

2022

YEAR IN REVIEW



Union House Theatre

Union House Theatre (UHT) is a community of people who, through a shared passion for exploring creativity, come together to make art happen.

UHT is the creative hub for extracurricular student theatre and performance at the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU). We provide an environment where diverse and autonomous student theatre can flourish, supporting an ecology of high-impact, student-led creativity. UHT facilitates and supports performance in all its forms by providing artistic leadership, creative programs, technical advice, mentoring, education and networking/industry opportunities that are responsive to students' needs.

We acknowledge that we live, work and create theatre on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We extend that respect to all First Nations people, and the long and rich histories of storytelling, art and culture on this land. Sovereignty was never ceded.

"All the staff were very helpful and supportive, and they struck the perfect balance between providing guidance to help us achieve our creative vision, but also letting us roam free in the venue and using it to our desires. The absolute best thing though — all the staff were the absolute friendliest bunch we could have hoped for!"

Artistic Director's Reflections

2022 afforded us so much to celebrate. Students are back on campus making theatre after the long closures due to Covid.

The community has emerged with a sense of determination for what lies ahead, and it is a joy to witness this vibrant student theatre community continuing to grow. We left our old digs at Union House, bid it farewell in style and packed hundreds of boxes to move into our new home in the Arts and Cultural Building. We bring with us a decades-long history of student theatre on campus and as we step toward the future, we are filled with so much excitement as to what this new chapter of student creativity at the University of Melbourne Student Union will look like.

As we move into the future together, we acknowledge that change is not always easy, but we hold a sense of anticipation of what these new spaces offer toward an exciting, strong, and very creative era of student theatre. We are all a little weary from the intensity of the last three years, but students are beacons of optimism and that is infectious – it gives us the energy to do what we do, and we are incredibly grateful to them for all that they bring.

Xanthe Beesley

Artistic Director/Theatre Coordinator, Union House Theatre



New Venue



Welcome to our new home. UHT relocated to the Arts and Cultural Building in July this year.

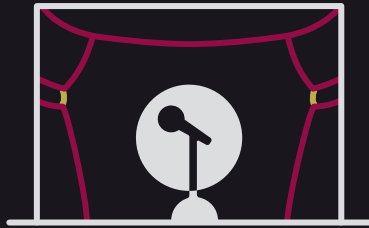
Two theatres (the new Union Theatre — a 400 seat proscenium arch venue with a balcony and orchestra pit, and Guild Theatre — a 100 seat black box space), a spacious set building workshop and rehearsal rooms are just some of the features of this spectacular facility — one which we know the students will claim and love as they make their mark and create amazing things.

The first productions in the new venues were Ormond Drama presenting *Everyman* in the Guild Theatre and Newman College with *Legally Blonde* in the Union Theatre.



Flare Dance Ensemble backstage, Photo by Namchops Photography

Union House Theatre 2022 At A Glance



25

Student Theatre
Productions



12

New
Works



23

Student Theatre Groups



8905

Audience
Members



892

Cast, Crew
& Creatives



7

Staff &
Mentors



14

Workshops



15,000

Most steps from orchestra
pit to bio box in a day



274

Boxes packed
and moved to
the new venues

20



Litres of pink paint used

Student Impact

Participation in programs remained high throughout the year, with strong engagement in workshops, residencies, intensives and mentorships.

Audition interest and cast numbers for UHT's production were significant. The Peer Mentors worked alongside new students to help grow their confidence and led folk through a range of activities all throughout the year. Student Theatre Groups grew membership and connection and new groups formed, whilst existing groups expanded and tried different processes and ideas. The recently developed venues were eagerly used by these groups to perform musicals, new writing, physical theatre and more.

UHT's programming included our long awaited, twice delayed production of *Nora: A Doll's House* by Stef Smith (UHT's final production in the old Union Theatre), as well as a punchy suite of creative and technical skill-building workshops and a Writer in Residence program with its own Play Reading Mini Fest to celebrate student writing. Creative development remained strong. The 2022 UHT Awards Night provided the perfect end to the year and a chance to celebrate the community and their achievements.

"The UHT and venue staff really welcomed us and made us feel at home in the venue, where we basically lived for a week! And I know this will be a never-forgotten memory as a result. So, from the bottom of my heart, I just wanted to thank you for making our first production since 2019 one to remember."

"UHT is made up of passionate and highly qualified staff who listen and work really well with students to present marvellous works of theatre. They are some of if not the best in the industry, and always bring their A-game to any student theatre they work on."



