

Adelaide rides new wave of arts

New Aboriginal work will be highlighted at next year's Adelaide Festival, write **Bryce Hallett** and **Michelle Griffin**.

FOR Paul Grabowsky, it's not enough to import critically acclaimed international acts for his first Adelaide Festival as its artistic director. No, Grabowsky wants to use the 50-year-old festival to foster a whole new wave of Aboriginal arts.

The 2010 program, announced yesterday at the Don Dunstan Playhouse, clearly flags Grabowsky's vision of the venerable festival's future.

"I've commissioned or supported new Aboriginal work across literally every genre in the festival," says Grabowsky. "I would hope that in future Adelaide festivals this can be seen a place where contemporary Aboriginal work can be shown as a regular part of the festival and as a concerted strategy."

One of the most intriguing works in next year's program is *Ngurrumilmarmeryu (Wrong Skin)*, a collaborative work produced by Nigel Jamieson, inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and featuring the Chooky Dancers from Elcho Island, using theatre, dance and video.

The visual arts biennale hosts *Putsch*, contemporary art by Queensland's ProppaNOW collective, featuring Vernon Ah Kee and Gordon Hooke.

Then there is *Wata*, a "kind of concerto" performed by contemporary music specialists the London Sinfonietta alongside the songmen of the Northern Territory's Roper River region, whose traditions inform the music.

"I think there's a lot to celebrate in bringing together the very, very old and the very, very new," says Grabowsky.

He hopes next year's festival will provide a compelling case for his plans to use the arts to create employment and leadership training in Aboriginal communities. "It makes a lot of sense when you consider that artistic practice is central to the Aboriginal experience," he says.

He plans to present this as a formal strategy document to the Federal Government before the next budget. "If it's seen as a mainstream employment initiative,



Elcho Island's Chooky Dancers are working on a new collaboration as part of the 2010 Adelaide Festival.

ative, it stands a chance of being properly funded," he says.

The program also, not unexpectedly, puts an emphasis on music, in varying classical and modern forms, but theatre, dance, the visual arts, free outdoor concerts and lighting shows are also well represented.

Among the highlights: the Wayne Shorter Quartet (Grabowsky calls them "without any sense of hyperbole, the best jazz group in the world"); *Shanghai Beauty*, performed by the Jin Xin contemporary dance troupe; *Good Morning Mr Gershwin*, a celebration of the American composer's music by France's Montalvo-Hervieu group; and an adaptation of William Faulkner's 1929 novel *The Sound and the Fury* by New York theatre group Elevator Repair Service.

The Womadelaide festival headline is Ravi Shankar, and Adelaide Writers Week features scientist Richard Dawkins, historian and travel writer William Dalrymple and novelist Sarah Waters.

Grabowsky's large-scale centrepieces, however, aim to give the festival's 50th

The biggest diva of them all

THEY call her Claudia. Many mighty singers have tackled Gyorgy Ligeti's imposing opera, *Le Grand Macabre*, since it was first staged in 1978, but the real star of the production that will open next year's Adelaide Festival is a 17-metre fibreglass model of a naked woman (right).

"To give a sense of her scale, my head is as big as her eyeball," says the festival's artistic director, Paul Grabowsky.

She will rotate upon the stage of Adelaide's Festival Theatre — as she did in Brussels, Rome and London — and performers will



make their entrance via her mouth, her breasts and her, ahem, buttocks.

Claudia is the brainchild of the Catalan theatrical group La Fura dels Baus.

"We came up with the body as a

universe to serve for the stage," Alex Olle, of La Fura dels Baus, told *Reuters* last year.

"We couldn't decide at first if it should be male or female but we chose a woman because there was more space."

(La Fura dels Baus) and Valentina Carrasco, promises patrons a bang for their buck (see breakout box).

When it comes to the marketing and promotion of festivals, the term "pre-eminent" is regularly coined to trumpet Adelaide, despite the fierce rivalry of interstate competitors in recent

times. But the City of Churches has cultivated a rich cultural platform affording exclusivity and experimentation.

"The real heroes of the festival were the audiences in the '60s who embraced new and different things, and encouraged its growth," Grabowsky says. "It's the audience that has made the

festival successful and I've tried to do projects for the 50th anniversary which are about the people of Adelaide and let them bask in their own glory."

Whatever the conservative pockets of resistance of the Adelaide establishment, the festival, with its sprawling Fringe, remains an important rallying point. "It's good that with my experience I can shake the tree little by taking risks and by having the confidence to be bold," Grabowsky says.

The artistic director observes that metropolitan festivals have been shown to be well run by impresarios but that practising artists bring another, arguably deeper, dimension. "There's a difference in head space. My work as a pianist and compose and my perpetual restless interest in other artists, naturally means I always think about things from a performer's perspective. I respond to colour, texture and movement, and like many artists I have a passion for the moment."

The 2010 Adelaide Festival runs from February 26 to March 14. adelaidefestival.com.au

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