

ROSIE DENNIS AND ARTS HOUSE PRESENT

# DOWNTOWN

ROSIE DENNIS



## ARTS HOUSE

ARTS HOUSE  
NORTH MELBOURNE TOWN HALL

TUES 16 - SAT 20  
AUGUST, 2011

OPEN STUDIOS:  
TUE 16 - FRI 19, 7PM. 20-35 MIN,  
INCREASING BY 5 MINS EACH DAY

FINAL PERFORMANCE:  
SAT 20, 7PM. 40 MIN

## CAST AND CREATIVE

Writer/Performer: Rosie Dennis  
Choir: Melbourne Gay and  
Lesbian Chorus  
Sound: Gail Priest  
Production Support: David Murray  
[suture.com.au](http://suture.com.au)

The structure of this work was  
commissioned by Campbelltown Arts  
Centre as part of its 2009 Contemporary  
Dance Program. Downtown was first  
presented in Sydney at Performance  
Space and has since toured to Finland,  
Belgium and Brisbane.

Image: Heidrun Löhr

“Downtown is a whimsical work from an artist who fixes us with a searching eye and vocal rhythms that, although now comforting, still incline to the pulse of poetry...”

*RealTime*

## DOWNTOWN – THE BACKGROUND

### The Party

In 2007 I was invited to the birthday party of a two-year-old girl.

The lounge room was full of tiny people, dressed in special party clothes, double-dipping party pies, chewing and spitting out food that looked good but tasted odd, taking small bites from fairy bread triangles and surreptitiously putting the triangle, sans bite, back on the plate.

I can remember it was noisy and crowded. At some point in the afternoon there was a clown, a game of pass the parcel, lots of singing, a bit of dancing and a huge cake that looked like a frog.

I think I was the only childless person at the party.

### I met a woman

Before an excess of sugary treats turned the party on its head, I had a conversation with a few of the parents. We talked kids, day care, nappies, ALDI and, being Sydney, we invariably found our way to real estate. However, surprisingly, our property conversation soon segued to a much heavier subject - that of post-natal depression.

As a small group of four adults, we stood huddled in a broken circle listening to a woman tell of how the decision to buy a smaller, more expensive house just off King Street, Newtown, instead of a bigger cheaper house in the suburban part of Dulwich Hill, saved her from her own dark thoughts during the first eight months of being a new mother.

She spoke of regularly and routinely pushing the pram up and down King Street, the crowd of people serving as a reminder that she was connected to a wider community. It reminded her that she was part of something bigger than her, her partner and this new little person who needed her unconditional love and attention almost 24 hours a day. Living so close to the main street meant that she could satiate her feeling of isolation in a matter of minutes.

### Conceiving

Post-party I thought a lot about this woman and her story. I thought a lot about the comfort she found in strangers. I thought a lot about belonging and feeling part of...something... bigger than our own lives. I thought a lot about how a main street, full of shops and hordes of people, gave a reprieve to her anxiety and depression. I thought a lot about the chemistry between people.

It was at this point I had the idea to make *Downtown*.

### More than triangles of bread covered in 100s and 1000s

The work has moved beyond the fairy-bread triangles and small people in party clothes. Its content more broadly explores the theme of community, connectedness and belonging. However, what drives this exploration and investigation is the memory of this slightly broken, fractured conversation in a suburban lounge room full of distractions.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

### Rosie Dennis

#### Writer/Performer

Rosie Dennis is a Sydney-based performer, writer and curator. She makes work that is technically simple, emotionally evocative and has a strong connection with the everyday. Her work has been presented at more than 25 festivals across central Europe, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. She presented and performed *Driven To New Pastures* and curated *MINTO:LIVE* for the 2011 Sydney Festival. She was recently awarded the 2011/2012 Rex Cramphorn Theatre Scholarship to research and develop a new performance work with young people in Menindee (NSW), Arplarra (NT) and Blacktown (NSW).

In addition to her performance work Rosie Dennis has taught a range of performance-making workshops for Urban Theatre Projects, Queen Street Studio, PACT, Shopfront, Blacktown City Council, Department of Juvenile Justice, Holroyd City Council, Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, STARTTS and PCYC.

### Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus

The Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus (MGLC) had its humble beginnings 21 years ago. Through the vision of one man, Lawrence McGuire, and a host of supporters including the ALSO Foundation, a safe place was created for community members to express themselves through song. In 2011 MGLC is thriving, welcoming people from diverse backgrounds - straight, bi, gay, lesbian and transgender. MGLC has toured Europe, performed at the Chicago Gay Games and the Out Games in Montreal (2006), and took part in the Out and Loud Festival of Australasian gay and lesbian choirs in Auckland (2010). With their collective talents and the support of patron John-Michael Howson, MGLC is a community force of professional standard to be reckoned with, a group dedicated to celebrating the joy of diversity through song. The Chorus is currently preparing for a more traditional performance featuring the music of John Rutter and Karl Jenkins, to be performed at St Andrew's Church, Brighton, on 15 October.

## ARTS HOUSE

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Arts House is a City of Melbourne contemporary arts initiative. Each year Arts House presents a curated program of contemporary art featuring performances, exhibitions, live art, installations and cultural events.

Arts House operates as a multi-dimensional resource hub for artists: producing, programming, devising, supporting and funding. Work is presented across two sites: Arts House, North Melbourne Town Hall and Arts House, Meat Market.

Arts House values arts and culture that help create a world where people are actively engaged, aware and empowered to participate, politically and culturally, to make positive change.