



The Wheeler Centre  
Books Writing Ideas



# ANNUAL REPORT 2017



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## MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



Every one of our 200 events across 2017 worked to do this: connect an idea, or an imaginative moment, story or conversation, with its natural audience. From our unprecedented number of events across the state and around the country (in part as recognition of our new status as a key national organisation supported by the Australia Council), to the second iteration of our biennial Festival of Questions, our events are individually conceived, crafted and curated to surprise and delight. I'm exceedingly proud of the team that delivered those events across 2017. We are known for our imagination and flair, and those qualities can be laid entirely at the feet of the Centre's amazing staff.

Among all the extraordinary activity in both our public programming and in our wider leadership and support for Australia's literary and ideas communities, 2017 marked a year of significant change for the Wheeler Centre. Three of our founding board directors – chair Eric Beecher, board secretary Tony Hudson and the powerhouse behind Readings books, Mark Rubbo – finished their tenure on the board. All three of them were indispensable in the founding of the Centre and integral to its growth and strength over the intervening six years. We warmly welcome new board appointees Corrie Perkin, Marcus Fazio and new chair Susan Oliver, who joined us towards the end of 2017, and acknowledge the debt of gratitude that the Wheeler Centre and literary Melbourne has to our outgoing board members.

In 2017, the Wheeler Centre won a Walkley Award. Not bad for a not-for-profit cultural institution! The media landscape has changed dramatically since we were founded back in 2010. We are not a media company, but we are devoted to excellence in the telling of stories. By working with extraordinary storytellers, as we do across our programme, and finding new and innovative ways to connect them with their audiences, wherever they are, we aim to shape, drive and improve the public conversation around books, writing and ideas. We have been honoured to work with journalist Michael Green and Manus Island detainee Abdul Aziz Muhamat to tell the story of Aziz's experience, to share some of a story that too few people are hearing, to use the medium of podcasting to share a message. *The Messenger* has found an audience and acclaim around the world, because it is an important story, told well by passionate and skilled storytellers.

But even through a period of change – and in the face of reinvention, growth and pushing the boundaries of how we define ourselves – there are some constants. The ongoing support of the state government through Creative Victoria, our donors, partners and supporters (most notably Tony and Maureen Wheeler, our patrons) and most of all our audiences. We may aim to celebrate the art of public conversation, but we do what we do in constant conversation with the readers, writers, thinkers and talkers that make up our community.

Watch this space. We're only just beginning.

**Michael Williams**

Director

## MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR



The result is the Wheeler Centre, and there is nothing quite like it anywhere in the world. It is the cumulative result of six powerful forces:

- 1) an inspired idea from one state government supported enthusiastically by successive governments;
- 2) a remarkably generous endowment from Maureen and Tony Wheeler, the founders of Lonely Planet;
- 3) a pair of exceptional directors, Chrissy Sharp and Michael Williams;
- 4) a highly committed, motivated and talented staff;
- 5) a succession of smart and pragmatic board members;
- 6) audiences who have embraced the concept and inculcated the Wheeler Centre into the life of Melbourne.

After nine eventful years as the inaugural chair of the Wheeler Centre, I retired at the end of 2017. It was quite a ride. It's not every year, or decade, you get to be part of helping to build something profoundly special in the Australian cultural ecosystem.

**Eric Beecher**

Chair (until 19 December)



# ABOUT THE WHEELER CENTRE

## OUR MISSION

The Wheeler Centre exists to drive the development and celebration of literature in Melbourne and beyond, and to foster broad public engagement in books, writing and ideas.

We aspire to be nationally and internationally renowned as a leading institution for the art of conversation, and a champion of the transformative power of informed public discussion and debate.

## OUR PRINCIPLES

The Wheeler Centre pursues a variety of activities, which are underpinned by six principles. Our principles express our aspirations as a leading Australian literary arts and cultural institution. They give shape to our creative initiatives and drive our relationship to audiences and the community.

### **Championing Writers and Writing**

We celebrate the contribution Australian writers make to our cultural and intellectual life. We offer new channels for writers to engage with readers, aim to make it easier to live and work as a professional writer in this country, and promote the achievements of authors across all genres. Writers are the backbone of Australia's literary industry; their work permeates our society and without them, the Wheeler Centre wouldn't exist.

### **Elevating Public Conversation**

We are dedicated to supporting and strengthening conversations throughout our community. We aim to raise the act of public conversation to an art-form and be a major catalyst for engaged cultural discourse in Australia. We are a key facilitator for the conversations that matter for engaged citizens: these conversations enrich lives, change mindsets, and build social cohesion and identity.

### **Exemplifying Inclusion and Accessibility**

We are dedicated to the principle of universal accessibility. We strive to reach the broadest communities possible and are committed to embracing linguistic and cultural diversity on stage. We programme eclectic and inclusive subject matter and literary styles that appeal to as wide an audience as possible and deliver our programme in accessible locations across Melbourne and Victoria, with a growing focus on digital content for our national audiences. As a central tenet of accessibility, around eighty percent of the Centre's year-long programme is free and over seventy percent is filmed for digital broadcast.

### **Supporting the Literary Sector**

We aim to be Australia's leading literary organisation and a hub for Melbourne's vibrant writing sector. In this capacity, we support the health and vitality of the entire writing and publishing ecosystem. From individual writers and small literary organisations to publishers, booksellers and readers, we support our partners, colleagues and stakeholders to create their best work.

### **Engaging Audiences**

Conversations require multiple voices and perspectives. Writers develop new vocabularies, hone their argument and test character; audiences probe ideas and ask questions that expose dark areas to light. Together this constantly evolving community advances knowledge and recommit to a culture of analysis, curiosity and connection. We endeavour to engage audiences through a variety of channels that embody our commitment to dialogue.

### **Future Proofing our Approach**

We are building a national and international reputation as a high-performing and unique cultural institution. Our achievements to date have required significant resources and an accelerated mode of operating. In the next stage of our life, the Centre will continue to be ambitious and innovative while consolidating the means required to do so. We must maintain our current level of output, build capacity for new ventures and ensure that we have created the best possible conditions for the Centre's future.



## THE STORY SO FAR

## 2017 SNAPSHOT

We have held **2,028** public conversations and events, giving **3,531** speakers a platform for their writing and ideas.

**121** Hot Desk Fellowships have been awarded to date, supporting emerging writers, with **21** Hot Desk Fellowships in 2017. Over **600** writers have been employed as judges for awards to date.

In addition to **1,140** videos of talks, performances and interviews, we now offer over **1,050** podcast episodes, alongside **2,460** original articles in total.

