

polyglot

Annual Report 2021



theatre is child's play ~~~

About Us

Polyglot Theatre is a world-renowned contemporary theatre company based in Melbourne making exceptional arts experiences for children and families. Our unique brand of theatre encompasses a wide variety of forms, and is shared with audiences everywhere, from the world's most prestigious theatres to the football grounds of regional Australia. Polyglot's artistic and philosophical approach of child-centred practice has earned us a strong reputation at home and abroad as a leader in the theatre for young audiences (TYA) sector, celebrated for creating distinctive, participatory works that are playful and conceptually rigorous. Access is central to our work at Polyglot, driven by the right of all children to experience growth and resilience through creative play.

Our Vision

Polyglot places children at the heart of our art. Our vision is of a world where all children are powerful: artistically, socially and culturally.

Our Values

- Children are central to our art as collaborators and participants. Our work exists to give children the power to be in control, to have an effect and experience freedom.
- Our artistic approach is one of unbridled curiosity, rigour and daring; we champion innovation and invite the unexpected.
- We work with respect, resourcefulness and a spirit of genuine collaboration in the pursuit of a sustainable future – environmentally, creatively and economically.
- We work with inclusive practice and a strong focus on accessibility, understanding the need for equitable engagement in the arts.
- We believe in leading change and pursuing best practice for our staff, our artists and our Board.

Our Mission

Polyglot's mission is to make innovative and daring theatre which provides children everywhere the opportunity for imagination and adventure through participation. We offer transformational, playful arts experiences that are alive and human in their content and connection. We relish the endless possibilities in theatre and performance for this very specific audience, providing scope for an extraordinary range of forms and styles. We are committed to advocating for the right of all children to experience arts and culture, and to promoting the importance of young people as a discerning audience from their earliest years.

Board of Directors 2021

Sarah Hunt – Chair
Sandra Stoklossa – Treasurer (from April)
Mario Agostinoni – Treasurer (to April)
Jacob Boehme
Kathy Fox (to June)
Matthew Hall
Greg Ireton
Rasika Mohan
Geoffrey Renton
Sandra Robertson
Dr. Mark Williams

Polyglot acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work, and we pay our deep respect to Elders past and present. For more than 65,000 years children and families have created and played on these lands and continue to do so. We are grateful to be able to make our art on this country too.

Always was, always will be.

Staff 2021

Sue Giles AM – Artistic Director & co-CEO
Katherine Fyffe – Executive Director & co-CEO
Emily Tomlins – Associate Director
Lucy Day – Business Manager
Rainbow Sweeny – Producer
Lexie Wood – Project Manager
Freya McGrath – Assistant Producer
Erica Heller-Wagner – Marketing Manager
Olivia Satchell – Development Coordinator
Sophie Overett – Administration & Operations Coordinator
Matthew Siddall – Access and Communications Coordinator
Fleur Brett – Bookkeeper

Artists, Facilitators and Production Staff

Tirese Ballard, Nick Barlow, Tanja Beer, Sharyn Brand, Alice Coffey, Martin del Amo, John Marc Desengano, Tina Douglas, Briony Farrell, Ashlee Hughes, Katrina Gaskell, Wendy Gilchrist Holmberg, Dan Goronszy, Mischa Long, Lachlan MacLeod, Sylvie Meltzer, Bridget Milesi, Hannah Murphy, Steph O'Hara, David Pidd, Ian Pidd, Rose Pidd, Zak Pidd, Daniele Poidomani, Leisa Prowd, Tamara Rewse, Stefanie Robinson, Morwenna Schenck, Sonya Soares, Tina Thompson, Emily Tomlins, Afsaneh Torabi, Jen Tran, Peter Walker, Glen Walton, Justine Warner, Blayne Welsh

Achievements

6,109 People reached in person

1,725 People reached online

362 Artist employment opportunities

82 In-person performances delivered

61 In-person workshops delivered

29 Online workshops delivered

50 In-person creative development sessions

32 Online creative development sessions

13 In-person Voice Lab conversations

17 Voice Lab online conversations

2,714 Polyglot at home views

Chair's Message

Sarah Hunt
Chair, Polyglot Board

Amongst the turbulence of another challenging year, the Polyglot team found moments of joyful creative expression, opportunities to connect and play with children and families, and time to deeply consider how the company would move with purpose into its next stage.

In April, the Board farewelled Mario Agostinoni, Treasurer from 2014–2021. Under his sound financial leadership, Polyglot grew into an organisation capable of weathering the significant financial impacts of the pandemic, and well placed to face future challenges. I thank Mario for his long period of service and guidance. We welcomed Sandra Stoklossa as our new Treasurer, and her rich experience and insight has proved invaluable in maintaining our stable foundation. We also farewelled our Deputy Chair, Kathy Fox whose six-year term ended in June. As well as her production and business acumen, Kathy brought warmth and humour to her work on the Board, and we are grateful for her service.

2021 marked Kath Fyffe's first full year as our Executive Director, and Polyglot continued to flourish under our co-CEO leadership model. In May, Sue was elected President of ASSITEJ – the international association of theatre for young audiences. We are thrilled for her many achievements within the TYA and wider arts sector, and her ongoing advocacy for the cultural rights of children is an enormous inspiration to our entire team.

Polyglot's whole-of-business approach to access and equity was solidified during 2021 and articulated in the creation of our 2022-2025 strategic plan. Our mid-year appeal fundraising success was testament to our clarity of vision. We raised over \$47,500 to embed access in all levels of the organisation, thanks to the generosity of our donors. Polyglot is incredibly grateful to be surrounded by such staunch supporters who share our belief that all children deserve ongoing access to the growth and resilience that comes from creative play and trailblazing arts experiences.

Raised funds enabled us to create a new, accessible Polyglot website, and we engaged Freerange Future – a digital creative agency and certified B Corporation – to design and develop our online home. With their fresh perspective and our passion for innovation, we also underwent a brand refresh, and our new look will be rolled out across 2022.

