

# THE RIFF 2026

## Australian Youth Theatre Festival

### Information and Application Pack

#### About The Riff Festival



The Q Theatre is committed to fostering theatre training, development, and opportunities for our community from the heart of Penrith.

Through The Riff Festival, we provide secondary schools across the region with a platform to engage in hands-on theatre-making, working alongside industry professionals to develop and stage original performances at The Joan, Penrith.

The Riff Festival offers drama students and teachers the opportunity to explore diverse theatrical styles, deepen their creative practice, and collaborate in a professional theatre environment. School groups, typically from years 10 and 11, participate in a guided creative process—transforming ideas into fully realized performances.

The program is built around two key experience-based outcomes:

1. **Understanding the theatre-making process** – from forming an ensemble, generating ideas, and developing a script to rehearsing, performing and reflecting on the work.
2. **Exploring theatre as a collaborative artform** – recognizing the vital roles of creators, technicians, coordinators, publicists, and audiences in bringing a production to life.

This **Information & Application Pack** outlines the six stages of The Riff Festival journey. It includes key program details, participation fees, and a Schools Application Form link. We encourage you to read through the document in full before submitting your application.

### CONSIDERATIONS AND QUESTIONS

We encourage school drama groups with students who identify as having a disability to participate in The Riff Festival.

Please note that all accessibility and learning requirements for participating students remain the responsibility of the school during all festival activities. It is essential that schools communicate any access needs to The Riff Festival staff as part of the application process.

Your application should outline your students' needs and goals for the program, as well as the resources and staff that will be supporting them and the guest teaching artist throughout the festival period.

For any questions, feedback and submissions, please contact the Q Theatre Team:  
Phone: **(02) 4723 7600 (ext. 2)** Email: [creativelearning@ppandva.com.au](mailto:creativelearning@ppandva.com.au)

## Stage 1: Preparing Your Group's Application

### Part A. Your Group's Purpose

Before applying for The Riff Festival, teachers are encouraged to consider the purpose of engaging in the festival, individually and together with their students. When speaking with teachers who are applying, talk through these key questions:

1. What theatrical styles have your students studied/experienced, and would like to engage with in their Riff Festival performance creation and production?
2. What learning outcomes do you expect to see from the students' engagement with the RIFF Festival?

### Part B. Your Group's Theatrical Style

The Riff Festival offers students a unique opportunity to work with alternate theatrical styles and genres, experimenting with a range of techniques and 'tools', to build the performance piece, in collaboration with a Director. The Riff Festival prioritizes organic artistic discovery, allowing students and directors to shape the work dynamically in the rehearsal space.

By adding the challenge of randomly selected criteria, such as theme, style and elements, students can explore at depth, and create their unique storytelling within a disciplined framework, from alongside industry professionals.

This approach fosters a more discerning theatrical palate for the participants and refined Artist adaptability skills, with the depth of understanding gained from their first-hand experience in creating their Riff Festival performance pieces.

### **Part C. Project Based Learning and the Driving Question**

This year, The Riff Festival will follow the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model, where participants engage in an inquiry-driven creative process. All school groups will explore a festival-wide theme and the driving question. In addition, there will be randomly selected styles and elements to be included in each performance piece. These disciplines and challenges are imposed to inspire and guide their theatrical exploration.

Students will work collaboratively with a director, experimenting with theatre-making processes to create a theatrical response to this theme, question, style and elements. The final performance will serve as an expression of their discoveries and collaborative efforts to communicate their story.

As part of your application, we encourage you to consider:

1. How can this experience deepen your students' creative and collaborative skills?
2. What tools and resources will best support your students in responding to the driving question?

The festival's driving question, theme, style and elements will be revealed at the start of the program, ensuring that all participants begin their creative process from the same foundation while allowing for unique interpretations and outcomes.

## **Stage 2: Festival Application**

### **How to Apply**

Once you have confirmed your group's purpose for participation and reviewed the festival structure, complete the online application form via the link below. When finished, click "Submit". You should receive a confirmation email with your application details within 48 hours of submission.

The application deadline is **Friday, 27 February 2026, 6:00 PM**. Due to high interest from schools, we recommend submitting your application as early as possible to secure your place.

### **Important Considerations for Your Group**

1. Preferred rehearsal sessions with your director at your school (please indicate suitable weekdays and times)
2. Booking the performance sessions into your school calendar (final performance details to be provided upon confirmation of participation)

### **Application Form**

Complete The Riff 2026 Schools Application Form at this link:

<https://form.jotform.com/260397637020860>

Applications will be accepted up until Friday, 27 February 2026, 6:00 PM.

