theatre seasons where they may connect with an audience. Whether this be through programming original works, giving further life to recently produced works around the nation or by reviving those revered plays from Australia's rich theatre canon, our national theatre culture – and the livelihoods of our playwrights – relies on a commitment by the 10 major companies to diverse Australian programming.

While four years of data can by no means indicate definite trends, we are cautiously optimistic the overall number of Australian-written works this season reflects this commitment, and that *The National Voice* serves alongside voices in the industry to foster an appetite for inventive, diverse Australian content.



We are encouraged by what is revealed when looking at gender, with all 10 theatre companies achieving gender parity across their Australian season. There is, of course, a bigger picture to be told here regarding statistics – for instance, while MTC has achieved gender parity in their Australian season they have done so through only programming two Australian works, one of which is an adaptation. Statistics on gender parity must therefore be taken within the wider context of the programming of Australian works on stage. It is promising that of the seasons programmed by the 10 companies, all have achieved gender parity across their Australian works – a goal we have long stated is attainable.

AWG recognises and supports the wider industry conversations regarding the importance of a diversity of voices on stage, in particular the representation of LGBTQI+, CaLD, Indigenous and disabled voices. *The National Voice* has deliberately excluded diversity analysis beyond gender from its remit. This does not reflect the value the Committee and AWG attaches to diverse voices on stage; rather, it reflects the Guild’s strategy to first engage meaningfully with partners in the diversity space as part of an overall diversity program and to listen before making our voice heard in this space. AWG is committed to working with organisations in an ongoing way to champion better representation of diverse voices on our stages, and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this discussion in a positive and appropriate manner.

While no statistics are presented below, AWG are keen to see the breadth of diverse stories, cultures and experiences in Australia reflected on stage, and for reporting on diversity on stage to become the norm.

THE SURVEY RESULTS

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

Theatre company	Total number of works in season	New Aus. works with Aus. writer credited	Aus. Devised works (no Aus. writer credited)	Aus. Revival	Total original works in season	Percentage of original Aus. works in season	Aus. Adaptation	Total Aus. works in season	Percentage of Aus. works in season	Percentage of Aus. writer-credited work in season^
Sydney Theatre Company	14	6	0	1	7	50	3	10	71	71
Melbourne Theatre Company	11	1	0	0	1	11	1	2	18	18
Queensland Theatre Company	8	3	0	0	3	38	3	6	75	75
State Theatre Company SA	10	4	0	2	6	60	2	8	80	80
Black Swan State Theatre Company	8	3	0	1	4	50	0	4	50	50
Belvoir St Theatre*	12	5	0	0	5	42	3*	8	66	58
Malthouse Theatre**	11	4	1**	0	5	45	4	9	82	73
Ensemble Theatre	10	3	0	0	3	30	1	4	40	40
Griffin Theatre Company	4	4	0	0	4	100	0	4	100	100
La Boite Theatre Company^	6	5^	1	0	6	100	0	6	100	83
TOTAL	94	38	2	4	44		17	61		

* *Sami in Paradise* is based on *The Suicide* by Nikolai Erdman without a credited writer and is this being classed as an Australian adaptation but is not included numbers relating to writer-credited works in a season

** *Trustees* is a collaborative work between Natalia Kaliada and Nicolai Khalezin from Belarus Free Theatre and Daniel Schlusser and the cast and thus is being classed as a New Australian devised work but with no credited Australian writer

^ *The Village* is a devised Australian work, and therefore does not fall under writer-credited work

THE SURVEY RESULTS

GENDER - ORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN WORK (New, devised and revival but not adaptation)

