

Bell Shakespeare strongly supports the Arts NSW proposed development of a new arts precinct at Walsh Bay.

The NSW Government has an outstanding opportunity through this development to add to the attractions of Sydney as a global city. The arts precinct includes Wharf 4/5, Pier 2/3 and Sydney Theatre. The concept provides for an integrated performing arts and cultural precinct within an enhanced public domain at Walsh Bay. A vibrant new facility providing a home on Pier 2/3 to an iconic company like Bell Shakespeare together with other arts organisations will add to the opportunities for local education and entertainment as well as event and tourism appeal of this historically important part of the city. The move to Pier 2/3 would be the culmination of a 24 year journey and ten years of planning for Bell Shakespeare. Bell Shakespeare is a major performing arts company with a strong balance sheet and is in an ideal position to take on a long term tenancy to provide a secure base around which other tenancies can be shaped. Bell Shakespeare's vision for Pier 2/3 is to support as much arts usage as possible and we would take very seriously our role in making this venue and its resources available to the wider arts community. Bell Shakespeare has a track record with engaging communities nationally through its Theatre and Learning programmes seen across Regional and State boundaries. In twenty four years the Company has established itself as the only national theatre company. With a permanent home at Pier 2/3 the Company will bring to Walsh Bay this same success ensuring the Pier is an accessible and desirable place for all to visit. Locating Bell Shakespeare at Pier 2/3 will be a vital component in creating a thriving and accessible performing arts precinct in Walsh Bay. It will complement Pier 4/5, and balance the existing commercial usage of Piers 6/7 and 8/9. The Company recognises the importance such a precinct represents for Sydney with the potential to link the NSW Art Gallery, the Sydney Opera House, the Museum of Contemporary Art to a Walsh Bay Precinct, which could then continue through to the new arts component at Barangaroo development and the Powerhouse Museum in Pyrmont.

Bell Shakespeare intends to use Pier 2/3 to create its national headquarters and permanent home. The development to include:

- Two rehearsal/performance spaces to both rehearse and present work. Access would also be provided to other arts organisations (eg Sydney Writers Festival, Biennale)
- Foyer exhibition space (off the main rehearsal space) – open to public access and shared with other arts organisations.
- Education resource & training facility – full time usage with public access. (NB Bell Shakespeare is seeking registration as an authorised training authority. This will strengthen our existing connections into the tertiary sector).
- Office accommodation for Bell Shakespeare staff (40 fulltime equivalent) including a fulltime ensemble of 8 actors 'The Players' - full time usage.
- Wardrobe and prop construction with limited storage – full time usage with controlled public access
- Loading dock with limited workshop (for refining props/sets that are built off-site) – full time usage, shared with other companies as required with controlled public access.
- Ticketing and box office facility – full time usage shared with other organisations
- Meeting rooms – full time usage and shared with other organisations. Limited public access on an appointments basis.

For 24 years a key component of Bell Shakespeare's work has been its public access program. The current access program consists of open rehearsals, Q & As, play readings to which members of the public are invited. Expansion of this programme is not possible as the Company currently operates in split rented sites which impacts on the space available and staff coordination to marshal such events.

Pier 2/3 and the Walsh Bay arts precinct will enable Bell Shakespeare to further develop the public access program by virtue of having all the Company located in one area with rehearsal/performance spaces in situ, wardrobe construction and storage, loading dock and small workshop facilities so that we can finesse sets. We can use our many skills in our new home to make theatre alive for the general public, students, teachers and the local community. In addition this new facility and the critical mass of arts groups in the precinct is sure to foster greater collaboration between organisations on public access programmes like the successful Walsh Bay Open Day.

The following outlines our plans for public access programs at Pier 2/3.

The Company intends to implement phase 2 of our Mind's Eye program at Pier 2/3.

Plans include a new rehearsal/performance space with a 300 seat capacity to accommodate public engagement via three, two week Mind's Eye productions per year. This will complement existing main stage programs (up to four per year) which are performed at the Sydney Opera House and other venues including Sydney Theatre and Wharf 2 on Pier 4/5. Mind's Eye is a program specifically designed to nurture talent in the creation of new works. It has a unique capacity to engage the community in the development of these new works.