## Stage 3: Confirmation of Schools

### Application Review & Notification

The Q Theatre team will review your school's application, and you will be notified of the outcome by **Monday, 23 March 2026**.

Successful applicants will receive:

1. **Confirmation of acceptance** into the program
2. A **formal agreement** detailing the school group's participation (schools need to complete and sign this agreement by **Friday, 27 March 2026**)
3. An **invoice for \$1,500** which covers:
  - The Riff Festival registration fee: \$750
  - Ticketing fee for 30 student tickets to the 12 PM performance on Friday, 19 June 2026: \$750

### Ticketing Information

If you require more than 30 tickets for your school group, please contact the Q Theatre Team by **Friday, 15th May 2026**. Ensure your calendar dates and financial requirements are arranged before applying.

## Stage 4: Engaging Your Director

### The Riff Festival – Director & Development Process

Once your school has registered for The Riff Festival, your school group will be paired with a Director who is experienced in theatre-making, education and training. This Director will guide your group through an eight-week development process, helping to explore the driving question, the allocated style and the must have elements to create a fresh and unique collaborative performance.

Your group will begin working with your Director, who will spend a total of twenty (20) face-to-face hours with your group throughout the festival period.

### Key Dates & Sessions

Performance Development Workshops: **27 April – 18 June**

- A total of 20 hours of performance development workshops will be scheduled at your school, with times coordinated between your group and the Director.

Technical & Dress Rehearsal: **15 – 18 June**

- Over four days we will move through Tech, Dress and Photo Call (4 schools per day). These dates will include additional time with your Director, a technical rehearsal, 2x dress rehearsals, and a photo call.

Performance Day: **Friday, 19 June**

- This includes the **Schools Matinee** at **12:00 PM** and **General Public Performance** at **7:00 PM**.
- Your Director is invited to attend both performances.

## Director's Role

Your Director will work closely with your group to guide the development of your performance, helping to explore the driving question and creatively respond to the challenges. They will also assist in building your group's process, generating ideas, developing material, and refining your performance. They are there to mentor your group's creative and artistic development.

## In-School Sessions and In-Between Sessions

You may hold additional in-school sessions outside of the scheduled time with your Director. In between sessions, when your Director is not present, we encourage you to continue to prepare for the next session by completing tasks the Director and Teacher have agreed upon.

## Stage 5: Performance Development Workshops

### Face-to-Face Performance Development Sessions with Your Director (27 April – 18 June)

Following the initial stages of the program, you will have the opportunity to schedule 20 hours of face-to-face performance development workshops with your Director, leading up to the **Production Week** and **Technical Rehearsal** days (outlined in next section). These face-to-face workshops will take place at your school and provide essential time for your group to continue developing and refining your performance.

It is important to work with your Director to arrange these development sessions at your earliest opportunity. Together, you can determine the best schedule for your group, ensuring that your time with the Director is maximized. During times when the Director is not on-site, be sure to set clear goals for students to continue progressing their performance independently.

Performance development workshop sessions can be arranged in the following formats:

- 5 x half-day sessions (4 hours each)
- 4 x half-day sessions (4 hours each), and 2 x 2-hour sessions
- Any combination of 2-hour, 3-hour or half-day (4 hour) sessions

We recommend a minimum of 2 hours engagement at a time, to allow your group, and your Director the time to re-connect, generate and refine performance material with depth, and plan activities to be conducted before the next workshop.

*NOTE: Where available The Joan can offer rehearsal spaces as an alternative to your school facilities, if this suits both your school group and your Director. Contact the Q Theatre team to discuss availability of The Joan. Venue availability is limited. Include this in your application if you would like to take advantage of this opportunity and contact the Festival Director early to look at space at The Joan for these workshops.*

## Stage 6: Production Week

### Technical Rehearsals (15 – 18 June)

A half-day Technical Rehearsal in the Q Theatre will be scheduled to finalise the performance preparation. Each school group will return to the Q Theatre at The Joan for a structured rehearsal day, with other schools scheduled on the same day to provide mutual support throughout the process.

Each group's Technical Rehearsal will be divided into two key sessions:

- **On-Stage Technical Rehearsal (2 hours):** Schools will work on the Q Theatre stage to fine-tune lighting, sound, and staging elements, with the possibility of running a dress rehearsal if time allows.
- **Final Performance Development Workshop (2 hours):** An opportunity to rehearse and refine performances in a dedicated rehearsal space with your Director.

