



# bad machine

Written by Brooke Robinson

Directed by Lily Balatincz



### **Performance Dates**

Thursday 17 March – 11.00am school show & matinee + Q&A

Thursday 17 March – 7.30pm \*

Friday 18 March – 7.30pm Opening Night

Saturday 19 March – 2.00pm & 7.30pm Closing Night

*\*tactile tour at 7pm and accessible show – Auslan & Audio description.*

*bad machine* is commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre and co-presented by Campbelltown Arts Centre and Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre.

# Foreword

Campbelltown Arts Centre (C-A-C) has a long history of commissioning provocative and challenging art that sparks important conversations. *bad machine* continues this tradition, asking crucial local questions that resonates globally. *bad machine* lay forth the dark side of Artificial Intelligence, where a computer-generated algorithm devoid of human compassion creates adverse results within our local community

Playwright Brooke Robinson's singular voice shines a light on the devastating consequences of the Australian government's Robodebt campaign. Robinson took inspiration from anonymous stories from some of the 400,000 Robodebt victims and has distilled these experiences of fear and vulnerability into the lens of four characters. Director Lily Balatincz has worked tirelessly to do these stories justice, producing a powerful and affecting piece of theatre that provokes reflection on the human cost of political decision-making.

Actors Rob Johnson, Gail Knight, Abbie-lee Lewis and George Spartels have brought these characters to life

with sensitivity and grace, reflecting and validating the real life experiences of so many vulnerable people in Western Sydney and beyond. This production would of course not be possible without the efforts of the creative team; composers and sound designers Kirin J Callinan and Robbie Balatincz, Max's voice Damon Herriman, lighting and video designer Aron Murray and audio consultant Peter Lenaerts.

C-A-C is extremely excited to be presenting this outstanding new work, and we are proud to be helping to forge a place for reflexivity and reflection in contemporary Australian theatre. We wish Robinson, Balatincz and the creative team all the best with *bad machine's* premiere season. I want to thank Anthea Doropoulos and the Campbelltown Arts Centre staff for their incredible work in bringing this project to fruition, and a massive thanks to Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre for their support.

**Michael Dagostino,**  
**Director, Campbelltown Arts Centre**

# Director's Note

My first encounter with playwright Brooke Robinson was when I was the Creative Producer of Contemporary Performance at Campbelltown Arts Centre. She had recently returned from London to her hometown of Campbelltown due to Covid. I was familiar with Brooke's previous works: *Oysters*, which was produced by the Old Vic in London, and *Good Cook. Friendly. Clean.*, staged at Griffin Theatre Company. Brooke was considering the subject of Robodebt and we bonded over our shared frustration that an artistic work exploring the devastating government policy didn't already exist. That meeting marked the beginning of *bad machine*.

At its core, *bad machine* is an exercise in imaginatively fleshing out the human toll of the Australian Federal Government's automated Robodebt system, which was conceived when our current Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, was Minister for Social Services. The data on the crisis is extensive and mind-boggling. Before Robodebt was introduced, an average of 20,000 letters were sent out by Centrelink annually; during the Robodebt era

this grew to 20,000 letters per week (Shalailah Medhora, 2019). The debts came with no information as to how they were calculated, with the burden of proof of innocence placed on the recipient. The letters included the Australian Federal Police logo and a penalty of six months jail term for non-payment. Debt collectors were contracted to secure payments.

Over 400,000 people in total received a Robodebt notice (Jack Snape, 2020). The Department of Human Services stated that over 2,030 people died after receiving a Robodebt notice. 429 were under the age of 35. 663 were classified by Centrelink themselves as 'vulnerable', meaning they were experiencing illness, substance abuse challenges or domestic abuse (Shalailah Medhora, 2019).

It is suggested through personal accounts, media investigation and Senate inquiries, that many deaths resulting from suicide were connected to the Robodebt scheme. However during the Senate inquiry of July 2020, the Secretary of the Department of Human Services, Kathryn Campbell,

denied the notion that Robodebt had led to any deaths.

These figures are so overwhelming in their magnitude, it's difficult to comprehend the very real havoc wreaked on hundreds of thousands of individuals, families and communities across the country. It is likely we all know someone who was affected. Many Australians have received Centrelink payments at some point in their life, whether as a student, between jobs, or as a new parent. This could have happened to your neighbour, your mum, your friend or indeed, you.

