



## The Wheeler Centre Background Summary

Australia's first Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas, The Wheeler Centre is located within a large wing of the State Library of Victoria, in the heart of Melbourne's bustling central business district and situated in a burgeoning cultural precinct close to Melbourne and RMIT Universities.

The establishment of the Centre is at the heart of an ambitious Victorian Government initiative which saw Melbourne designated as a UNESCO City of Literature in 2008 and join the UNESCO Creative Cities network alongside Berlin, Montreal, Seville, Edinburgh and other global creative cities.

The Centre will become a hub and home for writers and key literary organisations, including the Melbourne Writers' Festival, Victorian Writers' Centre, Express Media, Emerging Writers' Festival and Australian Poetry Centre, Small Press Underground Networking Community (SPUNC) and the Melbourne branch of PEN. It will provide literary organisations, publishers, universities, companies and the media with access to a large, new performance space, shared meeting rooms and workshop spaces.

The Centre will be responsible for programming a range of events across the year: the annual Premier's Literary Awards, the Deakin Lectures, keynote public events including international speakers, as well as book and magazine launches, speeches, debates, seminars, poetry recitals, book readings, symposia, awards and performances.

A new Centre management organisation will coordinate the facilities and public programmes. Events will be filmed and archived on the Centre's content-rich website for debate and discussion.

The Centre's first Director is Chrissy Sharp, who comes to the role after a distinguished career as an arts and cultural administrator in Australia and the UK. For the past five years she has been general manager of Sadler's Wells Theatre in London, and before that was general manager of the Sydney Festival, head of policy at SBS and Director of the Australian Writers' Guild.

The Centre is governed by an independent Board. Its members are Eric Beecher (chairman, principal of Private Media), Peter Biggs (managing director, Clemenger BBDO Advertising Melbourne), Gabrielle Coyne (CEO, Penguin Australia), Andrew Hagger (executive general manager, Private & Institutional Wealth, National Australia Bank). Joanna Murray-Smith (playwright and author) and Mark Rubbo (managing director, Readings bookshops).

Operational funding for the Centre will be provided by the Victorian Government, through Arts Victoria, and from a range of programming and philanthropic partnerships.



## MELBOURNE'S UNESCO CITY OF LITERATURE INITIATIVE

### Chronology

- June 2007      The State Government announces Melbourne to bid for UNESCO City of Literature status. A 16-person steering committee, led by Crikey publisher Eric Beecher, will prepare the bid and submit by October 2007.
- August 2007      The State Government commits \$9 million to the City of Literature Initiative and announces 10-person reference group, also led by Eric Beecher. In addition to the UNESCO bid, it announces the Initiative would include the establishment of a Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas to be housed at the State Library and enhanced Premier's Literary Awards and literary festivals, events and promotions.
- August 2008      Melbourne wins UNESCO City of Literature bid and joins their Creative Cities Network. Other cities in the network are Edinburgh as a City of Literature (Iowa City has since been named as the third City of Literature), Berlin, Buenos Aires and Montreal as Cities of Design, and Bologna and Seville as Cities of Music.
- October 2008      The State Government announces the board for Australia's first Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas - the centrepiece of Melbourne's winning bid as a UNESCO City of Literature. Chair: Eric Beecher, Directors: Peter Biggs, Joanna Murray-Smith, Mark Rubbo OAM, Gabrielle Coyne, Andrew Hagger.
- February 2009      Chrissy Sharp announced as inaugural director of the Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas. Her three-year term to commence in June 2009.
- November 2009      Minister for the Arts and Transport, the Honourable Lynne Kosky announces it will be named the Wheeler Centre after Lonely Planet founders Tony and Maureen Wheeler. Management and resident organisations move in, housed within a newly renovated wing of the State Library of Victoria.



## Melbourne's literary pedigree

Detailed in the 30,000-word City of Literature bid were Melbourne's compelling literary strengths.

