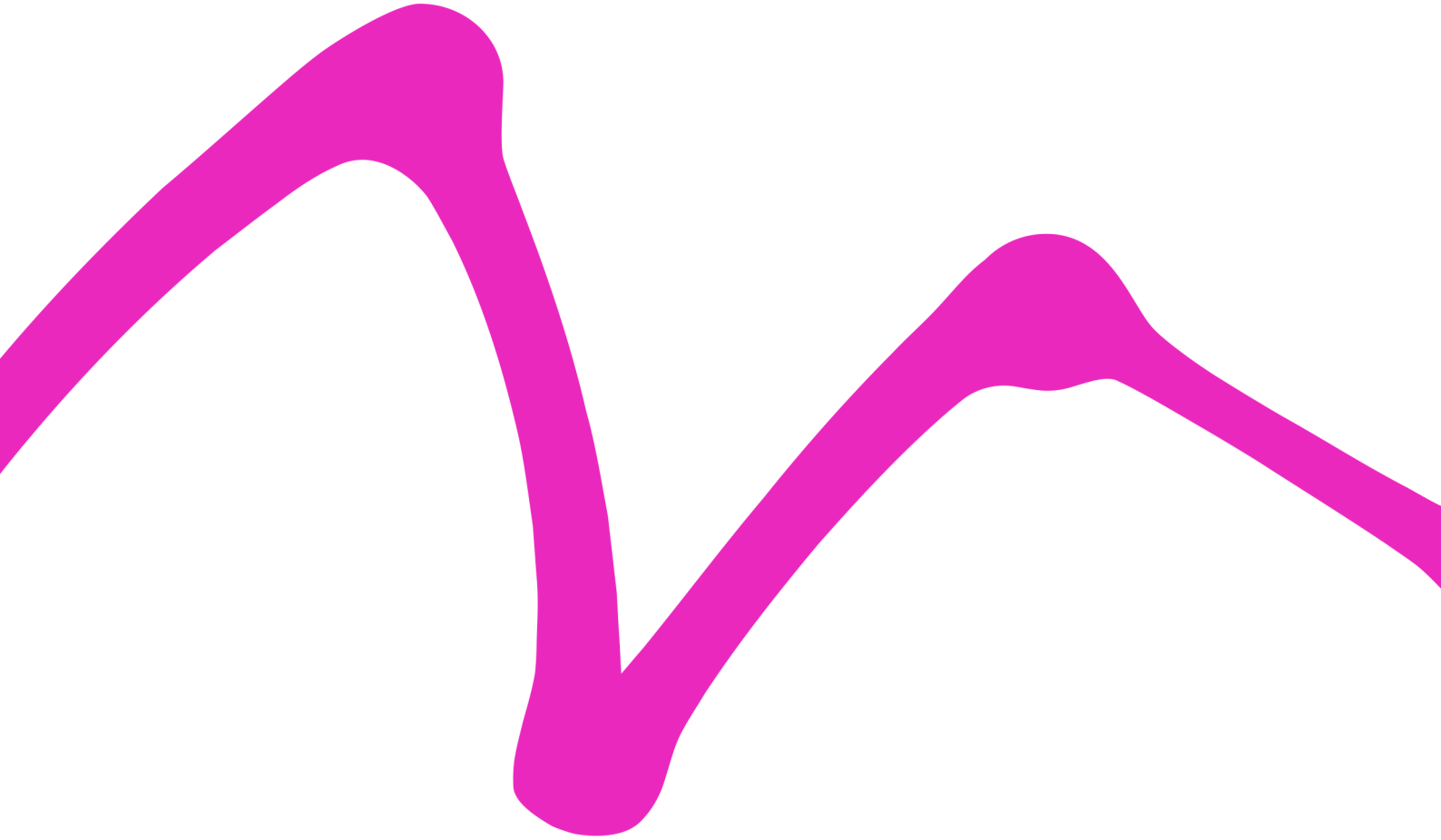
VAPAC Technical Managers October Conference

Sunday 26th - Tuesday 28th October 2025
Monash University Performing Arts Centres
(David Li Sound Gallery)
48 Exhibition Walk, Clayton 3800



VAPAC Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres

Guest Speakers

Laura Hook
Freelance Production Manager

Laura Hook has worked in the Theatre Industry in the UK for over 20 years.

