

## **Sydney Theatre Company announces 2021 Resident Artists and new Design Associates Program**



*Courtney Stewart and Shari Sebbens are STC's newest Resident Artists*

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Sydney Theatre Company is delighted to announce **Shari Sebbens** and **Courtney Stewart** will join our existing Resident Artists in 2021. Shari (*Black is the New White, The Bleeding Tree*) has been appointed Resident Director and Courtney (*White Pearl, Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark*) is the company's new Richard Wherrett Fellow - a career pathway opportunity for emerging directors.

Shari and Courtney join fellow STC Resident Artists; Resident Director Jessica Arthur (*Wonnangatta*) and Associate Director Paige Rattray (*The Deep Blue Sea*), along with Emerging Writers' Group members - James Elazzi, Jordyn Fulcher, Enoch Mailangi and Wendy Mocke - and Patrick White Fellow Anchuli Felicia King.

STC's Resident Artist program champions new writing and diverse voices, aiming to establish a collaborative environment in which artistic excellence can be achieved. In 2021, **STC Artistic Director, Kip Williams** will also be launching a new Resident Artist initiative - the **Design Associate Program** - which will be an annual opportunity for three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) peoples to be supported and developed in the area of theatre design.

Having forged his own career at STC as a Resident Artist, Williams said he was thrilled to welcome aboard these two incredible creatives to play a central role in the day-to-day artistic life of STC.

*"I am so excited that Shari is continuing her long affiliation with STC in becoming our new Resident Director," Williams said. "It has been a pleasure and a privilege having Shari as our Richard Wherrett Fellow these past two years, and I look forward to seeing her continue to develop and flourish as an emerging directing talent in her new role. Her work on STC Virtual and her wonderful production of Superheroes at Griffin (one of the first shows to open post-lockdown) are testaments to her immense talent. Though the circumstances of 2020 meant Shari was unable to make her STC directing debut last year, I cannot wait for the wonderful projects she will direct for us in 2021."*

*"I am also thrilled to announce that Courtney is joining STC's Artistic Team as our new Richard Wherret Fellow. Her wealth of experience in many aspects of theatre from acting, directing, dramaturgy and her wonderful work as a part of the Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP) Director's Initiative make her the perfect choice. I am particularly excited to collaborate with Courtney in her role as Dramaturg on my upcoming production of Playing Beatie Bow by Kate Mulvany. All of us at STC can't wait to watch Courtney's formidable talent develop even further."*

Among the many exciting projects our new Resident Director Shari Sebbens has on the cards for 2021 is a new television series called *The Whole Table*, a co-production between STC and NITV set to air on January 20. Shari will host the ground-breaking current affairs show that will feature a regular panel of First Nations artists and explore a range of issues that impact Indigenous people both in Australia and abroad.

Shari is a proud Bardi, Jabirr-Jabirr woman born and raised in Darwin who studied Aboriginal Theatre at WAAPA and acting at NIDA, graduating in 2009. After a successful stint as a performer on stage and screen, including in Nakkiah Lui's stellar *Black is the New White* directed by Paige Rattray (2017 and 2018), Shari decided to make the leap into directing and in 2019 was appointed the STC Richard Wherrett Fellow.

Shari was set to helm her first production, a re-staging of Deborah Mailman and Wesley Enoch's seminal Indigenous play *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, in 2020 before COVID restrictions brought those plans to a halt. In 2021, Shari will be Assistant Director to Wesley Enoch on Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' *Appropriate* before finally making her STC directing debut later in the year. Details will be announced in March for Act Two, the second release of plays in our 2021 season, which will feature two productions directed by Shari.

*"It is an incredible honour to be promoted to Resident Director for a company that is constantly pushing the boundaries of what constitutes theatre and not scared to engage in the necessary conversations and actions required for cultural growth,"* Shari said.

