



# **LA MAMA STRATEGY 2026–2030**

# LA MAMA STRATEGY

## 2026–2030

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Cover image , Izabella Yena and Michelle McCowage in Ballkids  
(or scenes from a friendship), 2024, photo by Darren Gill

## WHY LA MAMA MATTERS

Since 1967, La Mama Theatre has championed and amplified the Australian theatrical voice. Our legacy is both valued and evolving, and in 2026 we proudly reaffirm our role **as the home for the next generations of theatre-makers** – a place to challenge, create, and lead transformative social, cultural, and artistic change.

La Mama is more than a theatre; **it is a cultural force**. With its iconic history and intimate spaces, La Mama hums with grassroots energy and courageous creativity. For decades, **it has been an incubator of bold ideas and new voices**, nurturing thousands of works that have gone on to shape the national arts landscape. This is where groundbreaking work begins, and where the future of theatre is made.

At the heart of our identity is an **Artist-First Model**. By offering 80% box office returns, free venue access, and comprehensive support across technical, front of house, marketing, ticketing, and producing, we remove barriers so artists can focus on their craft and take creative risks.

**Our audiences** are equally vital to this ecosystem. With diverse programming, affordable tickets, and our legendary hospitality – free tea, coffee, and spaces to connect – La Mama offers more than just a performance. It creates community, conversation, and belonging.

Above all, La Mama is **an open community**: a rare space where unfiltered, urgent voices are heard. We embrace work that is raw, challenging, and profoundly human, because it is through this risk and experimentation that theatre, and society, evolves.

If we lost La Mama, we wouldn't just lose a theatre. We would lose the roots of Australian culture – the spaces where First Nations stories, migrant stories, queer stories, quiet stories, and dangerous stories are held and heard. We would lose the stage where the next generation of artists learn not only how to perform, but how to survive, collaborate, adapt, protest, listen, and lead. La Mama is about more than theatre – it is about safeguarding the future of who we are, and who we might become.

With the support of Creative Australia, Creative Victoria, the City of Melbourne, and the many donors to Our Next Act, La Mama will proudly re-open for performance in February 2026, with a commitment to new Australian work. The first two years will focus on stability and resilience, before expanding ambition to scale programs and deepen impact. **By 2030, La Mama will be positioned to provide greater support for artists, reach broader communities, and deliver lasting cultural impact for decades to come.**

**VISION** To spark a theatre of possibility, creating life-changing moments which transform individuals and shape the future of Australian storytelling.

**PURPOSE** To nurture artists and ideas, engaging audiences, and strengthen culture by supporting bold, vital new Australian theatre.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1

Artist Recruitment, Retention and Sustainability

**GOAL:** Independent Artists at all stages have a viable practice making new Australian work.

Partnerships and Sector Capacity Building

2

**GOAL:** To strengthen the theatre sector, create pathways and opportunities for artists, and work collaboratively to achieve recognition of the valuable contribution of artists and the arts.

Measuring and Communicating Impact and Relevance

3

**GOAL:** La Mama's cultural, social, artistic, and economic impact is evidenced and widely understood; La Mama is recognised as indispensable and funded accordingly.

Reinvigorating Profile and Developing Audience

4

**GOAL:** Brand profile communicates La Mama's unique identity and successfully engages new target audiences while retaining existing loyal audience.

Income generation and Financial Independence

5

**GOAL:** Financial security and independence without compromising the La Mama Model.

Organisational Capacity Building

6

**GOAL:** La Mama is a modern, equitable, human-centred workplace; staff and governance effectively support the organisation's purpose.

## COMMITMENTS

Artistic Freedom. Access & Inclusion. Open-Door Culture. First Nations Cultural Conservation. Championing Diversity. Celebrating Difference. Climate Action. Geographic Equity. Collaboration. Generosity of Spirit. Responsiveness. Trust. Health and Wellbeing. Sustainability. For All.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

**IF WE** empower and support artists

**BY** offering trust, freedom, resources, and minimal financial risk

**THEN** they create powerful storytelling that connects hearts, minds and communities

**AND ULTIMATELY** the art becomes a vehicle for an empathetic, curious and connected society, one where artists are valued, and culture thrives

# LA MAMA: LOOKING TO 2030 AND BEYOND

After a dedicated year of consultation and rigorous strategic review, we emerge from 2025 fortified with ambition and momentum. Looking towards 2030, we hold a **renewed vision** and a **clarified purpose**, with a **resourced path to financial viability**. The groundwork we have laid is not only for La Mama, but for the wider sector. Circumstances have given us the privileged opportunity for sector leadership and we are showing the way forward.