I extend my sincere thanks to the government agencies – federal, state and local – and philanthropic organisations whose substantial investments in our work ensure that we can share creativity and play with children and families everywhere.

In reflecting on a year filled with the dips and troughs of achievements and hardship, I thank my fellow Board members who guide the organisation with steadfast commitment and wisdom. Their unwavering support brings tremendous energy to Polyglot and its practice, and it is a privilege to serve the company alongside them.



Shadow Play. Photographer: Theresa Harrison.

Executives' Message

Katherine Fyffe
Executive Director

Sue Giles AM
Artistic Director

2021, for all its challenges, was a year of great achievement and a source of pride for all of us at Polyglot. It started with joy and energy as *Paper Planet* was presented by Footscray Community Arts in their beautiful black box studio, in the heat of Melbourne summer. We worked carefully and creatively to embed COVID-safe measures into the season, acutely aware of the new territory we were entering, as were our venue partners after long periods of closure. Being able to return to our audiences of children and families was a very special feeling, and to work together in real life was hopeful and deeply satisfying.

The year took quite a departure after that, with stops and starts and many more postponements. We were thrilled to deliver three seasons during the April school holiday: *Ants* at Melbourne Recital Centre, *Boats* at Arts Centre Melbourne and *Paper Planet* at Bayside Gallery. We were also lucky to attend DreamBIG in May for APAM (which felt like a dream), to pitch a new work in development, *Pram People*. Our Arts Centre Melbourne commissioned work, *Parked* (working title), in collaboration with Oily Cart (UK), also forged ahead in whatever way we could imagine, constantly flexing around the pandemic challenges faced in each country. Relationships with our creative and venue partners, as well as our donors, sponsors and the trusts and foundations who contribute so much, are vital for Polyglot's sense of identity as well as our future. We are especially grateful for their support and friendship in 2021.

Even though we were plunged back into lockdown, Polyglot's staff stayed strong: caring, cheerful and hard-working despite the stresses and uncertainties. Our Board members were a tower of strength, dealing with their own rocky paths and yet standing firm behind the company's decisions and mission. Our Generator artists were also dauntless. Their creativity and dedication to new ideas throughout 2021 was inspiring, and several new works emerged through online concept development sessions.

They leapt at every opportunity to get together, and this meant that we found moments of in-person work that kept everyone's interest and sense of possibility alive. A one-day creative exploration with Rawcus became all the more significant because the very next day we started lockdown #6; in-person work on *Bees* was squeezed in between restrictions; *Shadow Play* grabbed brief spurts of time at the Convent; and *Pram People* rehearsals included our Sydney-based choreographer on a Zoom screen in a pram experiencing a baby's point of view.

"We are highly attuned to the impact of COVID-19 on children and families. The effect of these two years is real, with children feeling socially isolated, anxious about the state of the world, and fearful for the future."

Polyglot's remit and vision is even more important in these days of crisis and we are proud that the company kept the creative approach to life visible and accessible. Our commitment to advocating for the right of all children to experience arts and culture spurred our willingness to get back out there whenever possible, as well as our inventiveness in creating online and remote access to fun and imagination.



We Built This City.
Photographer: Theresa Harrison

2021 was the first year for our new co-CEO team, and although sometimes it felt like climbing a mountain only to discover an even higher one on the horizon, we have found enormous energy and inspiration working together. December saw Polyglot back on the streets celebrating the 20th anniversary of *We Built This City* – a fitting tribute to the company's dedication to the participation and centralisation of children.

Artist Reflection

Briony Farrell Polyglot Artist

Although Melbourne was plunged into another long lockdown, I worked more for Polyglot in 2021 than I have in my entire career. It was working for this company that kept me afloat, with my creative cup full, during a time of real uncertainty. There is so much variety in the work we do, it is always surprising and continues to provide me with consistent and meaningful professional development as an artist and human.



Boats. Photographer: Jason Lau

It began with Polyglot Inspiring People Society (PIPS): a hive mind of kids who help us test creative ideas. Throughout 2020 we kept in touch online, so it was very special to reunite in person through *Paper Planet* at Footscray Community Arts in January. Making giant birds with a guitar-playing giraffe was surprisingly cathartic after the separation we had endured in the 12-months before.

I then toured *Paper Planet* to Western Autistic School and Sunshine Special Development School. This was a true career highlight. Thanks to the staff and my Polyglot colleagues' expertise, I gained greater awareness in setting up creative spaces so that they are welcoming, exciting, and accessible for *everyone*. This season clearly demonstrated to me that by accepting all types of responses and behaviours during a performance (especially those discouraged in traditional theatre settings), a creative work can be cracked wide open, revealing a world of surprising possibilities. I will never forget the simple delight of spending thirty minutes with one young student, eyes locked and laughing, ripping up paper into snowfall.

After ruminating on these discoveries, I launched into a season of *Boats* at Arts Centre Melbourne. Through the sea of passers-by, we sailed to unknown islands, found treasure and chased sharks down the grassy slopes under the Spire. There was a buzz as people reacclimatised to Melbourne post-lockdown, hungry for communal experiences. For me, this season was a reminder of the need to give space. To allow young people to lead the experience with their own curiosity and imagination, and for us to listen and follow with enthusiasm. It was enthralling to be taken on a journey through the eyes of a child, to see whales in the passing cars, lighthouses in the trees, all while warming our hands over a campfire conjured up by our collective imagination.

It was only made better by the fact that I was able to then tour *Boats* to Cairns Children's Festival in May. It was surreal boarding the plane to that muggy city after so long stuck in Melbourne and in hindsight a gift, as we would fly home into another lockdown only a few days later.

This last lockdown, #6, I found the most fatiguing. I had tasted what it was like to be working creatively again, so being confined at home was hard. I was lucky during this time, still able to work as an independent artist with funding from Regional Arts Victoria's Creative Worker in Schools program. Although teaching drama and theatre-making online is not my preference, those classes became little beacons of light throughout my week.

