



# The Parsifal Project

## Newsletter May 2023

*The Parsifal Project* is a contemporary reimagining of the famous medieval legend.

This new theatre work from [Ink Pot Arts Inc](#) is now in its second year of development. To date, we have been immersing ourselves artistically in all elements of the tale – mythic origins, historical roots, medieval music, art and, of course, text - as part of our process to find meaningful resonance between this iconic story and the challenges we are navigating in our current world.

Our project is distinctive: it has 30-plus acclaimed regional and international artists and community members sharing collectively in its making; it is multicultural, inclusive of our Indigenous culture; and it combines traditional artistic mediums with modern digital ones. *The Project* recognises that the Parsifal story is a human story, mapping both our spiritual history and our modern soul development, and the production needs to reflect this with a mix of the contemporary and medieval media.

Moreover, this story of one person's search for spiritual enlightenment describes a threshold event, a window into the spiritual reality of the Grail, and is, therefore, a sacred drama for our times.

Through our extensive, exploratory process, we anticipate offering new insights into our understanding of Parsifal's quest for the Grail as a metaphor for modern life. If the story is our future, its mythic themes and symbolic language could be wayfinders for today's youth.

We believe it is a creative initiative suited to our times.

The project has four interwoven stages: research, script writing, creative development, and performance. Each stage is building the foundations for the culminating performance season, which we anticipate will be in mid-2024.

In this newsletter, we'd like to share with you something of our journey so far!

## Stage 1. Parsifal Unpacked

We began online in Winter 2022 by unpacking the complexities of the story.

Over six sessions and with 30 participants from different cultures, we compared the different versions of the legend that appeared around the 12th century in Western Europe to try to find the essence of the story. Dr Fiona Campbell, drawing on her extensive research and teaching experience with the Grail Mysteries, created an immersive experience of art and music that guided us through the iconic motifs and the soul gestures of the legend, interspersed with readings from the texts by artists Jo-anne Sarre and Paul Cleaver.

In small groups, we then shared our experiences of what truly spoke to us through the artistic representations. From the discussions, we then elicited themes that resonated with us today. Several themes emerged as especially meaningful to participants: the broken sword, the wounded king, and the many maidens who seem to act like mirrors to Parsifal's soul.

*'Most societies have come to define themselves by their historical myths and national narratives. We are, who we say we are... People grow up believing they live within a story ... what is the story we believe we are living within? Where is our narrative going?'*

Historian David Blight

And questions, questions! What does it mean to be wounded today? Where is the wasteland today? And what is the question for today we must ask ourselves?

Some participants reflections from the course:

*'Sometimes in the story, we are in the real world among characters, ... and then at other times we are in a spiritual realm.'*

*'The Amfortas pride – where did I act out of pride in the world?'*

*'How can we portray the many forms of 'Grail' experiences in our time?'*

## Stage 2. Parsifal Reimagined

In Spring 2022, we explored the five emerging key themes from Parsifal Unpacked through creative writing, as a first step towards developing the script for our play.

Having deconstructed the interwoven storylines of the Parsifal, Grail and Arthurian legends, we used this material as inspiration for reimagining this medieval romance in our own words.

Each workshop used one key theme as a prompt to explore its mood and meaning, using different writing techniques to evoke poems, short stories and word pictures.

One exercise explored the soul gestures of archetypes such as the Wounded King, the Hero, the Beloved and the Loathly Lady, using images taken from productions of Wagner's *Parsifal* and film interpretations of the Grail legend as writing prompts; another concerned crafting textual 'soulscapes' of the story while listening to music from the Crusades or a traditional Catalan song, *El Cant dels Aucells*.

Perhaps the most demanding creative work we attempted was our final workshop on writing a new Grail Rite. Using consonance and anaphora, we crafted short but powerful verses that brought us to the altar of the Grail. For example:

*Kneel before it — the time has come.  
Kneel before it — drink in the Light.  
Kneel before it — to set oneself aright  
— the sacrifice made  
has brought me to the golden Light.  
the darkness — illuminated.  
the darkness — vanquished.  
the stone revealed: transformation attained.  
the stone revealed: worthy of the spiritual ideal.  
I have attained: the question asked.  
I have attained: the knowledge given.  
I have attained: whom I seek.  
It is -I- emblazoned upon the world.*

We finished Stage 2 and the year with the exciting news of a major Country Arts SA Project Grant. This enabled us to launch the next stage of our sacred theatre work, *Parsifal Rescripted*.



## Stage 3. Parsifal Rescripted

Now Autumn 2023, we are in the process of bringing our collective experience to further the script creation.

From January to April, our collective of professionals and community members worked together on stage at the Living Arts Centre at Mt Barker Waldorf School, finding their relationship to the story and forming a group of collaborators.

These sessions have provided local insights for our international playwright Peter Oswald, who is now deep in the process of crafting the reimagined Parsifal script for us. A notable variation in our script is the depiction of the story through the eyes of the women of the tale, highlighting their role of modern community in enabling each of our unique spiritual journeys.

During our final March weekend, the company focused on developing a performative style that embodies the transformation that takes place in Parsifal's soul/spiritual life.

In tandem with the script development, our directorial group (director, scriptwriter and researcher) have ongoing Zoom conversations to work through the interplay of ideas and material that continually emerge through our stage work.

We also have a special Circle of Care group, who carry the spiritual responsibility for this emergent process. As well as the directorial group, this Circle includes Penelope Lait and Jolyon Bromley, who both have more than 30 years of expertise working with Steiner's Mystery Dramas.