We have retained the coffee house theatre essence of La Mama – **artistic freedom, risk-taking, new Australian work, community, and empowered independence** – while evolving to reflect contemporary needs. **Transparent processes** now support artists with clarity and care; **segmented and curated programming** connects more deeply with audiences; **meaningful partnerships** expand reach and resonance; and critically – **facilitates pathways** strengthen independent artists, leading the sector towards **vitality and sustainability**.

Our new **ANNUAL PROGRAM FOR AUDIENCES** engages audiences by curating and communicating targeted programming streams while the interconnected **PATHWAY FRAMEWORK FOR ARTISTS** facilitated the rigorous and supported development of new Australian work. Fundamentally, La Mama is about cultivating creativity and it is this approach that fosters excellence.

As the world grows increasingly divided, La Mama recognises its responsibility to artists and to the future of Australian culture. We offer an **antidote to division**: a place where **difficult conversations** can be held, where community can gather, and where **art engages courageously with the complexities** of an ever-changing world. In this way, La Mama will continue to be a home for community – connected, cohesive, vibrant – **a place of peace and possibility**.

## By 2030, La Mama will have:

- Supported independent artists at all stages to have viable, sustainable practices making bold new Australian work.
- Strengthened the theatre sector by creating pathways and opportunities for artists, and by working collaboratively to recognise and amplify the contribution of artists and the arts.
- Been recognised and valued for its indispensable cultural, social, artistic, and economic impact, ensuring appropriate, ongoing funding.
- Successfully engaged new audiences while retaining the loyalty and trust of existing ones, through brand communicates and unique identity.
- Financial security and independence without compromising the Artist-First Model.
- Established operations as a modern, equitable, adequately staffed, human-centred workplace where staff and governance effectively support the organisation's purpose.

Without La Mama, we risk an increasingly elitist, homogenised, and shallow culture. With La Mama at its best, Australian theatre culture will thrive.

**We are here.**

**We are leading cultural change.**

**And we invite you to join us.**





Glenn Shea in *Three Magpies Perched in a Tree*, 2024 photo by Darren Gill



Frankie Van Kan in *A Body at Work*, 2024 photo by Darren Gill

# ANNUAL PROGRAM FOR AUDIENCES

<b>FEBRUARY</b>	<b>MARCH</b>	<b>APRIL</b>	<b>MAY</b>
<b>PRESENTS, ON DEMAND, EDUCATION</b>			
<b>JUNE</b>	<b>JULY</b>	<b>AUGUST</b>	
<b>EXPLORATIONS &amp; SCRATCH</b>			
<b>SEPTEMBER</b> <b>LA MAMA FESTIVALS</b>	<b>OCTOBER</b> <b>FRINGE FESTIVAL</b>	<b>NOVEMBER</b> <b>FIRST NATIONS CULTURAL CONSERVATION</b>	<b>DECEMBER</b> <b>FARA DAYS</b>

- 8 Bold New Australian Works at HQ, Courthouse & Online
- Up to 4 Education Shows
- 48 Explorations & 12 Scratch Events
- 2 x La Mama Festivals (10+ shows)
- 6 x Fringe Festival Shows
- 30 Days of First Nations Story, Song & Dance
- 10+ Community Activations for Fara Days

# **PATHWAY FRAMEWORK FOR ARTISTS**

## **PATHWAYS IN**

- CONNECT • LIFT-OFF • EMERGE • CAREERS
- SPRINGBOARD • PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- CULTURAL CONSERVATION



