



**Wednesday 5 May 2021
Media Release**

**A high note to 2020: The performing arts industry
celebrates four leading lights in long-awaited
Industry Achievement Awards announcement**

**The Industry Achievement Award recipients for 2020
have been revealed and honoured:**

**2020 JC Williamson Award®
Deborah Cheetham AO and David McAllister AM**

**Sue Nattrass Award®
Jill Smith AM and Ann Tonks AM**

Melbourne, Australia:

Live Performance Australia (LPA) today announced and honoured four of Australia's most celebrated live performance luminaries in a postponed 2020 Industry Achievement Awards ceremony, which took place on Wednesday 5 May at Melbourne Recital Centre.

Deborah Cheetham AO and **David McAllister AM** have been announced as the recipients of the **2020 JC Williamson Award®**, the foremost honour that the Australian live entertainment industry can bestow. In awarding the 2020 JC Williamson Award®, LPA recognises an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the Australian live entertainment and performing arts industry and shaped the future of our industry for the better.

At the same event **Jill Smith AM** and **Ann Tonks AM** were revealed as the dual recipients of the **2020 Sue Natrass Award®**. This prestigious award honours exceptional service to the Australian live performance industry, shining a spotlight on people in service roles that support and drive our industry, roles that have proved particularly crucial in ensuring the sector's survival over the past year.

2020 JC Williamson Award®

Yorta Yorta woman, soprano, composer and educator Professor **Deborah Cheetham AO**, has been a leader and pioneer in the Australian arts landscape for more than 25 years. In 2009, Deborah established Short Black Opera with her partner Toni Lulich OAM, as a national not-for-profit opera company devoted to the development of Indigenous singers. Her first opera, *Pecan Summer* was a landmark work as Australia's first Indigenous opera and has been a vehicle for the development of a generation of Indigenous opera singers. Deborah is the founding director of Dhungala Children's Choir and in 2020 she established Ensemble Dutala, Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Chamber Orchestra.

Deborah's recent career highlights include an invitation to sing at the opening of the 2017 Venice Biennale, the Sydney Opera House production of *Pecan Summer*, performances of *Songs of Belonging* in Paris, London, New Delhi, Tokyo, Rome, Singapore and Sydney and sold out performances of her highly acclaimed choral work *Eumeralla, a war requiem for peace* on Gunditjmarra country at the Port Fairy Spring Festival as well as at Melbourne's Hamer Hall with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

As a composer Deborah's list of commissions for major Australian ensembles includes works for the Melbourne, Sydney, Queensland, Adelaide and West Australian Symphony orchestras, the Goldner Quartet, Sydney Philharmonia Choir, Orchestra Victoria, Melbourne Ensemble, the Australian String Quartet, Rubiks Collective, Plexus Ensemble, the Flinders Quartet and the Victorian Opera.

Deborah is a recipient of the Merlyn Myer Prize, the Sir Bernard Heize Memorial Award and the Melbourne Music Prize. Deborah is a member of the Honour Roll of Women and the Aboriginal Honour Roll in Victoria. Deborah was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of South Australia and, in 2014, was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO), for 'distinguished service to the performing arts as an opera singer, composer and artistic director - to the development of Indigenous artists, and to innovation in performance'.

A graduate of The Australian Ballet School, Perth-born **David McAllister AM** joined The Australian Ballet in 1983. During his time with the company, he danced many principal roles, including those in *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Don Quixote*, *Coppélia*, *Manon*, *La Sylphide*, John Cranko's *Onegin* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and Jiří Kylián's *Stepping Stones*. Throughout his career, David made numerous guest appearances worldwide, dancing with Bolshoi Ballet, the Kirov Ballet, the Georgian State Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Singapore Dance Theatre and, in 1992, as part of a Royal Gala performance in London in the presence of the Princess of Wales. In 1985 he won Bronze at the Fifth International Ballet Competition in Moscow.

In 2001, David took his final bow as a dancer after a performance of Albrecht in *Giselle* at the Sydney Opera House, partnering Miranda Coney. In July of that year, David became artistic director of The Australian Ballet and became the company's longest-serving artistic director. David invigorated the company's repertoire with a series of new commissions from the world's foremost choreographers, including Alexei Ratmansky, Graeme Murphy and Wayne McGregor. He appointed two new resident

choreographers, Tim Harbour and Alice Topp, and, through co-productions with leading international companies, secured major works such as Christopher Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*[®] and Yuri Possokhov's *Anna Karenina*.

As a director/choreographer, he gifted the company with a lavish and widely acclaimed new production of *The Sleeping Beauty*, funded largely through donations from philanthropic supporters, and three works in the Storytime Ballet series, made especially for young children. David's contribution to the arts was recognised in 2004 when he was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia. Last week David was awarded the RAD's Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Award, recognised internationally as one of the most prestigious in dance and the highest honour from the Royal Academy of Dance.

LPA Chief Executive, Evelyn Richardson said "Deborah Cheetham AO and David McAllister AM are true luminaries of our live performance industry. Their work has inspired millions of Australians and their dedication to the development of new generations of diverse artists and creators, is particularly inspiring, with their incredible efforts propelling Australia's reputation for innovation, creativity and artistic excellence through live performance."