They also reminded me of the joy I felt when creating *Polyglot at home* videos in 2020. These encouraged me to find creative activities in the everyday, discover stories hidden around my house and garden. And so I made some more. Commissioned by the City of Whittlesea, Lachlan MacLeod, Alice Coffey and I created *Picnic Party* – a bevy of ideas to make the billionth picnic we all had to inevitably attend a little more exciting.

Chalk Walk was inspired by the positive messages I had seen children draw on pavements during lockdowns. As we filmed, we saw families trailing behind us to complete the obstacle courses we had just drawn. It is this kind of community connection created by a bit of chalk, or a teddy in a window, that I hoped we would hold onto as the world reopened. And reopen it did. In a flurry, it felt like life was hurtling at an all-time high speed.

2021 was full of activity and stillness, utter joy and hardship, community and isolation; it was a year of great learning and creative expression. *My year of Polyglot.*



"There were a couple of times where I saw really young kids drop right into a make-believe world, and I had moments when I viscerally recalled doing this myself as a young child – remembering a sense of immersion and commitment to that world."

~ Tiresa Ballard, Polyglot artist, (*Paper Planet*)



Industry Leadership

Polyglot continued to lead in many aspects of our sector and in the broader arts industry, despite the particular challenges of being in Melbourne during 2021.

Sue Giles AM is a Board member of Theatre Network Australia and representative of ASSITEJ Australia globally. In this role she was part of the creation of a showcase video of Theatre for Young Audiences and Youth Arts in Australia, supported by Australia Council for the Arts, for use in international contexts and for national advocacy. A highlight of Sue's industry leadership in 2021 was her election as President of ASSITEJ International at the Tokyo World Congress online in May, beginning a three-year term of work with the Executive Committee and the membership of the Association.

Leadership activity included:

Mentoring

Sue Giles mentored:

- ~ Pablo Latona (a Canberra artist undertaking a Kids x Art residence)
- ~ Big Mouse Theatre in Macau
- ~ Generator artists Sylvie Meltzer, Glen Walton and Briony Farrell in their independent practice

Kath Fyffe met with Khalid Warsame, General Manager at Western Edge Youth Arts, consulting on fundraising strategies and the creation of a donor program.

Polyglot presentations

- ~ *Pram People* was pitched at APAM.
- ~ *Bees* was pitched at APAX.

Sue presented Polyglot and ASSITEJ work for students at the Victorian College of the Arts (University of Melbourne), and Griffith University in Queensland. She held a creative session and presentation for New Zealand residency Creative Collider for Capital E Theatre in Wellington, and she ran an online artists lab for Papermoon Puppet Theatre's inaugural Gulali Children's Festival.

Policies

Polyglot's work around the new Equity Action Plan encompassed the entire year with engagement in the Fair Play Program, which was funded by Creative Victoria, and delivered by Diversity Arts Australia.

Polyglot shared policies with our peers, including our Child Safe Policy and COVID-safe plan.



Boats. Photographer: Jason Lau

The Generator

The Generator is a capacity-building program that supports Polyglot's artistic vibrancy and sustainability. Through the Generator, our core artists undertake artistic leadership roles, represent Polyglot at conferences, deliver training and mentorship to artists and educators, and receive professional development opportunities.

The Generator demonstrates Polyglot's sector leadership through employment and capacity-building opportunities that support the sustainability of artists' careers in the independent sector – especially vital during the upheaval of the pandemic. Generator-driven works make up the majority of new work in development, embedding artistic rigour, new voices and diverse approaches across Polyglot to ensure the strongest work for our young audiences.

In 2021, Generator-led projects and initiatives included:

- ~ Inaugural Associate Director position, filled by Emily Tomlins
- ~ Creative developments: *Bees*, *Shadow Play*
- ~ Project planning: *Family Forts*, *Totems*
- ~ Creating content for *Polyglot at home*
- ~ PIPS leadership and strategy
- ~ Creative exchange day with Rawcus

The Generator is generously supported by the Canny Quine Foundation and the Besen Family Foundation.



We Built This City. Photographer: Theresa Harrison

“The Generator has provided me with the chance to see an idea come to fruition from its first inkling to a finished piece over a long period of time, which has allowed for the kind of development and reflection that can be hard to find in other settings. The chance to really hone a set of images and ideas and respond to how the kids interact with the offers we make.”

~ Mischa Long, Polyglot artist

Touring Repertoire



Ants

Ants is an interactive performance which brings children together to explore the landscape around them.

Ants as big as humans work together intently, using sound and movement to communicate, and children are irresistibly drawn closer to find out how they can join in. Gradually a world of meaning unfolds, with children's movement making lines and patterns, transforming public space and disrupting the everyday. Children choose how they interact with the big insects, becoming ant-like creatures themselves and taking part in their world. This is an enchanting and unusual experience that everyone can enjoy at their own pace.

**Music Play Family Festival,
Melbourne Recital Centre,
12-13 April**

This season featured a special live performance of a newly commissioned score generously supported by Melbourne Recital Centre's Betty Amsden Bequest.

**Des Moines Performing Arts,
USA, 5-8 August**

This season was delivered in partnership with Inlet Dance Theatre.



Boats

Boats engages children and their families in play that transforms familiar space into something wild, unpredictable and fun.

You will find *Boats* in the strangest of places – on dry land! Children and their families use their imaginations and small, colourful boats to go on exciting sea-faring adventures across the wide-open oceans of town squares and park lawns. There are islands to visit, stranded crew members to rescue, castaways and seagulls. There are times you might need to dodge sharks and steer through choppy water to safety.

Boats is an energetic experience that can absorb children from ten minutes to hours and hours. Some may wish to rock in calm waters and tell adventure stories; others may zoom around and explore. Children choose how they interact with the Harbourmaster, the crew and the landscape, making this a fun, shared family time that everyone can enjoy.