Theatre company	New Aus. works with Aus. writer credited	M \ F	Aus. Devised	M \ F	Aus. Revival	M \ F	Total original Aus. works in season	Total M \ F (original Aus. Work in season)	Percentage M\F (Original Aus. Work in season)
Sydney Theatre Company	6	1 \ 5	0	0	1	1 \ 0	7	2 \ 5	29 \ 71
Melbourne Theatre Company	1	1 \ 0	0	0	0	0 \ 0	1	1 \ 0	100 \ 0
Queensland Theatre Company	3	1.5 \ 1.5	0	0	0	0	3	1.5 \ 1.5	50 \ 50
State Theatre Company SA	4	0 \ 4	0	0	2	2 \ 0	6	2 \ 4	33 \ 66
Black Swan State Theatre Company	3	0 \ 3	0	0	1	1 \ 0	4	1 \ 3	25 \ 75
Belvoir St Theatre	5	2 \ 3	0	0	0	0	5	2 \ 3	40 \ 60
Malthouse Theatre	4	0 \ 4	1	0.5 \ 0.5	0	0	5	0.5 \ 4.5	10 \ 90
Ensemble Theatre	3	2 \ 1	0	0	0	0	3	2 \ 1	66 \ 33
Griffin Theatre Company	4	2 \ 2	0	0	0	0	4	2 \ 2	50 \ 50
La Boite Theatre Company	5	1 \ 4	1	0.5 \ 0.5	0	0	6	1.5 \ 4.5	25 \ 75
TOTAL	38	10.5 \ 27.5	2	1 \ 1	4	4 \ 0	44	15.5 \ 28.5	

GENDER - ORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN WORK (New, devised, revival and adaptation)

Theatre company	Total original Aus. works in season	M \ F	Aus. Adaptation	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	2 \ 5	3	0.5 \ 2.5	10	2.5 \ 7.5	25 \ 75	10	2.5 \ 7.5	25 \ 75
Melbourne Theatre Company	1	1 \ 0	1	0 \ 1	2	1 \ 1	50 \ 50	2	1 \ 1	50 \ 50
Queensland Theatre Company	3	1.5 \ 1.5	3	0.5 \ 2.5	6	2 \ 4	33 \ 66	6	2 \ 4	33 \ 66
State Theatre Company SA	6	2 \ 4	2	2 \ 0	8	4 \ 4	50 \ 50	8	4 \ 4	50 \ 50
Black Swan State Theatre Company	4	1 \ 3	0	0	4	1 \ 3	25 \ 75	4	1 \ 3	25 \ 75
Belvoir St Theatre	5	2 \ 3	3	1.5 \ 1.5	8	3.5 \ 4.5	44 \ 56	7	3 \ 4	43 \ 57
Malthouse Theatre	5	0.5 \ 4.5	4	3.5 \ 0.5	9	4 \ 5	44 \ 56	8	3.5 \ 4.5	44 \ 56
Ensemble Theatre	3	2 \ 1	1	0 \ 1	4	2 \ 2	50 \ 50	4	2 \ 2	50 \ 50
Griffin Theatre Company	4	2 \ 2	0	0	4	2 \ 2	50 \ 50	4	2 \ 2	50 \ 50
La Boite Theatre Company	6	1.5 \ 4.5	0	0	6	1.5 \ 4.5	25 \ 75	5	1 \ 4	20 \ 80
TOTAL	44	15.5 \ 28.5	17	8 \ 9	61	23.5 \ 37.5		58	22 \ 36	



INDIVIDUAL COMPANY REPORTS

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

GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY

- Total works programmed: 4
- Australian-written works: 4 (100%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 4

LA BOITE THEATRE COMPANY

- Total works programmed: 6
- Australian works: 6 (100%)
- Australian-written works: 5 (83%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 5
 - o Group-devised works with no playwright credited: 1

STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA (STCSA)

- Total works programmed: 10
- Australian-written works: 8 (80%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 4
 - o Australian adaptations: 2
 - o Australian revivals: 2

QUEENSLAND THEATRE (QT)

- Total works programmed: 8
- Australian-written works: 6 (75%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 3
 - o Australian adaptations: 3

MALTHOUSE THEATRE

- Total works programmed: 11
- Australian works: 9 (82%)
- Australian-written works: 8 (73%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 4
 - o Australian adaptations: 4
 - o Group-devised work with no playwright credited: 1



SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (STC)

- Total works programmed: 14
- Australian-written works: 10 (71%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 6
 - o Australian adaptations: 3
 - o Australian revivals: 1

BELVOIR ST THEATRE

- Total works programmed: 12
- Australian works: 8 (66%)
- Australian-written works: 7 (58%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 5
 - o Australian-written adaptations: 2
 - o Devised adaptation with no playwright credited: 1

BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY

- Total works programmed: 8
- Australian-written works: 4 (50%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 3
 - o Australian revival: 1

ENSEMBLE THEATRE

- Total works programmed: 10
- Australian-written works: 4 (40%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 3
 - o Australian adaptations: 1

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (MTC)

- Total works programmed: 11
- Australian-written works: 2 (18%)
 - o New Australian-written works: 1
 - o Australian adaptation: 1