PERTH FESTIVAL

Founding Partner UWA

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## Perth Festival 2026 draws to a triumphant close, with confidence, connection and a powerful view from Perth



**Perth Festival 2026, reflecting the vision of Artistic Director Anna Reece, demonstrated the role that an international arts festival can play in sparking community connection and evoking a sense of place, while cutting through real and imagined barriers to celebrate art.**

This year's Festival offered a clear view from Perth, shaped by First Nations stories, global exchanges and local imagination, inviting audiences to engage deeply with art across theatres, galleries, public spaces and digital platforms. The Festival prioritised connection, attention and exchange redefining what festival participation can look like.

The Perth Festival editions of the digital work A View From A Bridge by UK artist Joe Bloom – in its first circuit outside the UK – have already been viewed by more than 2 million people around the world, sharing the deeply engaging and affecting stories of West Australians with a global audience. Filmed during Bloom's visit to the state in January, the series commenced on the opening day of the Festival with Noongar Elder Dr Richard Walley OAM's poignant reflection from the centre of Kings Park's treetop bridge, with five further episodes now live and two more to come. Through intimate encounters shared far beyond Perth, the project demonstrated how a festival rooted in places can still resonate globally, inviting people to connect with this city wherever they are.

Encouraging audiences to experience art in unique spaces was once again a feature of Anna Reece's programming vision with opera in an IKEA store (Secret Opera), Phillip Glass performed in a forgotten office inside a major shopping centre (The Trial), contemporary music and stunning visuals in a disused power station (East Perth Power Station and Boorloo Contemporary), a street-based adventure through the Boorloo cityscape (the booster protocol), a corroboree under the stars connecting the ancient cultures of Gondwanaland (The BhuMeJha Project), ballet in a quarry (WA Ballet's Incandescence),and a guided tour of Perth's major venues and their accessibility issues with Hugo Flavelle and his Wonder Chair (Let Me In, Let Me Out).

Powerful First Nations storytelling and performances were at the heart of the 2026 program with significant works led by First Nations artists embedded across exhibitions, music, special events and public space: Lotterywest




Community Experience **Karla Bidi** (Noongar for "Fire Trail") flanking the river with open-air sound and light installations stretching from the hills to the sea and **Kwop Ben** lighting up Boorloo Bridge each evening were experienced by over 100,000 people, while thousands more gathered on the shores of Dyoondalup/Point Walter to share stories of Country through song, dance and music at the one-night event, **Nitja.** Boorloo Contemporary showcased bold new works by Western Australian First Nations artists through the support of Wesfarmers Arts, including Melissa Sandy's **The Void,** Kait James' **Blak Flags**, April Phillips and Friends with Computers' **Under Waters** and **Lance Chadd Tjyllyungoo**'s monumental light projections.

Featuring 13 Perth Festival commissions, an incredible 28 world premieres and a further seven Australian premieres across 24 days, the Festival showcased art from 575 West Australian and 144 international artists. Of 117 events in the 2026 program, a third were free to experience, ensuring broad access and reinforcing Perth Festival as a shared moment for the city where everyone is welcome. A major highlight of the free program was the spectacular dance work **CERCLES**, which saw 162 dancers take over Forrest Place to perform Boris Charmatz's choreography over three hours for three consecutive nights. A truly euphoric experience for the audience and the dancers and an unforgettable reminder of what great art can do.

*"With this, her sophomore festival, she [Reece] is making her mark. The director's philosophy for the festival has been clear from the start: Western Australia first."* The Australian, 2026

Upon commencing as Artistic Director, with a strong desire to tell Western Australian stories and to place commissioned new work and collaborations centre stage, Anna Reece reached out to artists across the state inviting them to share their stories. Let Me In, Let Me Out, Dragon I, Brad Rimmer's Loom of the Land and Melissa Sandy's The Void all featuring in this year's program as a result of that engagement.