**Arts Centre Melbourne,
9-10 and 13-17 April**

Cairns Children's Festival, 15 May

"The pandemic encouraged all of us to rethink strategies to achieve our goals – Des Moines Performing Arts worked to curate free outdoor programs in City Parks. Seeing the Pappajohn Sculpture Park come alive with *Ants* by Polyglot Theatre gives me so much joy!"

Eric Olmscheid, Director of Programming & Education, Des Moines Performing Arts, USA (*Ants*)

"We were quite moved by the beautiful interactions the performers had with all the children. It was so nice to see how they followed the lead of the children and how they moved around the space adding a bit of awe and wonder..."

Parent (*Paper Planet*)



Paper Planet

Paper Planet is a universally accessible experience that families find utterly captivating.

Children and families are invited into a forest of tall cardboard trees, and after exploring the space, they add to this strange and delicate planet using only paper, tape and their imaginations. Theatre and play merge in this magical place, as creatures, plants, costumes, characters, stories and adventures spring to life.

Paper Planet grows as more families visit, and every session is truly unique as imaginations go wild. Children choose how they interact with the performers and with other children; some find themselves absorbed in quiet making, and others prefer to play and explore.

Footscray Community Arts,
22-25 and 27-31 January

Bayside Gallery, Brighton,
15-16 April

Convent Kids, Abbotsford Convent,
26 and 28-30 June

This season was designed to specifically meet the needs of families with Disabled children, and encouraged the participation of all family members. It was supported by the City of Yarra.



We Built This City

We Built This City is a wonderland of a construction site that brings whole communities together to think big and build the city shapes of their dreams.

Faced with thousands and thousands of cardboard boxes in a big, open space, children and families follow their impulses and create unique structures inspired by their relationship to their city. Polyglot artists roam the site as the Builders, engaging with kids constructing towering skyscrapers, winding tunnels and sprawling estates.

We Built This City sees children as the experts and adults enthusiastically following their lead. The whole experience is accompanied by a DJ spinning funky music, and at the very end of the season, the city is shaken and stomped to the ground in a shared moment of glorious destruction.

Conceived by Artistic Director Sue Giles in her first year with Polyglot, *We Built This City* premiered in 2001, and has gone on to delight children and families in countries including Brazil, China, Japan, Korea, the UAE, UK, and USA, as well as Australia.

University Square, 4-5 December

This special 20th anniversary season was presented by Melbourne Fringe and Metro Tunnel Creative Program.



"I want to come back here every day!"

Child, age 8 (*We Built This City*)

"My 3.5yo said it was the best day ever, both kids were smiling and full of creative energy as we left. They loved being the tornado at the end (it was their favourite part.)"

Parent (*We Built This City*)

"Bringing *We Built This City* back to Melbourne at this time has powerful resonance for us all, allowing children and families to re-connect with each other and their city, through imaginative participation in the arts, in public space. *We Built This City* was Polyglot's entrance point to all the participatory work that has followed and is a vital part of our artistic and philosophical journey."

Sue Giles AM

New Work and Innovation



Bees

Bees offers a fun and intriguing participatory experience for children and families, inspired by the mysterious life and work of bees. Creative development commenced via Zoom in 2020 during the height of Melbourne's lockdown. In-person development took place throughout 2021, with testing sessions at Abbotsford Convent. COVID-19 requirements were considered from the outset, and *Bees* is an artistic, playful response to our new 'normal'. *Bees* will premiere in 2022.

Creative Team

Tirese Ballard, Nick Barlow, Lachlan MacLeod, Steph O'Hara, Morwenna Schenck, Emily Tomlins, Afsaneh Torabi
Laurel Frank (design mentor)

Bees was developed through The Generator, with support from the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, and the Sidney Myer Fund.



Shadow Play

Shadow Play invites participants to engage with sound and light through projection and mapping of bodies in space. Unlike many other interactive digital experiences, *Shadow Play* is an ever-changing, nuanced and intriguing world that the participant never quite understands. There is no visual loop or repeating pattern, it is an ever-changing palette and as such is totally absorbing.

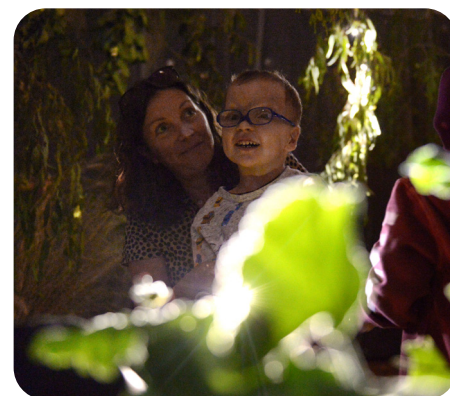
The *Shadow Play* artistic team undertook three creative development periods at Abbotsford Convent supported by the Convent's PIVOT program, culminating in a small testing session in December.

Shadow Play will premiere in 2022.

Creative Team

Steph O'Hara (lead artist), Tina Douglas, Peter Walker

Shadow Play is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria and The Robert Salzer Foundation.



Parked

Parked (working title) is our collaboration with Oily Cart (UK), commissioned by Arts Centre Melbourne for major arts and disability festival, Alter State. We are working across time and distance on a project that uses nature and landscape to explore ideas of freedom and power. The central point of view for the creation of the work is of Disabled children who experience the most barriers to access. Through creative development with schools and families, we are creating a universally accessible, sensory, immersive arts experience with sustainability at its heart.

Parked (working title) will premiere in September 2022.

Creative team

Sue Giles AM and Ellie Griffiths (co-directors), Dr Tanja Beer (scenographic design), Nwando Ebizie (sound design), Greta McMillan, Afsaneh Torabi, Sylvie Meltzer, David Pidd (collaborating artists)

Parked is supported by the UK/ Australia Season Patrons Board, the British Council and the Australian Government as part of the UK/ Australia Season. It has also received additional support from the Cassandra Gantner Foundation, State Trustees Australia Foundation, the Prescott Family Foundation, ArtPlay and Arts Council England.