## **PLAY**

- SCRATCH • EXPLORATIONS • IMMERSE



## **PRESENTATION**

- LA MAMA PRESENTS
- LA MAMA EDUCATION
- LA MAMA ON DEMAND

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

- LA MAMA FESTIVALS
- LA MAMA FRINGE
  - CULTURAL CONSERVATION IN ACTION
- FARA DAYS



## **PATHWAYS BEYOND**

- PRODUCER LED CAPACITY BUILDING
- SECTOR WIDE COLLABORATIONS

- 1500 + Australian Independent Artists Participate Each Year



# PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORK: EMPOWERING ARTISTS, ENGAGING AUDIENCES

**From 2026, La Mama will exclusively present NEW AUSTRALIAN WORKS** — works that are yet to be staged in full seasons.

Always **artist-led**, La Mama sets the gold standard for artist equity with a best-practice framework designed for long-term artist development, career sustainability, and cultural vitality. The program retains the core of La Mama's unique model: **artist freedom, venue support, ticketing, marketing, and a minimum 80% share of box office revenue.**

La Mama is **dedicated to supporting artists at all career stages and from all backgrounds.** This includes First Nations, regional and remote, artists with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse practitioners, and those from marginalised communities.

**Access and equity remain central:** applications open annually (October), with additional pathways offered throughout the year. An annually rotating external assessment panel ensures transparent, equitable decision-making and diverse representation.

La Mama's evolved programming framework facilitates the rigorous and supported development of new Australian work:

## **PATHWAYS (IN) → PLAY → PRESENTATION & PARTNERSHIPS → PATHWAYS (BEYOND).**

This framework fosters sustainable careers, community-building, and social cohesion while developing bold new work, growing engaged audiences, and strengthening organisational capacity.

**PATHWAYS IN (Year-round)** The *Pathways In* component of the framework, presents programs that foster life-changing practice opportunities for emerging and established artists, locally and globally. *Pathways In* programs include:

- **CONNECT:** Open access creative connection (6+ local, 6+ regional per annum)
- **LIFT-OFF:** School Leader program activating audiences and makers (16p/a)
- **EMERGE:** Cultivating a confident, youthful creative cohort (20+p/a)
- **CAREERS:** Career activation through internships (4+ internships p/a)
- **SPRINGBOARD:** Partnerships with tertiary institutions (4+ Explorations p/a)
- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Aligning with festivals need (responsive)
- **CULTURAL CONSERVATION:** First Nations grassroots storytelling on Country

**PLAY (June – August)** *Play* is the early-stage development support, allowing artists to take risks and explore ideas without pressure. La Mama Producers guide artists throughout their creative journey. The *Play* programs are:

- **SCRATCH:** Readings of works-in-progress (12 lead artists)
- **EXPLORATIONS:** Three-night experiments of new work (48 groups)
- **IMMERSE:** Writing intensive with dramaturgy (8 local, 8 regional)

**PRESENTATION (February – May)** This element of the framework will provide longer seasons (one month access), expanded support, and a carefully curated, multi-generational theatre experience. *Presentations* begin each year with a First Nations-led welcome followed by:

- **LA MAMA PRESENTS:** Curated theatre seasons with enhanced support, increased access elements, and marketing (8 productions p/a)
- **LA MAMA EDUCATION:** *Presents* works selected for school audiences, with curriculum resources, study sessions, Q&As and published script
- **LA MAMA ON DEMAND:** Filming and marketing On Demand all *La Mama Presents (and Education)* works to extend reach and accessibility (8 productions p/a)

**PARTNERSHIPS (September – December)** Partnerships are the strategic collaboration programs within the framework. Strategic collaborations extend impact, reach new audiences and highlight communities. The programs include:

- **LA MAMA FESTIVALS:** Festivals responding to urgent issues and showcasing new forms (8+ productions annually)
  - 2026: *Hope Punk Climate Festival* (Partner: Griffith University & Science Gallery); *Puppet Festival* (Partner: Lemony S & Arts Centre Melbourne)
  - 2027: *Festival of Mother Tongues* (Partner: Immigration Museum and Multicultural Arts Victoria); *Flow Deaf Storytelling Festival* (Partner: Flow Festival, TBC)
- **LA MAMA FRINGE:** Energised, week-long programming in sync with Melbourne Fringe (6 productions, October, Corporate Sponsor TBC)
- **CULTURAL CONSERVATION IN ACTION:** Partnering with Ilbijerri Theatre Company, YIRRAMBOI and University of Melbourne, for self-determined, decolonised storytelling, healing, and dreaming (First Nations Producer-led, November)
- **FARA DAYS:** Community activation through street performance including building on the legacy of La Mamica programs Musica, Poetica, Cabaretica for street music, poetry and cabaret on our very own 'Piazza Publica' on Faraday Street, Carlton. (December, Local Business partners)

**PATHWAYS BEYOND (Year-round)** The final element of the framework, Producers support artists to extend their work beyond La Mama. These programs support sustainable careers, deepen self-determination, and strengthen the wider sector through advocacy and leadership.