Deborah Cheetham AO responded to her award "I am deeply honoured to receive this award. The JC Williamson tour of 1965 brought home to Australia the greatest soprano the world has ever known and in doing so began the process of reshaping the modern Arts landscape in this country. Four decades later Joan Sutherland received this award in 2005 after a lifetime of devotion to her craft. The influence of Dame Joan's career and work ethic on my own endeavours cannot be overstated. To be counted amongst those have previously received this award is truly humbling. My uncle, Jimmy Little AO, was a 2012 recipient of the JC Williamson Award. I can imagine his smile lighting up the sky knowing that the inheritance passed down to me from our Yorta Yorta elders and ancestors is receiving this recognition today."

Sue Natrass Award[®]

Current chair of Theatre Network Australia, celebrated former General Manager of Geelong Performing Arts Centre and former General Manager of the Playbox Theatre (now Malthouse Theatre), **Jill Smith AM** has created an outstanding legacy in service to the arts.

In 2019, Jill was awarded an Honorary Doctorate with Deakin University for her work advocating for the Geelong Cultural Precinct Masterplan, including the redevelopment of the Geelong Arts Centre, and the arts in general. As General Manager of Playbox Theatre, she oversaw the theatre's 1990 rebirth at The CUB Malthouse.

Her advocacy and action has included a focus on the development of artistic work by First Nations, women, multicultural and people with diverse abilities, working to ensure our stages represent the diversity of our communities. Jill has also been a dedicated advocate for the work of Australian playwrights.

A member of the Honour Roll for Women in Victoria, recipient of the Australia Council's Inaugural Arts Administration Fellowship, recipient of the Sydney Myer Performing Arts Facilitators Award and the Don Mackay Award for Services to Touring. In 2021 she was further honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

Ann Tonks AM has contributed more than 30 years exceptional service to the live performance industry as a cultural manager, passionate educator, radio presenter, academic and writer. Ann was Executive Director of Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) for over 18 years, overseeing the creation and development of a suite of new work as well as the company's beloved new home, the Southbank Theatre, as well as new headquarters and workshops in Southbank.

Ann has worked as board director, advocate, consultant and advisor for some of Australia's foremost cultural organisations, including Arts Centre Melbourne, Melbourne Recital Centre, Philip Adams Ballet Lab, Polyglot Theatre, Chunky Move, Back to Back Theatre Company, West Australian Ballet and Australian Dance Theatre.

Ann is a celebrated academic and writer on leadership, management and economics, with her book *The A to Z of Arts Management, London: Routledge*, being a favourite resource for arts managers and students of arts management across Australia and the globe. Ann is currently an Enterprise Fellow at the University of Melbourne. In 2011 Ann was made a Life Member of LPA. She is also a Member of the Victorian Honour Roll for Women and received an Order of Australia award in 2017 for her contribution to the arts industry.

Ann and Jill were honoured by **LPA Chief Executive, Evelyn Richardson**, "Jill Smith AM and Ann Tonks AM are passionate and dedicated leaders in the live performance industry. Combining outstanding management with strategic vision and insight, Jill and Ann demonstrate a deep understanding of the artistic process and the value and role of the arts and artists in society and in the health of our communities."

Jill Smith AM responded to her award "In the context of over 60,000 years of art, song, dance and storytelling by the oldest living culture in the world - a contemporary career is indeed truly short. I feel so fortunate that I have had jobs that I loved. But I could only achieve what I did with the support of many and, the incredible work of our artists. I have loved being part of enabling artistic pathways for new work by our playwrights, actors, other creatives, and arts workers. I am also very proud of the legacy for Melbourne and Geelong through the creation of the Malthouse and Geelong's emerging arts precinct. A key support of course was none other than Sue Natrass AO, and I am honoured to receive this Helpmann Award in her name."

About the Helpmann Awards

The **Helpmann Awards** are the premier celebration of Australia's vibrant live performance industry. The Awards recognise distinguished achievement and excellence in Australia's live performance sectors including musicals, contemporary music, comedy, opera and classical music, theatre, ballet, dance and physical theatre, presentation for children and young people, regional touring and cabaret.

Although the 2020 and 2021 Helpmann Awards were sadly cancelled due to the sector's inability to stage live events under pandemic conditions, the Australian live arts and entertainment industry has delighted in ensuring the continuation of the Industry Achievement Awards, bestowing both the JC Williamson Award® and the Sue Natrass Award® to dual outstanding recipients.

Past recipients of the JC Williamson Award® include Dame Joan Sutherland OM AC DBE, Barry Humphries AO CBE, Kylie Minogue AO OBE, Dr Jimmy Little AO, John Bell AO OBE, Paul Kelly AO, Michael Gudinski AM, Stephen Page AO, David Williamson AO and Archie Roach AM to name but a few.

Established in 2014, past recipients of the Sue Nattrass Award® include Michael Lynch CBE AO, Rob Brookman AM, Ian McRae AO, Carillo Gantner AO, Susan Provan AO, Rhoda Roberts AO, Frank van Straten AM and Liz Jones AO.

The Helpmann Awards are proudly supported by the Victorian Government, via its tourism marketing agency, Visit Victoria.

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For further information or to arrange an interview with LPA Chief Executive, Evelyn Richardson please contact:

Susan Fitzpatrick-Napier

DMG USA/Australia

Office: +61 2 8218 2144

susan@dmgpr.com

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