We facilitated **200** public conversations and events, giving **673** speakers a platform for their writing and ideas.

**32,041**  
**49,500**  
**11,000**  
**4,585**

**41,304** audience members joined in our public conversations.

**80%** FREE  
**70%**

**80%** of our events are free each year. **70%** of our events are available digitally for anyone to listen to or watch online.

**6** literary organisations are housed in the Wheeler Centre hub. More than **246** other arts and community organisations have utilised the building facilities for their own endeavours.

**352,038** audience members joined our conversations, with **90%** of the total number of audience members attending our public events are located in metropolitan and outer metropolitan Melbourne, **8%** from regional Victoria and **2%** from interstate.

Our broadcasts have received **550,891** views and **7,311,766** minutes spent on YouTube, with **16%** of those video views in Australia; **37%** were from the US and **12%** were from the UK.

**48.2K**

**994,579** sessions took place on our website.  
Our wonderful community of *Wheeler Weekly* newsletter subscribers reached **48,184**.

**46%** of events place in partnership with other major cultural institutions, community groups, festivals and arts organisations.

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

**2017: A diverse range of speakers and events in Melbourne and beyond and a focus on podcasting.**

The Wheeler Centre's 2017 was extremely successful across all measures. Ticket sales remained consistently high across all events and budget targets were achieved.

Our programme of events – released across four seasons throughout the year – continued to champion public conversation, facilitated by an extraordinary line-up of speakers who are worth listening to speaking on topics that deserve our time and our open curious minds.

The year began with our seventh annual gala night of storytelling from across the region, responding to a provocative theme: **Stories for the Dead** presented as part of Arts Centre Melbourne's Asia TOPA.

Palestinian writer and activist Laila El-Haddad talked about politics and parenting in Palestine, while the brightest stars of Indian comedy – in partnership with Melbourne International Comedy Festival – Daniel Fernandes, Neeti Palta and Sapan Verma talked stand-up, censorship and how comedy might change the world.

We proudly contributed two events to the **2017 YIRRAMBOI Festival** Melbourne's premier First Nations arts festival presenting continuous cultures and diverse contemporary practice of First Nations artists from around the world.

Two of **Black Lives Matter's** founders and leaders – Patrisse Cullors, and Toronto BLM Chapter co-founder Rodney Diverlus – spoke with Jack Latimore about the achievements and broader goals of #blacklivesmatter and how we can translate the lessons of the movement to face and fight entrenched inequality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

We explored Australia's most burning questions in the far corners of our country with our **Questions for the Nation**

event series culminating in **The Festival of Questions** a day-long event of four debates and panels covering culture; class and climate; politics and punditry and philosophy and feminism held at the Melbourne Town Hall in October.

We heard about the origins and future of humanism from eminent British philosopher A.C. Grayling; environmental scientist Carmel Johnston enlightened audiences about her year living in an 11-metre-wide geodesic dome on the Mars-like slopes of Mauna Loa volcano in Hawaii; and we heard from youth worker, activist, writer and speaker Nevo Zisin on the view from beyond binary gender.

We celebrated the launch of the AFL's National Women's League with a stellar panel of female sports legends including sports reporter Karen Lyon, sports writer and journalist Angela Pippas, former Western Bulldogs VP Susan Alberti and former AFL commissioner and AFL life membership recipient Sam Mostyn. Former tennis champion Jelena Dokic also spoke about her tough beginnings, tumultuous games and bright future.

Our celebration of footy was extended to kids with a fun morning of footy talk with player Emma King and authors of the new book *The Footy Girl's Guide to the Stars of 2017*. Our **Wheeler Kids** series held in Melbourne and regional Victoria featured workshops for young artists with author Davina Bell and illustrator Allison Colpoys. Comedian and writer Alan Brough sang songs and told yarns about his new kids book; and Dream Puppets provided an artful retelling of *The Tempest*.

Our *Wheeler Kids* series ended on a high with David Walliams filling the Plenary at Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, with hijinks and laughter and a signing queue like no other – before and after the event – for adults and kids of all ages.

A highlight of the year for adults and children alike was our celebration of 20 years since the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* with an action-packed night of storytelling, music, reading and revelry at the Athenaeum Theatre.

We continued our successful **Invasion of the Pod People** series, where we presented some of America's best and brightest podcasters to share their thoughts and insights on the art (and business) of listening. In Australia for the first time, reporter Brian Reed discussed the smash-hit podcast *S-Town* produced with the team behind *Serial* and *This American Life* – to two sold out events at the Athenaeum Theatre. *Slate's Culture Gabfest's* Julia Turner, Stephen Metcalf and Dana Stevens recorded their popular podcast in front of a full house, including an interview and performed with indie rock auteur Courtney Barnett. *Radiotopia's* Julie Shapiro shared her insights from her long career in listening and was a judge of **So You Think You Can Pod** – the Wheeler Centre's search for new, audible ideas – alongside *Audiocraft* executive director Kate Montague, *Bowraville* podcast producer Eric George and the Wheeler Centre's senior digital editor Jon Tjhia.

In addition to our live events, our increased focus on podcasting was brought to the fore with the success of *The Messenger*. This co-production from Behind The Wire and the Wheeler Centre brought listeners into the Australian immigration detention centre on Manus Island – and revealed, in intimate detail, one man's experience of what it's really like to flee tragedy and seek asylum by boat. *The Messenger* won multiple awards, including the New York Festivals International Radio Awards Grand Trophy and a Walkley Award for best Radio/Audio Feature.



## HIGHLIGHTS

2017 saw the Wheeler Centre continue to deliver great programming, from the provocative to the poignant to the side-splittingly funny.

### Victorian Premier's Literary Awards

The Victorian Premier's Literary Awards were inaugurated by the Victorian Government in 1985 to honour literary achievement by Australian writers. The awards are administered by the Wheeler Centre on behalf of the Premier of Victoria.

The winners of the five award categories – fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry and writing for young adults – each receive \$25,000 and go on to contest the Victorian Prize for Literature.

The Victorian Premier's Literary Awards include two further awards: the Unpublished Manuscript Award and the biennial Award for Indigenous Writing.

The winning entries were announced at an awards ceremony on 31 January 2017:

#### FICTION

*Between a Wolf and a Dog* by the late Georgia Blain (Scribe Publications)

#### NON-FICTION

*Offshore: Behind the wire on Manus and Nauru* by Madeline Gleeson (NewSouth Publishing)

#### DRAMA

*The Drover's Wife* by Leah Purcell (Currency Press)

#### POETRY

*Carrying the World* by Maxine Beneba Clarke (Hachette Australia)

#### YOUNG ADULT

*When Michael Met Mina* by Randa Abdel-Fattah (Pan Macmillan Australia)

The winner of the **Victorian Prize for Literature** – Australia's single richest literary prize – was Leah Purcell for *The Drover's Wife*. The winner of the **People's Choice Award** was Randa Abdel-Fattah with *When Michael Met Mina*.