These sessions will be scheduled as either:

- A. Technical Rehearsal (**9:00 AM – 11:00 AM**) &  
Performance Development Workshop (**11:30 AM – 1:30 PM**)

OR

- B. Performance Development Workshop (**9:00 AM – 11:00 AM**) &  
Technical Rehearsal (**11:30 AM – 1:30 PM**)

OR

- C. Technical Rehearsal (**2:00 PM – 4:00 PM**) &  
Performance Development Workshop (**4:30 PM – 6:30 PM**)

OR

- D. Performance Development Workshop (**2:00 PM – 4:00 PM**) &  
Technical Rehearsal (**4:30 PM – 6:30 PM**)

A meal break is scheduled to take place between sessions. Meals will **not** be provided.

While one school is engaged in their Technical Rehearsal, their 'partner' school will use the Performance Development Workshop time to rehearse separately. The schools will then swap venues for their next session.

If time permits, we encourage the 'partner' school to observe a Dress Rehearsal during the final 30 minutes of their Technical Rehearsal. This provides a chance for feedback and fosters the spirit of collaboration that is central to The Riff Festival.

### **Performance Day**

The Riff Festival's performance day will take place on **Friday, 19 June**. This includes:

- **12:00 PM Schools Matinee Performance** (including 30 reserved student tickets per participating school)
- **7:00 PM General Public Performance**

While each performance is designed with a specific audience in mind, anyone is welcome to attend either session.

## **Tips for Developing Your Performance**

We have compiled a brief list of guidelines to help you and your students avoid some common pitfalls. Consider them ahead of your stagecraft workshop when you will have a chance to experiment and identify potential challenges early on.

### **Duration**

Your work is to be within 7 – 10 minutes in length, once performance ready.

### **Audience**

Your audience will range in age from Year 7 (age 12+) to adults, so consider appropriate language and content accordingly.

### **Voice/Volume**

Work on your breathing and voice, consulting with your Director with their experience as and when needed. There is a dramatic difference between rehearsing speech in a classroom and performing in large auditoriums such as The Q Theatre. We recommend you develop a keen awareness of the venue and the vocal projection you will need at the Q Theatre in June and continue your rehearsals at school with this in mind. If you identify vocal skills as a major challenge for your students, contact us so that we can work to support them through the rehearsal process.

### **Floor Space**

For maximum impact we keep the dimensions of the Q Theatre in mind when developing your work. To aid you in this we have included a stage plan with this pack (**APPENDIX 1**).

Consider the stage dimensions, entrances and exits, isles and other features and how you could exploit them.

For example, consider how your performance could spread across the auditorium, or the effect of contracting it into a restricted area. If you are ever unsure about an aspect of the space, contact the Q Theatre Team for clarification.

### **Design**

Beyond the script and the staging there are plenty of opportunities for you to embellish and enhance your performance by imaginatively employing elements of set, costume and props design. Working with the Directors, each school can balance the opportunity to dream up a design aesthetic for the production and refine the number and quality of items you will eventually use in the fully realized final design.

## **Technical Production and Deadlines**

The Riff Festival is an excellent opportunity for your students to engage with the technical aspects of creating a performance and learn how to manage time effectively while working on a project. It's encouraged for directors and teachers to involve students in the technical design and scheduling process throughout the rehearsal period, allowing them to develop hands-on experience in these critical areas.

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

If you have students who are particularly interested in technical production, please get in touch with the Q Theatre Team during your rehearsal sessions. We may be able to offer them the opportunity to volunteer with our production and/or technical crew as part of their preparation for performance day. This experience can count toward VET Entertainment hours where applicable.

## **Music and Sound Design (Copyright Free Options)**

Since much of the music and sound effects created by other artists are often protected by copyright, the Riff Festival requires the use of music and sound effects that are either copyright free or out of copyright. This allows the focus to remain on your students' creative talents and theatre-making skills, rather than navigating complex copyright issues.

Here are some options to access copyright free music and sound effects for your production:

### **Engage Musicians from Your School Group**

- Encourage any musicians from your group to create original music or sound effects for your performance. If you have external musicians or sound designers, you can ask them to grant permission for their work to be used in the performance by writing a letter to the Riff Festival, allowing their music or sound effects to be used for free. This is also a great way to support local artists.

### **YouTube Audio Library:**

- Set up a free account with YouTube Audio Manager, which offers a library of thousands of music tracks in various genres and styles, all available for free use. The YouTube Audio Library also provides an extensive collection of sound effects, perfect for setting the atmosphere of your performance. If you need assistance finding the right tracks for your piece, contact us, and we can help you navigate their offerings.

