

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 21 March 2024

Recipient of the 2024 ACTF Joan and Betty Rayner Fellowship Announced



Image: Courtesy of Michelle Heaven

The Trustees of the Australian Children's Theatre Foundation (ACTF) and Regional Arts Victoria are delighted to announce that the 2024 Joan and Betty Rayner ACTF Fellowship has been awarded to theatre-maker Michelle Heaven.

Michelle Heaven is a regionally based choreographer and movement-based performance artist, director, movement teacher, and puppeteer.

Michelle will undertake a series of mentorship activities learning through observation and gaining hands on experience and training with renowned puppeteer and director Scott Wright from Erth Visual and Physical Theatre (Sydney), creator of contemporary puppetry, Sam Routledge from Terrapin Puppet Theatre (Hobart), and with directors Zoe Barry and Geoff Cobham from Patch Theatre (Adelaide). Michelle has also been invited to attend a masterclass program with Basil Twist, renowned New York puppet designer and maker.

Michelle will also attend Edinburgh Children's Festival to see performances and participate in artist workshops, providing firsthand experience of current international contemporary works for children as well as networking opportunities with artists, producers, presenters.

"It is an honour to be the 2024 recipient of the Joan and Betty Rayner ACTF Fellowship. This Fellowship will enable me to combine my long-term practice, recent study, and interests with a series of pre-determined professional development engagements and research into existing companies, practices and current work in children's theatre nationally and internationally. This support will have a significant impact on my creative trajectory, facilitate and diversify my practice and elevate my capacity to make theatre for children. I am extremely proud to receive this Fellowship." – Fellowship recipient Michelle Heaven.

"As a result of a rigorous selection process it is with great pleasure to grant the ACTF Fellowship to Michelle Heaven. I am sure her proposed program of professional activities will lead to enhancing children's theatre, not only in Victoria, but across Australia." – Rod Parnall, ACTF Chair

About the Fellowship

The biennial Joan and Betty Rayner ACTF Fellowship supports the artistic development of an artists' practice to the amount of \$20,000 and is open to emerging or established artists working in children's theatre and to those wishing to diversify their practice into and across the field of theatre for children.

The Rayner sisters established the Australian Childrens Theatre in 1948 after decades performing throughout Britain, Europe and the United States as strolling players. Through their Theatre, Joan and Betty trained many emerging local performance artists, provided support for established children's theatre performers and brought to Australia many highly talented international children's theatre artists.

Joan & Betty themselves spent their early years developing their stage craft under the tutelage of renowned overseas performers and by travelling extensively to meet with local storytellers to observe the folk stories and customs of many cultures worldwide. This in turn inspired them to train others through the Australian Children's Theatre.

The foundation partners with Regional Arts Victoria to bring theatre and live performance opportunities to disadvantaged communities through a subsidy program which offers up to 75% subsidy off the cost of performances. In 2023 the ACTF supported 4,086 audience members to experience live theatre and performance through the subsidy program.

“We are thrilled be supporting a regional based artist with the 2024 Fellowship. Michelle will be mentored with leaders in the field, and these unique opportunities will equip her with tools which will compliment her skillset as a choreographer and movement-based performance artist and support her to create high quality theatre-based works for children in the future.” - Pippin Remi, Senior Manager, Creative Learning.

About Regional Arts Victoria:

Regional Arts Victoria backs artists and communities across regional Victoria to make, participate in, and experience creative work.

Regional Arts Victoria is an independent, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation working in long-term partnerships with every level of government, fostering contemporary and innovative regional cultural practice. We advise and impact on decision-making across multiple portfolios and levels of government.

Regional Arts Victoria is the peak body for regional artists and arts organisations, and the leading organisation for regional creative practice in Victoria.

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