



This Fringe Get Ready for the Weirdest Date You'll Ever Go On

An immersive journey through consciousness at Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne!

*What do a cognitive neuroscientist, a dharma teacher, a stand-up comedian, an 88-year-old woman with Alzheimer's, a teenager or two, a brain injury survivor, a group of running children, and several walking meditators have in common? They are all experts of the present moment, colliding at the World Premiere of *Speed Dating with Cacti*, a fun, immersive 2025 Melbourne Fringe Festival experience at Royal Botanic*

Gardens Melbourne.

This spring, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne invites audiences to take part in *Speed Dating with Cacti* — an immersive, mind-expanding experience that explores the slippery space between science and spirituality. Part theatre, part walking tour, and wholly unexpected, the investigation begins with the question of plant intelligence and ends with the thrilling acceptance of the exciting fact that, in all likelihood, humans will eventually face extinction.

Created by the internationally renowned Canadian performance company Mammalian Diving Reflex, this guided journey leads participants through a series of thought-provoking encounters, meditations, contemplations and demonstrations. Audience members pass from person to person, place to place, idea to idea, engaging with diverse perspectives that invite audiences to explore various models for thinking about consciousness and the true nature of reality.

"At the Gardens, we believe in stories that engage people through respectful, challenging and relevant storytelling that reminds us of our place in nature," said Emer Harrington, Executive Director Experience and Engagement Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. "Year-round creative and cultural events, exhibitions, talks, interpretation and wellbeing and learning programs are informed by principles of vibrancy, social inclusion and respect for First peoples' knowledge systems. *Speed Dating with Cacti*, an extraordinary immersive experience, brings together people of all ages and backgrounds — from a cognitive neuroscientist to teenagers, children to those affected by Alzheimer's — in conversation with the living world around us."

Known for critically acclaimed works such as *Haircuts by Children* and *All the Sex I've Ever Had*, Mammalian Diving Reflex brings its trademark blend of irreverence and insight to the 2025 Melbourne Fringe Festival.

"*Speed Dating with Cacti* is a playful invitation to consider consciousness and to embrace both the bizarreness and beauty of being sentient," said Director Darren O'Donnell from Mammalian Diving Reflex. "Audiences will be gently invited to step out of the everyday and enter a theatrical, philosophical, speculative and sensory adventure that is as enlightening as it is entertaining as it is engulfing."

Presented by Mammalian Diving Reflex in partnership with Melbourne Fringe and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

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END

WHEN: Saturday, October 18 & Sunday, October 19 at 11:00AM and 4:00PM (90 minutes)

Saturday, October 25 & Sunday, October 26 at 11:00AM and 4:00PM (90 minutes)

WHERE: Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne - 100 Birdwood Avenue, Melbourne VIC 3004, Australia

TICKETS: Full \$40, Concession \$30

TO BOOK: Visit melbournefringe.com.au or call (03) 9660 9666

ABOUT

Mammalian Diving Reflex:

"One of Canada's most in-demand cultural exports" - Rosemary McNeil, Weekend Australian

"[MDR] deserves a recognition that hasn't been invented yet." - Khristián Méndez Aguirre, Fusebox

"MDR connects people in a surprising way that is deeply involved with the local community and tailored to the characteristics of the place and society." - Get This Japan

Mammalian Diving Reflex is renowned across the world for its innovative approach to performance, having performed in 29 countries across 200+ tours. Recently, Mammalian was awarded South Korea's Dong-A Award for Best New Conceptual Play Award, Canada's Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Community Leadership, and was a finalist for Ontario Culture Day's Spotlight People's Choice Award, Finland's ANTI Contemporary Art Festival's International Prize for Live Art and the International Theatre Institute's Ellen Stewart International Award. mammalian.ca

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria:

Voted 'Australia's Best Major Tourism Attraction' at the QANTAS Australian Tourism Awards, the heritage-listed Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne offers a plethora of unique outdoor experiences. From a punt ride on the lake, or a relaxing picnic under the oaks, to a guided cultural walk or explorer bus ride along the many meandering trails, there's always something new to enjoy.

Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne delivers unforgettable experiences in one of the most beautiful and botanically rich settings in the country. www.rbg.vic.gov.au