- **PRODUCER LED CAPACITY BUILDING:** Producers work closely with artists from application stage to clarify and support ambition, develop strategic relationships, and build knowledge, networks and targeted opportunity
- **SECTOR WIDE COLLABORATIONS:** Including National Independent Theatre Network, Regional Arts Victoria, Multicultural Arts Victoria and more for sector cohesion leading to artist opportunity and pathways

Led by La Mama's Artistic Director, working with annually rotating Explorations Curators and internal Program Producers and La Mamica multi artform Producers, programming is strategically curated across **HQ, Courthouse, and Online, and in Partnership venues**, fulfilling La Mama's purpose: *to nurture artists and ideas, engage audiences, and build culture by supporting bold, new, vital Australian theatre.*

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Charlotte Otton in I Watched Someone Die on TikTok, 2024 photo by Darren Gill



# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: ARTIST RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND SUSTAINABILITY

**2030 Goal:** Independent Artists at all stages have a viable practice making new Australian work.

## Activities:

- **Pathways-focussed Programming Framework** provides more support for targeted and genuine artist success.
- **La Mama Producers** actively supported pipeline for an artist journey: Discovery and entry, personal and professional development, space to develop craft and career progression.
- **Exclusive commitment to new Australian work** and incubation of new voices and ideas.
- La Mama is **open daily** as a place for artists to meet, work and play with the comfort and motivation of community, available La Mama staff, coffee, and access to kitchen and WIFI.

## Success Indicators:

- **Creation of New Work:** Each year, at least 68 new Australian developments are supported annually through *Play* program.
- **Artist Development:** Minimum 1,500 artists engaged annually, with 80% reporting increased creative capability, sustainability, and confidence in their practice.
- **Alumni Progression:** 5+ alumni productions per year move to touring circuits or larger venues with La Mama's support.
- **Diversity Representation:** Annual programming reflects balanced representation of:
  - Emerging and established artists
  - First Nations artists
  - Geographic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity
- **Community of Practice:** From 2026, 1,500+ artists use La Mama spaces annually to meet, create, and collaborate, with steady growth in daily utilisation.
- **Career Sustainability:** By 2030, at least 50% of artists report that their engagement with La Mama directly improved their ability to sustain a career in theatre.



Helen Morse in *The Swallows*, 2024 photo by Darren Gill

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: PARTNERSHIPS AND SECTOR CAPACITY-BUILDING

**2030 Goal:** To strengthen the theatre sector, create pathways and opportunities for artists, and work collaboratively to recognise the valuable contribution of artists and the arts.

### Activities:

- Resource and prioritise strategic cross-sector partnerships through *Partnerships: La Mama Festivals: Immigration Museum and Multicultural Arts Victoria* (*Festival of Mother Tongues*), *Science Gallery and Griffith University* (*Hope Punk Climate Festival, ongoing climate leadership*).
- Resource and prioritise strategic arts-sector partnerships through *Play* (*Immerse/New Writers Collective Arts Centre Melbourne*) and *Partnerships: La Mama Festivals* (**Lemony S, Arts Centre Melbourne, Flow Festival**).
- Lead a **National Independent Theatre Network** for knowledge, resource sharing, artist pathways, particularly in regional and remote Australia. (**Blue Room, Old Fitz, Browns Mart**)
- Partner with local business and community organisations through *Fara Days*, sponsorship, profiling and marketing (**Readings, Nova, Brunetti, DOC, Rotary, COASIT, Carlton Inc. CNLC**)
- Partner with **Multicultural Arts Victoria** to ensure our commitment to multicultural communities is supported by best practice, lived experience and resourced peak bodies (*Festival of Mother Tongues 2027, ongoing culturally diverse representation leadership*)).
- Partner with **Ilbjerri Theatre Company** and **YIRRAMBOI** to ensure our commitment to First Nations communities is supported by best practice, lived experience and resourced organisations. (*Cultural Conservation in Action, from 2026*).
- Partner with **Regional Arts Victoria** to ensure our commitment to regional communities is supported by best practice, lived experience and in step with the peak body. *Regional Connect* and *Regional Immerse*, from 2026, *First Nations Regional Artist Conference 2028*, Evaluation and scoping additional venue/s across 2026 – 2030.
- Resource and prioritise partnerships with industry for cohesion, collaboration and advocacy: other theatres, service organisations, festivals, cultural organisations.