The Company will enlarge its Learning Programme.

For 24 years the Company has produced high-quality participatory arts experiences through in-school performances (Actors At Work) student and teacher workshops, teacher professional development programs, master classes, teaching artists residencies in remote communities and in-class teaching resources. These experiential events challenge and engage students and their teachers, bringing the works to life off the page and enjoyed as intended, through performance.

New programs to be introduced at Pier 2/3 include:

- School holiday workshop programmes for students and teachers.
- The annual schools production staged in the main performance rehearsal space for a four week season.
- Shakespeare Schools Performance Festival.
- Public seminars, either stand alone or in conjunction with the Continuing Education Program at Sydney University.
- Public screenings of live broadcast of Shakespearian stage productions from around the World.
- Broadcasts and live digital performances of Mind's Eye productions and Q&A events.
- A workshop programme for actors and aspiring actors on a term basis – similar to the successful Sydney Dance company classes. As a registered training authority Bell Shakespeare would be able to provide accreditation.

These activities will be held across the year with sessions running in the mornings, afternoons or evenings depending on the requirements of the activity resulting in a busy vibrant centre with high levels of activity all year round. A positive side effect of these programmes will be growth of the audience base for the Company's main stage productions ensuring the on-going viability of the organisation.

The Company will create an education & resource facility.

Incorporating a publicly accessible archive and library this facility will provide opportunities for volunteer support and engagement with an even wider student and teacher base. It will allow Bell Shakespeare to take a more prominent role as part of the global Shakespeare community on behalf of Sydney. The Company intends to have a specific space and organised facility to assist those visiting. There is considerable demand for this facility and it is intended that this resource would be open to the public and would complement the growth of Bell Shakespeare's digital offering and increased educational programmes.

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The Company will enhance existing access programmes.

There will be significant benefits for the many young people and teachers who work with the Company either through work experience programs or as recipients of the Regional Teachers' Scholarships and the Regional Performance Scholarships. These scholarship recipients come to Sydney and spend up to one week training and then return home with new and improved skills which they impart to their colleagues and students. Spending this week with the Company ensures that they see all facets of the theatre process from administration, to wardrobe making, ticketing, props and sets, and of course the rehearsal and performance. They also gain better insights into how different sections of an arts company work together.

The Company will extend our indigenous programs.

The Company has seen large growth in its work within indigenous communities right around the country including Northern Rivers NSW, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek, Thursday Island, Grooyte Eylandt, Ti-Tree, Beswick, Marree, Wilcannia and Cape York. The Company intends to expand this program – possibly in conjunction with other Pier 2/3 tenants– by developing a programme which will bring together indigenous students with whom we've done workshops, with local students, on an annual basis. This programme will be supported via sponsorship and philanthropy and would be conducted during a school holiday period. There are also potential synergies here to be explored with other arts organisations including Bangarra, ATYP and Sydney Festival.

The Company believes that the NSW Government has a one-off opportunity to create a major international cultural hub that would rival other major cities nationally and internationally. Bell Shakespeare supports the development to make the Pier a home for national performing arts organisations with shared synergies (eg Bell Shakespeare, ATYP, ACO), as well as providing space for other arts organisations and signature events (eg Sydney Writers Festival and the Biennale). This will create a rich exchange of ideas and creativity, and the potential for greater commercial activity eg bar, café, workshops and training programs. Bell Shakespeare's ability to promote the organisation, attract greater financial support and ensure continued long term success is predicated on having a permanent home. The Company has no doubts that fundraising efforts to contribute to capital costs will be successful. The longer term plan being to convert new capital donors into regular donors, as other performing arts companies have done. Pier 2/3 will enable the Company to meet its goals and create a more lively and vibrant destination attracting tourists and locals alike. Bell Shakespeare is, and always has been, an outwardly focused company. As a major national theatre company engaging with up to 200,000 people annually across the country through our main stage productions and extensive outreach public programs, we are keenly aware of the need to work with people in their own locales and spaces in order to demystify the theatre process, enhance participation and pass on skills.