The four people we follow through *bad machine* offer a cross section of Australian society, and Brooke gently urges us to consider our own biases toward welfare recipients and the stigma that can be attached to that label. We follow a 25-year-old law student from a privileged eastern suburbs bubble receiving Austudy. A 35-year-old former pro tennis player recently returned to Campbelltown and receiving Newstart while she gets back on her feet. A Greek-Australian man in his 60s living in regional NSW and receiving Carer Payments so that he can nurse his terminally-ill wife. A 50-year-old single mother working at Centrelink amidst the shift to a depersonalised automated system.

We connect with this disparate group because, though varied in age and circumstances, they are all vulnerable to the omnipotent pressures of insensitive government policy. It's not a stretch to

imagine the utter desperation of being in their position of powerlessness.

But living in a democracy, we do possess power, and we have the opportunity to exercise it. *bad machine* is premiering at a timely moment, ahead of the upcoming Australian Federal election.

However *bad machine* is not inherently political, it is human. But that's the crux of politics – in a democracy, we elect a government to represent us; our leaders are granted power to serve the people. The Robodebt campaign was an egregious misuse of this power. Although the catalytic background of the play's characters is the government's shift to an automated system lacking human oversight, our focus is on the people affected by these high-level policy decisions.

While this play concentrates on Robodebt, I believe there's a broader contemplation here. What direction are we moving in as a nation? Do we expect our leaders to have compassion and to model empathy? In a world with increasing automation, with jobs being replaced by machines, there are choices to be made. Technology can grant us god-like power – but how will we use it?

**Lily Balatincz**  
**Director, *bad machine***

# Creative Team

**Playwright**

Brooke Robinson

**Director**

Lily Balatincz

**Cast**

**Oliver/Ensemble**

Rob Johnson

**Eve/Ensemble**

Abbie-lee Lewis

**May/Ensemble**

Gail Knight

**Theo/Ensemble**

George Spartels

**Max's Voice**

Damon Herriman

**Sound Designer**

Robbie Balatincz

**Composers**

Robbie Balatincz & Kirin J Callinan

**Lighting and Video Designer**

Aron Murray

**Set/Costume Designer**

Emma White

**Directing Mentor**

Imara Savage

**Audio Consultant**

Peter Lenaerts

**Stage Manager**

Victoria Lewis

**Assistant Stage Manager**

Cindy Cavero

**Creative Producer**

Anthea Doropoulos

**Assistant Creative Producer**

Anne Cutajar

# Artist Bios

## Playwright

**Brooke Robinson** is an emerging playwright from Campbelltown in Sydney's South-West. She is a graduate of the Australian Theatre for Young People's Fresh Ink writers ensemble, Stephen Jeffreys' invitational writers group at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (London), The Criterion Theatre's invitational West End writers group in London and City, University of London where she completed a double MA in Playwriting & Screenwriting.

She was one of six artists to be commissioned for *Imagine 2037*, the imaginary theatre festival for the British Council's 20th Anniversary Edinburgh Festival Showcase and has had new scripts read and presented at other UK theatres including London's Drama Studio, Bunker Theatre, White Bear Theatre and The Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. *Oysters*, a short play on the British role in the international arms trade, was commissioned by London's Old Vic theatre for a special event in December 2019. She is currently under commission to Sydney's Griffin

Theatre after winning the 2020 Lyciscrates Prize for a new comic play on ethics and science.

Brooke Robinson's plays include *Good Cook.Friendly. Clean* (Griffin Theatre Company), *Dangerous Lenses* (Theatre 505, Sydney; The Sub Station, Melbourne and Vault Festival, London, UK), *Animal/People* (Tamarama Rock Surfers) and *The Telescope* (Red Line Productions for the Old Fitzroy Theatre).

## Director

**Lily Balatincz** is a performing artist, dramaturg, producer and emerging director who was born and raised on Darug Country in Western Sydney. She is a graduate of the NYU Tisch School of the Arts Graduate Acting MFA program and UNSW.