### 2017 Gala: Stories for the Dead

For our seventh annual gala night of storytelling, the Wheeler Centre partnered with Arts Centre Melbourne for Asia TOPA to bring together talented writers and artists from across the region. Each was asked to respond to the provocative (and slightly spooky) theme: Stories for the Dead.

Guests included writer **Clementine Ford**, soprano **Deborah Cheetham**, Indonesian dancer **Eko Supriyanto**, performer **Candy Bowers**, Thai classical dancer **Pichet Klunchun**, musician **Kakushin Nishihara** with translator **Nobuko Aiso**, US musician and author **Amanda Palmer**, broadcaster and writer **Myf Warhurst**, wordsmith **David Astle**, cellist and broadcaster **Eddie Ayres** and author **Ramona Koval**.

Held at Hamer Hall, the night featured very different reflections – from funny to ghoulish to political to poignant.





## Black Lives Matter: In Conversation

In February 2012, an unarmed African-American high-school student, Trayvon Martin, was shot dead in Sanford, Florida. His death was a flashpoint in American race relations, sparking protests across the United States and the beginning of a totally new kind of civil-rights movement: #blacklivesmatter.

In Australia to collect the Sydney Peace Prize, two of Black Lives Matter's founders and leaders – **Patrisse Cullors**, and Toronto BLM Chapter co-founder **Rodney Diverlus** – spoke with **Jack Latimore** about the achievements and broader goals of #blacklivesmatter ... and how Australians can translate the lessons of the movement to face and fight entrenched inequality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This event was attended by a diverse audience including visitors from local and regional Indigenous communities.



## If Walls Could Talk: Remembering Pentridge

From 1851 until its closure in 1997, Pentridge Prison in Coburg was the scene of many humiliations and acts of brutality – as well as unlikely alliances, and stories of hope, survival and friendship. The prison was home to thousands of people over several generations, from notorious criminals to ordinary men and women. The last man executed in Australia, Ronald Ryan, was hung there in 1967.

Writer and photographer **Rupert Mann**'s book, *Pentridge: Voices From the Other Side* presents the devastating, moving and funny stories of people who lived and worked at Pentridge. In this discussion, hosted by **Hilary Harper**, he was joined by former chaplain **Peter Norden**, former prison officer **Pat Merlo** and celebrated actor and former inmate **Jack Charles** to discuss criminal justice, collective history and the new development on the old site.



## High Profile International Guests

Hundreds of fans were enthralled by **Armando Iannucci**, the brilliant comedic mind behind *Veep*'s Selina Meyer, *The Thick of It*'s Malcolm Tucker and, in collaboration with Chris Morris on *The Day Today*, the irrepressible Alan Partridge.

Legendary British food critic **Jay Rayner** entertained audiences at the Northcote Town Hall and at an intimate lunch at the Sofitel Melbourne on Collins.

Some of our favourite writers – **Roxane Gay**, **John Safran**, **George Saunders** and **Brit Bennett** – discussed how they push against platitude, prejudice and power in their writing at the Comedy Theatre.



## The Wheeler Centre at The Toff in Town

In July, while the Wheeler Centre's performance space had a makeover, The Toff in Town became our home away from home. A series of four events were presented in the atmospheric setting, including some favourites from our regular programme: **Nailed It!**, **Take it from Me, Something Trumpy with Political Asylum** and **Poetry in Commotion: A Night of Performance Poetry**.



## A Walk in the Park

**Our Walk in the Park** series took audiences out of a physical venue and invited them to eavesdrop on three roving conversations around Princes Park in Parkville.

Hour-long ambles were held with **Lisa Dempster** and **Leah Kaminsky**; **Jessica Friedman** and **Fiona Wright**; **Damon Young** and **Ruth Quibell**. The writers reflected on their unique relationships with walking while audience members strolled behind them listening on wireless headphones.



## Harry Who? The True Heroes of Hogwarts

At the Athenaeum Theatre in October, the Wheeler Centre celebrated 20 years since *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* with a night of storytelling, music, reading and revelry. And, in true Hogwarts spirit, there was a competitive element to the night as speakers debated the controversial question: Who was the *real* hero of the Harry Potter series? Was it really the eponymous orphan wizard? Or was it misunderstood Snape, or heroic brainiac Hermione Granger? Was it the Sorting Hat who truly saved the day?

**Ben Pobjie**, **Clementine Ford**, **Josh Earl**, **Justin Heazlewood**, **Jessica Walton**, **Nayuka Gorrie**, **Cal Wilson**, **C.S. Pacat** and **Candy Bowers** made cases for their chosen hero while a quartet from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra performed a Harry Potter themed medley.



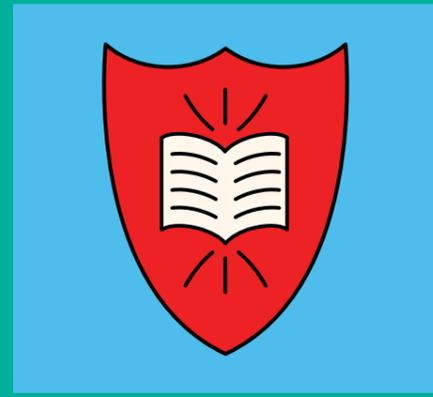
## YIRRAMBOI Festival

The Wheeler Centre proudly contributed two events to the **2017 YIRRAMBOI Festival**: Melbourne's premier First Nations arts festival presenting continuous cultures and diverse contemporary practice of First Nations artists from around the world.

**Black and Green: Environmentalists and Indigenous Australia** explored the history of the sometimes tense, often constructive and always evolving relationship between the environmental movement and Indigenous Australia. The event featured the co-editor of *Unstable Relations* and anthropologist **Eve Vincent**, contributor **Jon Altman**, and Indigenous climate change activist **Amelia Telford** in conversation with host **Tony Birch**.

**Dark Emu: Bruce Pascoe and Tony Birch in Conversation** referenced Bruce Pascoe's 2014 book of the same name, in which he argued that Indigenous people were not hunter-gatherers at the time of colonisation. In conversation with author Tony Birch, he discussed the writing, research and reception of the book and the question: what does challenging the past of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people mean for the present?