To date, we've experimented with the choreographic, instrumental, choral, soundscape and projection elements while working through the draft script. We've also explored layering ancient cultural elements of Indigenous Australia with the medieval narrative and those modern multicultural experiences that need to be voiced.

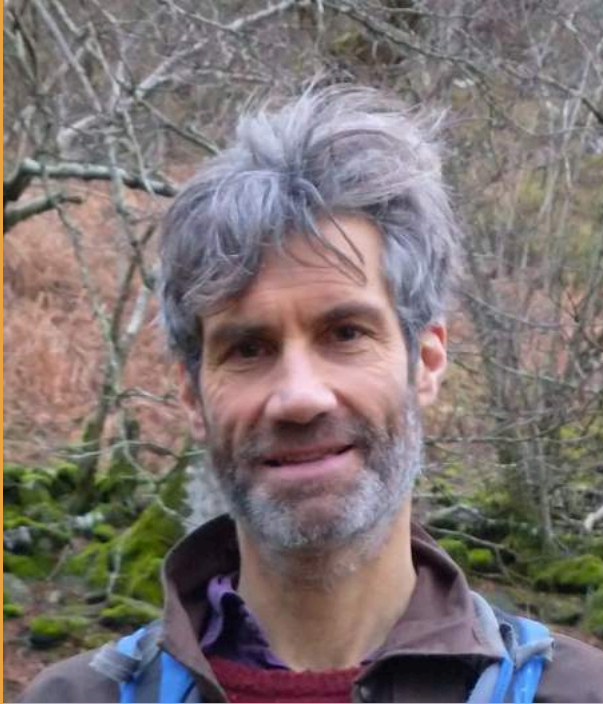
Moving in and out of the liminal spaces created by this bricolage of intertextuality is a particular challenge and one that makes our Parsifal Project, we believe, so distinctive!





## Introducing the playwright

Peter Oswald is an English poet and playwright with enviable credentials in the theatre world.



He was Writer in Residence at Shakespeare's Globe 1998-2005, and his interpretation of Schiller's *Mary Stuart* has had four major productions in the US and Canada. Three of his plays, in verse, have been staged at the Globe, (two of them starring Mark Rylance), others at the National Theatre, the West End, on Broadway and around the world.

He is a founder member of the Columina Theatre Company, which creates new verse drama with commedia roots; has written three verse plays for the Ruskin Mill Educational Trust, and two plays, including a biography play of Rudolf Steiner, for Lemniscate Arts.

Peter was awarded a Travelling Scholarship by the Society of Authors, who described him as 'the astonishing Peter Oswald.' He has been Writer in Residence at Dartington Hall in Devon and his poetry is published by Shearsman Books, Oberon Books and The Letterpress.

He is currently Associate Writer at the Marylebone Theatre, in London.

[Find out more about Peter's work.](#)

## Artistic Director & Project Manager

Jo-anne Sarre is a freelance director, actor, storyteller, and educator who has worked in the Performing Arts sector since her Speech and Drama training at The Harkness Studio in 1986.

As co-founder of Ink Pot Theatre (a professional touring company) and founder of Ink Pot Arts Inc (a Community Arts not-for-profit), she has been actively engaged in bringing high-quality theatre as a catalyst for personal transformation and community cultural development for almost 20 years.

[Find out more about Jo-anne here.](#)



## Researcher & Creative Consultant

Fiona Campbell PhD has extensive training in creative thinking, visual arts, music, communications, philosophy and adult education. She specialises in the study of consciousness through artistic media and is a founding member of the Stream of Life Research Studio.

As Painted Space, she has been a professional artist, muralist, and arts educator for 30 years, with lazure mural works of over 660 sq. ms in Belgium, Australia and New Zealand. Fiona's lecturing career includes Information Science at UTS and research at JMC Academy for Creative Industries. She regularly offers webinars and workshops on sacred art, the evolution of consciousness and the Arthurian and Grail legends.

[Find out more about Fiona here.](#)



## What happens next?

We are currently seeking Expressions of Interest from actors, dancers, and musicians who would like to be considered for the performance ensemble. Whilst we are still in the process of raising funds, our plan is to schedule intensive rehearsal weekends from October 2023 to April 2024, with the final rehearsal period in April-May 2024.

We anticipate the performance season will open in South Australia in May 2024.

## How can I get involved?

To register your interest, simply [email Jo-anne](#) with your CV, including 3 referees and a cover letter with your reasons for wishing to join the project.

For interstate artists, we will explore affordable accommodation requirements.

As preparation and support for this journey, we regularly facilitate artistic courses and workshops, which we invite you to attend.

### Current courses

*Speech of the Grail* is a creative speech and drama workshop at the Mount Barker Waldorf School on Tuesday mornings with Jo-anne Sarre, exploring the story as a stimulus for reflection and creative expression.

Jo-anne Sarre  
m: 0429 673 327  
e: [quill@inkpot.com.au](mailto:quill@inkpot.com.au)

*In Our Own Words: reTelling the Parzival Tale* is a creative writing workshop with Fiona Campbell, reimagining the Parzival and Grail legends for today. These online sessions are accessible to everyone and a great way to understand and explore the motifs of Parzival's quest for the Grail.

Fiona Campbell  
e: [paintedspace@gmail.com](mailto:paintedspace@gmail.com)

## Support us!

If you would like to donate to the project to facilitate our next steps, go to

[Give Now - Ink Pot Arts - 10 Reasons...](#)

Please include a note about supporting *The Parsifal Project*. Tax-deductible receipts automatically issued.

For updates about the project, [join our e-newsletter lists](#) [quill@inkpot.com.au](mailto:quill@inkpot.com.au)

We look forward to sharing more of our journey with you!