She graduated with a BA(Hons) in Performance Design and Production from Bretton Hall, University of Leeds in the UK. She then began her career as a casual technician with the Birmingham Hippodrome and held the role as a stage and props technician with the Birmingham Royal Ballet, which is where she honed her skills in all aspects of Theatre craft. She was a Senior Technician at the Peacock Theatre for Sadler's Wells (London), the UKs leading dance organisation, for 6 years.

Laura also worked internationally, as a Production Manager and Technician, with artists such as Caroline Bowditch, Joan Cleville Dance, Claire Cunningham and with the British Paraorchestra on the 'transformative' show The Nature of Why.

In 2016, Laura began collaborating as a set, lighting and stage designer and co-creator with Caroline Bowditch on various works including two works for children, The Adventures of Snigel and Snigel and Friends. Both shows toured to festivals and venues around the UK, Europe and Singapore. In the 2017 run of Snigel and Friends at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival it was nominated for a Total Theatre Award.

Since arriving in Australia she has worked with Arts Access Victoria to deliver everything from live music events, exhibitions and various shows. Looking after their portable accessible arts space, Nebula, at festivals and events. Including the Checkpoint programme at the award winning, inaugural, Alter State Festival in collaboration with Arts Centre Melbourne.

Laura continues to be driven by a passion for innovation and inclusivity in the arts. In January 2023, Laura took over as Production and Technical Manager at Theatre Works in St Kilda. One of Australia's longest running Independent Theatres in the heart of St Kilda, in the historic Parish Hall on Acland Street. Under Laura's direction she implemented a new lighting system in the main venue and upgraded and improved equipment and systems in both venues.

She has also had the pleasure to work with independent artists Vanessa di Natale on the Green Room Award nominated show 'Breeders' and with celebrated cabaret artist and performer Artemis Muñoz on their work 'Artemis: Utter Mess'. Most recently she worked with Olivia Muscat on her show 'Is Anyone Even Watching?' at Melbourne Fringe 2025.

Guest Speakers

Caroline Bowditch
Cultural Equity Consultant and Advisor

Caroline Bowditch is an internationally acclaimed performance maker, director, teacher, and consultant. She has redefined how disability and performance intersect on stages in Australia and across the world. Formerly CEO of Arts Access Victoria and Artistic Director of her own practice, Caroline is celebrated for combining bold creativity with fierce advocacy for access, equity, and representation in the arts.

Entertainment Assist

Entertainment Assist is a national health promotion charity that raises awareness about mental health and wellbeing in the Australian entertainment industry and champions for generational change where:

- Industry workers are educated to be aware of their own mental well-being,
- Industry workers are educated to support their peers around mental health; and
- Industry employers actively support the mental health and well-being of employees.

Governed by a Board of Directors, Entertainment Assist is committed to reducing the shockingly high rates of anxiety, depression, suicide, isolation and other matters associated with working in the Australian entertainment industry.

Entertainment Assist is for everyone working in the Australian performing arts and entertainment industry including performers, support workers, crew and technicians. By encouraging open conversations in workplaces from concert halls to rehearsal studios and construction workshops, Entertainment Assist supports a resilient industry culture through peer-to-peer, support, education and research.

Entertainment Assist champions change, drawing on research, education and training initiatives, identification of appropriate resources and promotion of appropriate mental health practices in performing arts and entertainment industry workplaces. We aim to communicate these resources as widely as possible by working collaboratively with entertainment industry colleagues including our peers, industry associations, membership organisations, individual employers and expert bodies.

Day 1

Sunday 26th October

3:00pm Registration

3:15pm Introductions & Acknowledgement of Country

Brett Tippet (Coordinator Technical Operations, Gippsland Performing Arts Centre)

3:30pm Red Flag Conversations with Entertainment Assist

As the Victorian Government will mandate new psychosocial safety regulations at the start of December, Entertainment Assist will explore how to manage "red flag" conversations effectively and learn how to protect ourselves from the weight of others' problems.

This session will offer practical guidance and simple conversation starters covering:

- Environment
- Approach
- Intention
- Open questions
- Establishing personal boundaries
- Permission to check-in questions
- Escalation to support resources

We'll also take time to unpack the ongoing challenges around shift rostering and WHS regulations. While venue management is driven for success, it appears that teams may not fully understand each other's challenges.

