

# Sydney Eisteddfod Strategic Plan 2025 – 2030



The stage  
is yours...

We nurture talent from grassroots to greatness. We link students, educators, industry professionals and communities to sustain a vibrant future for the performing arts in Australia.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Traditional Owners

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which our work and events take place. We celebrate and applaud the long, rich history of storytelling in song, dance, and voice. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We contribute to this continuity – developing and sharing our combined cultural journey through our activities on these lands where sovereignty was never ceded.

### Volunteers

The Board and staff thank our past and current volunteers for their support generously given to our activities over decades. The annual Sydney Eisteddfod is one of the largest competitive performing arts festivals in the world. With over 350 events running from May to September, we rely on dedicated volunteers – many of whom return year after year – to devote their time to bring the Eisteddfod to life. Thank you.

Story of  
the covered  
concourse

### This Plan

This Plan was developed between July and October 2024 with the assistance of specialist arts consultant, Tony Grybowski and Associates. Inputs to the Plan included desktop research and analysis, interviews with external stakeholders and workshops with the Eisteddfod Board and staff. We acknowledge the committed individuals who have contributed to this process.

# CHAIR'S WELCOME



This Plan represents a turning point for the Eisteddfod as we embark on a period of growth and development. The 2025 – 2030 strategy outlines ambitious plans to amplify our role in the local community, delivering a year-round program of activity to local students and teachers in partnership with other organisations and institutions.

The annual Eisteddfod season will always be our highlight activity and will be aimed at welcoming a more diverse local audience and participation. In 2023-4 we commenced on a major project to modernise the Eisteddfod through an integrated online IT system incorporating registration, ticketing, CRM and adjudicator tools. This system will provide significant efficiencies and enable engagement with our trusted stakeholders in a most effective way.

By 2030, I hope to see the Sydney Eisteddfod cemented as a cornerstone of Australia's artistic landscape, bridging the gap between arts education/training and professional practice. We want the organisation to showcase multi-disciplinary excellence, nurturing talent across a spectrum of creative expression. I want the Sydney Eisteddfod to be acknowledged as a key partner in addressing the national challenge to connect the creative arts industry with primary and secondary educational providers, fostering a seamless pathway from classroom to further tertiary studies and the stage.

In the next five years we seek to enhance our core offerings while expanding our creative horizons. This may include the creation of a flagship festival event that becomes a highlight of the national arts calendar, positioning the Eisteddfod as not just a facilitator but also a creator of artistic projects.

Simultaneously we seek a focus on improving the participant and audience experience in traditional eisteddfod events, with a particular emphasis on increasing market penetration in areas that are already supportive of the Sydney Eisteddfod's traditional competition events. We aim to dedicate resources to transform the Chippen Street Theatre into a thriving commercial venture, further solidifying our position in Sydney's vibrant arts scene and ensuring the sustainability of our mission for generations to come.

The aim is for us to be recognised for our role in shaping the artistic journey of over 28,000 participants annually, hosting more than 350 events each season, and providing a platform for 2.5 million Australians throughout our rich history.

Max Holzner  
Chair, Sydney Eisteddfod

Sydney Eisteddfod  
Strategic Plan 2025 – 2030

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 1933 the Eisteddfod has established itself as the most respected competition of its type in Australia. The objective of this Plan is to ensure the relevance and reputation of the competition and its associated activities is sustained into the future.

The Board, as custodians of this cultural institution, are committed to ensuring the Eisteddfod continues to present enriching opportunities that meet the needs of the community we serve – the participants, partners, teachers, adjudicators, volunteers, supporters, and the esteemed alumni.

Significant operational reform has been achieved over the past two years. This Plan seeks to build on these reforms and bring a spirit of disciplined enquiry and innovation to the planning and delivery of future programs.

This Plan *The Stage is Yours, 2025 – 2030* is structured in three sections:

- PART 1 – Our Strategy in Summary
- PART 2 – Our Plan and approach
- PART 3 – Our foundations for success – our history, stakeholders and governance

At its heart are the Goals and Success Measures, as outlined in Part Two. These capture the activity priorities for the next five years. They provide the framework for more comprehensive annual Business Plans which identify in greater detail the programs and services which can achieve the priorities, and what performance levels should be nominated as measures of success.