Her directing credits include *From Nowhere to Now Here* (Tempo Rubato, Melbourne), *She Bit Her Tongue* by Caryl Churchill (Studio Tisch, New York) and *GFM*, co-directed with Dina Shihabi (Freeplay Festival, New York).

As a performer, she has worked on the development and premiere of new theatre works *The Eggs* by Adam Rapp (NYC), *Meantime* by Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros (NYC), *Stop the Virgens* by Karen O (NYC and Sydney), *Weak Trembles* by Hal Corley (NYC) and *I Ragazzi* by David Goldsmith (NYC).

For her performance work, she has been the recipient of the 2017 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Play in Washington DC, the Dame Joan Sutherland Award and the Ron Van Lieu Yale School of Drama Scholarship. Balatincz was the 2020 Japan Foundation delegate for Australia for the Tokyo Performing Arts Meeting (TPAM) in Yokohama. She is currently a peer reviewer for Australia Council for the Arts and the American Australian Association.

## Oliver/Ensemble

**Rob Johnson** is an actor, comedian and writer. Some of his recent credits include *The Boomkak Panto* (Belvoir), *Calamity Jane* (Belvoir/One Eyed Man), *The Torrents* (STC/Black Swan), *Spamalot* (One Eyed Man), and *Rosehaven* (Guesswork/ABC). For the stage he has written *The Recidivists* (Red Line Productions) and *Fat On Purpose* (Giant Dwarf).

For his performance as Francis Fryer in the national tour of *Calamity Jane*, Johnson was nominated for the Green Room Award, Sydney Theatre Award and Glug Award for Best Supporting Actor in a Musical. He is a two-time NSW Theatresports Champion, and was a national finalist for the Equity/Second City Comedy Scholarship in 2020.

Rob Johnson's short stories have been published by *Overland*, *Aniko Press*, *Underground* and *Literatus*, and his non-fiction by *Audrey Journal* and *Switched On Media*. He was the winner of the 2020 Albury City Short Story Award, the 2018 Hal Porter Short Story Prize and the 2012 Best of Times Short Story Competition, and was shortlisted for the 2015 John Marsden & Hachette Australia Prize for Young Writers.

## Eve/Ensemble

**Abbie-lee Lewis** is a Kalkadoon woman who grew up in Western Australia.

In 2008 she graduated from the Aboriginal Theatre Course at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts and in 2009 she worked with Yirra Yarkkin Theatre Company touring the play called *Talk It Up* by David Milroy. In 2010, Lewis was accepted into the 3 year Acting Course at WAAPA and graduated in 2012.

Lewis has worked with Bell Shakespeare, touring their educational program, *The Players*, and in 2017 performed in the educational main stage production of *Macbeth* where she worked with James Evans.

In early 2017 Lewis worked on the original work by Seanna Van Helten, *Fallen*, directed by Penny Harpham and produced by Sport for Jove.

Lewis secured a Guest appearance on ABC's *Blak Comedy* and starred as Emily in the *Black Swan* production that saw three First Nations performers at the heart of it, directed by Clare Watson. In 2021 Lewis starred as Hermia in Bell Shakespeare's national tour of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and performed as Ida in *The Bleeding Tree* written by Angus Cerini directed by Ian Michael and produced by Blue Room Theatre.

Lewis is currently the Andrew Cameron Fellow at Belvoir.

## May/Ensemble

**Gail Knight** is a seasoned performer in the commercial world of television guest roles, TV commercials and voice overs. Knight's first foray into her 3-decades-long, full-time performance career, kicked-off with stage.

Beginning in 1989 at the much lauded Kent Street Theatre in Sydney, Gail's first role was in *Steel Magnolias*, where the character of Annelle allowed her to explore a flair for character acting and accents, while also unearthing a hidden talent for hairdressing.

Gail Knight continued to perform on various independent stages in Sydney and then Melbourne, from tap dancing in *Dinkum Assorted* to the deliciously farcical *Absurd Person Singular*, and the beautiful Irish play *Dancing at Lughnasa* for Heidelberg Theatre Company.

Since joining RMK Management in 2002, Knight has staked her place as a natural performer who constantly seeks to blend live performances with a successful voice over career. Recent performances include portraying a wife of an injured worker at the Hanson Safety Conference and a day-long improv performance to healthcare professionals, depicting three women living with gynaecological cancer.