- The city is home to an array of literary organisations, including the Victorian Writers' Centre, Express Media, the Australian Poetry Centre, the Melbourne Writers Festival and the Emerging Writers Festival
- It has the largest literary publishing sector in Australia and largest number of independents, with an exceptional mix of small, medium and large publishers
- A third of all Australian bookstores are in Victoria, 41% of Australian booksellers are based in Melbourne generating 43% of total book sales in Australia
- The city has been home to some Australia's greatest writers, past and present including Marcus Clarke, C J Dennis, Peter Carey, Helen Garner, Christos Tsiolkas and Nam Le, to name only a few
- Nearly a third of all Australian writers live in Melbourne (approximately 1300) with 97,600 people identifying writing as a hobby
- There are 287 local libraries in Victoria, with 2.5m members who borrow around 50m items each year
- Melbourne is home to the State Library of Victoria, the first major cultural institution to be established in Melbourne since its founding in 1854, with over 1.5m visitors annually
- Melburnians consume more books, magazines and newspapers per capita and enjoy the highest concentration of community book clubs in the country

## What being a City of Literature means for Melbourne

- It is a permanent title which recognises the city's literary sector as a leader in Australia and on the world stage.
- It puts Melbourne on the international cultural map as one of only three Cities of Literature and one of only 19 cities in UNESCO's Creative Cities Network.
- The Wheeler Centre will provide a central focus point for everyone interested in literature and its promotion.
- The Centre will become a home for Melbourne's writers and key literary organisations, and a meeting place for the state's literary and publishing community.
- The Centre aims to attract audiences to the Centre and online through annual programme of events, including the Premier's Literary Awards, the Deakin Lectures, keynote public events, book & magazine launches, speeches, debates, poetry recitals, books readings, symposia, and performances.

# Media Kit



The  
Wheeler  
Centre  
Books  
Writing  
Ideas

## MANAGEMENT PROFILES



**Chrissy Sharp, Director**

An arts manager of international standing, Chrissy Sharp's professional career has taken several guises. Arriving in Melbourne to take up the position, she describes her new role as Director of the Centre for Books Writing and Ideas as "the best job in the world". Most recently, she has been responsible for turning around London's Sadler's Wells, where she was General Manager from 2004.

Previously she managed the Sydney Arts Festival for three years, from 2000 – 2003, and was Head of Policy at SBS from 1995 – 2000. She has also been the Executive Director of the Australian Writers' Guild, as well as an industrial officer for the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, a theatrical agent and a researcher for various media organisations. During the late 70s Chrissy ran a beef and wool producing farm and owned a flower shop.

She has a BA hon. in Modern History from the Australian National University and was a graduate trainee in the Commonwealth Department of Trade. Chrissy lives in East Melbourne with her husband, Michael Lynch.



**Michael Williams, Head of Programming**

Michael Williams is the Wheeler Centre's Head of Programming, having worked as a writer, editor and broadcaster. With a thesis on the meaning of the Miles Franklin award under his belt, Michael embarked on a career in publishing, spending over six years at Text Publishing before going to New York, where he worked in the office of literary scout, Maria Campbell, for six months.

Since returning to Melbourne he has worked freelance for Random House, Scribe Publications, Affirm Press and others and has just completed 18 months as part of the breakfast radio team on Melbourne's 3RRR. His reviews can be read in the *Age*, the *Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, as well as the *Australian Book Review*, *Meanjin* and the *Monthly*. He was also a member of the judging advisory panel for the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2009.

wheelercentre.com



26 November 2009

**The Wheeler Centre**

**A Victorian Government initiative and the centrepiece of Melbourne's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature.**

# Media Kit



The  
Wheeler  
Centre  
Books  
Writing  
Ideas

## MANAGEMENT PROFILES



**Chrissy Sharp, Director**

An arts manager of international standing, Chrissy Sharp's professional career has taken several guises. Arriving in Melbourne to take up the position, she describes her new role as Director of the Centre for Books Writing and Ideas as "the best job in the world". Most recently, she has been responsible for turning around London's Sadler's Wells, where she was General Manager from 2004.