Student Theatre Groups

- 2050 Theatre
- Element Theatre Company
- Fake Newspaper Theatre
- Flare Dance Ensemble
- Floor Work
- Four Letter Word Theatre
- Intercollegiate Activities Council – ICAC
- International House Theatre Group
- Medleys – Med Revue
- Med Moves
- Melbourne University Chinese Theatre Group – CTG
- Melbourne University Comedy Revue Board – MUDCRABS
- Melbourne University Law Revue
- Melbourne University Modern Theatre Company
- Melbourne University Shakespeare Company – MUSC
- Newman College Theatre Group
- Ormond College Drama Club
- Queen’s College Music and Drama Society – QC MADS
- St Hilda’s College Drama Society
- St Mary’s College Drama Society
- Trinity College Dramatic Society
- University College Theatre Company
- University of Melbourne Music Theatre Association – UMMTA

Honorary Theatre Groups – Affiliated with Clubs & Societies

- Melbourne University Chinese Music Group – CMG
- Melbourne University Sri Lankan Students’ Association – MUSLSA

The student theatre community at UHT is exciting, varied and energetic. Groups presented 25 performances across the Guild and Union Theatres.



2022 Union House Theatre Program

- SummerFest
- Scratch Night
- Writer in Residence Program
- *Nora: A Doll's House*
- Farewell to the Original UHT Venues
- Play Reading Mini-fest
- Peer Mentor Program
- WinterFest
- Red Creative Development
- Theatre Board History Project
- Awards Night

Workshop Program

UHT runs a diverse workshop program covering everything from performance training, cross-disciplinary practice, back-stage skills and budgeting.

Creative Workshops

- Page to Stage
- Creating Creative Ideas
- Acting Essentials
- Eat Cake and Talk Theatre
- Directing Text
- Ideas & the Body
- Making New Work from the Archives
- Voice Essentials
- *Red* Adaptation

Backstage Workshops

- Risk Management
- Lighting
- Production Management
- Sound
- Power Tools
- Set Design
- Marketing
- Budgeting for Theatre



UHT Production

NORA

:A Doll's House



UHT presented *Nora: A Doll's House* in the old Union Theatre, 26–30 April.

This play takes Ibsen's Nora and situates her in 1918, 1968, and 2018, to chart the progress society has made over 100 years, yet it also acknowledges just how little has changed in the fight for women's rights. This production of *Nora: A Doll's House* marked the final time that UHT used the Union Theatre in Union House — a venue that has served the community so well since 1938.

In a new era for student theatre at UMSU, we then transitioned our activities to the Arts and Cultural building in the Student Precinct at Parkville campus. Performing a political piece, with a nod to history and new questions for the future seemed like a fitting way to end our residence at Union House and move to new stages.

This production reminded us of what UHT has become known for — theatrical experimentation, giving voice to, and encouraging the creative journeys of, students. With this work we engaged a new generation of student artists and invited them into the next act of theatre on campus. An amazing team of professionals came together to support them — directing, designing and managing the environment where the students' performances could flourish.

Ensemble

Shravya Akkapeddi
Leah Bourne
Elizabeth Dewing
Smriti Hosur
Abigail Kargbo
Afreen Khan
Sam Kouryialas
James Madsen-Smith
Cassidy McCredie Pledger
Anannya Musale
Luci Rawson
Tulipa Rodriguez-Quin

Creatives and Crew

Directors – Xanthe Beesley & Liv Satchell
Artistic Associate – Dominic Weintraub
Costume Designer – Natalie Gillis
Costume Assistant – Lauren Williams
Makeup Assistant – Vaishnavi Ravikrishna
Set Designer – Claudia Mirabello
Lighting Designer – Giovanna Yate González
Sound Designer – Connor Ross
Sound Design Mentee/Operator – Ella Roberts
Stage Manager – Max Woods
Assistant Stage Manager – Maleea Hegarty
Production Manager – Tom Brayshaw
Head Technician – Clynton Jones
Stage Carpenter – Allen Laverty
Marketing – Erin Adams
Marketing Assistant – Linh Phan

'Being cast in Nora: A Doll's House gave me an opportunity to act for the first time, being brilliantly guided by the directors as well as having space to explore theatre on my own. I have learnt so much during the entire process of the play's rehearsals and performances, and have shared lovely moments with the cast members, student peer mentors, costume and set designers, and the directors. Being a part of the production has been a fulfilling learning experience.'

Annanya Musale
Christine 2, Nora: A Doll's House

'Working on Nora was a life changing opportunity for me. I had the chance to work with incredible theatre professionals that taught me so much about the process and encouraged so much self-growth. It has been the highlight of my time at University and I couldn't be more grateful for everything I've learned and all of the wonderful people I've met. All I can say is thank you so much to UHT and the amazing staff that create such a safe creative space for students, it's much needed and a vital part of our campus culture.'

