

Artform Impact

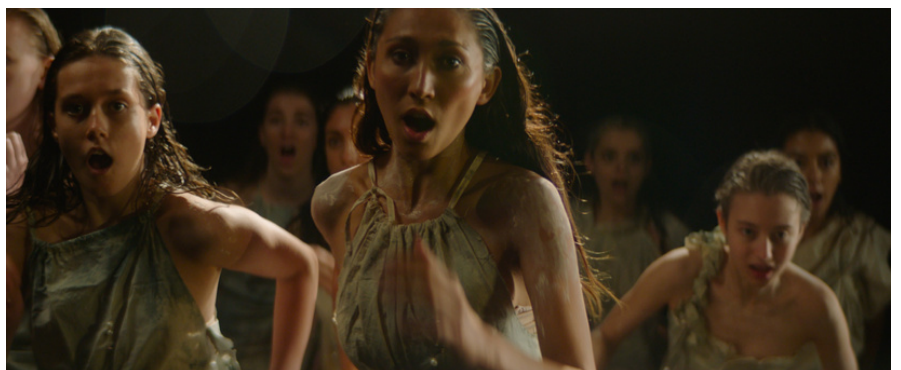


The House That Dan Built is a company that cultivates longterm, positive changes in the Arts by offering opportunities for women-identifying artists of all ages. We are dedicated to creating pathways from a girl's first music lesson to professional artistry, focusing on ensuring sustainable careers for women artists. The House embodies innovation within the artform by opening up fresh new ways of working.

The House approaches its role within the arts industry with the discipline and training expected from a leading vocal company, and combines this with inclusive, supportive community engagement processes that uncover ability and celebrate participation across regional and metropolitan NSW and Australia.

We simultaneously occupy high art spaces at major festivals - including Sydney Festival, Sydney Mardi Gras, Tokyo Festival World Competition and Venice Biennale d'Art - alongside unexpected community performances in our smallest towns. We are as celebrated in the context of the Venice Biennale as much as we are embraced by rural women seeing local stories for the first time in their hometowns.

This breadth of innovation within The House's approach allows it to have a major impact across its art form. The House pioneers an approach that understands how integral it is to ensure every girl who raises her hand has the opportunity to access music and performance opportunities. This directly correlates to the elevation of women-identifying voices and artistry that is the foundation of our company.



The unique approach that The House takes towards its creative and artistic process focuses upon collaboration and the elevation of a diverse ensemble of voices and performers. This approach redefines how works are conventionally created, and establishes a core, cross-age ensemble, who contribute their perspectives.

This is exhibited within our core House Performance Ensemble, which sees a collective, ranging in age from 14 to 30 train in voice and performance. The impact that this creative practice has is instrumental to the works created. Works such as *Tender Young Creatures* and *Salt* demonstrate the impact of a cohesive and diverse development process; the creation of a seamless work in which all performers work simultaneously as a unit and collective of soloists to deliver a show.



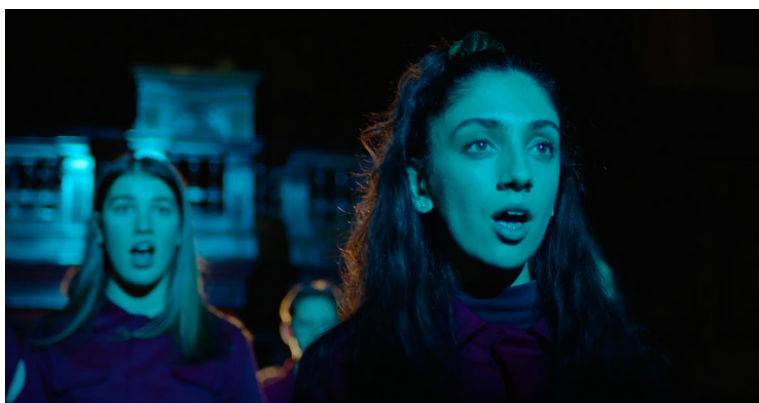
Of 15 orchestras and opera companies included in the 38 organisations that comprise the National Performing Arts Framework, only two organisations have female leadership. These statistics surrounding both the lack of female representation in arts leadership, and the elevation of female artistic voices are fundamental to our driving goal of raising girls' voices and advancing women's careers. The House challenges this lack of representation through the employment of 96 amount of emerging and female-identifying artists. This is seen through the following projects:

- **Festival in a Box.** In mid-2021, The House developed our goal of a festival that engaged with emerging female-identifying artists across multiple mediums in the creation of new works. Following the lockdown of Sydney, The House employed (35 artists) in the creation of a tactile festival contained in a box, to be celebrated and experienced from one's living room. This innovation of artform enforced The House's ability to be consistently collaborating and creating outside of the rudimentary boundaries enforced by conventional theatre and vocal performance.

- Contemporary Opera Commission. The House That Dan Built has always prioritised the elevation of female-identifying voices in creative projects, particularly in the creation of new works. In seeing this gap in the industry, The House that Dan Built has been developing an annual Contemporary Opera Commission, in which The House ensemble collaborates on the genesis of a new work with a leading woman composer. This process is vital to revolutionising the artform and has impacts both on its employment of leading and emerging creative artists, as well as creating space for works and stories surrounding the experiences of female-identifying artists to be heard, further richening the artistic and cultural discourse of Australia's performing arts industry. This artform impact has been realised through the projects *Bagatelle* (2021) and *Reverence* (2022) which involved developments with artists Sally Whitwell and Rose Riebl in the creation of original work.

"I am grateful for this opportunity and feel as though my creative identity has grown through this development. This program is helping young musicians to build their own creative process, discover their musical identity, and is giving more opportunities to women in the arts."

Jayden Selvakumaraswamy on her experience working with the creative ensemble on *Bagatelle*.



"The House does a really amazing thing creating community, especially between young women and older women, they create a connection that often gets lost. The House understands that everyone in that room has something artistically valuable to say."

Iris Simpson on her her experience in the audience of *Reverence*.



The Australia Council for the Arts notes that women represent only one-fifth of songwriters and composers registered with the Australasian Performing Rights Association (APRA), despite being 45 percent of Australians with a music qualification and half of those studying music (Australia Council for the Arts 2017). It is in generating and implementing these programs that The House leaves its impact upon the artform.

Audience Impact

The House That Dan Built is unique in its creation and development of work and programs that directly impact and engage in dialogue with our audiences and participants. These works are vital to the current industry as they enhance the cultural and artistic dialogue of the arts in Australia, and initiate conversation with their viewers that continue beyond the conclusion of the performance.

The role of the audience within The House's programs is core to the generation of our works. Every work generated within The House is created with a strong purpose and story to be told. The creative process of these works ensure that the experiences of our creative team and ensemble form the foundation for the work's themes. Because of this personal element to The House's work, our relationship with our audiences is incredibly important. Our works are created because we believe them to be important and relevant to today, and the engagement with audiences surrounding our works is essential to their message and impact being heard. This is evidenced further within works such as *Tender Young Creatures* and *Salt*.



Tender Young Creatures and *Salt* presented examples of innovative interactions with audiences, to further ensure the impact of the piece was experienced effectively. Both pieces undertook a creative process that saw the first-hand lived experiences of the creative team informing the work and music created. *Tender Young Creatures* takes a cross-age ensemble and presents the diverse experiences of women and girls walking home alone at night in an immersive performance space. This core theme and exploration is then presented through the structure of Red Riding Hood's story. In exhibiting this work, the audience was encouraged to stand and interact with the space. Performers broke the invisible barrier between the show and the audience to interact and immerse the audience within the world of the work. In doing so, this piece enforced its thematic explorations in an innovative way.



"With images projected on the walls the performers stood, crouched, weaved, whispered and completely engaged in the ever evolving space we all shared. We stood in the room, sat on a box or wandered as the performance weaved around us. Dialogue was whispered or chanted but mostly delivered in beautiful multi-harmonies music. The girls' beautiful voices were haunting at times in this dimly lit art gallery space."