### Success Indicators:

- **Regional Access:** By 2027, *Regional Connect* and *Regional Immerse* are resourced and supporting 20+ regional artists and groups; regional exchange projects delivered annually, by 2030 additional regional venue/s secured.
- **Formalised Regional Partnership:** By 2028, La Mama and Regional Arts Victoria secure philanthropic support to remove systemic barriers for regional artists and formalise regional pathways.
- **National Network Outcomes:** By 2027, Network companies collaborate on at least 1 national tour, plus joint professional development opportunities for artists and staff.
- **Advocacy Impact:** From 2026, La Mama contributes to at least 3 sector-wide advocacy campaigns annually that demonstrably increase funding, media coverage, or public recognition of independent artists.
- **Audience Development through Partners:** By 2028, 10% of La Mama audiences are first-time attendees introduced via partner organisations, with at least 30% of them returning within 2 years.
- **Extended Creative Opportunities:** From 2026, at least 10 productions or artists extend their practice (personal, professional, creative opportunity) as a direct outcome of partnerships.
- **Partner Satisfaction:** Annual surveys show 90% of partners report collaborations with La Mama as successful, mutually beneficial, and impactful.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: MEASURING AND COMMUNICATING IMPACT AND RELEVANCE: SOCIAL COHESION, CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS, ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION, THE VALUE OF ART

**2030 Goal:** La Mama's cultural, social, artistic, and economic impact is evidenced and widely understood; La Mama is recognised as indispensable and funded accordingly.

### Activities:

- Three-year research partnership with Dr Ben Eltham (Monash University) to co-design a human-centred, evidence-based **Evaluation Framework** and **Social Network Analysis** that aligns with policy settings and captures impact across short (1–3 years), funding-cycle (3–5 years), and strategic (5, 10, 20 years) timeframes, with inputs from self, peers, and stakeholders (from 2026).
- Develop and implement a **Communication Strategy** that translates evaluation findings into accessible stories and evidence for diverse audiences (from 2026).
- Create and launch a **La Mama Archives Website** documenting all shows ever performed at La Mama, including images, programs, and artist data (2027).
- Establish and maintain an **Artist Alumni Database**, storytelling through profiles, case studies, and mapping alumni achievements (2027).

### Success Indicators:

- **Federal Support:** Federal four-year organisational funding re-instated by 2029.
- **Evaluation Framework and Social Network Analysis:** Implemented from 2026 and revised annually, producing robust evidence that directly informs programming, advocacy, and communications.
- **Impact Reporting:** Annual General Report evolves into a data-driven **Impact Report** (from 2026), with findings shared publicly and celebrated across sector and media channels.
- **Archives and Alumni:** By 2028, La Mama Archive site launched, fully searchable with historical productions documented, and integrated with a comprehensive Artist Alumni Database.
- **Media Presence:** Positive coverage of La Mama's impact and relevance achieved in at least 12 major media outlets per year from 2026.
- **Policy Influence:** Evidence of La Mama's role in shaping cultural policy agendas, demonstrated by citations in at least 3 policy documents, inquiries, or peak body reports by 2030.
- **Distinctiveness Maintained:** By 2030, La Mama is recognised nationally as the premier home for new Australian work, with this distinctiveness cited in external evaluations, industry reports, and funder assessments.
- **Stakeholder Endorsement:** Annual surveys show 90%+ of artists, partners, and audiences agree La Mama is indispensable to Australian culture.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: RE-INVIGORATING PROFILE AND DEVELOPING AUDIENCE

**2030 Goal:** Brand profile communicates La Mama's unique identity and successfully engages new target audiences while retaining existing loyal audience.