## **Sound Design, Live Music, and Requests**

### **Recorded Sound:**

- All pre-recorded music and sound effects must be submitted on either a CD or USB drive by the specific deadline. Ensure all tracks are in the correct order and edited to the desired length before submission.

### **Live Music/Instrument Requests:**

- If your production includes live music or instrument requirements, please include these details in your technical requests. Note that you may not parody or alter the lyrics of existing work.

For any technical or music-related questions, or to discuss specific arrangements, feel free to contact the Q Theatre Team, and we will assist you in ensuring your production meets all necessary guidelines.

### Lighting Design and Requests

Most lighting states are possible with the Q Theatre's lighting resources, the chances for special lighting states increase if you let us know early. Contact us before the deadline below if you have any lighting questions or special requests, and we will do our best to accommodate your vision. We encourage you to carefully plan your lighting states for maximum dramatic effect: consider the mood of your scene, the motivation and interactions of your characters, and the general atmosphere you are working to evoke.

### The Script/Technical Deadlines

We understand that the final weeks of rehearsal are a period of rapid development and change, however, to allow the team at The Joan enough time to source and prepare the necessary equipment for all schools involved in the Riff Festival 2026, contact us earlier in the preparations rather than later to ensure a smooth process for all.

### The Riff Production Deadlines

<p><b>Monday, 25 May</b> (3 weeks before Production Week)</p>	<p>Contact the Q Theatre Team with ALL final technical queries. <i>(note: requests made after this point may not be considered due to production limitations)</i></p>
<p><b>Monday, 1 June</b> (2 weeks before Production Week)</p>	<p>Email ALL recorded songs/sound files to the Q Theatre Team.</p>
<p><b>Monday, 8 June</b> (1 week before Production Week)</p>	<p>Email your final Production Script to the Q Theatre Team.  <i>(NOTE: Production Scripts with formatting different to The Riff Festival Script Template provided may not be accepted for Production Week.)</i></p>

## External Engagements

### Industry Feedback

One of the goals of The Riff festival is to provide participants with a clear understanding of the practicalities and processes involved in creating a professional scale production, while also fostering a critical approach to their own work and practices. To support this, we assemble a panel of industry experts each year who offer tailored feedback to each group. This feedback focuses on three key areas: technical production, stagecraft, and performance skills. The aim is to provide constructive reflection for the group, offering insights that will not only inform their current work but also enhance their future performance practice.

### Marketing the Festival

The Riff Festival is a non-profit event, and we rely on ticket sales to ensure the festival can continue year after year. It is expected that both Teachers and Students will actively promote the event. Your efforts to spread the word play a key role in building audiences for the festival,

and this is greatly appreciated by the Riff Festival and all participating schools. We encourage you to advertise the festival within your school networks and direct any interested parties to our Box Office for more details.

Closer to the performance date, The Riff will provide posters and flyers to assist with promotion. We also strongly encourage you to make the most of your 30 student tickets by inviting other year groups, staff, and faculty members to help fill the venue and ensure the performers have the best possible experience.

### Media Consent

By submitting an application to participate in the RIFF Festival, the school acknowledges and agrees that, if accepted, **media consent** is provided for all participating students. This consent permits Q Theatre to capture and use photographs, video, and other recorded media of participants for promotional, archival, and reporting purposes across Q Theatre platforms, including but not limited to websites, social media, and marketing materials.

**If a school or parent/guardian wishes to withdraw media consent for any individual participant, this must be explicitly communicated in writing via email to the Q Theatre Team. All media consent withdrawals must be received no later than Friday, 27 March. Withdrawals received after this date may not be able to be accommodated.** Q Theatre will make reasonable efforts to respect all media consent withdrawals received by the stated deadline.

### Contact

Your main contacts within the Q Theatre Team for enquiries and to discuss your involvement throughout all stages of this year's festival:

#### **Rebecca Matthews – Festival Director**

Rebecca leads the engagement with the Directors and Teachers with each school, and curates the design of this year's Riff Festival. Contact Rebecca for all enquiries relating to your Director, theatrical styles, theme, physical elements, etc.

#### **Adis Regar – Festival Administrator**

Adis leads the administration and coordination aspects of the festival. Contact Adis for all enquiries relating to your invoicing and festival logistics.

#### **Josh Guiliano – Technical Manager**

Josh will be leading the technical preparations, rehearsals and operations for the Riff festival 2026. Contact Josh with any urgent technical issues.

The Q Theatre Team can be reached at the following:

Phone: **(02) 4723 7600 (ext. 2)** Email: [creativelearning@ppandva.com.au](mailto:creativelearning@ppandva.com.au)

APPENDIX 1

Q THEATRE STAGE PLAN

