

A New Century

The Arts Centre's role in the Melbourne community continues to grow and is further reflected by major events such as the annual AFL Grand Final Parade, which departs from the forecourt on its way into the city. The Arts Centre has also been a finishing point for the Melbourne Marathon and features as a key location in many of the city's fun runs and civic occasions, including Anzac Day and Australia Day.

In recent years the Arts Centre has contributed to the Australia Day activities with free performances and other activities usually centred on the Outdoor Lawn between Hamer Hall and the Theatres Building.

A key performance venue for summertime activities, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl has regularly hosted free family concerts, music festivals the annual Carols by Candlelight and international artists touring Australia. Programming opportunities were further enhanced following a considerable renovation of the Bowl and its surrounds. The venue was closed for 18 months from 1999 for the upgrade and was relaunched with a fanfare in September 2001. It continues to be a popular and much-loved venue for outdoor performances for a diverse range of audiences.

Since the renovation the Bowl has hosted a wide range of international acts, including Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Dame Kiri te Kanawa, Ray Charles and Bon Jovi.

In 2002 the Bowl was the chosen venue for Victorians to reflect on the tragedy of the Bali Bombings in October that year. A memorial concert brought together some of our best-known artists as the Premier of the day, Steve Bracks, and then Governor of Victoria, John Landy, joined representatives of the Indonesian Government in tributes for the lives lost.

In 2009 the Bowl celebrates 50 years as a significant and much-loved part of Melbourne.

October has regularly been the time of year for the Arts Centre to host the Melbourne International Arts Festival in its venues and surrounds. The Famous Spiegeltent has become a regular visitor to the Arts Centre forecourt for the Festival period and now the Arts Centre enables this exciting cabaret season to extend for several weeks after the Festival, bringing a diverse and often new audience to the precinct.

Spring has also become the time for the annual children's festival Chookahs! Created and managed by the Arts Centre, the festival includes interactive workshops and performances which attract schools from throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria. The five-day event culminates in a weekend of family activities.

In 2004, to mark the 20 anniversary of the opening of the Theatres, the Arts Centre invited the public to join in Open Day activities, which included popular backstage tours supported by a range of free performances throughout the venues.

During the 2006 Commonwealth Games the Sidney Myer Music Bowl hosted a series of free concerts reflecting the cultural diversity of the Games nations. Capacity audiences enjoyed the entertainment during perfect summer weather. The

Commonwealth Games period also saw the Arts Centre create *The Beach*, a project designed to showcase Victoria's love of relaxation by the water and a chance for the Arts Centre to let its creative juices flow. The project successfully involved the creation of a beach between Hamer Hall and the Theatres, and included a performance stage, relaxation areas and roving performers. A large screen captured all the key action of the Games and proved a popular meeting place for locals and visitors alike. Adjacent to *The Beach*, the Arts Centre forecourt also played host to several outdoor physical theatre performances during the Games.

The Arts Centre has welcomed tens of millions of people to experience thousands of theatrical, dance, and musical performances as fine as anywhere in the world.

Our programming continues to embrace a diverse range of Australian and international performances to capture the imagination of an equally diverse audience.

The long-established partnerships with Australia's leading performing arts organisations ensure that the best of Australia's music, opera, dance and theatre continues to have a home at the Arts Centre.

We continue to seek out the best international performances for our stages and to feature international seasons from all parts of the world. In recent years contemporary dance has been strongly represented in tours by American company Momix and popular seasons by the all-male ballet company Les Trocaderos de Monte Carlo.

In 2007 the Arts Centre presented the exclusive Australian tour of the Royal Shakespeare Company's productions of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Chekhov's *The Seagull*, featuring Sir Ian McKellen and a stellar supporting cast.

In 2008, further international seasons will feature productions of Edward Scissorhands, a Matthew Bourne dance adaptation of the successful fantasy film, and a return of the renowned physical theatre company of Phillipe Genty.

Following the Commonwealth Games of 2006 the Arts Centre launched *Mix It Up*, a program of performance reflecting Victorian's cultural diversity and supported by free public programs and exhibitions. *Mix It Up* has since regularly presented international music acts and dance companies reflecting many multi-cultural themes. The program has attracted new and enthusiastic audiences from the city's many diverse communities. In 2007 *Mix It Up* won Victorian Government recognition with an Arts Portfolio Leadership Award and an award for Excellence in Multicultural Affairs.

There have been important inroads into Melbourne's thriving independent theatre with the creation of *Full Tilt*, a program stream designed to further broaden opportunities both for Arts Centre audiences and Victorian artists. *Full Tilt* continues to umbrella several annual seasons in the Fairfax Studio and BlackBox.

The Arts Centre Collections continue to grow, with regular acquisitions to the Visual Arts Collection and the ever-growing archive in the Performing Arts Collection.

We created the Icon Series of exhibitions designed to reflect the careers of Australian performing artists of international significance. The careers of Barry Humphries' character Edna Everage, pop icon Kylie Minogue and cult

songwriter/performer Nick Cave have all been represented in the Icon Series. The hugely successful Kylie exhibition attracted nearly 1 million visitors during its tour of Australia and three cities in the United Kingdom where it broke attendance records. By the end of the tour early in 2008 the exhibition was voted the world's second most visited decorative arts exhibition in the past year.

Today, the Arts Centre sits at the heart of a thriving arts precinct. As the Theatres Building approaches a 25-year anniversary (2009) we are hopeful of further growth and development. The Victorian Government's Southbank Cultural Precinct Redevelopment, with the Arts Centre at its heart, is currently in its design and concept stage and awaiting further Government approval.

The Redevelopment would include a new public plaza that will link the Arts Centre's two buildings and provide a space for public events and performances. It will also enable planning for a significant improvement in the Arts Centre facilities, including improved and integrated entrances to the Theatres and Hamer Hall and a greater flexibility to meet the needs of both performers and audiences.

During the last financial year the Arts Centre attracted 2.7 million visitors to 1378 ticketed performances and more than 7000 free public programs. It continues to welcome new visitors every day.