## Theo/Ensemble

**George Spartels** is a familiar face to Australian audiences of all ages, thanks to his many appearances over the years in ABC's *Play School* and as Benito Alessi on *Neighbours*. Spartels has worked across the board in film, television and theatre for over thirty years. On stage, Spartels has worked with most of the major state theatre companies.

Theatrical highlights include: *Godspell* (original Melbourne production), *The Last Confession*, alongside David Suchet (London, Toronto, LA, Australian tour), *Hamlet* (STC), *Chicago* (STC), *Signal Driver* (QT), *Romeo & Juliet* (State Theatre Company SA), *The Levine Comedy* (MTC), Mike Leigh's *Greek Tragedy* (Sydney, Edinburgh and London seasons), *Losing Louis* (Ensemble Theatre), and *The Spook* for Belvoir Street Theatre.

George Spartels has also appeared in *Stool Pigeon*, a one-man show for the Sydney Festival. Television appearances include: *Packed to the Rafters*, *All Saints*, *Homicide*, *Cop Shop*, *GP*, *Fallen Angels*, *Rafferty's Rules*, *The Great Bookie Robbery*, *The Sullivans* and *Sweet and Sour*. His film roles include *Blame it on Burumba*, *Seeing Red*, *Mad Max III – Beyond Thunderdome*, *Out of it* and *Kick*.

## Sound Designer/Composer

**Robbie Balatincz** is a sound designer and musician hailing from Western Sydney. He is a graduate of the Bachelor of Music program at Western Sydney University.

Working across film, TV, commercial and music production, recent screen credits include *After She Died* (dir. Jack Dignan), *Sink* (dir. Cloudy Rhodes), *Twig* (dir. Adrian Nugent) and *Setaceous* (dir. Tel Benjamin).

As a musician, Balatincz has been a member of bands The Griswolds, Megastick Fanfare and Cassette Kids (touring member) and has toured Australia, the US, the UK and Europe.

## Composer

**Kirin J Callinan** is a singer, songwriter and guitarist. He is a founding member of Mercy Arms, and has played and collaborated with the likes of the Night Game, Jack Ladder and the Dreamlanders, Genesis Owusu, Mark Ronson, Alex Cameron and Connan Mockasin. He's known for his exuberant public persona and diverse musical output.

Callinan launched his solo career in 2009 with the release of *Am I a Woman, Yet?*. His *Way II War* music video won the 2012 J Award for Australian Video of the Year. Callinan's third solo record *Bravado* (2017) reached number 5 on the ARIA Hitseekers Album Charts, and the video for single *S.A.D.* was nominated for Best Video at the 2017 ARIA Awards.

## Lighting and Video Design

**Aron Murray** is an emerging designer with a passion for the visual. His work incorporates projection, live camera and augmented reality with the goal of creating unique, cutting edge ideas and effects for live performance.

Receiving his formal performing arts training from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), Murray holds a Master of Fine Art in Design for Performance as well as a Bachelor of Fine Art in Technical Theatre and Stage Management.

Aron Murray enjoys the unique creative opportunities offered in independent theatre and has worked on productions including *Rudy and Cuthbert Too* (KXT Theatre, 2019), *Degenerate Art* (Old Fitz, 2018), *Halftime* (The Hayes, 2021) and *This Genuine Moment* (La Mama, 2021).

## Set/Costume Designer

**Emma White** is a set and costume designer for stage and screen. White is a graduate of NIDA's MFA Design course and has a BFA in Sculpture from UNSW Art and Design. In 2019, White was nominated for an APDG Award for Best Emerging Designer for Live Performance and was selected for APDG's Mentor program. Since graduating, White has worked regularly as a design assistant to Elizabeth Gadsby alongside working in the costume department at Belvoir St Theatre.