### Activities:

- **Programming for Reach and Profile:**
  - *La Mama Presents* grows profile and brings in new audiences supported by increased marketing investment.
  - *La Mama Partnerships* connects to invested communities, extending reach and recognition.
  - *Fara Days* builds stronger local community presence; rigorous artist application process and guest curators expand reach.
- **Audience-focused Marketing Strategy** implemented to identify priority audience segments and design clear engagement pathways (2026).
- **New Audience Software** to track attendance, behaviour, and engagement, embedding evaluation and data analysis into practice (from 2026).
- **Leveraging Online Audiences** through live-streaming, digital content, and donor portal, converting online reach into in-person audiences and supporters.
- **Develop strategic Media partners** for increased reach and influence (Broadsheet and Nova (Val Morgan, 2026)

### Success Indicators:

- **Audience Diversity and Reach:** Growth in identified priority audience profiles (new, regional, online, lapsed) tracked annually and evolved in response to data.
- **Audience Retention and Loyalty:** Maintain 80% capacity across seasons (approx. 30,000 annual attendances), with ticketing data showing repeat attendance year-on-year.
- **Online Growth:** Online audiences reach 5,000+ in 2026, scaling to 10,000+ by 2030, with measurable conversion to in-person audiences (10% by 2030).
- **Audience Satisfaction:** 90% of surveyed audiences report positive experiences of La Mama's programming, welcome, and cultural value (biennial survey from 2026).
- **Profile Recognition:** By 2028, media, sector peers, artists, staff, and community consistently describe La Mama's unique identity in alignment with its brand values, as evidenced in evaluation surveys and external media coverage.
- **Community Engagement:** *Fara Days* achieves measurable participation, with clear pathways for local audiences to transition into other programming attendance.
- **Partnership Impact:** Audience data demonstrates at least 20% of attendees at partnership events and through partnership promotions are first-time La Mama audiences, with 40% returning within 12 months (by 2030).



The Roof is Caving In, 2024 photo by Darren Gill

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5: INCOME-GENERATION AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

**2030 Goal:** Financial security and independence without compromising the Artist-First Model.

### Activities:

- **Fee for Service Innovation:** With business guidance and mentoring provided by Creative Australia, La Mama will leverage our artistic assets and expertise for long-term business modelling and planning, leaning into tourism and hospitality potential.
- **Government:** Aligning with cultural policy for Creative Australia, Creative Victoria and City of Melbourne, an increase in government operational support.
- **Philanthropy:** Project grants will support programs: *Pathways (In and Beyond)*, *First Nations*, *Education*, *Presents*, and *Play*.
- **Partnership:** Strategic partnerships will support programs: *Fara Days*, *Fringe*, *Festivals*, *On Demand*.
- **Merchandise:** Introducing the La Mama Vintage Posters project, significantly increasing visibility and marketability for books, gift cards and totebags.
- **Sponsors:** A tiered sponsorship program will align with Corporate Social Responsibility matrix of partners who share values for exchange opportunities for skill sharing and subsidise food and beverage and marketing collateral.
- **Donor Strategy:** Launching in June 2026, our new Donor Strategy will build a pipeline to identify and acquire mid-sized and major donors. Additional Campaigns will be added for specific purposes with strategy and time sensitivity.
- **Box Office:** La Mama will take max 20% of Box Office, contributing to operations.
- **Major Arts Trust:** Relationship building and ideating involvement/possibilities/projects with very high net worth individuals to create a multi-million-dollar Arts Trust with sufficient interest gained annually for substantial operational support (2030).
- **Bequests:** Communicating the possibilities from Bequests and inheritances with sensitivity and inspiration (2030).