Previously she managed the Sydney Arts Festival for three years, from 2000 – 2003, and was Head of Policy at SBS from 1995 – 2000. She has also been the Executive Director of the Australian Writers' Guild, as well as an industrial officer for the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, a theatrical agent and a researcher for various media organisations. During the late 70s Chrissy ran a beef and wool producing farm and owned a flower shop.

She has a BA hon. in Modern History from the Australian National University and was a graduate trainee in the Commonwealth Department of Trade. Chrissy lives in East Melbourne with her husband, Michael Lynch.



**Michael Williams, Head of Programming**

Michael Williams is the Wheeler Centre's Head of Programming, having worked as a writer, editor and broadcaster. With a thesis on the meaning of the Miles Franklin award under his belt, Michael embarked on a career in publishing, spending over six years at Text Publishing before going to New York, where he worked in the office of literary scout, Maria Campbell, for six months.

Since returning to Melbourne he has worked freelance for Random House, Scribe Publications, Affirm Press and others and has just completed 18 months as part of the breakfast radio team on Melbourne's 3RRR. His reviews can be read in the *Age*, the *Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, as well as the *Australian Book Review*, *Meanjin* and the *Monthly*. He was also a member of the judging advisory panel for the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2009.

wheelercentre.com



26 November 2009

**The Wheeler Centre**

**A Victorian Government initiative and the centrepiece of Melbourne's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature.**

# Media Kit



The  
Wheeler  
Centre

Books  
Writing  
Ideas

## Maureen and Tony Wheeler Founders, Lonely Planet Publications

The Wheelers met each other on a bench in Regent's Park, London in 1971 when Maureen was 20 and Tony 24. Within a year they were married and made the inspired and, at the time, unusual decision to spend their honeymoon travelling to Australia the long way - overland through Europe and Asia.

They gained so much from the experience they decided to turn their travel diaries into a guide. The resulting handmade publication, *Across Asia on the Cheap*, had an initial print run of 1,500 and sold out in the first week in Sydney bookshops. Out of it, Lonely Planet was born. The Wheelers followed it up in 1975 with *South-East Asia on a shoestring* which they wrote in a backstreet Chinese hotel in Singapore. The guide, with its distinctive yellow cover, soon became the bible for travel in the region. It has sold well over half a million copies worldwide and is now in its 13<sup>th</sup> edition. The Wheelers decided to settle in Melbourne to raise their two children and develop the company.

Now, over 30 years later, Lonely Planet is a globally loved brand. With offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, it has over 500 staff members, 300 authors and 500 titles which all carry the Lonely Planet trademark of an adventurous, independent approach to travel.

After receiving a number of offers for the company over the years, in 2007 the Wheelers found a partner whom they trusted to remain true to Lonely Planet's principles. In October of that year BBC Worldwide - the main commercial arm and a wholly owned subsidiary of the BBC - acquired a 75% share in the company.

Tony and Maureen Wheeler remain actively involved with Lonely Planet but are now able to devote an increasing amount of time to their charitable activities through the Planet Wheeler Foundation.

## The Planet Wheeler Foundation

The Wheelers began supporting offshore charitable causes decades ago. As Lonely Planet grew in success so did their passion for giving. In 1987 the company began a policy of donating a fixed percentage of profits to charitable organisations.

The Planet Wheeler Foundation was established in 2008 by Maureen and Tony Wheeler following the sale of a majority stake in Lonely Planet Publications to BBC Worldwide. The Foundation, which is a separate entity, is based in Melbourne and currently funds over 70 projects in the developing world focussing on the Mekong Delta, East Africa, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

The Foundation has no religious or political affiliations.