Pram People

Pram People is a new Play Space work using the ubiquitous and necessary baby pram to create large scale visual beauty in public spaces. Wearing headphones to hear choreographic suggestions from children, parents pushing prams dance, weave and interact with each other and the landscape. *Pram People* plays with power and trust, with the vulnerability of new parents and the relationship between child as instructor and parent as follower. Hilarious, serious and surprisingly moving – *Pram People* activates public spaces, reclaiming the pram as an asset to public art, rather than a liability. Polyglot works alongside choreographer, Martin del Amo to create this COVID-safe experience, as well as children and families from the Kensington public housing estate through The Venny, and local schools.

Pram People will premiere in October 2022.

Creative Team

Emily Tomlins (co-director), Martin del Amo (co-director and choreographer), Nick Barlow, Afsaneh Torabi

Pram People is supported by the Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund – an Australian Government initiative, and the City of Melbourne through the Arts and Creative Investment Partnership fund and ArtPlay.



LINK

LINK is an ongoing collaboration between Polyglot Theatre and Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay in Singapore. Artists from both countries use remote, online connection and in-person engagements with local schools and day care centres.

In late 2020, the Esplanade approached Polyglot about collaborating to create a new work. Working within the parameters of connection at a distance, a process was developed that would enable the artists to form a cohesive creative team and share skills and insights.

The first portion of LINK was split into five stages across 2021, with time for reflection and change built into the pace of the work. It involved relationship-building, creative development periods with schools and early learning centres in both countries, and culminated in a presentation with plans for a final performance outcome. LINK will continue in 2022.

Creative Team

Polyglot Theatre: Katrina Gaskell, Sylvie Meltzer, Glen Walton

Esplanade Theatres: Grace Kalaiselvi, Emanorwatty Saleh, Dr Natalie Alexandra Tse



Totems

Conceived by First Nations artist, Blayne Welsh with Tamara Rewse, *Totems* is the first-stage creative development of an interactive work for primary school children based on significant stories and animals of different communities throughout Australia. Using the concept of totems or moieties, the work will be created by engaging directly with communities, and through creative play ask the question, “What would you want the kids of Australia to know about this place?” The story will then be formed by the community into a short performance work with the support of facilitators. This work is First Nations-led and follows creative protocols of cultural engagement.

Creative workshops for *Totems* in 2021 had been planned, but due to continued lockdowns and travel restrictions, were unable to go ahead. Work will continue in 2022.

Creative Team

Blayne Welsh and Tamara Rewse (lead artists)

Totems is supported by the Sidney Myer Fund.



Planning for 2022

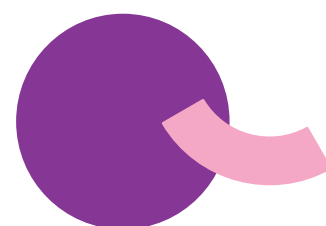
Family Forts – reflections on play in the home

Family Forts is a playful, creative project with children that will investigate the experience of home, family and community from a child’s perspective. Through workshops in multiple early learning centres over two years, we will explore the connections between children and their adults – parents, carers and educators – in creating playing spaces, imagined worlds, and stories that illuminate the child’s world view. This process will culminate in a model of work that can be shared with other centres, and a public exhibition of the children’s creations.

Creative Team

Ashlee Hughes (lead artist)

Family Forts is proudly supported by the City of Casey.



Voice Lab

Voice Lab is our unique module for collecting the thoughts and opinions of children.

It encourages reflective thinking and the articulation of feelings. It is curious and pays close attention to what children communicate. Voice Lab is an immersive, creative experience for children, one at a time. In a world where the child's voice is often unheard, Voice Lab provides a way for children to have a say about their present and their future.

The Voice Lab team used the first half of 2021 to make important COVID-safe changes to the physical and online modules, ensuring that presenting partners and the children and families they work with felt comfortable and safe in using them. We made several adjustments to the physical dome model to ensure easy cleaning and increased airflow. For our partners using the Voice Lab online module, we created a lightweight, pop-up inflatable space that can be easily couriered from the Polyglot headquarters. It is quick and easy to set up – you simply unroll it, plug it in, and put a laptop inside. It has been designed to imbue the Voice Lab online experience with the otherworldliness and magic that the physical dome offers. Children enter the pop-up space one at a time, and their conversation with Voice Lab takes place via Zoom through the laptop.

In July, the Voice Lab dome had its first outing since February 2020. It visited Satellite Foundation, where it spoke to children about their lives, and about the Satellite programs in which they have been involved.

Voice Lab: If your voice could be heard by the whole world, what would you say?

Child: Understand that everyone around you could be a hero if they were seen in a particular light. Every single person.

Satellite Foundation used Voice Lab online in October, where it spoke with participants from the At Home program about their lives, friends, sense of self, sharing experiences, and what it means to stay connected, be creative and keep well. It also gathered feedback about the At Home workshops.

Voice Lab: Does it help to talk with others about your feelings?

Child: Yes you should always do that, because then you have someone to look after you, and you have someone who always has your back...

October also saw Voice Lab featured at IPAY CultureCrew Festival, alongside 13 other productions from around the world. CultureCrew is one of the only youth-juried international performing arts events, with the selection panel comprising of 19 young people from five different countries. Artists Lachlan MacLeod and Sylvie Meltzer created a new Voice Lab showcase video for the digital event.

Postponements

Voice Lab online was due to start work with the National Arts Festival in Makhanda, South Africa, in July. Set up in a caravan in the Village Green, Voice Lab online was going to talk to children about life in their community. A local South African artist was to facilitate in Makhanda, with the Polyglot team operating Voice Lab remotely from their homes in Melbourne. Unfortunately, due to a Stage 4 lockdown in South Africa, we were unable to go ahead, and hope to deliver this engagement in 2022.

We also planned to take the Voice Lab dome to regional Victoria to work with Communities for Children – Bendigo, talking to local children from an early learning centre and primary school. The questions focused on friends and family, and how to make their community a great place for children. This engagement was postponed multiple times due to lockdown, and we look forward to connecting with these children and offering them an opportunity for reflection and sharing in 2022.