Lynden Jones, Theatre Now (2018).

The House practices an approach that privileges the creation of new work and places a large consideration upon the active role and participation of the audience. This creation of work challenges the convention of what an audience's role within a performance is, and recognises a need for the revolutionisation of the position an audience holds in the creation of meaning. As seen within The House's projects and unique styles of creative collaboration, we engage in work that actively connects with its community. The impact upon audiences is seen through the dialogue our performances offer. We create work that actively connects with its community, extending a hand to our audience to join our conversation post show.

New, innovative works such as this are crucial to the diversity of Australia's arts industry, and recognise a gap in women's stories and voices being elevated. The House experiments in content and methods of performing and expression, the impact being an audience that is engaged in new and unconventional ways, and introduced directly into dialogue with the performers.

The House's creation of new works and our unique approach to audience interaction cements a connection with our audience that sparks conversation and encourages them to think about the meaning and purpose of our work long after it ends. These works challenge conventional theatre, and The House recognises the need for work that engages with audiences in this way, as well as the conversations that happen as a result. These new works for audiences to consume are those that actively engage and connect with the audience community. This work of The House is exhibited through projects such as AKIN and 100 Capes 100 Stories, which actively centre around the audience and participants that they feature.

Social Impact

The House has a role in nurturing what Sally Blackwood in her 2021 doctoral thesis identifies as, "a current generation of socio-politically aware singers [that] is less interested in being simply a 'voice for hire' or a 'cog in their grand machine,' and more empowered to question narratives and female and other diverse representation, and to actively seek out a more participatory position in creative decision-making." Taking an active role within various communities through the medium of performance is fundamental to The House's ethos.

The House recognises the benefits of collaboration through a cross-age ensemble, and the social impact this decision has in its capacity to reflect the authentic experiences of young female-identifying performers.

In representing diverse and marginalised voices, The House's programmes contribute to the cultural dialogue of Australian performance, and establish the social importance and responsibility to be listening to these voices. In creating works that represent and speak to an experience that is often underrepresented, The House holds society accountable to consume and elevate performance that authentically represents the society it performs for.





The House's social impact also lies in its ability to employ artists. The employment of emerging artists and creatives is vital to the continuation of arts practices whose opportunities offered hold immense impact and weight. Last year, The House employed 96 artists across projects such as Bagatelle, Festival In A Box, Toy Choir, and AKIN workshops. The effect of this was evident through the feedback received whilst working on projects in a pandemic. Artists voiced the need to continue connecting and collaborating as it was important for them to be exercising their artistic practices. Many artists expressed how grateful they were to be involved in art projects again.

The House follows the ethos that every girl who raises their hand should be provided an opportunity to learn how to use their voice and undertake creative and musical education. This focus further extends itself through our belief that female artists should have their story told and be provided with a platform to elevate their creative pursuits with artistic support. In placing these areas of opportunity and elevation at our forefront, the House creates a social network and community that artists and creatives can access and connect to.

Excellence

We have seen that pursuing mastery of skills is a given when the fire is lit; but true excellence can only be achieved when dedicated women have the opportunity to lead and share their knowledge with the world. Our commitment to excellence is demonstrated in the artists and companies we collaborate with on new, important choral works that broaden the canon of new Australia. To that end:

- In 2021, we commissioned celebrated composer Sally Whitwell to create *Bagatelle* with our Ensemble.
- In 2022, we continued our programme of collaborating with a celebrated composer with *Reverence*, written and developed in collaboration with Rose Riebl.
- We partnered with Sydney Chamber Opera on *The Howling Girls* by Damien Ricketson, which premiered at Carriageworks in 2018 and toured to the 2019 Tokyo Festival World Competition.
- We worked with Angelica Mesiti on *ASSEMBLY*, commissioned as the Australian Entrant to the 2019 Venice Biennale d'Art.