[wheelercentre.com](http://wheelercentre.com)



ARTS  
VICTORIA



26 November 2009

**The Wheeler Centre**  
A Victorian Government initiative and the centrepiece of Melbourne's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature.



## PRESS RELEASE

### NEW CENTRE TO BE NAMED AFTER LONELY PLANET FOUNDERS

The new hub of Melbourne's renowned literary and publishing scene, the Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas, will be named after two of Australia's most significant and successful publishers, Tony and Maureen Wheeler.

Arts Minister Lynne Kosky today announced the creation of The Wheeler Centre named after the founders of the Melbourne based and world acclaimed Lonely Planet.

"Tony and Maureen Wheeler created a publishing enterprise on their kitchen table over 30 years ago. It was built on the idea of editorial excellence and became an internationally acclaimed source of information - all from their base in Melbourne," Ms Kosky said.

"This is a spectacular publishing success story, a story of an idea exported to the world, the story of two creative minds. It is, unquestionably, a story of books, writing and ideas. I can think of no more appropriate name for this exciting new institution."

"The Brumby Labor Government is delighted to be able to name The Wheeler Centre after two of this country's most important book publishers."

The Wheelers, who now devote much of their time to philanthropy in many parts of the world through their foundation - Planet Wheeler, have made a substantial donation to the new Centre in the form of an endowment. The Centre's board intends that income from the endowment will be applied specifically to funding expanded programming.

Tony and Maureen Wheeler said they were proud to be associated with the Centre, the cornerstone of the Victorian Government's City of Literature initiative.

"The Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas is a fantastic initiative and it is humbling to have this honour in what is the reading and writing capital of Australia," Mr Wheeler said.

"The Centre provides a vibrant hub to tap into the extensive talent and creativity that has long been part of Melbourne and we know that in years to come it will have gained a reputation for excellence and innovation not just in Australia, but as an outstanding exponent of the UNESCO City of Literature ideals," Mrs Wheeler said.

The Centre will be the base of the Melbourne Writers' Festival, Victorian Writers' Centre, Express Media, Emerging Writers' Festival, Australian Poetry Centre, Small Press Underground Networking Community (SPUNC) and the Melbourne branch of PEN International. It will present its own programming as well as provide literary organisations, publishers, universities, companies and the media with access to a large, new performance space, shared meeting rooms and workshop spaces. It will open in February 2010.

"This naming announcement of The Wheeler Centre is a wonderful start to the life of this exciting new institution," Ms Kosky said.

"It is only a matter of months now before this vision becomes a reality. I look forward to the 2010 public opening of The Wheeler Centre, when the range of activities and programming will help to raise the profile of literature in this state and right across the country."



## Melbourne's Newest Talking Point announces first public events in the City of Literature

Following its recent naming as a UNESCO City of Literature, Melbourne's newest cultural institution - The Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas - today announced that its first series of public events will commence February 2010. The nine events (eight of which are free) will bring together more than 30 speakers in storytellings, forums, launches, orations and discussions.

Michael Williams, Head of Programming said "Launching our year-round programme with only two weeks of activities was always going to be difficult, but the range of beautiful stories and brilliant ideas amongst the Melbourne community seemed like an obvious place to start. Just as the Centre will be showcasing the best of local and global conversations, the last fortnight of February will be about highlighting the discussions already going on around us. From the personal to the political, the broadly philosophical to the directly provocative, these nine events are a hint of some of what's to come".

The Centre will be launched with **A Gala Night of Storytelling** at the **Melbourne Town Hall** on **Saturday 13 February** at **6.00pm**. Twelve of Australia's best-loved literary identities will recount tales that have been handed down to them through their families. Held on the anniversary of the Federal Government's apology to the Stolen Generations, proceeds from the ticketed event (\$15, concession \$5) will go to the Indigenous Literacy Project. Speakers are: **Chloe Hooper, Paul Kelly, Cate Kennedy, Judith Lucy, Shane Maloney, David Malouf, John Marsden, Alex Miller, John Safran, Christos Tsiolkas, Tara June Winch** and **Alexis Wright**.

