

President's Report - 2017 AGM

Last year we celebrated 30 years of the founding of the Guild and reflected on how it all began.

It was in 1986 that Bruce McBrien, David Richards and Doug Savage established a supporting body for non-professional theatre, the aim being to give recognition to the abundance of talent in the State by way of a program of Awards for Excellence. This encompassed all aspects of a production, affording opportunities to the myriad of people involved and showcasing talent that might otherwise go unnoticed, and so the Music Theatre Guild of Victoria was born.

The Guild has achieved much in the last 30 years despite no significant funding and will continue to do so as long as there are dedicated people prepared to contribute their time and expertise to keep the dream alive. In the beginning there were 25 companies; today membership stands at 97, a living testament to the three gentlemen who shared their passion and vision for musical theatre.

Every year brings new theatre companies, new shows, new faces and new talent, which was the ultimate dream back in the 80's. Each year also brings new challenges both artistic and technical for the creative journey from page to stage. Our founders would be both amazed and delighted to witness musical theatre as it stands today and feel immense pride in the knowledge that it all began with them.

With the passing of the years comes the loss of some of our founding members. 2016 saw the passing of Bettine McCaughan, a Judge for 13 years and Life Member of the Guild; and Rosemary McBride who was a Committee Member and sponsor of our Junior Bruce Awards over many years. Both ladies will be fondly remembered for their theatrical involvement and our thoughts are extended to their respective families.

The Awards Night would be a non-event without our Judges and the Guild acknowledges them from both the Open and Junior panels and thanks them for their dedication and time in judging 112 productions throughout Victoria in 2016. The road trips increase each year, as do the kilometres travelled, and their time and efforts are recognised and greatly appreciated; and we should not forget the partners of Judges and Committee whose unseen support is also acknowledged and appreciated.

We would also like to sincerely thank Open Panel Chairman Brad Fischer and Junior Panel Chairman David Crawshaw for their work in 2016. We welcomed new judges Shaun Kingma, Carla Gianinotti, Ann Hubbard and Dayna Tinline and offer our thanks to relief judges, Dot Parker, Peter Maver, Fran Boyd, Elyse Carmichael and Scott Hili.

Thanks go to the production team of Director Danny Ginsberg and Co-Host Mike Fletcher, Musical Director Amy Wert, Production Manager Brett Wingfield, our wonderful orchestra and everyone behind the scenes, all who volunteered their time to be a part of the Guild's 30th year celebration of excellence in musical theatre.

Special mention goes to PLOS who hosted the evening, with thanks for their support in the preparation and Front of House management and also to Monash University, Peninsula Campus for providing the venue for the Guild rehearsal.

Feedback from the 2016 Awards Night has been very positive. It was a break from tradition, compared with other years, with Danny Ginsberg and Mike Fletcher hosting the night. They brought humour and light relief to the stage that did not detract in any way from the more serious side of the evening. The performances, carefully chosen throughout the year by our judging panels, were a showcase of excellence from companies far and wide in Victoria and made a statement that talent is not discriminated by location. The orchestra was stunning under the direction of Amy Wert whose workload was enormous in the lead up to Awards Night. We thank Amy for the long hours of preparation, hard work and patience in coordinating a night of musical excellence.

Presenting such a wonderful production doesn't happen overnight but over months of careful and precise planning and for this we acknowledge and thank our Production Manager, Brett Wingfield, whose loyalty and dedication to the Guild spans many years.

Congratulations to Edith Harray Award recipient Paul Denham, acknowledging his outstanding contribution to musical theatre; to Brian Davis and Sharon Leppard, recipients of the Musician's Award; to Dot Parker, who was awarded Guild Life Membership and to everyone who received commendations, nominations and those recipients of a Bruce Award.

The Guild also acknowledges those companies, individuals, corporate bodies and foundations that sponsor our Bruce Awards each year in support of the Awards Night.

It was opportune that night to offer congratulations to Valda (Val) Pagram who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours last year, for service to musical theatre.

To my Guild Committee colleagues, sincere thanks for your time, support and work throughout the year. A small team, but a good team, who share their theatrical passion and uphold the vision of our founder Bruce McBrien.

Our choice of venues for the Awards Night is quite restricted as we require a theatre with a seating capacity of 800. However, we are excited to travel to Bendigo this year for the 31st Bruce Awards for Excellence to be held at the stunning new Ulumbarra Theatre in beautiful Bendigo with Director Vern Wall and Musical Director Cynthia Holsworth. And for those of you wishing to enjoy a weekend away in Bendigo, the Guild website will keep you updated with accommodation packages on offer.

To all companies and schools my best wishes to you all for success with your productions in 2017 and may your seats never be empty!

Beverley Meldrum
President – Music Theatre Guild of Victoria
AGM
25th March 2017