

CITATION
Honorary Doctor of Letters
James McCaughey

James McCaughey was a recipient of the Shell (Australia) Scholarship in Arts. He was a graduate of Classical Philology at the Arts Faculty at the University of Melbourne, followed by Divinity Studies at Pembroke College, Cambridge (1965) and an M.Litt. at Dublin University (1967). McCaughey began his professional life teaching classical studies at Princeton and Bryn Mawr College in the United States. Appointed as Seymour Reader in Classics at Ormond College and the University of Melbourne in 1969, he pursued his interest in Epic and Greek Tragedy, creating the Greek Theatre Project dedicated to the production of Greek plays in the language of contemporary theatre. He directed Euripides's *Bacchae* and *Hippolytus* and this project culminated with his production of Aeschylus' *Oresteian Trilogy* at the Pram Factory, Carlton in 1974. He developed a unique approach to choral performance and worked with the Fulbright Fellow, Rush Rehm, currently Professor of Drama and Classics at Stanford University who wrote the translation for the trilogy.

In 1975, when the Faculty of Arts launched a suite of interdisciplinary subjects, McCaughey became the subject leader of the new Interdisciplinary subject in Drama; thus Melbourne became the first Victorian university to teach theatre studies. This year-long course uniquely developed a comparative approach to theatre studies and drew upon academics in Russian (Judith Armstrong) and German (Hector Maclean) to pioneer teaching of important developments in the theatrical canon. In addition, he introduced new approaches to theatre theory and practice, and encouraged the exploration of twentieth century texts, notably Brecht and the Theatre of the Absurd, as well as the creation of new Australian texts and performances. The influence of this program on students has produced teachers, academics and theatre companies, such as The Eleventh Hour, artistic directors, such as Peter King, and playwrights, such as Hannie Rayson.

During this period, James was also a prime mover in establishing the University Assembly, an innovative structure to engage staff in the governance of the University of Melbourne in 1974. Invited to become the inaugural Director of the Performing Arts program at the then-new Deakin University in Geelong, he created the Mill Theatre Company, a leading community theatre group based in Geelong that produced a body of distinctive works based on historical research. The "Mill" has been the subject of much scholarly interest because of its unusual physical theatre aesthetic and complex dramaturgical interactions with the audience.

Subsequently appointed as Director of the Playbox Theatre Company (1984-6), James left to pursue a freelance career which has included winning the Victorian Community History Award for his film *The First Eleven*, about the Aboriginal cricket team that toured England in 1868, working with the Timorese Cultural Group to create a play, *Matebian nia Lian* about the occupation of East Timor and staging *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Gasworks in 2002.

Since 1986, McCaughey has provided wisdom and leadership as Chair of the Gasworks Art Park, South Melbourne, an urban parkland which belongs to the community and houses artists' studios, a theatre, a cafe and a sculpture park. During the 1990s, James was also Chairperson for DanceWorks, a contemporary dance company specializing in choreography.

In summary, McCaughey has made a lifelong contribution to fostering the arts in Melbourne, in particular theatre, with a passion for both the scholarly understanding of complex ideas about belonging and history, and an inclusive vision of the community. He has recently created a solo performance called *Conversations with the Gods about their Deaths and Other Matters* – which has been received with critical acclaim. In light of his contribution to the field of theatre studies at the University, and to his distinctive understanding of the role of the arts in society, it is therefore fitting that the Faculty of Arts should recognize his contribution through the award of Doctor of Letters.