

Melbourne Theatre Company receives record \$1 million private donation

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Jane Hansen and Paul Little at home. *Photo: Simon Schluter*

Former Essendon Football Club chairman Paul Little and his wife, businesswoman Jane Hansen, have donated \$1 million to the Melbourne Theatre Company, the biggest private donation in the company's history.

The money goes to the MTC Foundation, of which Ms Hansen is chairwoman, and is the first of what the millionaire couple hopes will be a growing pool of philanthropic donations to the fund. Money from the interest it earns will not be used for the MTC's main season of productions but rather invested in areas such as new commissions and original Australian plays.

"We both love the theatre and we both think the Melbourne Theatre Company does extraordinary work," Ms Hansen said. "We don't always get it right, not all of the productions appeal to everybody, but that's the challenge of theatre."

MTC executive director Virginia Lovett said philanthropic funding was becoming more important as government funding across the arts became less secure. The company received about \$2.6 million in state and government grants, according to its most recent annual report, and box office sales have

traditionally been responsible for almost 70 per cent of its revenue.

Ms Lovett said box office takings covered the cost of its "main stage" program but "investing in new work and taking risks, we have to really go to private giving and philanthropic sources".

"So if we really want to push above our weight and lead on the front foot we have to increase that contributable income," she said.

A former investment banker, Ms Hansen has been an MTC member since her youth and also sits on its board of management. Her husband, also the former boss of Toll Holdings, has an [estimated worth of \\$870 million](#). It is through their Little Foundation that the MTC donation is being made. They are active philanthropists and last year donated \$10 million to the University of Melbourne for history scholarship.

Ms Hansen said she hoped their donation would encourage others to give.

"I think everywhere it's just about a greater awareness of community and active philanthropy is very important. And I know from my experience it's just a wonderful space to be in, it's just a very rewarding, positive space."

[The MTC snared 25 Green Room nominations](#) this week, awards recognising the best of Melbourne theatre and performance productions. This included eight nominations from its NEON season of independent theatre.

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