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Arts Editor

Back To Back Theatre's producers might not know exactly what will be in their new play *Lady Eats Apple*, which has its world premiere at the 2016 Melbourne Festival.

But they do know what their cast and audience will be in – two giant inflatable chambers measuring 8000 and 2500 cubic metres filling the expanse of Hamer Hall.

And they know, at least initially, where the show will go, with the internationally acclaimed outfit already locking in further runs in Australia and overseas before the play has even had its opening night.

Back to Back producer Alice Nash says the Geelong company's plays are created by its ensemble of actors, who are perceived to have an intellectual disability, and by director Bruce Gladwin.

"I think its one of the most exciting things about the creation process," says Ms Nash. "We never know where we're heading when we set off into the narrative woods. It's both exciting and terrifying.

"It is an ensemble company and therefore actors work with the company ... and part of Bruce's job is to share the task for the actor challenging and exciting."

The unusual, often lengthy process has seen the company lauded around the world. Their previous production, *Ganesh Versus The Third Reich*, which sparked controversy when it premiered at the 2011 Melbourne Festival, has since regularly toured overseas, wowing



Playing it by air

crowds at the Edinburgh Festival and catching the eye of arts writers at the *The New York Times*.

"The word I love to use the most to describe Back To Back Theatre's work is sly," says Ms Nash. "While the creative team might proclaim that they might not know where they're going, there's some deep part of their collective imagination [in which they do]."

While the narrative remains a work in progress, what Ms Nash

can reveal ahead of the show's announcement at the Melbourne Festival program launch on Tuesday night, is that it is "ambitious".

For new Melbourne Festival director Jonathan Holloway, an Englishman who has come to Victoria via the Perth Festival, the centrepiece of his first program marks a major step forward for Back To Back (which is about to expand into television, with plans to film a show in the regional

Victorian city next year). "I think taking the world stage is fantastically important," he says, adding he hopes more Australian acts that premiere at Melbourne Festival will go on to tour the world.

Holloway has done away with the festival hub by the Yarra River, instead turning an existing bar – The Toffin Town – into a nightly festival venue. And he promises to make public events in the city streets more visible with acts in-

PICKS OF THE PROGRAM

Ancient Rain

Paul Kelly and Irish-French singer Camille O'Sullivan put W.B. Yeats' poetry to music.

Star Trek: The Ultimate Voyage

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra performs score from film and TV series at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.

Backstage in Biscuit Land

Comedy show by Jess Thoms, who has Tourettes and says "biscuit" 10,000 times a day.

War and Peace

Berlin theatre collective Gob Squad tackle Tolstoy's epic story.

The Home Within

Large-scale installation by Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota that will move around the city.

Giant inflatables form the set of Back To Back Theatre's Melbourne Festival world premiere of *Lady Eats Apple*.
Photo: Jeff Busby

cluding *Les Tambours De Feu* by Catalan company Deabru Beltzak, which will see dancers with pyrotechnics and drums traversing Melbourne laneways.

Holloway is proud of the program's balance between "the specialist and the niche, and the popular and accessible".

Melbourne Festival runs from October 6-23. *The Age* is a festival partner.