Kids Collaborations

Rumba Shop!

Building on a strong relationship developed through *First On The Ladder* (our three-year art-meets sport program), Polyglot is working alongside children from the Rumbalara Football Netball Club community and young people from the Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE) to create playful, interactive shopfront installations in the main mall of Shepparton in regional Victoria.

Rumba Shop! works with the art and insight of Rumba children to bring the Club's ethos to the wider community, celebrating the strength of First Nations culture and family. Rumbalara's vision includes an ongoing partnership with Polyglot as they work towards embedding art alongside sport, health and education in the lives of young people in their community.

An initial planning session with the community leaders saw us intending to return to Rumbalara home games with our creative play workshops. The Club had engaged support artists/facilitators to collaborate with our team, and we welcomed Tina and Krystal, two local First Nations women who work in early childhood education and care, and the Rumbalara homework club. Tina and Krystal made an enormous difference to our work, with their knowledge of children and families, and their enthusiasm for the Polyglot child-centred approach.

Many *First On The Ladder* participants were now older and focused on sport, which meant we needed to engage new children and families to build the Rumbalara-Polyglot relationship. While we only attended three home games before the lockdowns began again, it was joyful and productive.

The children made awards for members of their community, their family and friends, with stories attached. Our team developed a mobile creative unit so that they could take the art to where the kids were gathering. Later in the year, the photographs of these awards were made into a simple montage for sharing on Rumbalara social media.

We reconnected with the Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE) and mapped out a strong workshop-based training program for the Year 10 students. Our team sought First Nations artists, and artists who are people of colour, to engage with the students, sharing skills in design, audio and sound creation, lighting and tech. The focus was promoting theatre as a possible career path for young First Nations people. This program was postponed three times, and eventually cancelled, due to COVID-19.

The team worked hard to respond flexibly and creatively to all the challenges, and their spirit was dauntless. However, the constant postponements and last minute restriction changes means that most of the creative collaboration and work will take place in 2022.

Rumba Shop! is supported by the Newsboys Foundation.



RUMBALARA
FOOTBALL NETBALL CLUB



Workshops

Polyglot Theatre's workshop program is designed to inspire children to explore their imaginative potential. We invite children to experience the joys of creativity and collaboration, while developing their critical thinking skills.

In our workshops, our experienced artists give children attention and respect. Through a creative exchange built on trust and fun, children understand that their contributions are valid and interesting, and can be part of something bigger than their own classroom, school or community. In return, our artists gain the benefit of the children's insight and energy, and the opportunity to challenge their preconceptions of what children think and how they act.

Polyglot's workshops tailor creative participation to individual children, and our artists ensure an accessible, safe and welcoming space for all. We work to facilitate each child's understanding of their place and power in the imaginary world they are helping create, whether it is developing a personal narrative, or using their senses to engage in the environment around them.

Polyglot's school workshop program is generously sponsored by Lucas Dental Care.

In person workshops



Paper Planet Workshop

Polyglot artists welcome students into a sensory play space filled with tall cardboard trees. Performances unexpectedly happen as simple materials meet creative freedom. Our *Paper Planet* workshop offers an unusual and immersive environment within school grounds that illustrates the complexity, power and intricacy of students' creativity.

Western Autistic School,
15-19 March

Sunshine Special Development
School, 22-26 March

POSTPONED: Ascot Vale Heights,
16-20 August

These engagements were supported by the Victorian Department of Education and Training Strategic Partnerships Program. The Ascot Vale Heights workshops will take place in 2022.

Thoughtaculture

Thoughtaculture cultivates inventive ideas for ways to make the world a better place, drawing on children's sense of possibility and divergent thinking. Their ingenious designs become the solutions to the issues that are topmost in children's consciousness.

Wagga Wagga, 17-21 May

This tour was presented by Wagga Wagga City Council.

"Best incursion we've had at the school."

Educator

"Polyglot people were great with kids, excellent at interacting with all the students."

Educator

Professional Development for Teachers

POSTPONED: Arts in Greater Dandenong, 2 September

This workshop will take place in 2022.

Online workshops



Thoughtaculture

Reservoir East Primary School
(Years 5-6), 4 November

Paper and Tape Escape

Ruyton Girls School (Prep-Year 1),
31 August

Ocean Grove Primary School
(Year 3), 18 October

My Shadow Self

Ruyton Girls School (Year 2 & 3),
8 September

Paper and Tape Escape (on demand)

ArtPlay for Open House Melbourne
– 23-25 July

ArtPlay, 25 August – 20 September

Seegerstrom Center for the Arts
Education Program, 29 November
– 10 December

My Shadow Self (on demand)

ArtPlay, 25 August – 20 September

Polyglot at home



In another year peppered with lockdowns, our *Polyglot at home* content was once again popular. These on-demand videos feature creative activities for children and families to enjoy together with simple materials found around the house and garden.

Four new *Polyglot at home* videos were created in 2021:

Box City

Chalk Walk

Dolly's World 3

Picnic Party – commissioned
by the City of Whittlesea

Selections from the full suite were
presented throughout the year:

Melbourne Fringe online
30 September – 17 October

Wyndham City
1 October – 10 December

City of Whittlesea for
Super Kids Sunday
24 October – 8 November
*Including the special commissioned
video Picnic Party*

“Freya and Afy were fantastic facilitators who pitched it just right for the age and stage and they gave time for students’ to share their creations at the end which was so valuable... it has been such a great way to scaffold learning online during a pandemic and bring joy to our learners!”

Educator, My Shadow Self

Polyglot Inspiring People Society (PIPS)

Emily Tomlins
PIPS Coordinator

There were several notable opportunities during the year for the PIPS to flourish as an advisory team, even though it was difficult to organise consistent gatherings through lockdowns.

In March, the first general public testing of *Bees* took place. The PIPS brought their wisdom and enthusiasm to this new Play Space work, with an informative and passionate conversation following the performance. Several of their suggestions were implemented in the next stage of creative development: more colours in the 'pollen' powder we use, the importance of smell as an extra sensory component, and that our "hive" set piece should be the centre of our world and a place for our audience to return to safety during their brave exploration of the wider *Bee* world.