*"Being a city on the edge of the rest of the world gives Perth a distinct perspective and offers our visitors something they won't find anywhere else,"* Anna Reece said. *"Our 2026 Perth Festival reflected that clearly. From free public moments to sold-out shows, from First Nations led projects to Western Australian and international artists appearing side by side, the Festival was shaped by this place and the people who make work here. I'm proud of the audiences who gave their time and attention, and grateful to the artists who chose to bring their work to Perth. It truly felt like a global festival city this summer, inviting the world in, while celebrating everything that is already here.*

*"Festival time is some of the best time in our city. It's when people come out, spend time together, learn, listen, love and play and use the city in a different way. Moments like this remind us why Perth Festival matters, not just to the arts, but to the life of the city."*

Across the program, sold out international productions sat alongside Western Australian work, with local artists drawing strong audiences and national attention. Ticket demand reached incredible heights well before opening weekend, with multiple headline performances sold out well in advance. Audiences were quick to secure seats for major Australian and international works including **LACRIMA**, **The Trial**, **Secret Opera** and **the booster protocol.**





Music events proved equally irresistible with performances by **Morcheeba**, **Max Cooper** and **Syber:013** at East Perth Power Station and **Martin Hayes** at St Mary's Cathedral as part of the new Sanctum Series drawing capacity houses. At **The Embassy**, 18 out of 20 programmed performances sold out, demonstrating how enthusiastically audiences embraced this year's unique mix of sophistication, sass and late-night revelry.

In its inaugural year at Lawson Flats, the **Summit Series** was equally successful with three sold-out sessions including **In Conversation with Joe Bloom**, the UK artist behind *A View from a Bridge*, **Poetic Futures** with First Nations poets, and the Sundance Grand Jury Documentary Prize winning film **Cutting Through Rocks** – bringing together artists, poets, musicians, filmmakers and thinkers to spark conversation and inspire new ideas. Perth's ultimate secret gig series for music lovers, **Astral Weeks**, also sold out ahead of its opening.

The 2026 Festival also marked the beginning of a new chapter for the organisation, with newly appointed CEO Marah Braye commencing her tenure.

*"It has been thrilling to join Perth Festival at such an exciting time to welcome Australian and international artists, and to see the city wholeheartedly embrace this celebration of a place and its creativity. This year's festival brought together First Nations voices and Western Australian artists with leading European theatre makers and artists from the Indian Ocean rim and Southeast Asia, opening a rich space for local audiences to engage, encounter and be inspired."* Marah Braye said.

*"This wonderful Festival is made possible through the support of government, sponsors and a community of generous donors led by Lotterywest and The University of Western Australia, and we thank them deeply for their commitment to the arts."*

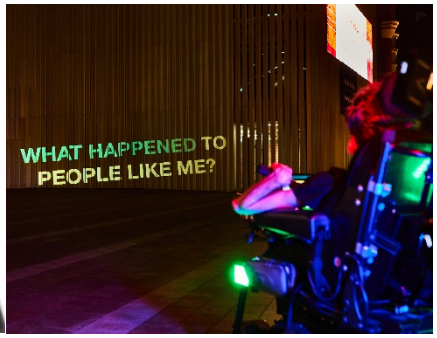
The iconic façade of the **East Perth Power Station** illuminated the banks of the Derbarl Yerrigan / Swan River with striking designs by Bibbulmun Noongar/Budimia Yamatji artist **Lance Chadd Tjyllyungoo**. His imaginative storytelling anchored the site as a gathering place by the water, celebrating its cultural and environmental significance. Lush wetland landscapes, animated with frogs and birdlife, mesmerised audiences and brought the location's distinctive sense of place to life.

This is the venue's second year as the pulsing heartbeat of the Festival's contemporary music program, bringing in record numbers of people across ticketed Main Stage and free Casa Musica performances. The buzzing atmosphere of this Lotterywest community experience – complete with food trucks, long-table communal gatherings, Synergy chill-out zone, and a lively dancefloor – made the hub a community melting pot to enjoy warm sunsets throughout February. Adorned with commissioned flags from Wadawurrung artist **Kait James**, the walls of the Power Station also became a celebrated canvas for political commentary and cultural pride.

Other Main Stage acts included **Baker Boy**, **King Stingray**, **Rebel Rebel**, **Max Cooper**, and **Sudan Archives**, bringing together a dynamic mix of First Nations hip-hop, surf-rock energy, boundary-pushing electronic music, and global experimental sounds.






Beyond the music, the East Perth Power Station was a dynamic hub for community connection and cultural celebration. Events such as **Under the Red Lanterns**, marking Chinese New Year, invited families and friends to engage with traditions, storytelling, crafts, and performances in a welcoming Festival setting. **Powerhouse** was also a night of celebrating emerging homegrown bands in a lineup curated by (and aimed towards) young Australians, spearheaded by Oscar Cvitan of Birdland, culminating in a night at the Power Station swarming with teenage culture vultures and music fans.