Following the Gala, the first of a series of FREE events will commence at The Centre:

### ***Debut Mondays***

**Fortnightly from Monday 15 February, 6 - 7pm**

First time writers get the chance to spruik their work. Four ten-minute readings from the best new writing talent in town.

### ***In Conversation With Jennifer Byrne***

**Bi-monthly from Tuesday 16 February, 6.30 - 7.30pm**

One of the country's foremost interviewers and host of the ABC's *First Tuesday Book Club* will shine a light on all kinds of writers: local and international, first-timers and established greats; and from every genre from children's to philosophy.

### ***Ethically Speaking: Media & Journalism***

**Bi-monthly from Wednesday 17 February, 6.15 - 7.15pm**

Public forums on questions of moral philosophy and ethics, and how they affect our everyday existence. A panel of top journalists and ethical thinkers under the guidance of former *Age* editor and now director of Melbourne University's Centre for Advanced Journalism, **Michael Gawenda**, will tease out the old and new ethical dilemmas facing journalists today.

# Media Kit



The  
Wheeler  
Centre

Books  
Writing  
Ideas

## **Mark Danner**

**One-off event. Friday 19 February, 6 - 7pm**

Award-winning U.S. journalist Mark Danner has reported and written on foreign affairs, politics and war for over 25 years for the *New Yorker*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *New York Times Magazine* and others. An in-depth discussion about his latest book *Stripping Bare the Body* as well as the state of journalism with a person who's been at the front line of some of the biggest journalistic questions of the day.

## **The Writer's Mix Tape**

**Monthly from Tuesday 23 February, 6 - 7pm**

In collaboration with 3RRR, a notable writer will reveal the 10 songs that have most moved and shaped their career in discussion with a rotating selection of the station's top broadcasters.

## **Reading on Vocation**

**Monthly from Wednesday 24 February, 6 - 7pm**

In collaboration with ABC Radio National, *The Bookshow's* **Ramona Koval** will invite the city's leading professionals - from physicists to comedians - to talk about the books that have been important to them. The first session will explore some of Melbourne's most acclaimed architects. Recordings from each event will be broadcast on *The Bookshow* the following Friday.

## **Lunchbox/Soapbox**

**Weekly from Thursday 25 February, 12.45 - 1.05pm**

A spot for Melbourne's writers to sound off (in an informed and entertaining fashion) on a topic of their choice. A 20 minute piece of polemic while you eat lunch. Beginning with contrarian and celebrated thinker **Peter Singer**.

## **Meanland**

**Bi-monthly from Thursday 25 February, 6.15 - 7.15pm**

Two of our best literary journals, *Meanjin* and *Overland*, will present a panel discussion on the impact of new technology, economic change and shifting notions of intellectual property on reading and writing in Australia. The first discussion will include **Sherman Young, Margaret Simons, Peter Craven** and **Marieke Hardy**; chaired by *Meanjin* editor **Sophie Cunningham**.

## **The Wheeler Centre**

Cnr Swanston & Little Lonsdale Streets  
Entrance in Little Lonsdale Street

## **Tickets & Bookings**

Pre-purchase on-line or at door one hour prior to event start time.

See website for details [wheelercentre.com](http://wheelercentre.com)

Bookings recommended for all free events except *Lunchbox/Soapbox* and *Debut Mondays*.

**For all media enquiries contact:**

Peter Bridges

Bridges PR

m: 0417 390 180

e: [bridges@bridgespr.com](mailto:bridges@bridgespr.com)

[wheelercentre.com](http://wheelercentre.com)



MELBOURNE  
CITY OF  
LITERATURE

ARTS  
VICTORIA



26 November 2009

The Wheeler Centre

A Victorian Government initiative and the centrepiece of Melbourne's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature.