

MEDIA RELEASE – 26 October 2015

## Melbourne Festival's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration featuring literary adaptations, collaborations, debate and discussion draws to a close

The 30<sup>th</sup> Melbourne Festival - the third and final program from Artistic Director, Josephine Ridge – drew to a close yesterday with sold out, final performances from cult UK band **The Fall** at the pop up Foxtel Festival Hub, **Haydn Open House** at Ridge House in Toorak and **1984** from Headlong at Arts Centre Melbourne.

It was a fitting end to a Festival that opened on Thursday 8 October with full houses for Belgian dance production **32 Rue Vandendrienen**, Melbourne-made cabaret meets circus show **LIMBO**, choreographer Antony Hamilton's **NYX** and **Bronx Gothic** from PS122 alumni Okwui Okpokwasili.

The 2015 Festival has brought to its conclusion many initiatives and ideas Josephine has explored over her three years as Artistic Director including **Tanderrum**: a powerful ceremony bringing together Elders from the five clans of the Eastern Kulin to celebrate their rich cultural heritage and mark the Festival opening and **Haydn for Everyone**: a quest to perform all 68 of Haydn's string quartets— paying homage to the man who invented the genre and charting his impact on its development. The reputation of the Foxtel Festival Hub as a go-to contemporary music venue with a great social vibe was cemented and underlying themes such as the creatively charged intersection of art and politics were explored across the past three programs.

Josephine's festivals were also characterized by international co-commissions such as **Hofesh Shechter's Sun and Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre's The Rite of Spring / Petrushka**. Local/international co-commissions included **Circa's Opus, Complexity of Belonging** with MTC and Chunky Move and Australian co-commissions included Malthouse Theatre's **The Shadow King**, headed for a London season in 2016 and Opera Australia and Barking Gecko's **The Rabbits**. Support for the independent sector included three commissions with Theatre Works: Daniel Schlusser Ensemble's **M+M, The Rabbles' Room of Regret** and Fraught Outfit/St Martins' **The Bacchae** and with Arts House Stephanie Lake and Robin Fox's **A Small Prometheus**.

Josephine Ridge said: "It has been a great honour to be the Artistic Director in this anniversary year and I am delighted that the Melbourne public have embraced the 2015 program so enthusiastically. Melbourne is an exhilarating and sophisticated city and I look forward to seeing how the Festival continues to reflect its unique character and beauty in the years to come."

The 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the Festival featured close to 80 events, almost half of which were free, and achieved a box office of around \$3.3 million, the strongest result in over a decade. The average ticket price was a low \$46, reflecting a desire to be as inclusive as possible.

With eight world premieres, 17 Australian premieres, 15 events exclusive to Melbourne Festival and five specially commissioned works from over a 1000 artists from 23 different countries across more than 30 venues, the program connected with an incredibly diverse audience.

12,000 tickets to **Flight Facilities with the MSO** at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl were snapped up within three hours of going on sale. The thrilling collaboration was the brainchild of the Festival's Director of Contemporary Music, Declan Forde and is a shining example of just what a festival can bring to a city.

Audiences flocked to local Melbourne dance, theatre and visual arts companies and artists including Fraught Outfit/St Martin's **The Bacchae**, Antony Hamilton's **NYX**, Speak Percussion's **A Wave and Waves** and Outer Urban Projects' **Grand DiVisions**.

International companies and artists brought new work to Melbourne, with thousands of theatre lovers seeing UK company Headlong's extraordinary production of **1984** over twelve sold out performances at the Playhouse, Arts Centre Melbourne. **Batsheva Dance Company** thrilled audiences on and off the stage with **Decadance** and the Australian premiere of **Last Work**, the sold out season of **Desdemona** inspired debate and discussion on the politics of race, class and gender and **New York Narratives** introduced NYC independent theatre company PS122 and also highlighted Melbourne's deep seated appreciation for independent theatre.

**Courtney Barnett, Jen Cloher, Adalita** and **Gareth Liddiard** paid a triumphant tribute to **Patti Smith's Horses** with two packed out performances at Melbourne Town Hall. The Festival was also proud to present a number of co-commissioned works including **The Rabbits, The Experiment, Masquerade** and **Monkey...Journey to the West**, along with a wildly popular contemporary music program at the Foxtel Festival Hub.

The Foxtel Festival Hub enjoyed a bumper year, with thousands flocking to the banks of the Yarra to soak up the bountiful spring sunshine and a chance to engage with other Festival-goers in a riverside precinct enlarged by the addition of a Spiegeltent with its Strut and Fret produced house show, **Limbo**. Daily free programming featured in **MPavilion** next door to the Hub, and the Festival presented the largest program yet of free ancillary events to encourage debate, including the 30 Year anniversary forums held on each Saturday of the festival period.

Revenue targets for corporate sponsorships were exceeded, including securing new Major Partner UnionPay International to sit alongside Leadership Partners China Southern Airlines and Foxtel.

Our private giving program achieved record results. We maintained our recent tradition of 100% Board giving and individuals and foundations responded generously to our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary program, helping the Festival to stage our very broad program of free ancillary events. Presenting Partners and Patrons Circle support increased by 57% on 2014, with a 90% renewal rate to the Patrons Circle donor program. 32% of our 2014 donors increased their donation in 2015, and 27% of Patrons Circle donors were new to the Festival in 2015.

Melbourne Festival CEO, Katie McLeish said: "I am very proud of the team's achievements over the past three years. The staff and board could not be more committed and this year, in particular, Melbourne's international arts festival has resonated deeply with its diverse audiences and artists. Commercial success flows from that engagement with the program."

Some of the incredible companies and artists who presented work in Josephine's three festival programs were **Sylvie Guillem; Nature Theater of Oklahoma** with its epic masterpiece **Life and Times: Episode 1-4**; **Kneehigh Theatre's** adaptation **Brief Encounter**; **Ontroerend Goerd's Teenage Riot** and **All That Is Wrong**; **Belarus Free Theatre**; **The Rabble**; **Hofesh Schechter**; **Wang Bing**; **Archie Roach**; **Amadou & Mariam**; **Ólafur Arnalds**; **Gurrumul**; **Polyglot Theatre**; film-maker **John Landis**; **The Cinematic Orchestra**; **Circa**; **Heiner Goebbels**; **Carsten Holler**; **Trisha Brown Dance Company**; **Jeff Mills**; **Clint Mansell**; **Nils Frahm**; **Big hart**; **Chunky Move**; **Shaun Parker & Company** and **Richard Tognetti and the ACO**.

The 2016 Melbourne Festival will be held from 6 – 23 October. New Artistic Director Jonathan Holloway will announce his first program in the second half of 2016.