4:30pm Succession Planning
Facilitated by Brett Tippet (Coordinator Technical Operations, Gippsland Performing Arts Centre)

Understanding what succession planning is and how to prepare and support emerging leaders in our venues, ensuring smooth transitions when roles change and building confidence for staff to step up when needed.

5:30pm End

Day 2

Monday 27th October

8:45am	Welcome Day 2
9:00am	Introductions Brett Tippet (Coordinator Technical Operations, Gippsland Performing Arts Centre)
9:10am	VAPAC Executive Update Melenie Stevenson (Executive Director, VAPAC)
9:20am	Committee Updates from Wellbeing, OHS and Training Wellbeing - Thomas Duncan (Theatre Technical Officer, Ararat Rural City Council) An update on recent psychosocial safety laws, clarifying what's in scope, what's out, and the current state of play for our sector. OH&S - Stuart Sinclair (Senior Venue Technical & Operations Officer, Cardinia Shire Council) A general update on current safety matters, including recent changes to scaffolding regulations in Victoria. Training - Strafford Floate (Technical Training & Development Lead, Arts Centre Melbourne) Sharing the latest on TechConnect and exploring opportunities to link training with our venues and conferences.
9:40am	Round Table - What's happening at your place? Facilitated by Brett Tippet (Coordinator Technical Operations, Gippsland Performing Arts Centre Share your latest updates, innovations, or behind-the-scenes wins or challenges from your venue & company
10:10am	Morning Tea

Day 2

Monday 27th October

10:30am Technical Management for Safe & Inclusive Contemporary Circus Touring

Presenters: Caroline Bowditch (Cultural Equity Consultant and Advisor), Laura Hook (Freelance Production Manager)
Facilitator: Imogen Titmarsh (Head Technician, St Albans Community Centre)

This session will explore safety, technical access, and inclusive design within Circus and Physical Theatre (CaPT), equipping participants with best practices for creating safe performance environments, navigating venue-specific technical requirements, and implementing accessible backstage operations.

It will cover the principles of designing performances with accessibility in mind and explore ways to integrate features such as adaptive rigging and staging requirements for performers with disabilities.

11:30am How to Survive Dance Season?

Facilitators: Nathan Duncan (Venue Technician, Darebin Arts Centre) & Thomas Duncan (Theatre Technical Officer, Ararat Rural City Council)

An open discussion on navigating one of the busiest times of year - sharing tips on managing long hours, staying creative through repetition, and maintaining positive client relationships.

12:30pm Lunch

1:30pm Team Structures & Position Descriptions Workshop

Presenter: Kate Kelly (Industry Development Manager, VAPAC)

In this session we will review what the tech team structures are across the network, comparing the job titles to position descriptions and workshop the common roles and responsibilities. We'll discuss how the team structure and staffing levels influence the venue operation and wellbeing of crews.

