

MEDIA RELEASE: Tuesday May 4 2010



Capital funding catapults Circus Oz towards new digs in Collingwood

Circus Oz, Victoria's internationally acclaimed contemporary circus, is thrilled with the Victorian Government's budget announcement today, that 3 million dollars has been allocated towards Stage One of the development of their new home in Collingwood.

Stage One will involve a detailed engineering study and designs for a new purpose built home on the site of the former TAFE complex in Johnston Street, Collingwood. This locale holds great significance for the company. The young troupe began a ground-breaking 35-week season at the Last Laugh in Collingwood in 1979. Its first ever Big Top was stitched together in the basement of the Pram Factory (which is now the location of Cinema Nova) just down the road in Carlton in the previous year.

Credited with revitalising a traditional art-form in a uniquely Australian way, Circus Oz has influenced the development of circus arts around the world for 30 years, undertaking its first critically acclaimed international tour in 1980. The company is the only Victorian based arts organisation categorised as an 'International' company by State and Federal Government agreement. As well as performing regularly to audiences in urban and rural communities in Victoria and across Australia, Circus Oz plays an important role in representing Victoria's artistic excellence and distinctly Australian humour internationally. The company has performed in 26 countries across five continents and since 1990 has played to over 1.9 million people.

Circus Oz Chair Wendy McCarthy has stressed the importance of this funding, "Our current studio in Port Melbourne no longer fulfils the needs of an internationally renowned, contemporary circus company. We need a fully-equipped, full size rehearsal studio to develop the level of performance skills and innovation we are striving for. We need a home where audiences can experience work in progress, with professional modern administration facilities."

Circus Oz has been searching for a suitable permanent home for almost a decade. For the past 16 years, the company has resided in a former Naval Drill Hall in Bay Street, Port Melbourne, where it trains and rehearses, runs classes for children and adults, High Flying Teams programs for corporate and community clients, builds its equipment and provides rehearsal space for many smaller circus and physical theatre companies and individual circus artists. Continuing to operate from the current premises, that the company has seriously outgrown, has been threatening the artistic and financial viability of the organisation as well as its potential for further growth and development. When all stages of the new, significantly larger facility in Collingwood are completed it will be possible to run all the programs concurrently rather than stopping during rehearsal periods. This will give Circus Oz the capacity to expand its activities and engage with many more Victorians.

In addition to the significance of returning to where it all started, Circus Oz is very much looking forward to joining the strong, vibrant Collingwood community. Circus Oz hopes the new location will enable the company to engage with many of the diverse communities in Collingwood including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the families living in local public housing.

An investment in the cultural fabric of Melbourne, this funding announcement is a significant step towards securing the future of Circus Oz, a Melbourne institution that represents Victoria's culturally distinct, contemporary circus arts, both nationally and internationally.

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