

Sandra Bates (Ross, 1955) – Full Biography

Sandra Bates was Governing and Artistic Director of the Ensemble Theatre for 30 years from 1986 to 2017. She is its longest serving Artistic Director of any theatre company in the country. She had a long association with Ensemble Theatre both on stage and as a director.

Sandra originally trained as a speech and drama teacher then studied Pharmacy at Sydney University and worked as a Pharmacist for 25 years. Sandra joined Hayes Gordon's acting classes in 1968. She appeared in a number of plays including LUTHER, THE GINGERBREAD LADY, DEEDS and THE SHOE-HORN SONATA for Ensemble and in A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE at the Opera House (which she later directed herself at the Sydney Opera House in 2000).

Sandra also wrote the play, WHEN IN ROME, which was performed for an Australian Playwrights Season, then enjoyed four subsequent productions.

Sandra became the founding Artistic Director of the Studios Rep Theatre in 1983 and directed eight productions at the Rep before being invited to take over the position of Artistic and Governing Director of Ensemble Theatre by its founder, Hayes Gordon on his retirement in January, 1986.

Some of the early plays Sandra directed for the Ensemble include THE MARGINAL FARM, BREL IN CABARET, SOME NIGHT IN JULIA CREEK, NEVER IN MY LIFETIME, the World Premiere of Alan Bennett's TALKING HEADS, A SHAYNA MAIDEL, THE BOYS NEXT DOOR, SINGLE SPIES, A DOLLS HOUSE, ROAD, HOPPING TO BYZANTIUM, OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY, MAN OF THE MOMENT (staged at the Seymour Centre), THE SEAHORSE, LIPS TOGETHER TEETH APART, THREE HOTELS, WAITING ROOMS, SOMEONE WHO'LL WATCH OVER ME, EMERALD CITY, THE LAST YANKEE, MR HALPERN AND MR JOHNSON, MONEY AND FRIENDS and WRONG FOR EACH OTHER. In 1997 she directed DEATH OF A SALESMAN staged at the Opera House Playhouse with Max Cullen and Lorraine Bayly as Willy and Linda Loman, which won the 1997 Most Outstanding Production Award chosen by John McCallum, senior theatre critic for The Australian newspaper. In 2008 she redirected this production at the York Theatre, Seymour Centre with husband and wife Sean Taylor and Jacki Weaver.

Sandra has also directed the Sydney and Queensland seasons of INTIMATE EXCHANGES, the World Premiere and Australian tour of DOUBLE ACT with Barry Creyton and Noeline Brown and the national tours of MIXED EMOTIONS with Lorraine Bayly and DOUBLE BASS with Henri Szeps, which she also directed for the Perth Festival.

In 1999 Sandra directed the Australian premiere of the New York play, VISITING MR GREEN by Jeff Baron starring father and son, Warren and Daniel Mitchell, which sold out and transferred to the Footbridge Theatre. She also directed the World Premiere of the first of David Williamson's community conferencing plays FACE TO FACE, which enjoyed great critical acclaim, transferred to the Footbridge Theatre for an extended season and toured throughout regional Victoria and NSW. In 2001 she directed the World Premiere of the second instalment of the trilogy A CONVERSATION which went on to tour NSW and Victoria in 2003 and directed the NSW Premiere of the final part CHARITABLE INTENT in 2006. Sandra was invited to direct FACE TO FACE for the Perth Theatre Company, which was then presented at the Brazilian Festival in 2001. In 2009 Sandra directed THE RUBY SUNRISE, which was her 100th production for Ensemble Theatre.

Sandra actively encouraged Australian content at the theatre and each year produced at least two or three Australian productions that were mostly World Premieres. World Premieres of new Australian plays produced at Ensemble Theatre over her 30 year tenure included David Williamson's CRUISE CONTROL, AT ANY COST, MANAGING CARMEN, LET THE SUNSHINE, WHEN DAD MARRIED FURY, RHINESTONE REX AND MISS MONICA, FLATFOOT, LOTTE'S GIFT, OPERATOR, BIRTHRIGHTS, A CONVERSATION and FACE TO FACE, Alex Buzo's THE MARGINAL FARM, Terry Stapleton's SOME NIGHT IN JULIA CREEK, John Misto's DARK VOYAGER, HARP ON THE WILLOW, THE SHOE-HORN SONATA, GOSSAMER and SKY, Australian novelist, Sue Woolfe's stage adaptation of her award winning novel LEANING TOWARDS INFINITY, the musical THE VOYAGE OF MARY BRYANT with book and lyrics by Nick Enright, Henri Szeps' I'M NOT A DENTIST and WHY KIDS? and Don Mackay's ACT ONE.

In 2000, to celebrate the company's 40 years in their Kirribilli venue, Sandra presented an enlarged season of 16 plays in four Sydney venues, at the Ensemble Theatre, The Playhouse-Sydney Opera House, The Footbridge Theatre and the SBW Independent Theatre.

Sandra's more recent directing credits include SIX DANCE LESSONS IN SIX WEEKS, PROOF, RAPTURE BLISTER BURN, HAPPINESS, BOMBSHELLS, WHEN DAD MARRIED FURY, THE GINGERBREAD LADY, THE ACT, FOUR FLAT WHITES IN ITALY, AT ANY COST?, JUST THE TICKET, RAIN MAN, NINETY, THE RUBY SUNRISE, DUETS, LET THE SUNSHINE, McREELE, DEATH OF A SALESMAN, BURNT PIANO, GLORIOUS!, RABBIT HOLE, TRYING, THE DRAWER BOY, CHARITABLE INTENT, A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE, CHAPTER TWO, OPERATOR, HUMBLE BOY, ART, BIRTHRIGHTS, THE DOCK BRIEF and AFTER THE BALL.

AWARDS: Sandra's production of DEATH OF A SALESMAN at the Sydney Opera House was awarded the 1997 John McCallum Critic's Choice Glugs Award for Outstanding Production. Her production of THE PRICE was nominated for a MO Award for Best Theatre Production in 2002. Sandra's production of SIX DANCE LESSONS IN SIX WEEKS was awarded the 2006 Glugs Award for Best Production and the 2007 Helpmann Award for Best Regional Touring Production. Sandra was made a Member in the Order of Australia in 2001 for her services to theatre and the arts. She was awarded the Variety Club Heart Award for Theatre in 2002. In 2004 she was awarded the Hayes Gordon Memorial Glugs Theatre Award for Outstanding Contribution to Theatre. In 2007 Sandra was presented with The Lifetime Achievement Award by the Sydney Theatre Critics.