## Monday Conversations

The Wheeler Centre collaborated with Sydney Writers' Festival and Belvoir to produce **Monday Conversations**, a monthly series held at Sydney's Belvoir St Theatre, which focused on one idea beginning with a performance or reading inspired by the topic.

### Anaesthesia

**Kate Cole-Adams'** book, *Anaesthesia*, explored the enigma of this mysterious medical practice – interweaving scientific and historical research with personal experience to present a haunting meditation on memory, paralysis and consciousness. How common is it for patients to 'wake up' during surgery? Is pain still pain if you can't feel it? Cole-Adams broached these questions and more in a fascinating panel discussion hosted by **Benjamin Law** followed by a reading on the topic.

### Alcohol and Us

Writer **Jenny Valentish** joined researcher **Michael Bowen**, broadcaster and author **Wendy Harmer** and host **Kate Jinx** for a fresh discussion about Australia's changing relationship with alcohol, and how we can anticipate and deal with the side effects. Actor **Nikki Shiels** (*The Rover*) performed a short piece to open the conversation.

### Doing Justice

Barrister **Julian Burnside** and **Kat Armstrong**, Acting CEO of the Women's Just Network, an organisation that gives direct support, through mentoring and advocacy, to women affected by the criminal justice system, hosted a conversation about justice – what it means to them, and what it should mean to all of us. Kat Armstrong is also an ex-prisoner, having served 10 years in jail, so brought a great deal of knowledge and experience to this informative discussion.

### Performance Anxiety

Can stage fright be a source of strength? Do all of us – even non-performers – lead double lives? And how do top performers pull themselves together backstage before they break out in cold sweats and involuntary jazz-hands? At this conversation, hosted by **Kate Jinx**, guests spoke about the phenomenon of performance anxiety and what it reveals about the chasm between our interior and exterior selves. Prefaced by a reading on nerves by actor **Gareth Davies**, musician **Tim Rogers** and actor **Claudia Karvan** shared stories of pre-show and mid-scene tears and tremors; dread and despair; panic ... and puke.



## The Longform Society

**The Longform Society** was established as a reading club for lovers of the essay form. Before each event, ticket holders were emailed a collection of outstanding essays grouped around a thought-provoking issue. Host Sophie Cunningham and a panel of three writers then rigorously examined the arguments put forward by each piece – and the philosophical, social, economic or political implications.

In our first meeting of the Longform Society, we read a selection of compelling, entertaining and occasionally terrifying pieces on the subject of robots and artificial intelligence with **Mel Campbell**, **Jeff Sparrow** and **Rafael Epstein**.

For our second meeting of the Longform Society Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, an exhilarating, genre-defying work of feminism, queer theory and memoir, was dissected by **Quinn Eades**, **Onyx Carmine**, **Sarah-Jane Norman** and **Hannah McCann**.

In the third Longform Society event, Sophie Cunningham, Mel Campbell, Maxine Beneba Clarke and Cameron Adams discussed the writing that celebrates our ongoing fascination with celebrity, and some of the most memorable pieces by, or about, the superstars of our times.

**Chloe Hooper**, **Sophie Cunningham** and **Bernadette Brennan** focused on some of Helen Garner's seminal essays in our final Longform Society event as Helen's collections, *Stories* and *True Stories*, were republished.

Each Longform Society event was live-streamed to allow a home audience to participate via #longformsociety.



## Audio Production

The Wheeler Centre's audio focus continued in 2017.

One of the Wheeler Centre's proudest achievements in 2017 was the success of *The Messenger*. This co-production from Behind The Wire and the Wheeler Centre brought listeners into the Australian immigration detention centre on Manus Island – and revealed, in intimate detail, one man's experience of what it's really like to flee tragedy and seek asylum by boat.

*The Messenger* is based on thousands of voice messages sent between Abdul Aziz Muhamat, a refugee in Australian immigration detention on Manus Island, and Michael Green, a journalist based in Melbourne. Since March 2016, Aziz had been reporting from Manus Island in short 30 second bursts, via WhatsApp messages sent from a smuggled phone. Aziz told the inside story – the good and the bad – of a place that consistently featured in the headlines. A place that despite dominating the news, remained and remains largely unknown and unknowable by the public.

Awards for *The Messenger*

- 2017 New York Festivals International Radio Awards: Grand Trophy winner, National and International Affairs Gold Medal and News Gold Medal.
- 2017 United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Awards: Winner, Best Radio Documentary.
- 2017 Walkley Awards: Winner, Radio/Audio Feature.
- 2017 Australian Human Rights Commission Human Rights Awards: Winner, Media Award.
- 2017 Quill Awards: Finalist, Podcasting.

As part of the **Invasion of the Pod People** series in 2017, the Wheeler Centre continued to give people the chance to get their innovative podcast ideas and concepts off the ground.

*Radiotopia's* Julie Shapiro shared her insights from her long career in listening and helped judge of **So You Think You Can Pod** alongside *Audiocraft* executive director Kate Montague, *Bowraville* podcast producer Eric George and the Wheeler Centre's senior digital editor Jon Tjhia.

The winning entry was 'Waru' from Coel Healy. Named for the Martu word for fire, the pitch was for a proposed six-part podcast series about Australia's unique relationship with bushfires.

**The Australian Audio Guide**, developed in partnership with *Audiocraft*, is a handpicked companion to the best Australian podcasts and radio features. Launched in November 2016, the site features quality audio content and explores Australian audio culture with interviews, features and listening suggestions. [australianaudioguide.com](http://australianaudioguide.com).



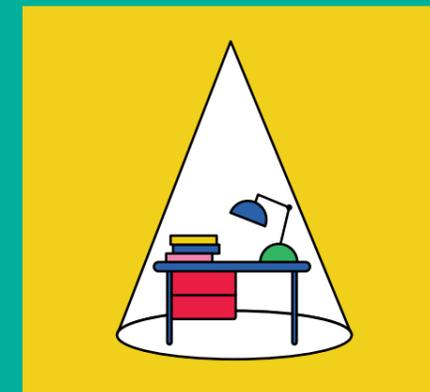
## Books and Ideas at Montalto presented by the Wheeler Centre

On nine Friday evenings throughout the year, from March to November, the Wheeler Centre brought the best of Australian writing to the Mornington Peninsula. Guests were able to swap the hustle of the city for an unhurried, immersive look at the stories behind the stories – all while enjoying outstanding food and wine, fascinating company and the opportunity to hear from writers in an intimate and relaxed setting.

2017's line-up included a diverse range of writers, cartoonists, journalists and great conversationalists including **Kaz Cooke**, **Melanie Cheng**, **Richard Cornish**, **Tony Jones**, **Judy Horacek**, **Jane Harper**, **David Marr**, **Jackie French** and **William McGuinness**.

