

The Balnaves Foundation makes major gift to Ensemble Theatre

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PERFORMING ARTS EDITOR

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Neil Balnaves: photo supplied

The Kirribilli-based Ensemble Theatre, which receives no funding from the Australia Council or Arts NSW, has received a \$300,000 from The Balnaves Foundation.

Announcing the gift on Monday, the Ensemble Theatre's Artistic Director, Mark Kilmurry, said he and the entire team were 'absolutely thrilled' by the generosity of Neil Balnaves and The Balnaves Foundation.

'Neil visited our theatre several months back then phoned to say he thought Ensemble was Sydney's "best kept secret". He liked what we were doing, in particular performing the often confronting plays which we feel are important

on so many levels to help make us think about our society and its people differently,' Kilmurry said in a statement.

'This gift is a huge boost to Ensemble Theatre and its actors, writers and all who are involved in our wonderful theatre.'

The support will go towards marketing, PR, and communications expenses over the next three years.

'Our ultimate aim is to reinforce the Ensemble's place as a major and important theatre company in Sydney where people can enjoy a varied and wide range of productions,' Kilmurry added.

Reflecting on his gift to the company, Neil Balnaves, Chair, The Balnaves Foundation said that a flourishing arts sector was important to Australia's national identity, our individual and collective health, and the economy.

'The arts is the inception point for new ideas by helping us to stretch our imagination, stimulate our creativity, nourish our soul and help us process, change and make sense of the world around us,' he explained.

'Theatre is so much more than entertainment. Good theatre challenges our beliefs, helps us to empathise with others, looks at the problems we confront individually and as a society and helps us find solutions and ultimately better our lives.

'We wanted to support Ensemble because it does these very things so well. We want to see Ensemble grow, have its voice heard and help as many people as possible to benefit from what Ensemble does,' Balnaves said.

The Ensemble was established in May 1958, and bills itself as Australia's longest continuously running professional theatre company (in comparison, Melbourne Theatre Company has operated since 1953, but was first known as the Union Theatre Repertory Company).

Its revenue is raised through ticket sales, subscriptions, sponsorship and donations instead of government funding. In 2015, outgoing Artistic Director Sandra Bates [jokingly described the theatre as being funded by David Williamson](http://performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/news/performing-arts/richard-watts/ensemble-theatre-launches-2015-season-245514) (<http://performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/news/performing-arts/richard-watts/ensemble-theatre-launches-2015-season-245514>), in light of the financial injection the Ensemble receives each time in stages a new Williamson play.

The Balnaves Foundation is a private philanthropic organisation established in 2006 by Neil Balnaves AO to provide support to charitable enterprises across Australia.

Dispersing over \$2.5 million annually, the Foundation supports eligible organisations that aim to create a better Australia through education, medicine and the arts with a focus on young people, the disadvantaged and Indigenous communities.

ensemble.com.au (<http://ensemble.com.au>)

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