Important details such as the scope of the annual program, annual participation targets and annual revenue expectations will flow from this Plan, and form the second stage of the Eisteddfod's planning cycle.

This planning cycle will be supported with a focus on governance, performance monitoring, and reporting by the Board. These efforts will be captured in the Annual Information Statement and Financial Report.

Primary research was undertaken as part of the planning process that included a global sector scan and selected local stakeholder consultation. The learnings from this research provides the context and introduction to part two of the strategy.

# THE PLAN IN SUMMARY

## VISION

'The stage is yours'

We nurture talent from grassroots to greatness. We link students, educators, industry professionals and communities to sustain a vibrant future for the performing arts in Australia.

## PURPOSE

To present the annual Sydney Eisteddfod, one of the largest and most successful competitive performing arts festivals of its type in the world.

To provide opportunities for young people to experience the rewards of public performance, each aspiring to achieve their personal best.

To spread the Eisteddfod's reach locally, nationally and internationally by connecting with like-minded people and communities to develop future audiences and provide life-changing success and career opportunities for the participants.

## VALUES

Ensemble – a team built on trust and mutual respect

Aspirational – nurturing a desire for greatness in every performer

Collaborative – as a team and with partner organisations

Bold – open to innovation, fresh ideas and a contemporary focus

Great hosts – a welcoming and supportive environment for performers and audiences

## STRATEGIC GOALS

### GOAL 1

A Dynamic Program

### GOAL 2

A Collaborative Program

### GOAL 3

A Sustainable Program





## CONTEXT

We participate in a changing world, in which community and audience expectations are evolving in diverse and exciting ways. The Eisteddfod embraces these changes and recognises it must also respond and evolve. Benchmarking research and consultation with key stakeholders were important dimensions of the Plan's development.

This process identified the opportunities which are outlined below.

Sydney Eisteddfod is regarded as a leading cultural institution, modelling best practice in the sector. Unlike other Eisteddfods, it benefits from a primarily paid workforce and strong financial reserves, giving it greater capacity for innovation and impact. The sector faces significant challenges, including rising operational costs, volunteer shortages, competition from commercial entities, and difficulties in adopting modern technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the sector, with some organisations recovering better due to strong internal commitment, focus on revenue-generating activities, and prudent spending.

Post-pandemic, many organisations are focusing on refining their core activities rather than expanding programming, aiming for sustainability. They are also building stronger connections with local communities and exploring potential partnerships across various sectors.

There is an emerging focus on creating defined revenue streams through competitive and non-competitive performance opportunities, informed by research, risk analysis, and stakeholder feedback. Organisations are identifying untapped opportunities to engage alumni in program delivery and philanthropic support. Inclusion is an emerging focus, with efforts to provide opportunities for all participants, regardless of background or skill level, and to incorporate non-competitive events.

There is interest in developing closer formalised partnerships with complementary and aligned organisations, with a focus on skill development through expanded scholarship programs and international collaboration.



# STRATEGIC GOALS

## Goal 1

### A Dynamic Program

Sydney Eisteddfod will be known for the vibrancy and prestige of its annual competition season. The program will be relevant and contemporary, reflecting the performance interests of young participants. Adjudicators will be respected and committed to nurturing young talent. Performance venues will add a sense of occasion and achievement for young participants.