This event series is presented in partnership with Montalto Vineyard & Olive Grove.





## The Festival Of Questions

We held a series of panel discussions called **Questions for the Nation** in Newcastle, Perth, Darwin and Brisbane between July and October where we explored audiences' most important questions. We teased out these discussions and debates further in **The Festival of Questions** at the Melbourne Town Hall in October.

Held in conjunction with the 2017 Melbourne Festival, The Festival of Questions was a series of thoughtful, quick-witted and exhilarating discussions held across four sessions in the one day. Speakers wrestled with the big questions facing Australia and the world including culture; class and climate; politics and punditry; and philosophy and feminism. Do terms like 'right wing' and 'left wing' still have meaning today? Is the world changing too fast, or not fast enough? Audiences enjoyed a day of storytelling, comedy, debate and discussion listening to guests such as **Julian Burnside**, columnist **Jamila Rizvi**, **Tim Wilson**, **Geoffrey Robertson QC**, *The Guilty Feminist* podcaster **Deborah Frances-White**, journalist **Helen Razer**, journalist **Lauren Duca**, Get Up! Human Rights Campaign Director **Shen Narayanasamy** and author **George Megalogenis** to name a few.



## The F Word Address

Feminist journalist **Jane Gilmore** started her #FixedIt project in 2013 to hold the media to account in their portrayal of victims of rape and child abuse. For the Wheeler Centre's annual F Word Address, Gilmore evaluated the Australian media and how they have performed in 2017 in their depiction of women – whether it's in politics, the arts, sport or in the reporting of domestic violence.

Today, thanks to social media, audiences have increasing power to force change in the way the news is presented. But are public perceptions still being shaped by such reporting? And how can a simple correction – a better image, another choice of words or laying blame where it belongs – make a difference?

Part feminist stocktake, part personal reflection, in the Wheeler Centre's second F Word Address, Gilmore tackled the year that was and examined how the media has chosen to represent – or misrepresent – women in 2017.



## Talkfest

Hosted by Director Michael Williams, **Talkfest** delves into the Wheeler Centre's live recordings and curates the most compelling moments from our best public discussions. Commencing in June, twenty six episodes spanning a diverse range of topics including indigenous recognition, failure, sex, population, family, heroes, space, spirituality, war and love were broadcast Australia-wide on Radio National each weekend, and featured on the ABC Listen app. Talkfest is an important initiative in fulfilling our charter of amplifying our physical events and expanding our audience reach beyond our physical events programme.



## Programming in Regional Victoria

The Wheeler Centre is now a leading Victorian cultural organisation, dedicated to the dual purpose of being a vibrant hub for the literary sector and producing a diverse year-round programme of public conversations. Through this public programming, the Wheeler Centre is in the unique position of embedding the practice, discussion and appreciation of Australian literature into the everyday lives of Victorians.

Our 2017 **Regional Programme** saw involvement from 16 local and international speakers across five diverse locations delivering 13 events that reached audiences of up to 1,500 children and adults.

Our programme included high-profile Australian authors **Robert Drewe** and Man Booker Prize award-winner **Richard Flanagan** at the Bendigo Town Hall, journalist **Peter Greste** at Kyneton Town Hall and anthropologist, broadcaster and interviewer **Sally Warhaft** at M.A.D.E. Ballarat with former Westpack Group CEO, **Gail Kelly**.



The **Wheeler Kids** programme extended to regional Victoria workshops for young artists with author Davina Bell and illustrator Allison Colpoys. Comedian broadcaster and writer Alan Brough sang songs and told yarns about his new kids book, *Charlie and the Karaoke Cockroaches* in Bendigo's Capitol Theatre, M.A.D.E in Ballarat, Benalla's Performing Arts and Convention Centre and Kyneton Town Hall.

We held an engaging discussion in conjunction with All the Queens Men, the National LGBTI+ Ageing and Aged Care Conference and Warrnambool City Council, **Coming Back Out: Elder LGBTI+** in Warrnambool. At the tail end of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey – and months of heated, often painful public debate on the issue – **Tristan Meecham**, **Heather Morgan**, **Lizzi Craig** and **Pauline Cramer** discussed how there can be a compassionate and respectful future for LGBTI+ people as they age.

## Hot Desk Fellowships

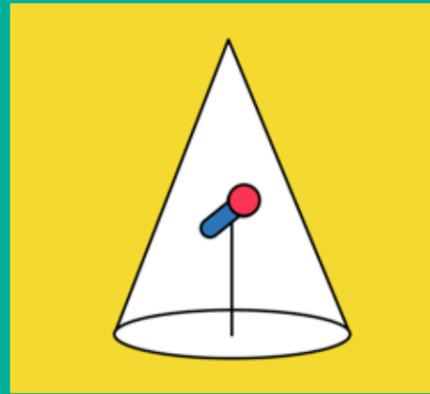
The Wheeler Centre's **Hot Desk Fellowships** returned in 2017, once again made possible by the generous support of the Readings Foundation. Twenty writers were offered fellowships and an additional Playwright Hot Desk Fellowship was offered to an emerging female playwright, supported by the generosity of the Just Pretending theatre group.

The fellowships, which include a \$1,000 stipend and workspace in the Wheeler Centre over a ten-week period, were created simply to give emerging writers the space to write and create. Hot Desk Fellows also have the opportunity to meet, network and work with the Wheeler Centre's resident organisations. All writers and their projects were featured on the Wheeler Centre's website, as well as in a special Hot Desk Edition of *The Next Big Thing*.

The 2017 Fellows were:

Mandy Beaumont, Ana Maria Gomides, Omar Sakr, Mira Schlosberg, Angela Serrano, Khalid Warsame, Samantha Hill, Christopher Bryant, Koraly Dimitriadis, Elizabeth Flux, Lou Heinrich, Jordi Kerr, Tim McGuire, Mia Slater, Ingrid Baring, Alexandra Collier, Grace De Morgan, Mindy Gill, Jane Howard, Bobuq Sayed and Lorelei Vashti.





## The Fifth Estate

**Sally Warhaft** has been the Wheeler Centre's in-house news anchor since 2012. In 2017, the anthropologist, broadcaster and intrepid interviewer's fortnightly live series continued as she responded to the most important debates of the day in the **Fifth Estate** series. Every second Tuesday, Sally hosted a dizzying array of guests from the worlds of politics, culture, international relations and beyond, in a witty and revealing analysis of current affairs. Guests included **Sam Dastyari** and **Gareth Evans** with their newly released books and **John Hewson** and **Adrienne Stone** on the High Court. Also, as part of the Melbourne Writers Festival we presented two events, the *Collapse of American Power in the Middle East* and *Hindu Nationalism in India*.