Bell Shakespeare will complement the existing tenants by providing an exciting performance program and extensive education program with a specific focus and skill set. Bell Shakespeare's excellence emanates from its mission i.e. specialisation in works by, about and inspired by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The funding base from the State and Federal governments reflects our specialist nature. As a national organisation the Company has a long and successful history of partnering with other companies around the country. These collaborations are used to leverage relationships and build on them. Many of the Company's actors, directors, writers and designers work with the resident companies of Wharf 4/5. The Company has strong associations with the Sydney Theatre Company, as demonstrated by the various co-productions/associations over the years (eg *Uncle Vanya*, *Venus & Adonis*). A move to Pier 2/3 would aid the Company in realising its goal of regularly staging one of its productions at Sydney Theatre (the Company has successfully presented a season of *The Servant of Two Masters* at Sydney Theatre). Discussions are also taking place into the sharing of dedicated education

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resources and space. The Company has strong relationships with Sydney Dance Company and Bangarra Dance Theatre with discussions on-going about the redevelopment and how resources may be shared. Australian Theatre for Young People [ATYP] and the Company have a long shared history in finding a home together, providing training to young artists and sharing resources. In recent times the Company has worked with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs and is in discussions on further collaborations. Detailed discussions with Sydney Writers Festival have taken place to ensure that the proposed Bell Shakespeare premises would meet with their needs for the annual festival. Bell Shakespeare remains committed to providing resources for this annual hallmark event. Additionally the Company in recent years has provided space and resources for the Sydney Festival on a seasonal basis. This is set to continue and would facilitate the Festival having a greater presence and impact in the Walsh Bay precinct each year.

The world will be looking at what the NSW Government does with Pier 2/3 and the Walsh bay arts precinct given its prime harbour front position – this is a place where excellence in performance and access should be showcased. Having cemented itself as a national institution Bell Shakespeare sights are now set on enhancing its reputation as an internationally recognised brand and to play our role in promoting Sydney and Australia. The Company has performed in international festivals (eg Bath Shakespeare Festival, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Auckland Arts Festival) to wide acclaim and has discovered a new audience base keen for Shakespearean-inspired theatre for young people. The Company is developing links with The Globe in London and has been in discussions regarding touring a work there. For many years the Company ran extensive education programmes in Singapore and Malaysia. The Company's Co-Artistic Director and founder John Bell, is a well-known figure and is held in high regard nationally and internationally. He has won scores of awards – most recently the Helpmann Lifetime Achievement and the Sydney Theatre Awards Lifetime Achievement – and is one of Australia's "national living treasures". In exploring new opportunities for the precinct the Company, in collaboration with STC, will reignite the industry vision for a biennial Australian Theatre Festival. This Festival based in the Walsh Bay precinct, would see the best of Australian theatre showcased over a two week period attracting visitors from around the country and abroad. Further to this the Company sees great synergies between such a Festival and the city's burgeoning retail and shopping districts and would explore opportunities with the sector of combining a Shopping Festival similar to those held in Singapore and Hong Kong. Given past experiences with developments of arts precincts around the country, some of which fail to realise their potential because of the lack of credible businesses, Bell Shakespeare offers a profile and presence that will ensure the success of the Walsh Bay development. The Company will bring with it a wealth of support from every sector essential to making a new precinct work – Government, patrons, artists, workers, students, philanthropists, sponsors and corporate Australia. Walsh Bay should be an arts precinct that will be recognised as "the place to go". It will be unique because of the physical environment, but this alone is not enough. Organic growth of the precinct by having established companies with strong reputations growing the space is critical. Our presence will attract that critical mass.

In conclusion Bell Shakespeare is poised to celebrate the next twenty years of success in a permanent purpose built home on Pier 2/3. Bringing high profile and wide community support to the Walsh Bay precinct the Company is sure to enhance the precincts positioning as a world class arts hub and further enhance Sydney as a truly global city. A strong track record of community engagement ensures the Company has the knowledge and skills to make Pier 2/3 and the wider Walsh Bay precinct an accessible and desirable place to visit. The Company is in a strong financial position and has confidence that it can contribute capital funds to the redevelopment and enjoys strong relationships with its colleagues both in the precinct and around the country. Bell Shakespeare looks forward to continuing to foster a love of Shakespeare and theatre both locally, nationally and internationally from a new home on Pier 2/3 within the Walsh Bay arts precinct.

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