

MMF Inclusivity Guidelines/FAQ – 17.04.21

Part A – Introduction

The Melbourne Magic Festival understands that magic in both its viewing and its performance is more accessible to some groups of people than others. This document is the beginning of a process through which the MMF will engage, learn, and self-reflect on how we as a festival can be more inclusive of people of different races, ethnicities, classes, abilities, religions, genders, sexualities, and ages. We acknowledge our current gaps in understanding particular groups needs and that working towards being more inclusive and supportive will only improve the calibre of the festival we produce.

Until a firm and considered policy and/or code of conduct can be produced, the following document has been written to begin the discussion and answer some initial questions that have emerged from our community.

The aim of this document is to address current behaviour on and off stage by everyone who is involved with the Melbourne Magic Festival. Although it is primarily written towards performers, its content applies to volunteers, stagehands, tech operators, and front of house staff.

The Melbourne Magic Festival acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which perform, rehearse and gather. We pay our respects to their elders past, present, and emerging.

Part B – FAQ

Q: What is "inclusive" and "included"?

A: According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary 'Inclusive' is defined as: *including everyone especially: allowing and accommodating people who have historically been excluded (as because of their race, gender, sexuality, or ability)*

Being inclusive is how we, through our words and our actions, welcome other people into our environment or space regardless of who they are. By not disrespecting people for being different (whatever that difference maybe) you are telling them that they are welcome.

The opposite of inclusivity is discrimination. Being discriminative is not only bad manners, it's against the law.

Q: Is inclusivity only about gender?

A: No, it is about all sorts of differences: race, religion, gender, sexuality, age, neurodivergence, disability, appearance, and so on.

Q: What are pronouns?

A: They are words used to refer to someone or something without using names or proper nouns. E.g. Him, her, they, it, I, we, you.

Q: What is "someone's pronoun"?

A: These are the third person pronouns someone has chosen for themselves to best reflect who they are. E.g. "My name is Sam and my pronouns are she/her", "I'm Alex, and I use they/them pronouns", or "Bailey uses he/him pronouns".

Most people use one set of pronouns: she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, etc.
Some people use multiple sets: she/they, or they/he.

If you are unsure of someone's pronouns, just ask.

There are also "neo-pronouns" – new words created that can be used in the same way. But for now, relax, and don't stress about them.

Q: Is there a default or catch-all pronoun?

A: Yes, use 'they, them, theirs'. Don't presume you know someone's pronouns. Alternatively, if you know someone's name, you can just use that instead.

Q: Isn't it inaccurate to refer to a single person as they?

A: No, 'they' has been in use for a very long time to refer to a person of unknown or unspecified gender since at least the 14th century! Many famous writers have used singular 'they' including Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Austen.

Q: It feels so unnatural and unspontaneous...

A: So is a card sleight. Practise makes perfect.

Q: What if I get it wrong?

A: Quickly correct yourself and move on. It will take practice, but people are very forgiving. The worst thing you can do is bring your show to a standstill and give a 15-minute monologue about "how this is very new" and that you're "so very sorry" and "really trying to get it right".

Q: How should I address/welcome an audience?

A: We are all in the habit of using 'Ladies and Gentlemen' and/or 'Boys and Girls' when addressing the audience as a whole. There are lots of alternatives you can find that will suit the type of performer you are, the show you do, and the audience you have. Here are just a few suggestions:

Formal: *"Good evening everyone"*

Very Formal: *"Distinguished guests"*

Casual: *"Folks"*

Very casual: *"Y'all"*

Silly: *"Ladles and Jellyspoons"*

Shakespearean: *"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears"*

Extra-terrestrial: *"Greetings earthlings"*

Q: Where can I learn more?

A: Talk to people. Listen to your audiences and the world around you. If someone outside of your usual experience has time and patience to tell you about their life, ask questions and hear the answers. Here are some links that are also a good starting point:

Q: Will this help me pick up chicks?

A: That's not really the point now, is it.

Q: Why does this matter? Why is it important to worry about all this?

A: Because it is respectful. The public is increasingly aware and sensitive to this matter. Inclusive language lets everyone know that we have a space where all are welcome and valued based on what we have in common. That we are welcoming of uniqueness, difference, and diversity. As public figures, we are influencers and have the opportunity to shape attitudes and give positive experiences. We have a public platform to make our community better, stronger, happier and our artform more sophisticated.

Q: Do I need to rewrite my show?

A: Perhaps, that's up to you. Looking critically at your material is good artistry and you may, or may not feel you need to do that.

Q: Why should I change my show or language?

A: To create an inclusive and respectful environment. As artists, we choose to look critically at our work in a constant effort to improve, communicate clearly and be relevant. Finally, let's face it, if more people feel comfortable, you'll sell more tickets.

Q: How can I change my show?

A: Consider the effect of every word and action on your audience. We do that anyway to entertain, time a joke, misdirect... Extend your creativity to see if there are more ways that you can be inclusive. Be critical of your work, as all artists should and look at language, jokes and punchlines, routines and props, and see how you can create an environment where everyone can feel that they are being spoken to and included.

Ask yourself: Why do I always do this? Is there an alternative? (e.g. pick a female volunteer, have my assistant dress provocatively, do that one gag or this heckler come back?)

Q: I've never thought about all of this. Am I a bad person?

Once upon a time, it was relatively common for white performers to dress up as a stereotyped Chinese man when they performed. Now, no one dresses up as a Chinese magician unless they are actually Chinese because we know it was wrong then, and it is still wrong now.

No one is going to blacklist your name unless you are deliberately being disrespectful through your language and actions. It will take time to learn, but if you make a deliberate attempt to learn and improve you are certainly on the right path.

Q: How will it improve my show?

A: Any fresh look can be positive and revealing. New ideas may emerge that you had not thought of before. More of your audience will feel you are speaking to them and will want to engage with your work. And anyway, "old fashioned" language can make you seem dated and out of touch, and no one wants that.

Q: How can I make this funny and entertaining?

A: Ask yourself, does this contribute to creating the world in which I want to live? The joy of being in an audience is the sense of community, of oneness, of being included.

Q: It's such a great routine, I don't want to ruin it...

A: Again, think critically or ask for advice. Maybe there is a much better way to present the same core material. Again, you may discover something new or even better.

Q: Is this for children's shows too?

A: Yes. Children are particularly vulnerable to judgement and unintentional negativity. There are clearly different approaches for children and adult shows, as well as for family shows. Children are constantly shaped by memorable experiences, and parents are watching.

Q: How can I do this overnight?

A: You can't. Nobody can, and nobody is expecting you to. It's an adventure of discovery. Don't pressure yourself. Just start.

Q: But the rules keep on changing!

A: Yes they do. Fortunately, as performers, we are infinitely adaptable and our super-power is reading a crowd.

Q: What if someone gets offended at my inclusivity?

A: If someone gets offended that you are being inclusive, then that's on them and not on you. And if they are going to make a fuss and disrupt the show, you probably don't want them there anyway.

Q: Isn't this political correctness gone mad?

A: Yeah, nah. "political correctness" is when people do something because that's what the rules say, not because they want to. though true, sometimes it can be the doorway into breaking bad habits. Ultimately, it's your call.

Q: Why is it so complicated? It seems like a lot. Help!

A: Relax, you may be getting this all at once. Start with small, inclusive changes, and go from there.