## The Next Big Thing

A Wheeler Centre stalwart, our Next Big Thing series showcased the best in fresh Australian writing with a focus on a different genre each month. Over 11 events in 2017 spanning a diverse range of topics including Romance, Memoir, Climate Fiction, Halloween Edition, The Lit Mag edition, Poetry Edition as well as our fantastic regular Hot Desk and Emerging Writers' Festival Editions.



## The Show of the Year

As always, the 2017 season came to a close with our annual Show of the Year where a stellar line-up of comedians, musicians, writers and raconteurs came together to remember the year that was.

What happened in 2017? Well, as conveyed by our guest speakers; President Donald Trump danced at the Inaugural Ball, *Wonder Woman* kicked arse and Prince Philip snipped his last ribbon. Elections in Kenya and the UK hogged headlines. Eurovision launched in Asia. The Mooch blazed bright and faded fast. Fighting continued in Syria and we were rocked by terror attacks in Libya, Afghanistan, England and Spain.

At home, dual-citizenship troubles spread through federal parliament like constitutional conjunctivitis. We said goodbye to Dr G Yunupingu and John Clarke. Flume won a Grammy, Nicole Kidman won an Emmy and the AFL Women's League was a rip-roaring success.

2017 didn't always treat us right (nuclear war threats, postal surveys, *The Mummy*) but it had its charming moments (BBC Dad, Beyoncé's twins).

Speakers included **Lawrence Leung**, **Angela Pippas**, **Ladychoir**, **Jamila Rizvi**, **Selena Jenkins**, **Anthony 'Lehmo' Lehmann**, **Sukhjit Kaur Khalsa**, **Isabel Angus**, **Michael Williams**, **Dave Arden**, **Ali Moore** and **Casey Bennetto**.



## Reimagining the Performance Space

Several improvements were made to the Wheeler Centre's performance space in 2017 in an effort to continually improve its functionality in hosting as wide an array of programs as possible.

The performance space was designed and built in 2009 and is home to eight percent of our free programming, equating to 118+ events and 30,000+ audience members annually. It is our central location for digital content creation.

Beyond this initial fit-out, no significant changes had occurred. After seven years, we needed to reimagine and upgrade the space and facilities to enable significant improvement for our audiences (live/digital).

This project, supported by the Ian Potter Foundation, Russell Mills Foundation, and the Wheeler Centre Endowment was designed to serve three of the key organisational priorities:

- Enhancing the experience for audiences (live/digital)
- Wider and effective dissemination of our content
- Diversification of audience geographically and demographically.

Specifically, the project was designed to:

- Enable critical infrastructure upgrades within our performance space to enable flexibility in live event configurations
- Build the Wheeler Centre's capacity in live event streaming and broadcasting for partnerships and syndication of content
- Build the Wheeler Centre's capacity for digital audience immersion in live programming
- Build the Wheeler Centre's capacity to produce digital content for new and diverse audiences, augment digital experiences and dissemination.

Permanent lighting bars were installed, allowing the removal of the "temporary" truss structure installed in 2011. This work was done in consultation with State Library Victoria and Heritage Victoria to ensure that all heritage features and aesthetics remained intact.

High definition cameras were installed to deliver broadcast-quality footage of our events to be featured on **wheelercentre.com** and shared with our event and media partners.





# FUTURE PROOFING OUR APPROACH

Our community of over 200 sponsors and donors are essential partners in bringing transforming conversations and shared literary experiences to over 350,000 people, both in the Wheeler Centre's performance space, in Melbourne's iconic venues and increasingly in community settings throughout Victoria and online.

Until 2017, Development income remained steady at approximately eight percent of income annually. However, Development income for this year represented only six percent of recurrent funding due to staffing changes, which affected donor and sponsor relationships. Greater investment in the programme in late 2017 saw immediate positive change in this regard with a number of major donors and sponsors renewing their financial commitments in the last two months of the year.

## Corporate Partnerships

The Wheeler Centre is committed to developing long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships with organisations that are passionate about playing a key role in our city's cultural and intellectual life; organisations that are enmeshed in our community, not sitting apart from it.

We wish to draw attention to three long-term collaborative sponsorships that have helped deliver extraordinary conversations to all Victorians over the years.

**Sofitel Melbourne on Collins** has been the Centre's exclusive accommodation partner since 2012. Over this time, the Sofitel has provided hundreds of international and local high-profile writers with first-class accommodation and service. Sofitel Melbourne is a notable investor of the arts and this is never clearer than in the support it has provided to the Wheeler Centre over the years. As the hotel's arts partner, the Wheeler Centre each year enjoys a special event hosted at the hotel for Wheeler Centre VIP's, donors, sponsors and other special guests.

**Montalto Vineyard & Olive Grove** has been the Centre's major wine sponsor since 2014. The partnership has helped the Wheeler Centre build upon our existing cultural contribution to Victoria through the **Books and Ideas at Montalto** series, and continues to stir

and excite the imaginations of Victorians attending these events throughout the year. Over fabulous food and wine, and in the most enchanting and ever-evolving setting, the partnership has delivered robust literary conversations with some of the country's finest writers, including Elliot Perlman, Alex Miller, Michelle de Kretser, Kate Grenville, Indira Naidoo, Richard Cornish, Melanie Cheng and Tony Birch, to name just a few.

**Aēsop** has been the Wheeler Centre's programming partner and campaign partner for the Adopt-a-Word program. Since 2015 they have provided skin, hair and body care products of the finest quality as gifts to the first lucky fifty donors across four campaigns every year.

Alongside its commercial activities, the **Aēsop Foundation** provides essential support of the arts as an avenue through which to inspire, learn and communicate. To our delight, in 2017, the Centre became a successful applicant in a major grant from the Aēsop Foundation, which will provide essential funding over three years for a new writers' scheme – **The Next Chapter**, to be launched in May 2018. The Wheeler Centre is privileged to have this opportunity to continue in partnership with an organisation that shares its mission to inspire and elevate marginalised writers from diverse backgrounds.

## Trusts and Foundations

Trusts and foundations continue to support significant new programming at the Centre.

