

THE NATIONAL VOICE 2016



An annual analysis of theatre
programming trends

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Writers' Guild's The National Voice report is an annual survey and analysis of programming trends across Australia's 10 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.

As it did with the inaugural 2015 report, the 2016 survey and analysis also focuses on gender parity as a key issue.

In 2016, ninety-five shows have been surveyed across ten companies, including the state theatre companies: Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, and Black Swan. Also included are Belvoir, Malthouse, Ensemble, Griffin and La Boite.

The research focussed on these companies' main stage programs for statistical purposes. 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 and burlesque seasons, which augment or accompany the 'main stage' programming rather than comprise the company's core business.

MAIN FINDINGS

Australian work: In 2016, the trend across the scoped companies is that – compared to 2015 – fewer works with an Australian writer attached are included in main house programming.

In 2015 programming, 63% of projects had an Australian writer attached (either as authoring an original work, or as adaptor of an extant work).

In 2016, of the 95 plays to be produced across 10 programs, 47 – or 50% - are by an Australian writer. An additional six 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 56%.

Of these 53 works, 34 are original works and 19 are adaptations.

These figures demonstrate a sharp decline in the programming of work by Australian writers in 2016, compared to 2015.

Gender parity: 2016 reveals an increase in the disparity between the programming of male-authored and female-authored work. In 2015, of the 58 works by Australian playwrights (including original and adapted works), 57% were by men, and 43% by women. In 2016, the comparative percentage is 61% (male) and 39% (female) across all programmed works, both original and adaptations.

THE AWG SAYS

The significant decline in the staging of Australian works is of deep concern to the Australian Writers' Guild. While international and classic work will always be an important part of our theatre, we strongly believe that Australian theatre is best served when Australian-authored works are placed at the centre of our national conversation.

We believe Australian writers have the heart, intellect and capacity to interpret our own world from within – responding to our own ideas and perspectives with exceptional voices which best understand our unique landscapes and cultural frameworks.

Half of all the 2016 works proposed and produced by companies offering a subscription season do not involve an Australian writer. This also has clear implications for Australian playwrights' ability to access opportunities to build an ongoing and sustainable practice.

On the gender findings, the Australian Writers' Guild unequivocally believes that gender parity is an eminently achievable goal for the ten 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. The 2016 survey figures indicate that on current trends - and despite the attention that continues to be brought to this issue - this remains unlikely unless greater efforts are made.

It would appear that commissioning of adaptations is where the gender disparity is at its most pronounced.

The AWG also notes that of the international writing produced by the companies surveyed in 2016, 89.5% of it is written by men.

THE SURVEY RESULTS

While it is recognised that Australia's leading theatre companies each rightly aspire to an individual character and to providing distinctive programming to their various audiences, it is of some use to collate their productions in terms of Australian content and gender parity in a table form. This is not to produce a "league table", but to gather in a simplified and easily accessible form the key findings for each.