We will achieve this by implementing the following over the next four years:

#### STRATEGIES

1. Establish an ongoing program of research and customer surveys to track trends in customer satisfaction and retention
2. Consult with schools and aligned training organisations to review performance categories to ensure relevance and appeal to future participants
3. Streamline entry requirements to enable schools and large groups to be processed efficiently.
4. Review event scheduling to align with resource capacity and enhance 'on-time' performance of events
5. Focus event scheduling on venues which are seen to have prestige and status to strengthen the 'on stage' experience
6. Initiate an evaluation program to measure the impact and benefits of participation
7. Increase and diversify the reach of the Eisteddfod to reflect more broadly people from all backgrounds in the community.
8. Explore the potential for the introduction of non-competitive performance strands, focusing on the rewards of public performance at recognised venues
9. Maintain selected formal partnerships with other leading Eisteddfods and related organisations to provide unique opportunities for participants. The partnership agreements to allow for bi-annual review of mutual benefit

#### MEASUREMENT

1. A comprehensive 'Customer Satisfaction Survey Program' developed and implemented and initial findings used to establish baseline targets. The program to initially include CRM analysis of retention rates, exit surveys of participants and data on 'ease of participation' ratings. Periodic reports from the program are used to inform annual planning and evaluation
2. An Evaluation Framework dashboard measuring 'overall impact and value' of participation is established in three years. The dashboard developed in partnership with an evaluation expert (academic or appropriate evaluation provider) and used in corporate materials, advocacy documents and funding proposals.
3. Data sourced from a bi-annual survey of participating schools used to review the relevance of competition performance categories and identify opportunities for new activities.
4. Increase the 'on time' performance rating of core Eisteddfod programs in three years.
5. Participation from students from public schools is increased. Targeted philanthropic funding is sourced in three years to support participation from disadvantaged schools and communities.
6. A 'non-competitive' performance program is tested through a pilot program designed to provide public performance opportunities in attractive and recognised venues

## Goal 2 A Collaborative Program

Sydney Eisteddfod will sustain the loyalty of the community of supporters spanning its ninety- year history and prioritise initiatives to grow this network.

Sydney Eisteddfod will strengthen relationships with key stakeholders including public and private schools and the expanding network of performance academies across Sydney and wider NSW. We will establish and champion engagement with the network of performance training institutions in NSW. The goal will be to collaborate, rather than compete with these organisations to offer recognition and performance opportunity for emerging talent. Sydney Eisteddfod will be recognised for its contribution to the professional career development its programs provide to participants.

We will achieve this by implementing the following over the next four years:

### STRATEGIES

1. Explore the potential to partner with training and skill development organisations to deliver masterclasses / workshops at the Chippen Street Theatre
2. Develop and implement an Advocacy Strategy to enable targeted engagement and communication with key stakeholder individuals and organisations
3. Convene an expert cultural education advisory committee to meet periodically, to advise the Board on trends on cultural education and training in Australia to support the Eisteddfod's long-term planning
4. Demonstrate leadership in the sector by convening occasional meetings, forums and events for targeted stakeholder groups to share information and discuss trends in the sector

5. Develop an Alumni strategy to support the further development of the Eisteddfod's alumni program with the objective to build sustained support and awareness of the value in participation
6. Enhance the audience experience at all Eisteddfod events by ensuring venues have easy access, hosts are welcoming, and events are delivered effectively
7. Build a volunteer loyalty program to enhance participation, retention and growth

### MEASUREMENT

1. The Education Advisory panel is established (with a Terms of Reference) to meet twice a year. The Panel initially identifies current issues in cultural education and training related to the Eisteddfod's strategic development and provides professional opinion on evaluation data. Six-monthly panel reports are reviewed by Board and management
2. Audience satisfaction ratings are obtained, via survey, and are reviewed to identify areas of improvement
3. The Alumni program is expanded and demonstrates value by increased sector awareness and support for the Eisteddfod
4. At least three sector discussions (convenings) are held annually on current topics of relevance to stakeholders and the sector
5. The volunteer program continues to expand and diversify its pool of participants by incorporating new recruitment strategies, such as partnering with event management training courses, while maintaining strong retention rates.
6. The venue-hire policy and event hire bookings for the Chippen Street Theatre builds awareness of the venue as a 'cultural hub'

## Goal 3 A Sustainable Program

Sydney Eisteddfod will achieve long term sustainability to maintain its relevance and respond to changing education and social trends. The reserve funds will continue to grow, the reformed business model will operate efficiently, and philanthropic partners will be recognised and expanded.