In 2017, with the support of the **Helen McPherson Smith Trust**, the Wheeler Centre presented its Regional Victoria Programme, which formed an important component of our public activity. From early July, we presented thirteen sessions in five tour locations – Ballarat, Benalla, Bendigo, Kyneton, and Warrnambool. These sessions were in three identified formats of children's programming, in conversations with major authors and speakers and political/social discussions driven by local interest. Highlights of the programme included **Alan Brough** appearing in Benalla, Bendigo, Ballarat and Kyneton with his new book, *Charlie and the Karaoke Cockroaches*, high-profile Australian literary authors **Robert Drewe** and **Richard Flanagan** and our popular **Fifth Estate** series, hosted by anthropologist, broadcaster and interviewer Sally Warhaft.

**The Readings Foundation** continued its generous support of the Hot Desk Fellowships in 2017, providing twenty writers the opportunity to work on their writing from their own desk at the Wheeler Centre for a period of ten weeks. These fellowships allowed writers to focus on a specific project, and were available to support both established and emerging writers alike with the purpose of allowing them the space and time to nurture their work and see it grow.

**The Ian Potter Foundation** generously supported continued updates to the performance space at the Wheeler Centre in 2017, as part of the Reimagining the Performance Space

project. The project aims to address the ongoing need to update our performance space in accordance with the changing nature of the work we present and our commitment to making our events more accessible through a broad range of mediums. In 2017, 118 events took place in our Performance Space and the improvements to our filming and recording capabilities enabled access to many of these events for those who weren't able to attend in person due to reasons of distance, or otherwise.

## Private Giving Conversation Starters

The Wheeler Centre is grateful to each of its 24 Conversation Starters, individual patrons whose support ensures a diverse and vibrant programme of over 200 events each year. These donors are individually acknowledged in our honour roll. We take this chance to welcome two new Conversation Starters – **Ellen Koshland** and **Elke Gjergja**. We would also like to thank Inaugural Conversation Starters **Eric and Sue Beecher**, **Tony and Wendy Hudson**, **George and Rosa Morstyn**, **Mark and Wendy Rubbo** and **Wendy Whelan** who have been loyal and generous supporters since inception of the program in 2014 through to 2017. Their generosity inspires others and ensures the Centre's capacity to pursue its mission.

## Adopt-a-Word

Our Adopt-a-Word campaign program continues to be successful, raising a total of \$12,155 in 2017, with 143 words adopted overall. The two most effective campaigns were the Father's Day campaign in August (for September) and the Christmas drive (over November and December) – our most successful campaign to date – raising \$5,590 with 70 words adopted in these two months alone.

In the lead-up to Christmas, themed words such as *gimcrack* (n.) a showy, useless thing; a worthless knick-knack, and *pandiculation* (n.) simultaneous stretching and yawning, were adopted as gifts for loved ones, while the Father's Day campaign saw *barbigerous* (adj.) bearded and *patronymic* (n.) a name derived from the name of a father or ancestor, gifted for the occasion.

Our outstanding community of supporters enables the Centre and its programme to reach further and impact more strongly on the lives of all Victorians. Together we are future proofing the art of writing and conversation by creating a vibrant community of writers, thinkers and talkers around Victoria – and increasingly around the globe.



# FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Wheeler Centre is a key organisation in the medium-sized cultural sector, with an annual turnover of \$3.8m in 2017. The Wheeler Centre values fiscal accountability, with a focus on generating new revenue streams and managing our cost base responsibly. The board and its finance sub-committee monitor performance against budget for all activities and oversee the long-term security of the company. The following breakdown provides a snapshot of our 2017 financial operations. It is not intended to replace or modify the content of the Centre's independently audited Annual Financial Statements.

## Expenditure

The Centre's annual expenditure patterns in 2017 demonstrate the high levels of resourcing required to support our mission:

### Public Programming:

Artists' fees and production and travel costs account for 53% of expenditure

### Fundraising:

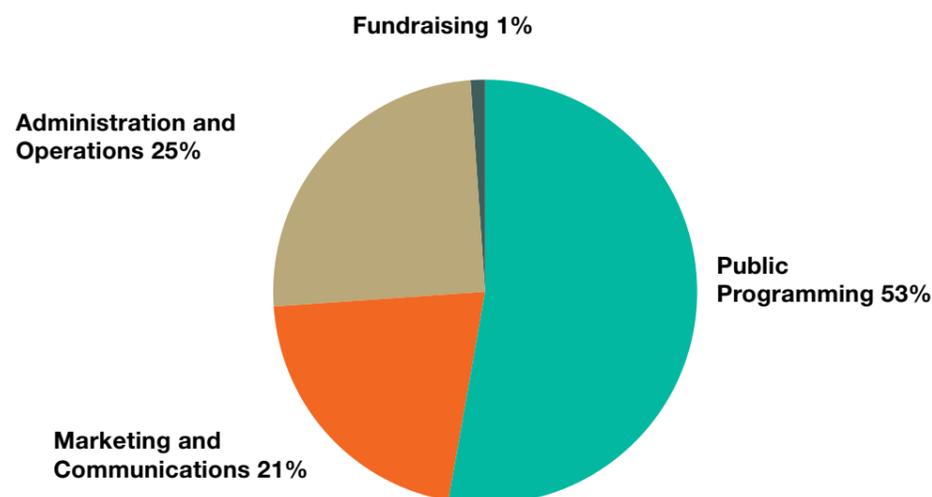
Various fundraising activities account for 1% of expenditure

### Marketing and Communications:

21% of expenditure was spent on marketing, communications and digital activity

### Administration and Operations:

The remaining 25% was spent on building operations, staffing and administration.



## Income

Demand for our daily talks and special events continues to grow. Likewise, the support we provide to the cultural sector has become invaluable to partners, publishers, booksellers, writers and literary organisations. The Wheeler Centre is focused on securing income levels that enhance our ability to deliver on this demand.

We have five main revenue streams:

### Box Office and Project Fees:

The Wheeler Centre sets itself ambitious box office targets and has strived to increase this income stream since inception. Box office and project fees (from collaborations with other institutions) accounted for 15% in 2017.

### Investments:

The Wheeler Centre's strong net asset position is underpinned by our endowment from the Planet Wheeler Foundation from which we are able to access interest and dividends. In 2017, this accounted for 12% of annual turnover.