Company	Works in season (2015 figs in brackets)	New Aus	Number Female	Reviv Aus	Number Female	Devised Oz No Writer	% origin Aus Work	% Fem (Aus writers)	Adapt by Aus Writers	Number Female	% of works with Aus Writer (inc Adapts)	% Fem (inc Adapts)
Sydney Theatre Company +	16 (15)	4 (3)	3 (2)	1 (1)	0 (0)	1M	31 (27)	60 (50)	2 (2)	0 (0)	44 (40)	43 (33)
Melbourne Theatre Company*	11 (12)	0 (4)	0 (1)	1 (-)	1 (-)		9 (33)	100 (25)	3 (1)	1.5 (1)	27 (42)	62 (40)
Queensland Theatre Company*	8 (8)	1 (4)	0 (1)	1 (-)	1 (-)	1M	50 (50)	25 (25)	1 (1)	0 (0)	38 (63)	12.5 (20)
State Theatre Co SA	10 (7)	5 (2)	3 (2)	0 (2)	0 (0)		50 (57)	60 (50)	2 (1)	1 (1)	70 (71)	57 (60)
Black Swan STC	7 (7)	3 (1)	0.5 (1)	- (-)	- (-)		42 (14)	17 (100)	2 (1)	0 (1)	71 (28)	8 (100)
Belvoir^	12 (12)	3 (6)	1 (3.5)	1 (1)	0 (0)	1M, 2F	42 (58)	25 (50)	3 (4)	2.5 (2)	50 (92)	50 (50)
Malthouse^	10 (9)	2 (6)	1 (2)	- (-)	- (-)	1	30 (67)	50 (34)	2 (1)	0.5 (1)	40 (78)	37.5 (43)
Ensemble Theatre	10 (10)	2 (3)	1 (0.5)	0 (1)	0 (0)		20 (40)	50 (12.5)	1 (1)	0 (0)	30 (50)	30 (10)
Griffin Theatre Company*^	6 (6)	5 (6)	1 (3)	- (-)	- (-)		100 (100)	20 (50)	1 (-)	0 (-)	100 (100)	17 (50)
La Boite Theatre Company	5 (6)	0 (2)	0 (1)	0 (-)	0 (-)	1	- (33)	- (50)	2 (4)	1 (2)	40 (100)	50 (50)
Total no. productions	95 (92)						Total % Fem (Original Works Only)				Total % Fem (inc. adaptations)	
Total % of work with Aus Writer	49.5% (63%)							43 (40)				39 (43)
Total % Aus content inc. devised works	56%											
		M	F	No writer								
Total Original Aus Works	28 (42)	16.5 (25)	12.5 (17)	6								
Total Adaptations by Aus Writers	19 (16)	12.5 (8)	6.5 (8)									
							Total % Fem (Int Works Only)					
Total no. of International Works produced	42 (n/a)	36 (n/a)	5 (n/a)	1 (n/a)				10.5 (n/a)				

NOTES

*Not included are works in 'add on' or 'independent' or education seasons that sit outside of mainstage subscription packages.

^Belvoir's includes 'Ruby's Wish', a devised piece with no writer credited; Leah Purcell's 'The Drover's Wife' was counted as an Australian Adaptation; Meow Meow's cabaret was excluded from Malthouse's season as per 2015 stats. Griffin's figures include 4 mainstage shows, and three labelled 'Special Events'. One of these is devised by a woman. There are an additional three independent shows not included here.

+ Includes in these statistics the Wharf Revue as a New Australian Work. Power Plays is counted as one new work by 'a' female (5 x short plays by women), and two shows have no writer attached and sit outside of the final gender ratio equation.

INDIVIDUAL COMPANY REPORTS

Each of the following companies has two paragraphs of analysis attributed to them. The first analyses the company's programming of Australian playwrights in their 2016 season, the second documents gender equity choices for 2016 programming. Companies are presented in order of their programming of Australian-authored work, from highest to lowest.

GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY

Griffin's 2016 season of six writer-driven works incorporates five new Australian plays and one adaptation by an Australian playwright, resulting in Griffin's 100% commitment to Australian playwrights for their 2016 season.

One play (17%) of Griffin's programming provides an opportunity for a female playwright, with 83% of 2016 opportunities going to males. This marks a decline from 2015 when Griffin were one of the few surveyed companies to achieve gender parity in its programming.

BLACK SWAN STATE THEATRE COMPANY

Black Swan's 2016 season features seven productions, three of them new Australian works. Two adaptations bring Black Swan's engagement of Australian playwrights to 71% of their overall program, representing an increased programming of Australian content from 2015.

One of these new Australian works is co-written by a woman. Black Swan's 2016 commitment to female playwrights rests at 8%, with 92% of opportunities going to men. This is the widest gender ratio gap of all the companies surveyed.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

With ten works programmed for 2016, five (50%) of STCSA's 2016 season consists of new Australian plays. Two adaptations – both by Australian writers – brings STCSA's commitment to Australian playwrights to 70% of their 2016 season.

Of STCSA's 2016 season, 57% feature female playwrights, with 43% of opportunities going to males. This represents the highest commitment to programming women writers of any of the companies surveyed.

Note: STCSA is the only major Australian theatre company with a stated policy of gender parity, with an express commitment in their company's Artistic Vision to "achieve gender parity in key creative roles over every three year programming cycle."