The volunteer network that has supported the Eisteddfod's operations over time will be revitalised. The skills-based Board will periodically review policies and procedures to ensure governance best practice. Over time, the Chippen Street offices and studio will be optimised for use by external hirers and become known as a specialist cultural space for Sydney.

We will achieve this by implementing the following over the next four years:

### STRATEGIES

#### Governance

1. Undertake a strategic review of the business model to ensure alignment with core business. The review to include the establishment of an annual Business Plan that sets annual targets and KPIs linked to the objectives as set out in this strategy
2. Develop a reserves policy and agree to retain financial reserves levels at a minimum of \$4m, complemented by independent review of investment strategies annually. Fund any new initiatives through identified additional funding sources
3. Implement a rolling strategic planning and annual reporting cycle complemented by an annual Board workplan commencing in 2025
4. Undertake an external Board governance review every three years to ensure best practice Board governance

#### People

5. Undertake an organisational structural review to support the new strategy
6. Review the HR systems and related policies and procedures including the development of a staff performance review system linked to strategy implementation

#### Operations and Systems

7. Develop a Premises strategy to optimise the Chippen Street Theatre as a unique and safe 'independent' cultural facility operated by the Eisteddfod. The Strategy to schedule necessary building upgrades, increase venue capacity and the procurement of a venue liquor licence and prioritise event hire bookings for the theatre to align with Eisteddfod activities and build awareness of the 'cultural hub'. The strategy to also commit to periodic Review of sub-tenancy arrangements (to the extent possible) to ensure strategic alignment
8. Review policies and procedures to demonstrate best practice, standardise program delivery and reduce risk
9. Optimise and fully integrate the new ArtFuel IT system across all areas of the organisation including as a key input into the Evaluation Framework project
10. Develop partnerships with local restaurants and venues to strengthen the precinct as a cultural destination

#### Philanthropic support

11. Build capacity to attract and retain philanthropic and sponsor support for programs and activities, including general donations

## MEASUREMENT

### Governance

1. The business model is implemented and returns surplus results for core business from 2025 and beyond
2. Reserves maintained at a minimum of \$4m and increase to \$6m by 2030
3. The Strategic Plan formally adopted and an annual Board workplan and Annual Report is implemented in 2025
4. The first independent Board Governance Review takes place in the second half of 2025 and 2028 and 80% of recommendations are formally adopted and implemented

### People

5. An organisational structural review takes place and is implemented in 2025 and supports the delivery of the Strategic Plan
6. All staff policies and procedures are implemented, and reviewed bi-annually by the Audit and Risk Committee of the Board

### Operations and Systems

7. The Chippen Street facility becomes well known in the community and is utilised (off season) by the sector with occupancy reaching 90% over three years
8. A capital works program is endorsed by the Board and schedules necessary activity to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the facility
9. A liquor licence is secured in 2025
10. Policies and procedures are developed and implemented to ensure the efficient and safe delivery of all Sydney Eisteddfod activities. This includes the training and onboarding of all new staff, contractors and volunteers from 2025 onwards
11. The ArtFuel platform is fully embedded across the organisation and is reviewed to ensure ongoing efficient operations and delivery of activities