Emma White's theatre credits include: as Set and Costume Designer: for Griffin Theatre: *Green Park*, Belvoir 25A: *Kasama Kita*, for Bondi Feast: *The Knife*, for The Blue Room Theatre/ Sotto: *You've Got Mail*, for Milk Crate Theatre: *Natural Order*, for National Theatre of Parramatta/Sydney Festival: *Boom*, for NIDA: *Stay Happy Keep Smiling*, *Venus in Fur*, for the Old 505: *Homesick*, for the Old 505/ Sotto: *Safe*, for Q Theatre: *Daisy Moon Was Born This Way*, for Red Line Productions at the Old Fitz: *Chorus*, as Associate Designer: for Hayes Theatre Co.: *American Psycho*, for Sport for Jove: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, as Assistant Designer: for National Theatre (UK): *Nine Night*, for Shakespeare's Globe: *Richard II*, and for Sydney Theatre Company: *Lord of the Flies*.

## Directing Mentor

**Imara Savage** is a theatre and opera director. She has directed award-winning productions for Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir Theatre, State Theatre Company of South Australia and Sydney Chamber Opera. She has presented work at the Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney Festival, and has also worked as a dramaturg with the Australian Ballet.

Imara Savage is a graduate of NIDA in Directing and the NIDA Playwriting Studio and holds a BA in Communications and International Studies from the University of Technology Sydney.

## Audio Consultant

**Peter Lenaerts** is a Belgian sound artist active in the fields of performance, contemporary dance, & film. Lenaerts is fascinated by empty spaces and invisible or acousmatic sound. Sound that doesn't scream for attention but sneaks into the listener's ear unnoticed. Sound without ego, pure sound, with a focus on the medium rather than the maker.

He was resident sound artist at the 2018 Hong Kong Arts Festival where he created music for *Vortex* by choreographer Wayson Poon. Other recent work includes *Non-Place* (2019) & *MicroSleepDub* (2015-2016). Apart from his own work, he has created soundtracks and composed music for choreographers and performance artists like Mette Ingvartsen, Andros Zinsbrowne, Salva Sanchis, Daniel Linehan, Eszter Salamon, ao. He strongly believes that in a culture dominated by visuals, nothing is as powerful, intense, and rewarding as simply listening

## Stage Manager

**Victoria Lewis** is a stage manager, choreographer, director and performer. Lewis was the Stage Manager for New Theatre's Production of *The Lovely Bones* (dir. Deborah Mullhall), *Pygmalion* (dir. Deborah Mullhall.), *The Removalists* (dir. Johann Walraven) and Assistant Stage Manager for *Lieutenant of Inishmore* (dir. Deborah Mullhall). Lewis has choreographed for New Theatre's Production of *The Grapes Of Wrath* (dir. Louise Fisher), Penrith Musical Comedy Company's production of *Big: The Musical* and DZ Deathrays's music video *Like People* (dir. Guss Mallmann). *Like People* was nominated for Triple J's J Award for Best Music Video of the Year 2018.

Victoria Lewis was Assistant Director for New Theatre's production of *Neighbourhood Watch* (dir. Louise Fisher). She has also performed in theatre shows such as *How To Make A Happy Meal* (dir. Nick Attins), *Tannos Collective* (Choreographer Stephen Tannos) and as part of *Club Cabaret* at Cake Wines in Redfern. Lewis also directed the short film *SKIN*, which has been nominated/screened in film festivals across Europe including London Shorts and Stockholm City Film Festival.

## Assistant Stage Manager

**Cindy Cavero** graduated from the Academy of Film, Theatre and Television (AFTT) with a Diploma in Theatre Production and began working for Sydney Festival this year as her first step towards working in the arts industry, to sharpen her skills and gain more experience. She was fortunate to secure the roles of Assistant Stage Manager for *Set Piece*, directed by Nat Randall and Anna Breckon, performed at Carriageworks, and *Thaw* performed by Legs on the Wall, on the forecourt of the Sydney Opera House for the Sydney Festival season.

During her time with Sydney Festival, Cavero took on smaller general crew member roles and enjoyed the process of bringing a production to life on stage.

## Creative Producer

**Anthea Doropoulos** is an experienced dance producer and arts manager with 16 years industry experience. As a creative producer she has fostered innovation in the dance sector by pioneering platforms for research, residencies, development, workshops and productions in inclusive and accessible dance practice for emerging and established dance artists.

