

6 Artist case studies

Cheryl Ho



Advice from Melbourne Fringe helped non-disabled artist Cheryl Ho embed access into her award-winning one-woman show

Cheryl Ho is a Melbourne-based Chinese-Singaporean Actor, Maker and Director of Special Projects at Artwave Studio.

Support from Access and Inclusion Coordinator Carly Findlay helped Cheryl to set an achievable goal for making her work accessible.

She collaborated with Deaifferent Theatre, embedding captioning into her one-woman show [落叶归根 \(Luò yè guī gēn\) Getting Home](#), which interrogates the conflict between a woman's desire for success and her sense of duty and longing to be with her family.

She went on to win four awards at Melbourne Fringe.

Cheryl says:

'The process was actually really, really fun from a craft perspective... Working on the captioning and how we describe sounds, a lot of humour came through. It didn't feel like "another thing" I had to do; it was very much woven into the fabric of the creative process.'

'I wish that more artists would utilise the resources at Fringe, and not fear not doing accessibility right, especially for the first time.'

Chelle Destefano



Support from Melbourne Fringe has helped Deaf artist Chelle Destefano develop her practice and gain recognition as a performance artist

Chelle Destefano is a multidisciplinary artist and storyteller focused on centring Deaf perspectives, language and culture.

Having initially presented an art exhibition at Melbourne Fringe, Chelle performed a show in 2019 after encouragement from the Festival. This experience kickstarted a new focus on performance, with Chelle becoming a regular feature in Fringe programs and developing other new works.

Chelle says that Melbourne Fringe are very good at offering proper access provisions, and have been proactive in supporting her. However, she wants to see funding for accessibility provided separately from creative budgets.

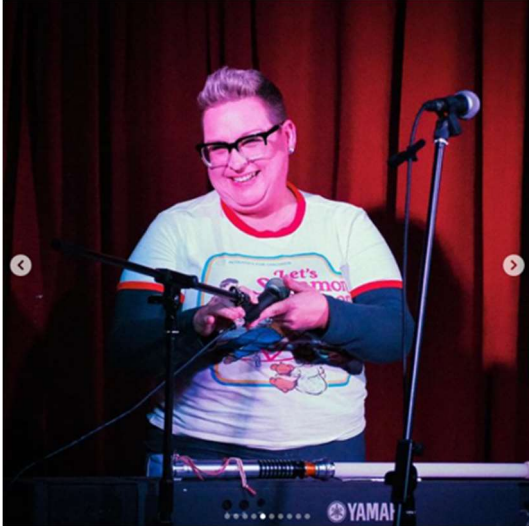
Chelle was recently awarded the Lake Art Prize for her multidisciplinary textile and performance work *Navigating to Safe Space*, which also attracted media attention. She is currently working on a major new project about Deaf clubs in the 80s and 90s, titled *What I Wish I'd Told You*, which will feature five other Deaf artists.

Chelle says:

'I want to help hearing people have a bit of cultural awareness. It's about educating and encouraging hearing people to understand there's a very rich Deaf culture and Deaf history.'

'Since I started the performing aspect in 2019, my career has gone right off. I started my masters of contemporary art. I've got a mentor... Fringe has really encouraged me to have Auslan in my performances.'

Jacci Pillar



Melbourne Fringe has opened up opportunities for autistic artist Jacci Pillar to perform at other autistic-friendly venues

Jacci Pillar (they/them) is an autistic comedian, writer, variety artist and producer with a background in anthropology. They are a PhD candidate at Melbourne University.

Jacci is passionate about the power of comedy to educate audiences on disability pride and says that having the 2020 Festival dedicated to diversity gave them more artistic freedom.

As an autistic person Jacci says they struggle with social communication and sensory processing issues. Their experience through Melbourne Fringe has helped them learn ways to talk about what they need, such as a 'soft spot' and no flashing strobes nearby.

Jacci describes Melbourne Fringe's 'Common Rooms' venue as a one-stop-shop where 'they all get it.' But they say there are big challenges in the broader scene and wonders how the organisation can have a flow on effect to every venue.

Jacci says:

'More conversations are now happening about stage access, lighting and sound for autistic people. They are shaping the space pretty rapidly.'

'I've learned ways to talk about what I need... The program has opened up opportunities for me at other autistic-friendly venues.'

Olivia Staaf



Winner of the Access Award in 2020, non-disabled artist Olivia Staaf hopes her practice will encourage others to make inclusive work

Olivia Staaf is an emerging theatre maker and producer, currently completing her Masters of Theatre (Directing) at the Victorian College of the Arts.

In 2020, Olivia directed and produced *A Recorded Companion* which received the Melbourne Fringe Access & Inclusion Award.

She said support from Melbourne Fringe helped her realise her ambition to make her work accessible in a range of ways, including captioning and making a sensory-friendly version of the show.

She describes the news that she had won the Access Award as bittersweet, saying 'To be recognised was actually sobering... It spurred me into action. I need to do more to encourage other people.'

Olivia's current arts practice focuses on a process that is socially-engaged, welcoming and inclusive. She is currently completing an internship at Back to Back Theatre and is also working as a Facilitating Artist at Footscray Community Arts Centre.

Oliva says:

'For me it's about inclusion – it shouldn't matter if you've got a disability or not – who are you making this work for? With? How can you make it inclusive?

'Fringe is very much a festival of experimentation... As an artist I was well-supported in the risks that I wanted to take.'

Heidi Everett



Melbourne Fringe has helped Heidi Everett on her journey to create accessible works advocating for mental health

Heidi Everett is a writer, multimedia artist, producer and mental health recovery advocate. She wants to create spaces for diverse people to advocate through theatre.

Initially participating in Melbourne Fringe as part of a show, Heidi is now an independent producer. She received a mentorship for emerging producers, which enabled her to gain practical tips and hands-on learning — an experience she described as a ‘huge win’ for her career.

Heidi’s practice has grown over time — she runs a range of mental health arts programs and has written her first book. She has also delivered mental health training to Melbourne Fringe staff — and is passionate about improving mental health accessibility for neuro-diverse people, beyond sensory friendly performances.

Heidi says:

‘We take so much care to put on a show that “goes there” but doesn’t trigger people into a stress attack through sudden noises, yelling, sex scenes, allusions to death and gore... I don’t want to sterilise works — but there needs to be a genre which is culturally respectful to neurodiverse people.’

‘Melbourne Fringe is the one space that supports people like me. Carly is great at doing that and makes sure doors are opened — or at least unlocked.’