In venues across the city, audiences revelled in the theatrics and adrenaline of **LACRIMA**; were amazed by the animatronic puppetry and industrial stylings at **U>N>I>T>E>D;** held their collective breaths for the raw emotion and talent of **Songs of the Bulbul;** embraced the decadent song-and-dance extravaganza **Meow Meow's The Red Shoes** from Black Swan State Theatre Company; were enticed by the striking fusion of multimedia and intimate narrative at **Haribo Kimchi** and the inventive live docu-drama **POV** that delivered tender and unrehearsed magic – all lauded by audiences and critics alike.

The theatrics continued with bold new work from local artists and companies. Adam Kelly charmed audiences with a series of comical derailments in the AI dilemma **Dragon I**, WA Youth Theatre's **Scenes From the Climate Era** was a play about now, performed by leaders of the future and **Lé Nør** showcased the creative brilliance, theatrical genius and technical wizardry of WA's The Last Great Hunt.

The Embassy returned in style, with thanks to support from City of Perth, welcoming full houses for charismatic bluesman **C.W. Stoneking**, the soul-stirring musical depths of **Annahstasia**, macabre mischief-makers **The Tiger Lillies**, the formidable wit of **Meow Meow**, and the joyful antics of Miss TINA (alter ego of Ben Graetz) who hosted a powerhouse evening of epic ballads to a packed house in **What's TINA Got to Do With It!**

The venue's irresistible sense of romance and nostalgia drew both new and returning audiences to the historic Perth Town Hall for blended nights of jazz, cabaret, blues, soul, and even late-night karaoke.

St Mary's Cathedral in Perth CBD hosted the new fine music initiative Sanctum Series, where audience members seated in pews soaked up the brilliance of expressive Irish violinist **Martin Hayes**, the explosive harmonies of ensemble powerhouse **Roomful of Teeth**, **Åkervinda**, **Lonquich-Clerici-Mehner Trio** and **Echoes Through Time**.

Lotterywest Films introduced a 'festival within a festival' to UWA Somerville this season, inviting audiences to immerse themselves in a compacted program of local and international stories, screening up to four different films a week. This included the one-night-only world premiere of **Birthright**, a WA dark comedy from director Zoe Pepper. The much-loved children's program **Cine Wonders** also returned with a line-up of new animations and nostalgic throwbacks, collaborating again with Sensorium Theatre and Luna Palace Cinema on several popular inclusive screening experiences, and introducing The Revival House theatre in Como to the mix.

In addition to the Boorloo Contemporary works, the Festival's free visual arts program included WA artist Brad Rimmer's photographs and accompanying soundscapes at Walyalup Fremantle Arts Centre (on display until 19 April), lauded as a moving portrait of country, community and time; PICA's Awakening Histories, foregrounding the storytelling of art and artists and following trade routes and cultural exchange to recast history and Painting Itself 绘画本身, which re-positions the western art economy through an Asian lens (both continuing until 29 March); South African artist Thania Petersen's exhibition at John Curtin Gallery, tracing the interconnectedness of cultures, migrations and shared experiences (until 3 May); the extraordinary, never-before-seen crayon works in Birrundudu Drawings, and a celebration of trailblazing Balgo artist Gracie Greene at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery until 4 April; and Pascale Giorgi's solo exhibition of new sculptural works at Goolugatup Heathcote (until 26 April). **Biomass**, a living, breathing future brought to life through the magical worlds of virtual reality and immersive technologies at WA Museum, also continues until 12 June.

*"In her second Perth Festival as artistic director, Anna Reece has cemented what she accomplished with her first – an event that is ambitious and far-reaching while feeling intimate and pensive."* The Age, 2026

The Festival thanks Principal Partner Lotterywest whose grant of $9.6 million has supported Perth Festival 2026, Founding Partner The University of Western Australia, and all those who have made such a positive impact on the community by supporting the Festival.

Perth Festival ran from Friday 6 February to Sunday 1 March 2026
Lotterywest Films continues at UWA Somerville until Sunday 29 March 2026
Information at perthfestival.com.au

Event photography can be found here

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