### Resource Utilisation:

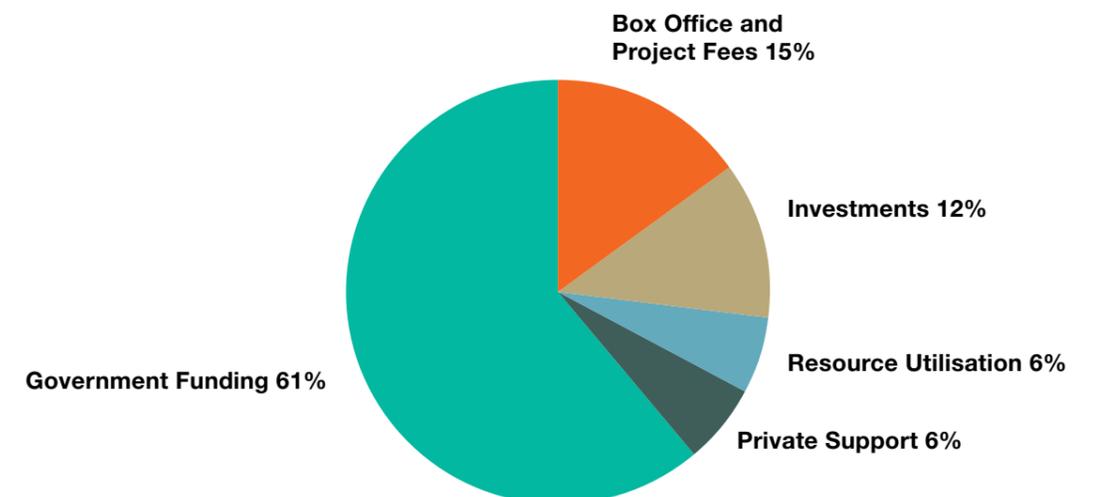
The Wheeler Centre offers its performance space, workshop and several meeting rooms for hire. This accounted for 6% of overall income in 2017.

### Private Support:

6% of the Wheeler Centre's income comes from major donors, trusts and foundations as well as corporate sponsors/partners and fundraising campaigns. We are striving to increase this figure moving forward to enable greater collaboration within the cultural sector as well as significant outreach work.

### Government Funding:

The Wheeler Centre relies heavily on support from federal, state and local government through the arts and culture portfolios, accounting for 61% of income.





## PARTNERSHIPS

### Venues, Publishers and Bookshops

The Wheeler Centre is proud to partner with a number of local and regional venues across our yearly programme of events. Our ongoing collaboration with Australia's diverse publishing industry and our support of local bookshops demonstrates our commitment to bringing writers and ideas to our audiences.

### Cultural Collaborations

Energetic and imaginative collaborations with community and cultural partners enable us to enhance our offerings to the community. Working with partner organisations also allows us to engage more broadly with diverse audiences.

### Resident Organisations

Melbourne's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature recognises the invaluable contribution made by the following organisations, all of which reside in the Wheeler Centre.

Alongside these organisations, a range of volunteer-led entities work within the Wheeler Centre, through small-scale Hot Desk residencies; PEN Melbourne and Freeplay Independent Games Festival. Small volunteer-run organisations are a vital component of the ecology of our literary and publishing sector. The Wheeler Centre is proud to support their activities.



## THANK YOU

As a cultural institution, we rely on the vision and generosity of our partners and donors. Their contribution and commitment enables us to champion writers and writing, support the literary sector, elevate public conversation and produce an extraordinary year-long programme with 80% of events free to attend. We take this opportunity to say thank you.

### GOVERNMENT



### PATRONS

Maureen and Tony Wheeler

### DONORS

#### Conversation Starters 2017

Thank you to our Conversation Starters:

Eric and Sue Beecher, Inaugural

Elke Gjergja

Andy and Jill Griffiths, Inaugural

Tony and Wendy Hudson, Inaugural

Ellen Koshland

George and Rosa Morstyn, Inaugural

Patricia O'Donnell, Inaugural

Mark and Wendy Rubbo, Inaugural

Michael and Radhika Santhanam-Martin

Brigitte Smith, Inaugural

Wendy Whelan, Inaugural

Thank you also for the generosity and support of previous Conversation Starters and other Friends of the Wheeler Centre donors who contributed to our tax appeal and those friends who Adopted-A-Word or became a regular giver.

### MAJOR PARTNERS

Media



Audio Visual



Accommodation



Wine Montalto



### CORPORATE PARTNERS



### FELLOWSHIPS & RESIDENCIES

Hot Desk Fellowships



### SPECIAL PROJECTS

Reimagining the Performance Space



The Russell Mills Foundation

Digital Engagement (Regional)





# OUR PEOPLE

## Our Board

- Eric Beecher – Chair  
(Term ended 19 December)
- Susan Oliver – Chair  
(Term commenced 19 December)
- Russel Howcroft
- Clare Wright
- Anita Ziemer
- Julie Pinkham  
(Term commenced 20 March)
- Belinda Duarte  
(Term commenced 20 March)
- Tony Hudson – Company Secretary  
(Term ended 19 December)
- Mark Rubbo OAM  
(Term commenced ended 19 December)
- Marcus Fazio – Company Secretary  
(Commenced 19 December)
- Corrie Perkin  
(Term commenced 19 December)

## Our Staff

- Director** Michael Williams
- General Manager** Jaclyn Booton
- Head of Programming** Emily Sexton
- Head of Marketing and Communications** Emily Harms
- Head of Development** Jacqueline Williams (from September)
- Head of Publishing** Sophie Black
- Office Manager** Sally Rosevear
- Programming Manager** Helen Withycombe
- Series Producer** Gemma Rayner
- Project Producer** Amita Kirpalani
- Senior Digital Editor** Jon Tjhia
- Marketing Manager** Shannon Hick
- Ticketing Coordinator** Claire Flynn
- Publicists** Kate Blackwood (until 24 April) and Jane Watkins (from April)
- Digital Writer/Editor** Sophie Quick
- Digital Coordinator** Scott Limbrick (from December)
- Events Manager** Gabrielle Ryan
- Production Manager** Johnboy Davidson
- Technical Coordinator** Jose Eveline
- Accounts** Sam Ryan
- Venue Coordinators** Letitia Parish (until 26 September), Mel Herron (from September) and Fury Telford

Our extraordinary front and back of house team who ensure our events run seamlessly night after night:

- Aaron Bradbrook
- Anne Bravos
- Stella Charls
- Chris Cody
- Ruby Duffell
- Fiona Dunne
- Jonathan Epstein
- Eric Gardiner
- Melinda Herron
- Jess Hutchison
- Shamini Joseph
- Charlie Kerekes
- Nicole McKenzie
- Angela McMurray
- Linh Nguyen
- Mark Novak
- Niklas Pajanti
- Leticia Parish
- Owen Phillips
- Ritchie Plunkett
- Sophia Robinson
- Autumn Royal
- Catherine Sietkiewicz
- Jen Squire
- Billie Tumarkin
- Nikita Vanderbyl
- Tim White





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Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas  
trading as The Wheeler Centre.

[wheelercentre.com](http://wheelercentre.com)