### Success Indicators:

- **Government Funding:** Federal, State and Local government provide recurrent operational funding; Government funding is an annually decreasing percentage of overall income, and an annually increasing amount.
- **Program Financial Support:** Core programs (*Pathways*, *First Nations*, *Education*, *Festivals*, *On Demand*, *Fara Days*, *Fringe*) have secured 100% external financial support (philanthropy, sponsorship, or partnership) by 2028, with minimum of two funding streams per program by 2030.
- **Individual Donor Growth:** Donor Strategy launched June 2026 with minimum 50 mid-level donors in Year 1; Donor pool increases by 15% annually; By 2030, achieve a balanced mix of small, mid-sized, and major donors contributing a minimum of 20% of operational costs.
- **Major Arts Trust:** By 2030, establish a multi-million-dollar Arts Trust seeded with at least \$5million; Trust generates a minimum of \$250,000 annual income through this investment; Five high net worth individuals engaged in ongoing cultivation towards this fund.
- **Bequests:** Bequest program launched with minimum 10 confirmed bequests pledged by 2030.
- **Box Office:** La Mama retains up to 20% of box office across all productions.
- **Merchandise & Fee-for-Service:** Merchandise sales (books, posters, gift cards, bags) achieve minimum \$50k annual turnover by 2028; Tourism and hospitality-linked activities deliver minimum \$100k in annual fee-for-service income by 2030.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Retained surplus continues each year; La Mama continues to hold at least 3 months of operating expenses in cash reserves, increasing with revenue increase; Diversified income streams: no single funding source to represent more than 30% of total annual revenue by 2030.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6: ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

**2030 Goal:** La Mama is a modern, equitable, human-centred workplace; staff and governance effectively support the organisation's purpose.

### Activities:

- Implement **human-centred pathways** through La Mama Policy for recruiting, welcoming, working with, and graceful exits for staff, board, volunteers, and artists (from 2026).
- Maintain **up-to-date position descriptions and contracts** that clearly communicate expectations, revised annually during staffing reviews (from 2026).
- Ensure **internal workflows and systems are clear**, with all staff trained in software and fully understanding roles and responsibilities (from 2026).
- Streamline artist experience through a **producer-led model** that manages staff load and enhances efficiency (from 2026).
- Embed **reflection and evaluation time** in programming structures for all staff (from 2026).
- Commit to **succession planning** for leadership and board roles, leading a culture of considered renewal (ongoing; 4 new Board roles announced end of 2025).
- **Increase staff** to meet the needs of organisation – operations, marketing and development.
- Achieve **salary parity** with industry standards across all roles by 2030.
- Deliver **whole-of-organisation professional development** opportunities annually (2026).
- Upgrade **organisational software and infrastructure**, including responsible integration of AI tools (from 2026).
- **Project Courthouse:** raise funds for upgrades to optimise physical space for efficiency and usability of rented Courthouse. (Lease expires 2028).

### Success Indicators:

- **Professional Development:** 100% of staff and board participate in at least 1 capacity-building or professional development activity per year.
- **Salary Parity:** Achieve salary parity across all roles by 2030, with progress reported annually.
- **Succession Planning:** CEO/AD succession plan fully documented and executed by 2030.
- **Staffing Structure:** Adequately trained and experienced staff are employed to meet the future needs of the organisation (General Manager 2026, Marketing, Development, Business 2027).
- **Staff & Board Satisfaction:** Annual survey demonstrates 80% satisfaction with workplace culture, leadership, and organisational support (from 2026).
- **Workflow and Software Adoption:** By 2026, 100% of staff trained in all core organisational systems and workflows, with annual refreshers.
- **Reflective Culture:** At least one dedicated reflection and evaluation session per staff member per program cycle (tracked through staff reporting).
- **The Courthouse is upgraded** to be viable for staff to support artists and audiences or alternate additional venue/s are sought.

By delivering on these six Strategic Priorities, La Mama will create the conditions for a theatre of possibility – **a place where life-changing moments unfold, transforming individuals and shaping the future of Australian storytelling.**



# CONTEXT & ENVIRONMENT

## PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE



Bruce Spence & Robin Laurie  
in Dimboola, 1969



Claudia Greenstone & Priscilla Doueihy  
in THEM, 2019



Miela Anich and Gary Watling in Oh My God I'm Blak!, 2024 photo by Darren Gill



## CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT: OUR RICH HISTORY

- 58+ years of pioneering the Australian cultural voice
- 2,500+ Theatre productions
- 25,000+ Performances
- 3,000+ Special one-off nights of poetry, music, cabaret.
- 50,000+ Writers, Actors, Directors, Designers and Crew.
- 2,000,000+ Audience
- 80% of Box Office has always gone to Artists.
- 60+ School shows
- Too many awards to count – from all corners of the globe.
- Artists and Audiences have always – will always – come from every part of society.



