

# They say the show must go on – and it is

Both students and teachers are excited to be back to live performances.

By Beverley Johanson

The return to a full school life has been welcomed by students, staff and families, particularly the return of performing arts subjects and co-curricular activities.

"We are committed to providing opportunities for students who wish to achieve great things, as well as those who want to simply experience the joy of performing together," says Terrie Jones, head of school at St Michael's Grammar School, a K-12 school in St Kilda.

St Michael's staff and students devised a range of online collaborations and virtual activities during COVID-19 lockdowns, including a virtual school choir and acapella group, song writing and monologue competitions as well as ad hoc skits.

"Nearly everything was a compromise in the online world, but that's not to say there was no value in reimagining arts education and experiences," Jones says.

"We had particular success with online one-on-one music lessons, with nearly all students electing to continue their tuition as a very welcome highpoint of their lockdown week."

Students are excited to return to performing, and audience reactions have been enthusiastic, but some



**Brighton Grammar School is back with concerts, ensemble productions and house drama.**

students are finding the regular, intensive routine of rehearsal and performing exhausting.

"The threat of a sudden change of cast or crew members due to isolation requirements has also been a challenge," Jones says.

Following a successful run of the student-directed play *DNA* and house drama in term 1, senior students recently presented Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia* to great reviews. The school's dancers have just completed a rehearsal and filming period for this year's dance feature film, *Cinematic*, to premiere at the Astor Theatre in August.

"We have started rehearsing the senior musical for 2022, *Hello Dolly*, and our jazz musicians recently travelled to

Beechworth for their first performing tour in three years, before staging the Jazz Night concert ... at the school last Saturday evening," Jones says. "It certainly feels like we are back to something near a normal program"

Michael Kent, head of drama and school productions at boys' school Brighton Grammar, says performing arts students didn't realise just how much they loved what they did until it was taken away from them.

"Our music and drama students are thrilled to be back performing," he says. "The buzz around choral concerts and production rehearsals has been infectious. Students definitely appreciate the value of performing much more than beforehand. For our

*'The buzz around choral concerts and production rehearsals has been infectious.'*

Michael Kent

choirs, being able to sing in the one room together again has been quite a moving experience."

The challenges of the past two years have shown just how resilient the students and the performing arts program are at Brighton Grammar, Kent says. During lockdowns, teachers adapted to the online environment and the students followed suit.

"Students were still able to build their self-confidence, express themselves creatively and build on their ability to work in teams – all areas of focus in the normal classroom. Our music teachers and students developed greater listening skills as they played their instruments or sang together online."

Engagement levels remained high as the students moved to filmed performances, weekly Zoom improv drama classes, music workshop videos, online concerts, digital rehearsals, ensemble videos and a whole-school and BGS community virtual choir.

The school's performing arts program is not letting up, with upcoming productions of *The Addams Family*, *Seussical JR*, a number of concerts, ensemble productions and its first house drama competition.



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