

New Australian play starring *Neighbours* alumni premieres at Flinders Fringe Festival 2026.

Soapboxed is a new Australian play written by Megan Herbert (*Neighbours*, *EastEnders*, 2024 Australian Political Cartoonist of the Year), developed from an idea by Lucinda Cowden (*Neighbours*). It premieres as a rehearsed reading at the Flinders Fringe Festival on the Mornington Peninsula on Saturday, 28 February.

Performed by a cast of Australian television legends and local Mornington Peninsula artists, *Soapboxed* examines the state of the arts, artists and audiences as they navigate an increasingly fractured media and technology landscape in 2026.

Featuring a cast of Australian acting legends (including Lucinda Cowden, Ryan Moloney, and Takaya Honda from *Neighbours*, Sally-Anne Upton from *Neighbours*, *Wentworth*, and AACTA Award-winning Best Film *Bring Her Back*, English/Australian comedian and actor John Voce from *Goolagong* and *Downton Abbey*, and Mornington Peninsula's Queen of song, Martine Halliday), this play offers laughter, tears, romance, a race against the clock, and plenty of emotional twists and turns (just like a good soap).

This production marks the first public reunion of the *Neighbours* alumni since the iconic soap opera ended its record-breaking 40-year run. There are plans to tour the UK later in the year in response to fan demand.

"It's about the future of the arts, and all of the different things artists are dealing with at the moment," Lucinda Cowden said. "So, it's very relevant, and very topical."

Megan and Lucinda, former *Neighbours* colleagues, began developing *Soapboxed* during the show's turbulent final years. Having worked in the UK and Europe, they observed that soap opera skills were more highly valued overseas than in Australia. As *Neighbours* ended amid growing pressures on the arts, from chronic underfunding to shrinking screen quotas and the rise of AI, *Soapboxed* emerged as a response, asking audiences to consider what is lost when the arts and artists are pushed to the margins.

"We wanted to honour all the best elements of soap storytelling while also tapping into a bigger conversation about the Arts and how we value them, or not, with everyone's attention so fractured as it is now," Herbert said.

"Audiences will laugh and cry, and be left with a lot to think about," she added.

The Flinders Fringe Festival, now in its fourth year, was established in 2023 by Melissa Jackson and Claire Thorn. Its programme features a diverse line-up of performers, artists, and entertainers offering plays, cabaret, jazz, sing-alongs, exhibitions, literary lunches, First Nations workshops, sculpture, writers and poetry workshops, nature walks, a festival picnic, and much more.

The Festival runs from Friday, 27th February to Sunday, 1st March, 2026.