*"I've worked with Sydney Theatre Company as both an actor and the Richard Wherrett Fellow in the last few years and I'm excited to continue my creative development under the company's invaluable guidance. As a Bardi and Jabirr Jabirr artist I am also proud of the choices STC continues to make in producing Indigenous work. In promoting more Indigenous voices to leading cultural positions, STC recognises the importance of diversity and are investing in the future of Indigenous storytelling on our stages. I'm excited to begin the year under the guidance of previous resident director and inspiration of mine, Wesley Enoch, as he leads us through *Appropriate* and onto *The Whole Table*. These projects will kickstart our year and incite some thrilling and necessary conversation that I know will carry on throughout the season and hopefully our lives."*

Courtney Stewart is an actor, director, dancer and teacher who has a long-standing creative relationship with STC. She has worked on a number of productions and developments of new Australian work with the company, including *Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark* and *Australian Graffiti*, and has been part of the company's CAAP Directors Initiative. Courtney also worked as a Dramaturg on the production of *White Pearl* for STC in 2019.

*"My relationship with STC has been one of the most meaningful professional relationships with a company I have had to date, and I couldn't be more excited to continue this relationship as the next Richard Wherrett Fellow,"* Courtney said.

*"This opportunity will give me the resources and space to further develop my skills in the areas of creative leadership, directing and dramaturgical processes. The new commitments the company has made to increasing equity in the area of cultural representation are incredibly important and this is something I am fiercely committed to. I am dedicated to the development of new Australian work, and want to be involved in diversifying the practices and the artists who are responsible for ushering these new stories to the stage. It's an absolute honour to be invited to the table at a time when the industry as a whole is breaking open important discussions and re-evaluating processes to strive towards a more equitable future for all artists."*

Previous STC Resident Artists include Benedict Andrews, Marion Potts, Wesley Enoch, Alice Babidge and Sarah Goodes. Previous STC Richard Wherrett Fellows include Jessica Arthur, Paige Rattray, Imara Savage, Sarah Giles, Lee Lewis and Wayne Blair.

**Ends**

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**Notes to Editors**

**- NITV & Sydney Theatre Company present *The Whole Table***

*The Whole Table* is a co-production between Sydney Theatre Company and NITV. Inspired by conversations that arose in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, the three-part, all Indigenous panel series looks at a range of topics through an arts and culture lens. *The Whole Table* is hosted by STC's Resident Director **Shari Sebens** (*The Sapphires, Redfern Now*), who is joined by regular panelists **Wesley Enoch, Nakkiah Lui** and **Rhonda Roberts** as well as special guests in each episode to engage in both humorous discussion and robust debate about a variety of Indigenous affairs. Special guests include Academy Award winner **Taika Waititi**, music legend **Adam Briggs** and national treasure **Miranda Tapsell**. *The Whole Table* premieres on Wednesday January 20 at 8.30pm on NITV as part of their hallmark *Jan 26 Always Was, Always Will Be* programming slate, providing timely and insightful viewing that amplifies Indigenous voices.

**- Design Associate Program (DAP)**

The Design Associate Program is a new, annual Resident Artists initiative for a group of designers. STC acknowledges the underrepresentation of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) peoples in the area of theatre design. The DAP aims to support and develop three artists who are looking to gain hands-on experience and mentorship within the theatre context. The program will be open to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and CALD people. We welcome applications from emerging artists, recent graduates as well as those with industry experience in associated fields (ie. architecture, non-theatre composition, advertising, visual arts etc.) interested in transitioning into theatre work. The Design Associates will each be offered a paid, 12-month position that includes two assistant positions on a mainstage production, mentoring from industry professionals, masterclasses and more. Successful applicants will join a program tailored to their specific design area of interest. The Design Associates will be given the opportunity to work with and learn from skilled staff and industry members as well as have access to resources that will enable participants to discover and develop who they are as creatives. The aim is for these designers to become integrated members of the company's artistic cohort. The areas of design we are offering positions for are: sound/composition, set design, costume design, lighting design. Applications for the program will open in coming weeks, and enquiries can be sent to [artisticteam@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:artisticteam@sydneytheatre.com.au)

#### **- STC Resident Artists program**

Sydney Theatre Company has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre-makers. Through the Resident Artists, Emerging Writers' Group, Patrick White Fellowship, Design Associate Program and CAAP Directors Initiative programs, STC is committed to providing professional development opportunities, access to key personnel and resources, and encouragement and support to pursue interests and projects away from STC. Our Resident Artists also play key roles in the day-to-day artistic life of the Company. They are supported by the STC Artist Program Donors. <https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about/artists-in-residence>