



Actor Stephen Noonan, with his son Luca, is performing in *Nursery*

Play group

Sally Chance is pioneering theatre for babies

WORDS CATHERINE CLIFTON PHOTOGRAPH EMMA BRASIER

Baby steps are a slow pace for most adults but the movement is endlessly fascinating for Sally Chance. Babies have "incredible social courage" says the dance and theatre aficionado.

It's their curiosity she hopes to tap into with her new production - *Nursery* - which is part of May's Come

Out Children's Festival. As a former artistic director of Come Out, Sally is familiar with creating a program to appeal to children of all ages but it's the under two age group that has captured her interest.

"We don't know the half of what babies are capable of yet and I'm fascinated by that possibility that there

is more and more to learn about babies and what they're making of the world around and how those early years are incredibly important for shaping how you see yourself and the world around you," she says.

Nursery, a combination of actions, words and music, is specifically for children, aged from four to 18 months.

"At four months, babies are robust enough to sit up and take in the world through all their senses... after 18 months they're looking for something else," Sally says.

"They're hardwired to be seeking out adult interaction and interaction with other babies - they have incredible social courage at this age."

"The last thing I'm expecting is that they'll all sit and not move... they want to move around, make noise and that's fine."

The 40-minute show features a "suite of choreographed sections" that focus on everyday concepts such as near and far, the ball and the garden.

"Essentially it's a beautiful piece of dance theatre

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performed by two dancers - a man and a woman - with live music and babies, up to 20 at a time, each come with an adult and view this," Sally says.

She says the experience encourages interaction and exploration.

"The premise is: You are here in the world and you are welcome," she says.

"I think the reason for making it is exactly the same as making theatre for any age group, it is a reflection of the baby's world, it meets the interactive and social connection-style of babies that age."

Nursery, a co-commission with Come Out and the Out of the Box Festival in Brisbane, features music by Heather Frahn and text by Janeen Brian. The performers are Stephen Noonan and Felicia Hicks.

Sally says the experience is one she hopes remains with the babies and their parents.

"Parents notice their children responding to things in the show that they weren't aware of... theatre can invite parents to experience their babies anew," she says.

"The beautiful thing about the show is that all audiences need to do is be there, there's nothing heavy duty about the experience, it's beautiful, entertaining, gentle and the babies respond to it - I hope - is as entertaining to parents as the show itself and it needs to be both."

Sally, who describes herself as a "dance artist", runs her own consultancy in health and education as well as creating performance work and being mum to an 11-year-old son.

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Sally Chance and Archie Noonan, promoting her first piece of baby theatre, *This Baby Life*, in 2012
PHOTOGRAPH ANNETTE DEW

She was artistic director for three Come Out Festivals, in 2003, 2005 and 2007, and is the founder of Restless Dance.

One of her current roles is to support mums with postnatal depression, encouraging dance play as a way for them to engage with their children.

She admits to being "totally fascinated" by infant mental health and after her third Come Out Festival she received a two-year grant to study the cultural life of babies and very young children.

Spending time with the Acorn Group, which supports parents of babies and children up to three years, at the Women's and Children's Hospital proved a valuable learning experience which

informed her first work for babies and their parents entitled *This Baby Life*.

"In order to make performance work I've drawn on those concepts from infant mental health ... but the last thing I'm doing is analysing the people who come to the show," she says.

While it may sound straightforward, Sally says making work for such a young age group still requires planning and rehearsal, although performers need to be responsive to the audience on the day.

"You can't just jump about in front of a baby with music on ... the babies definitely see the rehearsed aspect of the show and the ebb and flow of the images and if it's

not rehearsed they switch off," she says.

However, she insists "you can make a performance for babies about anything as long as nothing that goes into the show is sudden or scary".

"As long as you're careful about the form, the content can go almost anywhere."

After *Nursery*, Sally will be focusing on a show for two-year-olds based on "cause and effect" and hopes to do a book adaptation at some point.

"It's a time-honoured way of making theatre for children and I've never done it myself," she says.

Nursery is at the Hetzel Lecture Theatre, State Library of SA, from May 25-29. Tickets are \$20 for one adult and child. **Bass.net.au**

FAMILY TIME

Building bridges is the theme of this year's Come Out Children's Festival from May 22-30. The opening event - A Bridge Across Time - will involve more than 2000 people walking across the Adelaide Oval footbridge singing in unison.



→ Big Family Weekend (May 23-24)

The Adelaide Festival Centre and surrounds will be filled with cultural activities for the young and young at heart. Take part in the Cardboard Challenge or the Guinness World Record attempt for the most people contributing to a painting. Join in craft, cooking, music and nature play sessions too.

Highlights of the festival include:

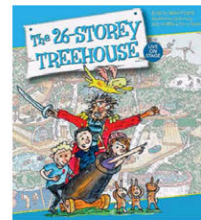
→ Look (May 22-26)

Look, an Imaginary Theatre Production, is described as a gentle story of resilience and friendship for the two to five year olds. It includes a 35-minute performance and interactive play time in the Banquet Room at the Adelaide Festival Centre.



→ Little Big Shots (May 23)

This international film festival for kids includes short stories, animation, documentaries and action films for children and, in some cases, produced by children. It will be at Mercury Cinema, Morphett St, Adelaide.



→ The 26-Storey Treehouse (May 23-24)

A fast-paced adventure by storytelling duo Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton has been adapted for the stage by playwright Richard Tulloch. The show, for children aged from six years, will be at Dunstan Playhouse.

comeoutchildrensfestival.com.au

ALSO SEE



WEEKEND FUN

Puppets, live music, ballet and science all feature in the diverse program for Something on Saturday which begins in May. The Adelaide Festival Centre's four-month program is designed to offer inspiring arts experiences for young people, especially the two to 10 year olds.

Ticketed shows are held on Saturday afternoons and a free art and craft workshop reflects the theme of the day.

May shows include That Science Gang's Just Add Water on May 2, Lights, Camera, Action! by Essential Talent on May 9 and Music for Little Monkeys by The Mudcakes on May 16.

Later highlights include Nay Nay's Tinkertime and Matty Grey's Gressed Out Game Show.

Nay Nay is a Tinkerer: she experiments, plays with ideas, tells stories and loves a challenge. Full of snazzy tunes that will have the kids up and dancing, Matty Grey's Gressed Out Game Show, a hit at the Adelaide Fringe, delivers magical mayhem.

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23