In June, an accessible season of *Paper Planet* was presented as part of the Convent Kids program. New PIPS Alex and Marly (aged 11) offered their first impressions: "a calm creative space ... everyone feels welcome." "It's really cool how you can be so creative and see all the other people's work."

Other testing continued between lockdowns. Maisie, Chester and Naiya (aged 6) provided new thoughts on an old favourite, *Boats*, and others contributed to a new COVID-safe version of *Ants*.

We used mail-outs to help with the long exhaustion of lockdown, finishing the year with a special delivery of Polyglot hoodies made especially for our PIPS. This was an incredible hit. Some were delivered by hand, with the help of PIPS alumni Alice Coffey, others by mail. An email from one of the parents summed up the excitement: "Thank you for the fabulous hoodies, which

have arrived safely and been a BIG hit with our girls. Thanks for helping us all through those hard lockdowns with your enthusiasm and energy. It sure made a difference."

We were delighted to receive photos of our PIPS happily wearing their new hoodies in style.

2022 heralds exciting new PIPS developments. With my new position as Associate Director, I am pleased to welcome Briony Farrell as the next PIPS Coordinator. Briony has been part of the PIPS team since 2020, and is a core Polyglot artist and independent theatre-maker and performer. We are also happy to announce that our PIPS community is growing larger, with the recent addition of five new PIPS aged between 5 and 11.

During all the shifts and changes in 2021, the PIPS remain a community of enthusiastic and passionate young people. Their contribution to the development of new Polyglot work, as well as the overall ethos of the company, is significant, and we look forward to our continued collaboration in 2022.



Bees. Photographer: Theresa Harrison



Paper Planet. Photographer: Jacinta Keefe

Access and Equity

All children have the right to access art and creativity. Polyglot's mission is to provide children with the opportunity for imagination and adventure through participation. We are committed to change that ensures we reach the broadest audience with safety and care, that we support that audience to access our work, and build workplace diversity across all levels of our organisation. We will do this through the creation of new pathways, consultation and training, building sustained relationships, and always in the spirit of collaboration that underpins everything we do.

2021 saw the initial development and implementation of our 'Audience Access and Access to Audiences' plan. We wanted to work closely with families with Disabled children for the development of *Parked* (working title), and through our collaboration with Oily Cart, we understood that the cultivation of trusting relationships takes time, energy and consistency.

We consulted with Janice Florence at Arts Access Victoria to create an access checklist for our presenting partners. This is used to gather access information about venues so that Polyglot can share this with our audiences on our website event listings. Not only does it demonstrate our commitment to accessibility to both our presenting partners and our audiences, it is a tool in advocating for the rights of Disabled people to equitably access arts experiences.

In June, Polyglot Theatre and Abbotsford Convent presented an accessible season of *Paper Planet* for Convent Kids, which was supported by the City of Yarra. Every aspect of the promotion, production and audience experience was tailored specifically for families with Disabled children. It was an opportunity for Polyglot to put research into practice, as well as learn and discover for the future.

In creating our new four-year strategic plan, we ensured that our focus on access and equity was woven through the many layers of our work. Our central tenet that

all children deserve the growth and resilience that comes from considered arts experiences created specifically for them will inform everything we do; from the initial kernel of a show or workshop idea to the organisations and institutions we collaborate with, to how we share information about public seasons of Polyglot's work and how we engage with our audiences.

We understand that our learning process is ongoing, and we look forward to the new conversations, ideas and practices that will help us in making our art accessible for all children and families.



We Built This City. Photographer: Theresa Harrison

Fundraising

Polyglot's approach to fundraising once again responded to the unique challenges faced by the company, and our artistic and production teams, in 2021. We worked closely with our individual donors and philanthropic supporters across the year, connecting via Zoom and in person when the opportunity allowed. These relationships are crucial to a thriving future for Polyglot, and we thank all our generous supporters who ensure that we can create and share our art with children everywhere.

Annual Giving

In 2021 we raised over \$47,500 in our mid-year campaign, which centred around supporting Polyglot's work in embedding access in all levels of our organisation. Nearly three quarters of those who gave were renewing donors, and the campaign saw increases in mid and high-level gifts from our deeply invested supporters.

We launched the campaign in May with an afternoon tea in the Polyglot office, which was memorably transformed into a *Paper Planet* forest. This tied into our co-presented Convent Kids season of *Paper Planet*, which was specifically designed for families with Disabled children.

Funds raised enabled us to commission a new accessible website, a major project key to increasing the accessibility of our work.

Trusts and Foundations

Following the news of the loss of our four-year Australia Council federal funding in 2020, Polyglot moved swiftly to build a new base of stable funding through gifts from philanthropic trusts, foundations and individual donors. This began to bear fruit in 2021, and we look forward to more progress in 2022.

Several key trusts and foundations made the welcome move towards providing multi-year operational support to Polyglot, and we especially thank our funding champions who made this commitment in 2021 to strengthen Polyglot in the coming years. Polyglot has relationships with a large number of philanthropic bodies, with a range of projects supported including social impact programs in schools and communities, as well as organisational capacity building projects. A full list of funders can be found on the following pages.



Paper Planet. Photographer: Jacinta Keefe



"I was delighted with the enthusiasm that everyone showed when presenting the new direction Polyglot is taking to move into the inclusive theatre space for children and young people with additional and complex needs. Theatre for this audience is extremely important in my mind and I know that Polyglot will enter the space with much thought, great care and bucket loads of fun, laughter and enthusiasm."

 Donor

Polyglot's Circle

Polyglot's Circle is an annual giving program for individuals and families. These donors play a crucial role in strengthening the company through financial support and advocacy.