In 2019, our Ensemble featured in Angelica Mesiti's *ASSEMBLY*, a three-channel video installation that was commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts for the 58th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia. Curator Juliana Engberg notes:

ASSEMBLY uses and personifies the exilic energies of those who seek belonging in the community - the young, the female, Indigenous, the newly arrived and exiled, the refugee as well as the artist. Mesiti's performers play along to an inherited code, but through translation, improvisation, adaptation and re-interpretation demonstrate how a new music can emerge."

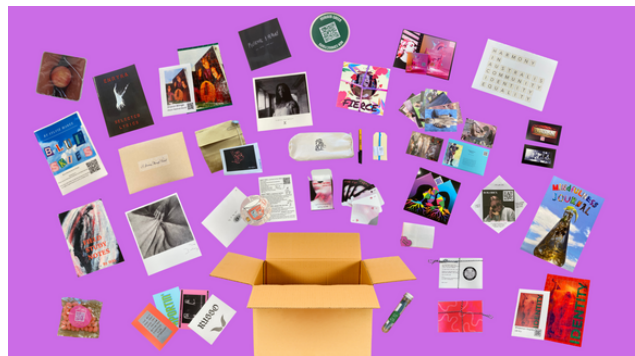
Juliana Engberg



Creativity/ Experimentation

The House creates art to make audiences and communities feel something. We link together in cross-age ensembles of girls and women to explore what is possible with the voice musically. Through this innovative process, we not only create original and experimental artworks, but offer avenues for audiences and communities to join in on the movement and be part of something bigger.

In 2021, we launched our inaugural *Whispers and Roars* festival for new sounds, new voices and new works. This festival is a safe space for young and emerging artists to bring something new to the table, show their work, and have the chance to explore new patterns, complex systems and the unpredictable. The House will continue this annual event within our season, fostering the creativity of emerging artists and providing a necessary platform for their work to be elevated.



Education/ Training

There is no other organisation in NSW that offers the training and creative education opportunities that we do. Our aim is to offer accessible music training to every girl who wants to learn.

Our AKIN training model is designed by expert musicians, performers and educators. We promote peer-to-peer learning under the guidance of employed Teaching Artists and Emerging Choir Leaders aged 18-30 who implement and run this program in their own communities. We know from years of running AKIN workshops across regional NSW that:

- Girls aged 13-15 are most likely to follow up and continue beyond the workshop with online interaction.
- Girls aged 9-12 are the most keen for the opportunity and will respond quickest to a call out.
- The girls aged 14-18 who apply will most likely already have music lessons, and skills on an instrument and are looking for a way to be able to write.
- Girls 9-13 who apply are looking for an introduction to music.



"I think music is a really great and rewarding thing to study, and it's a real way to bring a community together."

Grace Campbell, 2021 Fellow and Ensemble Member

Access/ Opportunity

We believe that the opportunity for access to the arts should be there for any girl who puts their hand up. We believe continual participation is fostered by ongoing support mechanisms, coupled with easy access to networks across all phases of the artists' journey.

We seek to eliminate these feelings of separation through sharing skills and experiences and creating music together to tell an integrated story of Australian women. Creating opportunities in regional and remote NSW is key to our program, as evidenced in the fact that we have worked with 1200 participants across NSW in Broken Hill, Deniliquin, Cooma, Nimmitabel, Berrigan, Blue Mountains, Lake Cargelligo, Narrandera, Gunnedah, Narrabri, Tamworth, Curlewis and Boggabri.

As a young, disabled woman from Western Sydney I have had my share of barriers within my artistic career. The House is nowhere near this. Dan has fostered a space where I, as a disabled woman can not only feel safe, but also encouraged to express and communicate in my own unique voice as a disabled person.

Bedelia Lawrencev, Ensemble Member



Joy

Always with joy. The House remains committed to offering our community joy through a synergy of performance mediums.

"I like playing music because it makes me feel really happy."

Akin Participant, Deniliquin North Public School