Leah Bourne
Nora 1, Nora: A Doll's House



UHT Peer Mentors



The UHT Peer Mentors had a very busy time on campus this year. Catching up on time lost during 2021's lockdowns, we ran a total of 16 initiatives, ranging from the social to the creative. We loved meeting new students through our pizza parties, Friday night pub hangs and our theatre club. We were inspired by students' contributions to the alumni networking event and the student theatre podcast. And we were heartened by those students who challenged themselves through our tailored mentorships and our Acting 101 workshops. In 2023, we will be continuing on our quest to make student theatre cool — with some ambitious ideas in the works.

Dominic Weintraub and Sodi Murphy-Shrives
UHT Peer Mentors

The Dialog

Student Theatre Review Team

In 2022 *The Dialog* has been no small beast to manage. Between lodgings at the newly minted Arts and Cultural building, an ever-expanding team of writers and sub-editors, and more theatre to enjoy than ever, it has been a fabulous year in review. And what a range of talent we have seen! From UniMelb students and alumni to Bell Shakespeare and the Melbourne Fringe Festival, we have reviewed 31 (!!) shows. Phew — what a year. To more critical engagement, and delightful explorations in theatre.

Nikita Mohar-Williams
The Dialog, Editor



Writer in Residence Program

In 2022 UHT continued its Writer in Residence Program in collaboration with La Mama Theatre.

The Writer in Residence program was an opportunity for 12 emerging writers to work with professional playwrights over 6 months, developing their unique style and voice as writers of new works for stage. Students participated in workshops, one-on-one sessions, and brought their ideas to the stage in the Playwrighting mini-fest, in the Guild Theatre as part of the Tastings Festival. Over one glorious afternoon writers took that important next step of sharing their words with an audience for the first time. Many of the works incubated in this program will go on to have future development opportunities at La Mama Explorations, with Student Theatre Groups and in UHT's program of activities in 2023.

The two professional mentors were Melissa Reeves and Tasnim Hossain.

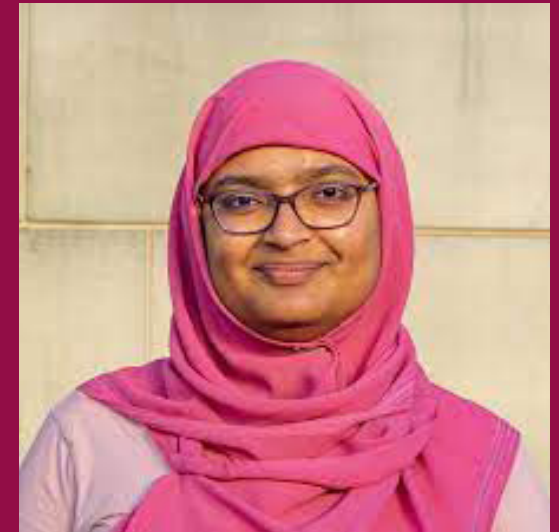
Melissa Reeves writes: "It was a great pleasure to connect with the six writers and play with various approaches to creating writing for performance over six sessions. I very much enjoyed encountering the different theatrical worlds the students gravitated to, and hopefully offering some new ways into the work, giving it the best possible chance of being original, vibrant and strong. The students were a joy to be with. They were generous and creative, diving into writing challenges at the drop of a hat."

"I found the Writer in Residence program to be such a valuable experience. I learnt so many new ways to approach my writing, and it was so interesting hearing from a real industry professional about their practice. It definitely made me more confident as a writer and I'm really excited to continue applying these new skills to my writing in the future!"

Alexia Shaw
2022 WIR participant



Melissa Reeves



Tasnim Hossain

Production Report



“We really enjoyed working with the UHT team and the production meetings were super helpful. We are so very grateful.”

2022 was yet another year of new things for UHT’s Production Department — not least of all two new venues to figure out!

It was just in time that after successive years of Covid-induced interruptions to student theatre, we finally returned to a full season of shows in the original Union and Guild theatres in Semester 1. We dusted off the cabling, the microphones, the curtains, and our own joints, and helped student theatre groups to shine the lights and turn up the sound for the last time in these iconic venues before moving across to our new forever home in the Arts and Cultural Building.

The new Union and Guild theatres (and the stunning natural-light-filled new Workshop!) greeted us in Semester 2 with new ways of working and plenty to adapt to. Still hot off the press when we bumped in the first ever show in these spaces, there was lots to discover and lots to learn.