Inspiring \$10,000+

Rebecca Giles Consulting
James McCaughey

Growing \$5000+

Linda Herd
Greg Shalit and Miriam Faine
Anonymous

Sustaining \$2500+

Simon Bedford
David Hanrahan
Julian Pocock

Empowering \$1000+

ADFAS Melbourne
Anne Satchell
Clarke Thuys
Mark Williams and Fiona Gruber

Encouraging \$500+

Sam and Monica Abrahams
Margaret Billson
Katrina Gaskell
Ruth Giles
Sarah Giles
Sarah Hunt
Clementine, Kate Taylor
and Greg Ireton
Heath McIvor
Fairlie Nassau
Ian Pidd and Sue Giles AM
Slome-Topol-Rosen Family
Charitable Trust
Kim Sweeny and Neredah Burns
Naomi Tippet AM

Sharing \$250+

Skye and Simon Abraham
Simon Abrahams
Bill and Jen Barlow
Nancy Black
John and Diana Chew
Kathy Fox
Andrew Giles
Emer Harrington
Damien Hodgkinson
Roger Luo
Lesley MacLeod
David McCarthy
Lesley McCarthy
Rasika Mohan
Nami Nelson
Naomi Nicholson
Geoffrey Renton
Sandra Robertson
Viv Rosman
Meg Upton
Michelle Van Graas
Molly Wagner
Dr Fiona Wahr and family



Funders

We thank the following government agencies and philanthropic organisations for their generous support.

Government



City of Casey

Philanthropic



Sponsorship

Polyglot Theatre is grateful for the support and services of two key sponsors in 2021.

Lucas Dental Care

Lucas Dental Care has sponsored our school workshop program since 2010, ensuring more students across Victoria can benefit from Polyglot's work.



Studio Binocular

Studio Binocular was Polyglot's Design partner from 2016-2021. During this time, they played an instrumental role in the look and feel of our branding

**STUDIO
BINOCULAR**

Thank You

Family

We extend a huge thank you to the partners, families and friends of our staff, artists and Board members.

Schools

Clifton Hill Primary School
University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre

Education News Contributors

Cat Sewell
Dr Meg Upton

PIPS

Alex B, Alex T, Ava, Chester, Daniel, Frank, Freya, Gabe, Huxley, Indy, Izzy, Lulu, Maisie, Marly, Mat, Naiya, Reema, Vivi

Polyglot Friends

Nicole Beyer and Theatre Network Australia
Caroline Bowditch, Janice Florence and Arts Access Victoria
Collette Brennan, Jo Leishman, Peter Quinn and Abbotsford Convent Foundation
Jeff Challis, David Farrington and Aakonsult
Clare Christensen, Eleni Kaponis, Wendy O'Neill and Arts Centre Melbourne
Laura Colby and Elsie Management
Laura Cornhill, Sarah Costanzo and Studio Binocular
Nick Crowther, Wayne Psaila, Roslyn Murphy, India Koning and Freerange Future
Rose Cuff and Satellite Foundation
Ellie Griffiths, Zöe Lally and Oily Cart
Penny Harpham and Western Edge Youth Arts
Theresa Harrison Photography
ITtelligent
Libby Koba and Inlet Dance Theatre

Dr James Lucas and Lucas Dental Care
Rachel Lim, Sophia Begum and Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay
Sam Osborn Rassaby
Toby Ovadia and Smart Records Group
Daniel Payne, Sonia Bonadio and Down Syndrome Victoria
Gianna Rosica, Roslyn Buzza and Gianna Rosica Accounting for the Arts
Dipika Shrestha and Kwik Kopy Coburg
Kate Sulan and Rawcus
Steph Urruty, Julie Wright and ArtPlay
Sarah Walker Photography
Heather Wallace, Danielle Rowe and the Association for Children with a Disability
Peter Wilson and MCA Insurance Brokers
The staff of all of our government and philanthropic funding partners



Pram People. Photographer: Sam Osborn



Ants. Photographer: Theresa Harrison

Financials

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2021

Assets	2021	2020
Current Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,840,026	1,536,589
Other Current Assets	59,811	220,893
Total Current Assets	1,899,837	1,757,482
Non-current Assets		
Property, Plant and Equipment	67,615	86,423
Total Non-Current Assets	67,615	86,423
Total Assets	1,967,452	1,843,905
Liabilities	2021	2020
Current Liabilities		
Trade and Other Payables	101,446	65,505
Provisions	99,790	80,925
Other Current Liabilities	900,351	950,455
Total Current Liabilities	1,101,587	1,096,885
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provisions	8,084	2,929
Other Current Liabilities	229,200	229,200
Total Non-Current Liabilities	237,284	232,129
Total Liabilities	1,338,871	1,329,014
Net Assets	628,581	514,891
Equity	2021	2020
Retained Earnings	418,581	414,891
Reserves - Future Fund	210,000	100,000
Total Equity	628,581	514,891

Statement of profit and loss as at 31 December 2021

Income	2021	2020
Grants		
Government Funding	644,008	613,228
Philanthropic Organisations	209,139	70,600
Other Grants	2,000	-
Total Grants Income	855,147	683,828
Other Earned Income		
Performance and Audience Sales	403,934	121,417
Resources Income	1,000	1,360
Sponsorship and Fundraising	66,012	71,047
Business Related Income	7,156	11,495
Government Support - COVID-19	103,300	349,250
Total Other Earned Income	581,402	554,569
Total Income	1,436,549	1,238,397
Expenses	2021	2020
Administration	772,781	734,643
Marketing and promotion	76,614	17,860
Production costs	473,464	377,371
Total Expenses	1,322,859	1,129,874
Surplus (deficit)	113,690	108,523

**The designation of reserves to the Future Fund reflects the company's positive end of year result. It is anticipated the financial impact of COVID-19 on Polyglot's operations will continue to be felt for some time, coinciding with the cessation of Australia Council operational funding from 2022.*

Let's get social

Instagram @polyglottheatre

Facebook /P0lygl0tTheatre

Twitter @PolyglotTheatre

YouTube /PolyglotTheatre

LinkedIn /polyglot-theatre



Talk to us

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