In 2019 Doropoulos started her role as Creative Producer at Campbelltown Arts Centre and has successfully produced sell-out dance seasons *Explicit Contents*, *The Complication of Lyrebirds* and *Mirage* presented in association with Sydney Festival. Doropoulos has developed a number of industry recognised programs including *Movement Movement* bringing the dance sector together annually to improve and grow dance connections in NSW and discuss the issues faced by the sector at large. Doropoulos has also overseen a number of projects that engage with emerging performance and dance artists.

Anthea Doropoulos has a strong passion for community engagement and works closely with a range of diverse artists and communities to support a more culturally rich arts community.

# Staff List

<b>Director</b>	Michael Dagostino
<b>Business and Engagement Manager</b>	Mouna Zaylah
<b>Head of Curatorial</b>	Adam Porter
<b>Visitor Experience Coordinator</b>	Zana Lopez
<b>Curator, Contemporary Visual Art</b>	Emily Rolfe
<b>Assistant Curator, Contemporary Visual Art</b>	Hannah James
<b>Collections Officer</b>	Jasmine Kean
<b>Creative Producer</b>	Anthea Doropoulos
<b>Creative Producer</b>	Brittany Green
<b>Assistant Creative Producer</b>	Anne Cutajar
<b>Education Officer</b>	Edwina Hill
<b>Creative Learning and Engagement Officer</b>	Timothy George
<b>Arts &amp; Cultural Liaison Officer – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</b>	Brenden Broadbent
<b>Design and Communications Officer</b>	Ashley Murray
<b>Media and Communications Officer</b>	Ella Beer
<b>Little Orange Studio Coordinator</b>	David Capra
<b>Little Orange Studio Assistant Facillitator</b>	Julie Finch
<b>Arts Administrator</b>	Sharon McAndrew
<b>Senior Visitor Experience and Retail Officer</b>	Louise Snowdon
<b>Visitor Services Officer</b>	Mellissa Grierson
<b>Venue Technician</b>	Phu Nguyen

# Thank You

This production has been brought to life by our phenomenally talented cast and I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to work with a company of actors with generosity of spirit, intelligence and passion while workshoping and realising a new work. It wouldn't be possible without the tenacity and dexterity of actors Abbie-Lee Lewis, Gail Knight, George Spartels and Rob Johnson, who have tackled the challenging actor's gym nature of this play with grit and finesse.

I have also been fortunate to work with an extraordinary Creative Team. Lighting/Video Designer Aron Murray, Set/Costume Designer Emma White, and Sound Designers/Composers Robbie Balatincz and Kirin J Callinan have each brought their unique skillset and vision to this production, and their willingness to experiment with conventions of theatre has been an utter joy. This has been a collaborative journey and I'm so thankful to Aron, Emma, Robbie and Kirin for their dedication to this production's evolution from script to stage.

I want to thank Imara Savage for her insight, support, collaboration and

mentorship across every stage of this project – it has been truly invaluable to me. A heartfelt thank you to Midnight Oil for allowing *Power and the Passion* to be used in the production, and John Watson and the team at Sony for their assistance in facilitating this.

I also want to thank Stage Manager Victoria Lewis, Assistant Stage Manager Cindy Cavero, Damon Herriman, Peter Lenaerts, Shaun Driscoll, Luke Bowen, Ali Kadhim, Tim Dashwood, Maria Raskopoulos, Fran Mathey, Sweeney Interpreting, Gabrielle Wilson, Ashley Murray, Anne Cutajar, Mike Bennie, P&V Merchants, David Hawkes and Stephen Curtis.

Last but not least, an enormous thank you to Michael Dagostino and Campbelltown Arts Centre staff for their bravery in supporting the development of important new theatre, and Casula Powerhouse for coming in as a presenting partner for the show. A huge thank you to Creative Producer Anthea Doropoulos for her indomitable determination, multitasking prowess, and miracle-making.

**Lily Balatincz**  
**Director, *bad machine***

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ATT.



Located on Dharawal land, Campbelltown Arts Centre is proudly owned by the people of Campbelltown and is a cultural facility of Campbelltown City Council. Campbelltown Arts Centre is assisted by the NSW Government through Create NSW and also receives support from the Crown Resorts Foundation, the Packer Family Foundation and the Neilson Foundation.

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Campbelltown Arts Centre  
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