From exciting joys (a sound console advanced enough to coordinate a NASA moon landing) to some new challenges (a sound console advanced enough to coordinate a NASA moon landing), with the patience and expertise of our team we helped 15 student productions find their way to the stage and worked hard on everything that will be possible in 2023 and beyond.

UHT Awards 2022



The UHT year wouldn't be complete without a night celebrating the student theatre community's achievements.

In 2022 we were thrilled to be back in person after two ceremonies on Zoom, with the first award ceremony ever held in the new venues. It was a huge success and offered a great platform to acknowledge the burgeoning creativity happening at UHT. Prizes were proudly supported by the University of Melbourne Theatre Board. There were 33 awards providing prizes for professional development/industry opportunities and 'best of' categories.

The Awards Committee is made up of seven students who are representative of the Student Theatre Community. The committee volunteered their time to see all 25 theatre productions as well as meeting four times throughout the year to collate nominations and select the categories and winners. We thank them for their huge commitment to make this awards program a success.

UHT heartily congratulates all students who were involved in student theatre this year!

Mentorship

Supporting, advising and advocating for students continues to be a significant focus of UHT's annual activities and programs.

Formal and informal mentoring opportunities exist at every level of the of organisation. Whether students are just starting out, trying something new or looking to take their first steps into the industry, our experienced staff were able to guide, challenge and celebrate each step of the way.

As well as a full program of mentoring activities within UHT, we also drew on a wealth of connections to industry professionals from various disciplines to continue to empower students as they progress on their creative journey.

Mentorships available within UHT:

- Artistic Leadership
- Producer Network
- Production Management
- Arts Administration/Marketing
- Technical (Sound/Light)
- Stage Carpentry/Set Building

"All the staff were willing to give up their time and knowledge wherever possible, and go above and beyond."

"I found working on Nora a great way to re-engage with the theatre community at the University post-lockdowns. It was a really positive learning experience to be guided by Liv and Xanthe. I feel that I grew as a performer and collaborator, and was immensely proud of the work."

Theatre Board History Project



Costume exploration from Samantha Thompson's *Join the Club*
Photo by Liv Satchell

The University of Melbourne has one of the longest histories of student theatre in Australia. In the last 20 years alone, over 150 individual student theatre groups have taken part in presenting a staggering 535 productions. This rich history is documented in the Melbourne University Student Theatre (MUST) online archive, which is bursting at the seams. Wherever you look, you can uncover students finding new and innovative ways to tell the stories on stage that have mattered to them.

In 2022, Union House Theatre worked alongside the University of Melbourne Theatre Board to explore student theatre history on campus. Contracted by the Board, Artist Liv Satchell led the group in an exploration titled “Student Theatre Archive Project” which was also supported by Melbourne Theatre Company, in particular Jeremy Rice – Head of Education and Families.

Semester 2 saw 15 students participating in a six-week workshop series exploring the last 20 years in student theatre on campus, as a springboard for writing their own page in the MUST history book. They developed the tools to generate their own creative ideas and learned how to communicate them to potential collaborators and to the people who can support their work.

The participating students included:

- Tulipa Rodriguez-Quin: love letter to that girl in the pink scarf
- Edwina Jackson: Space Walk
- Amy Penning: Finding Home
- Frankey Chung: RUSH
- Samantha Thompson: Join the Club
- Sara Norman: Can't Get Out of Bed
- James Madsen-Smith: Spheres

Farewell to the Original Union House Venues

On Thursday 25 August, a delightful crowd of student theatre alumni spanning several generations joined us to say a big farewell to the original theatre venues in Union House.

The event was an informal celebration on the stage of the Union Theatre and guests were invited to reminisce and wander through the Union, Guild Theatre and Des Connor Room one final time.

These venues have been a place of refuge and creativity for so many, and the stories shared on the night were full of passion and joy. With such a long and rich history, we know that student theatre will prevail in its new home.

Thank you to everyone in our community for your support in 2022.

STAFF

Artistic Director / Theatre Coordinator - **Xanthe Beesley**

Production Coordinator - **Connor Ross**

Head Technician - **Clynton Jones**

Administration and Development Officer - **Erin Adams**

Stage Carpenter - **Allen Laverty**

Production and Venue Manager (until April 2022) - **Tom Brayshaw**

"There was so much support and I never felt hesitation to come for help. Everyone was so welcoming and lovely from the beginning. This was crucial to the success of our show!"



**UNION
HOUSE
THEATRE**



umsu.unimelb.edu.au/theatre