BELVOIR STREET THEATRE

Of Belvoir Street's 12 shows in 2016, three are new Australian works, one is a revival of an extant Australian work, one is a co-devised new Australian work and three are adaptations penned by Australian playwrights - positioning Belvoir Street's 2016 commitment to Australian writers at 58% of their total programming.

In terms of gender equity across their season, Belvoir Street's 2016 season gives 50% of its writerly opportunities to women playwrights and 50% to men. Gender parity has been achieved here.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

Of the 16 works programmed across STC's 2016 season, four are new Australian plays. STC's revival of an extant play, plus a new Australian devised work, brings the overall percentage of Australian playwrights involved in STC's 2016 program to 31%. This figure rises to 44% once adaptations are taken into consideration.

Of the original Australian work programmed by the company, 60% is written by women. Once adaptations credits are taken into consideration, overall gender parity for STC's 2016 season sits at: 43% programming of female playwrights, 57% male playwrights.

LA BOITE THEATRE COMPANY

Of La Boite's five works, two are adaptations by Australian writers, and one a new Australian devised circus work, placing La Boite's commitment to Australian playwrights at 40% of their overall 2016 program, representing a fall in comparison to 2015. The Australian content figure rises to 60% if non-writer-driven work is added to the total.

In terms of gender parity, 50% of La Boite's 2016 programming opportunities go to women and 50% to men, with the fifth (circus) piece having no gender detail attached to its devising team. Gender parity has been achieved here.

THE MALTHOUSE

With ten works programmed for 2016, The Malthouse has two new Australian plays and two adaptations involving Australian playwrights - placing their programming of Australian writers at 40% of their 2016 season. With devised work credits factored in, the Australian content rises to 60%.

Of 2016 Australian writer-driven work, 37.5% is credited to female playwrights (one adaptation is co-authored by a woman), with 62.5 % given to males.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY

QTC has eight works in its main stage program in 2016, one of which is a new Australian play, one a revival of an Australian play, one adaptation and one new devised work (with no writer nominated), bringing QTC's overall commitment to Australian work to 37.5% of their 2016 season. This figure rises to 50% when devised work credits are included in the total.

With the devised, adapted and new work all having men as key writers or devisors, 12.5% of QTC's main stage 2016 season engages a female playwright, with the other 87.5% of opportunities going to male writers.

ENSEMBLE THEATRE

Of Ensemble's ten shows in 2016, two are new Australian works, with one adaptation by an Australian playwright. In total, Ensemble's commitment to Australian writers constitutes 30% of their 2016 programming.

Of Ensemble's 2016 season, 30% engages women playwrights, with the other 70% of opportunities going to men.

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

With 11 works programmed, MTC's 2016 season contains one revival of an Australian play but no new original Australian works. Their three adaptations involving Australian writers bring MTC's commitment to Australian playwrights across their 2016 main stage season to 27%.

When taking into account their 2016 revival of an Australian work - plus 50% of the above adaptations being outsourced to women - an overall 62% of MTC's 2016 Australian programming features female playwrights. This is a commendable gender parity ratio, but comes off the smallest base of Australian programming of all companies surveyed.

IN CONCLUSION

The intention of The National Voice is to provide not only a snapshot of what's happening in one particular year, but to accumulate data to examine trends over a longer period of time.

The marked drop in the programming of Australian content between 2015 and 2016 is clearly a matter of concern for all Australian playwrights, and the increased gender gap denotes an inequitable representation of our strong female voices, from emerging to established.

The Playwrights' Committee believes that Australian writers are responding with urgency, immediacy and flare to the socio-political world around them, and while there is a good spread of emerging, established and senior writers whose voices are being heard on our national and international stages, there is clearly room for increased programming of these voices at home.

We urge our major companies to lead the charge for Australian works, gender equity and cultural diversity on our stages - to demonstrate that theatre is not a reluctant or belated participant, but at the vanguard of this important and timely national conversation.

We wish our colleagues at the companies surveyed every success with their seasons and look forward to enjoying the work as it reaches the stage.