Caroline Lee & Cate Blanchett in *The Woodbox*, 1989

## CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT: THE CHALLENGES WE FACE NOW

La Mama recognises that the work to achieve our aims takes place within the context of the challenges we face now. These include:

- **Funding Shifts:** For future sustainability, we must complement government funding with other streams of support.
- **Sector Fragility:** Narrowing pathways for artists, limited opportunities, and rising living costs.
- **Burnout and Fatigue:** Sector-wide fatigue among arts workers, artists, and audience.
- **Artist Demand:** Continue to rise with limited and declining opportunities
- **Local Demographic Change:** Carlton's high cost of living has reduced the number of local artists, yet population density has increased due to high-rise development, presenting new opportunities for engagement.
- **Meta-Crisis Impacts:** Cost of living pressures, loneliness, mental health challenges, climate anxiety and post-COVID economic realities affect artists and audiences alike.
- **Digital Disruption:** Rapid advances in AI, digital entertainment and online content compete for attention and reshape audience behaviour and artistic practice.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** AI is an opportunity for us. Intimate, human, La Mama is a place where people will continue to find connection in an increasingly atomised world and AI can't deliver what we provide.
- **Cultural Evolution:** Greater awareness of First Nations sovereignty, disability rights, diversity and inclusion bring both opportunity and complexity.
- **Wealth Divide:** Inequity of privilege and income makes being an artist increasingly difficult for those without family or other financial backing, risking a more homogenous, elite cultural landscape.
- **Arts Education Decline:** Artist selection, development and career pathways have changed as performing arts courses and humanities departments have closed or become subject to increased fees. This is another opportunity for La Mama, providing an affordable space for artists to explore without needing to go to university.
- **Sector Competition:** We compete with other theatres, entertainment options and digital platforms for audience attention. We recently saw Melbourne Theatre Company generously and actively promoting La Mama. There is the chance to work as a sector – rather than see each other in opposition build audience together.
- **Cultural Ecosystem Growth:** Melbourne's growing population has created need for multiple venues like La Mama. We are in very high artist demand.
- **Venue:** After the 2019 fire, La Mama HQ rebuilt as a fully accessible and modern theatrical space that we own. The Courthouse, rented from State Government's Working Heritage, needs upgrades to meet these modern and accessible needs.

## CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT: LA MAMA'S STRATEGIC FUTURE-FOCUSED RESPONSE

La Mama recognises that the work to achieve our aims also occurs within the context of La Mama's Strategic Future-Focused Response. These include:

- **Reimagine Operations:** Align systems and staffing to evolving artist and sector needs, the realities of overwhelm and burnout, rising artist demand, limited resources and opportunity, sector gaps, and the ever-evolving needs of artists, audiences, and the theatre industry.
- **Strengthen Pathways:** Formalise artist development programs and partnerships to create clearer professional pipelines.
- **Segmented Programming:** Enables partner-based agile and responsive programming that separates core funding from programming, optimising opportunities for discreet fundraising and limiting disruption when funding applications are unsuccessful or funding options end or change.
- **Broaden Audiences:** Engage with local changing population and attract audiences from across regional and remote Victoria, online and beyond Australia.
- **Secure Resilience:** Diversify income streams, expand philanthropic support and invest in staff and artist wellbeing.
- **Deepen Community:** Test and evolve how we build connection, ensuring La Mama remains a place of welcome, social cohesion, inclusion and artistic freedom.
- **New Australian Work Commitment:** Supporting the development and presentation of many new Australian works builds the Australian cultural identity.

When Betty Burstall founded La Mama in 1967, she carved out space for a daring new Australian theatrical voice. Since then, those voices have multiplied, diversified, and reshaped our culture. Today, La Mama is uniquely positioned to lead the next chapter of this evolution – championing artists, igniting ideas, and shaping the future of Australian theatre.

Over the next five years, guided by our Strategic Priorities and realised through our new Annual Program for Audiences and interrelated Pathway Framework for Artists, La Mama will honour its responsibility to artists and to the nation's cultural life. We will remain a home for community – open, connected, cohesive, and vibrant – and a place where bold performance transforms possibility into reality.

**La Mama is not just part of Australia's cultural story – it is where the next chapter begins.**





Annie Thorold in FIN-I (The Utopian Connection), 2024 photo by Darren Gill