### Philanthropic Support

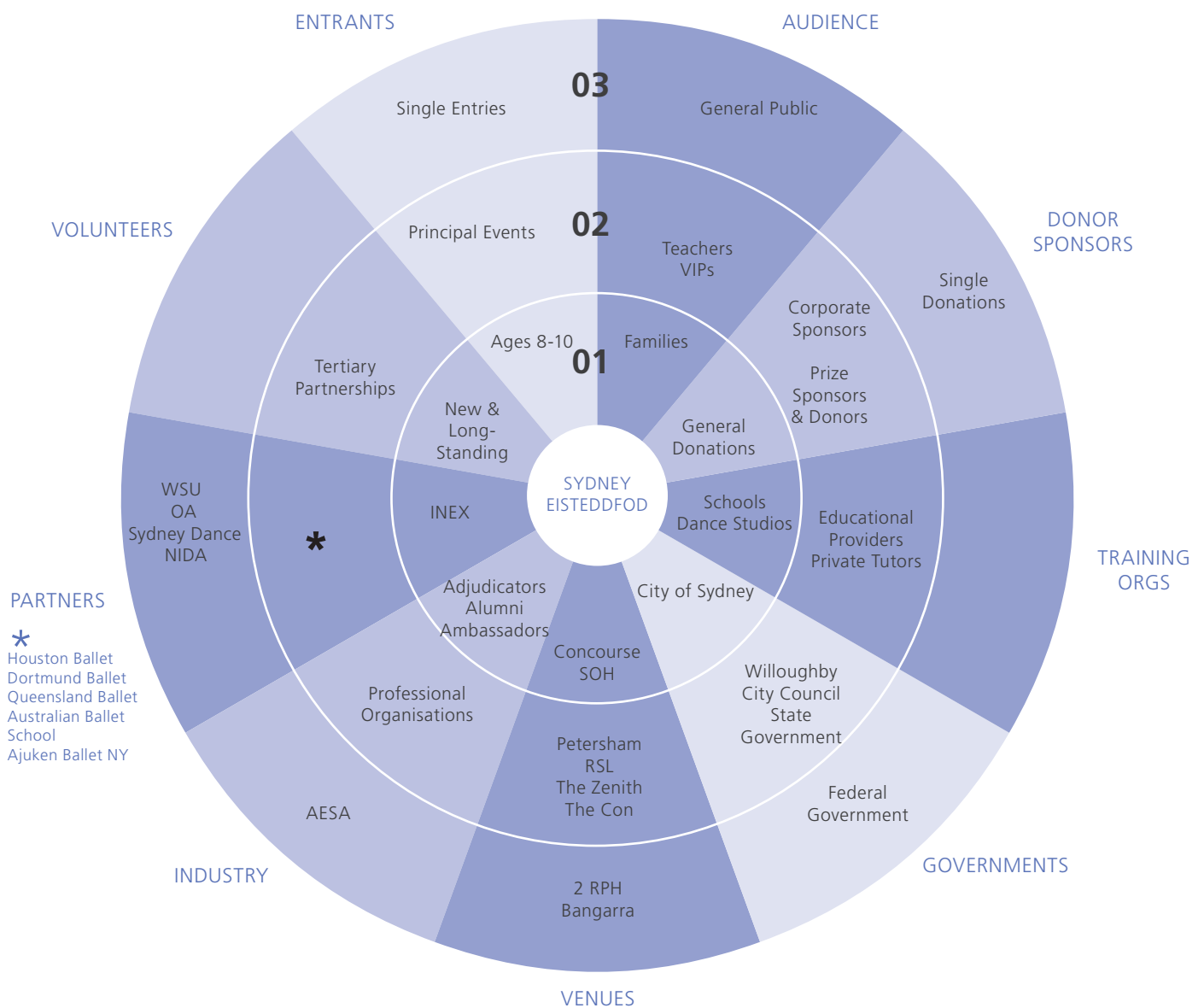
12. Philanthropic support increases to enable the sustainable growth of the organisation



# STAKEHOLDERS

This diagram/map provides a high level view of Sydney Eisteddfod’s stakeholders (people, organisations, community and groups) for the ongoing planning and management of constructive and beneficial relationships. Placements on this map may vary in different situations and dynamics.

All stakeholders are important to Sydney Eisteddfod contributing in a range of ways. The stakeholders on this chart are mapped according to level of engagement, importance and influence. The centre of the chart represents Sydney Eisteddfod itself – its Board and staff. Stakeholders in the first ring (closest to the centre) represent those with the highest level of importance. Stakeholders included in the third (outside ring) have lesser immediate importance or influence, however are still very important to the Eisteddfod’s ‘ecology’. The chart represents a high-level representation of stakeholders or stakeholder groups and will evolve and change over time.



