

Chris Kohn – Theatre Director

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Chris Kohn



It is a time of change for theatre director Chris Kohn, as his time as Artistic Director of the Arena Theatre Company draws to a close. Announcing in July that after four years he would be stepping down from the role, Kohn is busy making final preparations for the world premiere of *The House of Dreaming*, his final project with Arena, at this year's Melbourne Festival.

He is also currently developing *Cautionary Tales for Children*, to premiere in 2013. He will then be moving to Brisbane with his family.

Chris completed a Graduate Diploma in Directing at the VCA School of Drama in 1998. Founding the Stuck Pigs Squealing Theatre in 2000, he went on to become its Artistic Director. Under his directorship, Stuck Pigs Squealing received six Green Room awards, four Fringe Festival awards, two New York International Fringe Festival Awards, with seasons at the Store Room, Downstairs Belvoir, PS-122, Ontological-Hysterical Theatre, Malthouse Theatre and Brisbane Powerhouse.

He was appointed Arena's Artistic Director in 2008, and in this time commissioned and directed plays *Mr Freezy*, *Goodbye Vaudeville* *Charlie Mudd* and *Moth*. His commissioned works have received an AWGIE, several Green Room Awards and a Louis Esson Prize for Drama.

Chris has been the recipient of Green Room Awards for Direction and Writing, an Ian Potter Cultural Trust Fellowship, George Fairfax Memorial Award, Award for Excellence in Direction from the NYC Fringe Festival, a State Library of Victoria



Creative Fellowship and an International Residency fellowship at Les Couvent des Recollets in Paris.

Here he talks to artsHub about his work.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

A film director.

When did you know you would work in the arts?

When I was 18 and began playing music professionally in Perth.

How would you describe your work to a complete stranger?

I work with teams of artists to create new theatre shows from the ground up.

What's your background – what did you study to get to where you are?

I studied music and theatre at high school in Perth, then a humanities-based BA in Perth and Sydney, where I focused heavily on theatre and worked on lots of shows with other students. Then I completed a year of applied study in directing at the VCA, where I met a lot of people with whom I still work today.

What's the first thing career related you usually do each day?

I wake up and try to remember what part of what project I am trying to solve today.

Can you describe an "average" working day for you?

There is no average working day for me – each day is unique.

What's the one thing - piece of equipment, toy, security blanket – you can't work without?

The love and support of my wife Danica and my boys Ariel and Bodhi.

What gets you fired up?

Challenges.

Who in the industry most inspires you?

The Arena staff and artists I work with.

What is the best thing about your job?

The act of co-creation with a team. Also, creating work for young people.

What's the most challenging aspect?

The feeling that nothing is ever completed and everything can always be better.

What are the top three skills you need in this industry?

Passion, self-critique, ability to collaborate.

What advice would you give anyone looking to break into your field?

Do it if you have a passion, but otherwise don't, because it is a hard slog and the path ahead is not always clear.

How do you know when you missed the mark?

It feels wrong. If you aren't sure, you ask people you trust. Young audiences are pretty authentic in their responses, too.

When do you know you've made it?

You've never made it! But it's nice overhearing people's candid positive responses during a show or in the foyer later.