Day 2

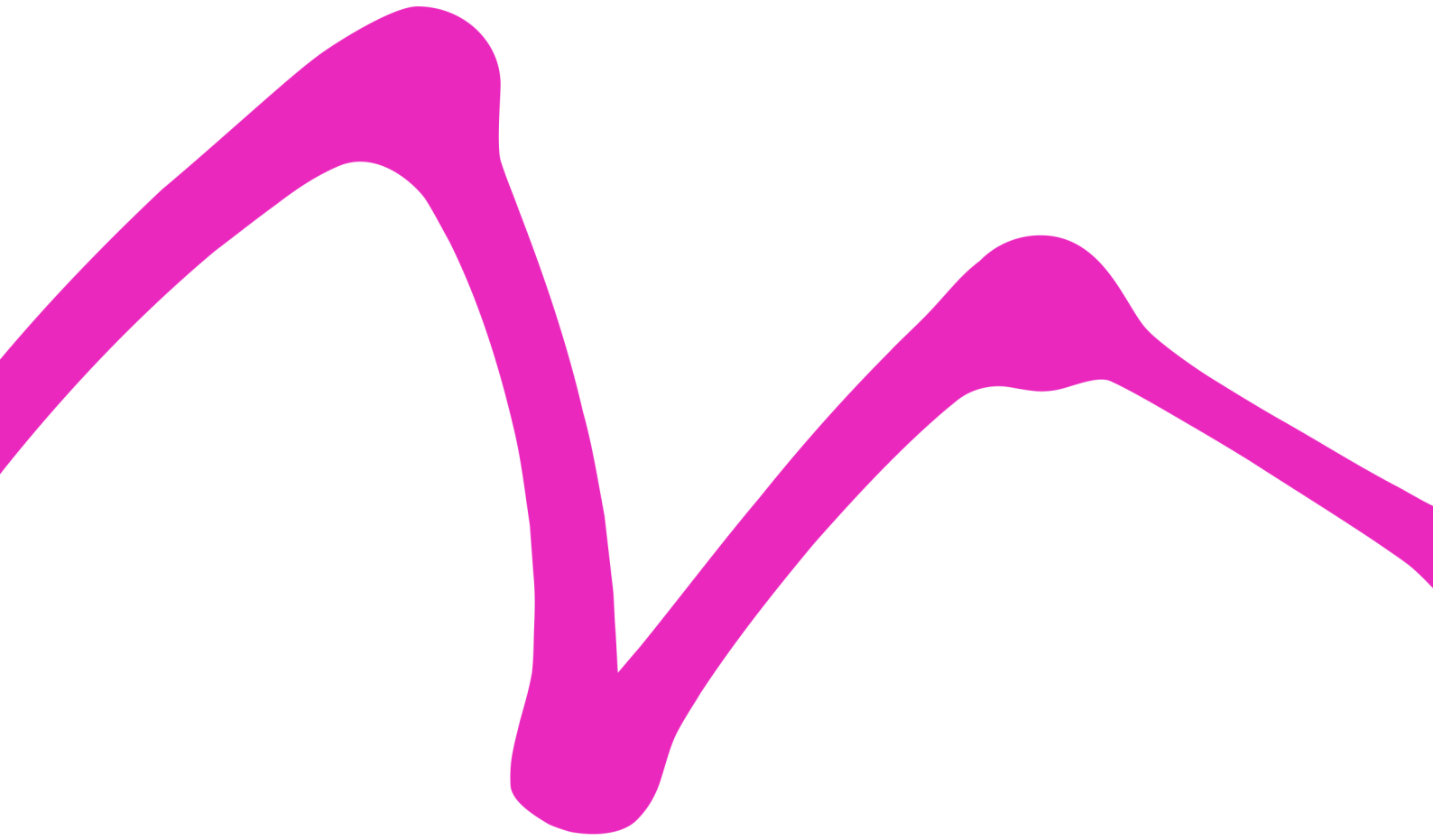
Monday 27th October

3:00pm	Insights From Small to Medium Venues Presenter: Thomas Duncan (Theatre Technical Officer, Ararat Rural City Council) A look at recent upgrades and renovations that have made venues easier to operate, highlighting whole-of-venue approaches and flexible systems that provide multiple levels of control.
4:00pm	Afternoon Tea
4:30pm	Sound Lab: Active Acoustics Demo See a demonstration of active acoustics technology, highlighting how adaptable sound can enhance different performance environments.
5:00pm	Venue Tour
5:30pm	Finish
6:00pm	Networking Event Notting Hill Hotel (260-262 Ferntree Gully Rd, Notting Hill) Included in the ticket price.

Day 3

Tuesday 28th October

8:45am	Arrival
9:00am	Welcome Day 3
9:05am	Training 101 - Part 1 Presenters: Strafford Floate (Technical Training & Development Lead, Arts Centre Melbourne) & Stuart McKellar (Technician, Teacher & Consultant) Technical Training 101 is designed to equip participants with essential technical skills and practical knowledge across key areas such as Vision, Sound, Lighting & Staging. Whether you're new to the field or looking to refresh your basics, this four-part series offers a hands-on, interactive learning experience.
10:45am	Morning tea
11:00am	Training 101 - Part 2 Presenters: Strafford Floate (Technical Training & Development Lead, Arts Centre Melbourne) & Stuart McKellar (Technician, Teacher & Consultant) Technical Training 101 is designed to equip participants with essential technical skills and practical knowledge across key areas such as Vision, Sound, Lighting & Staging. Whether you're new to the field or looking to refresh your basics, this four-part series offers a hands-on, interactive learning experience.
11:30am	General Business Facilitator: Brett Tippet (Coordinator Technical Operations, Gippsland Performing Arts Centre) Open floor for any additional updates, questions, or topics from members not covered elsewhere in the agenda.
12:00pm	Finish



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