# GOVERNANCE

Sydney Eisteddfod was incorporated in 1933 and operates under its Statement of Purposes and Rules. The Board of the Festival is elected according to the Rules of the organisation. The Members of the Festival include Friends, Full Members, Life Members and Honorary Members. The Board maintains a current skills matrix that is used to ensure representation across key stakeholder groups and necessary experience and attributes.

Sydney Eisteddfod operates with a small staff and an army of dedicated volunteers who are without doubt the lifeblood of the organisation. Its directors and advisors assist on an honorary basis and as Sydney Eisteddfod receives no Federal, State or Local Government funding. It exists through the generosity of corporate sponsors and private citizens plus the income it derives from entry fees, ticket sales at its venues, venue hire, and advertising in its principal programmes and through its communication channels.

Sydney Eisteddfod maintains close ties with other arts organisations across NSW and has an ongoing commitment to secure appropriate performance opportunities for developing artists.

This Plan will be supported by an annual Operating Plan, reformed financial budgeting and management and an ongoing commitment to Governance reform.

The following lists the Board and others formally associated with the organisation.

## **Directors**

**Chair:** Max Holzner

**Deputy Chair:** Simone Whetton

Toby Dewar

Matthew Tribe

Donald Mayes OAM

**Company Secretary:** Jennifer Wang

## **Investment Committee**

Chair: Andrew Marchant

Michael Clegg

Max Holzner

## **Patron**

Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AO  
KC Governor of NSW

## **Artistic Patrons**

Maestro Richard Bonyngé AC CBE

Maina Gielgud AO

## **Life Members**

Professor The Honourable Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO

Piroozi Desai-Keane OAM

Noel Cisłowski AM

## **Ambassadors**

Angela Bishop OAM

Alexander Campbell

Amelia Farrugia

Joshua Horner

Geoffrey T Jones OAM

Simon Kenway

Steven McRae

Dr Nicholas Milton AM

Stuart Skelton

Simon Tedeschi

Kim Walker

Simone Young AM

Léone Ziegler



## HISTORY

Eisteddfods in Australia have a rich history of being both a competition and a cultural festival honouring artistic expression and cultural heritage. Originating in Wales as a festival of literature, music and performance, the term “Eisteddfod” comes from the Welsh words “eistedd” (meaning “to sit”) and “fod” (meaning “to be”)<sup>1</sup>.

These terms have historically combined to refer to a gathering where poets, musicians, and performers compete in various artistic disciplines. Key features of Eisteddfods have centred around competitions in spoken word, singing, dance, music, and other cultural arts, with participants judged, and winners often receive prizes, medals, or titles. In Wales, poetry in Welsh language has always been a central focus, evolving to be a celebration of Welsh culture, identity and language from the 19th century onwards. Today, the National Eisteddfod Wales plays a vital role in preserving and promoting Welsh arts and culture<sup>2</sup>.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Welsh migrants took the Eisteddfod concept around the world to South Africa, the United States, and Australia. The inaugural Grand Annual Eisteddfod of Australasia (now

Royal South Street Society Eisteddfod Ballarat) was first held in Ballarat in 1891, attracting some 260 entrants who performed across 10 days of competition<sup>3</sup>.

The Association of Eisteddfod Societies of Australia (AESA) estimates there are now “at least 200 [Eisteddfods in operation], without the Pop ups.”<sup>4</sup> Most, if not all, Eisteddfods are members of the AESA, a national peak organisation that facilitates insurance, copyright negotiation, regular gatherings for members and more.

The Sydney Eisteddfod has fostered creativity since 1933, offering performance opportunities to all who enter ‘nurturing the performing arts at a grass roots level and providing life-changing opportunities for young artists...’<sup>5</sup>. In 2023, Sydney Eisteddfod announced and subsequently relocated to a new permanent home base at Chippen Street Theatre (45 Chippen Street, Chippendale), with a dedicated fifty seat black box performance space<sup>6</sup>.

Building upon its legacy, the Sydney Eisteddfod seeks to ‘respect the long history and traditions of the Eisteddfod... and respond to the many changes we experience in the performing and training environment...’<sup>7</sup>.

SYDNEY EISTEDDFOD

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