

# Salvage yard becomes theatre for new Tom Waits musical in Christchurch

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Peter Falkenberg, founder and Artistic Director of Free Theatre Christchurch, at The Pump House in Christchurch.

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An experimental Christchurch theatre company has found a unique place to stage its latest musical – a demolition and salvage yard full of curious wonders.

The Free Theatre company will be performing the [Tom Waits](#) musical *Woyzeck* at The Pump House in Christchurch from Friday.

Director Peter Falkenberg said they had found a perfect venue in [The Pump House](#), which displays salvaged antiques like vintage motorbikes, rugs, statues and pendants in a heritage brick building.

“It is quite a find,” he said.

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“It is an amazing place. The environment is so theatrical. It is like a trash cathedral.

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“We were really surprised when we looked around.”

Falkenberg said the venue was perfect for the musical, which is an adaptation of the classic German play where a soldier hallucinates after being fed an experimental diet of nothing but peas by a doctor.

“When the audience look around that space, they see his hallucinations all around them.”



Hester Ulliyart, left, plays the title role in the new production of Tom Waits musical Woyzeck.

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Woyzeck is the third Tom Waits musical Free Theatre has staged in Christchurch after [The Black Rider in 2017](#) and [Alice in 2018](#). All three productions have been New Zealand premieres of the musicals, which were written between 1990 and 2000.

“It is great stuff,” Falkenberg said.

“We love Tom Waits. The music is a mix of jazz, cabaret and even circus music.”

The original play, by 19th century German playwright Georg Büchner, was the first Free Theatre production Falkenberg directed in 1980.



The Pump House provides a curious backdrop for Free Theatre's latest production.

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“It is a very serious play, but we play it in the most unserious environment.”

Free Theatre struggled to raise funding for the new show. It was rejected three times for funding from Creative New Zealand, but raised money through a Boost Ōtautahi crowdfunding campaign in May 2022.

It as also given small grants by gambling charities, the Christchurch City Council and the Canterbury Arts and Heritage Trust.

“We have done the whole thing on a shoe string.





Pump House owner Paddy Snowden on a vintage motorbike displayed at his eccentric salvage yard.

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“We are like a troupe of actors who have to do make do with what we have. That gives us a kind of charm.”

He said the show felt appropriate for a [world struggling with climate change](#) and war.

“It is a very fitting play for the current time as a lot of the play is about mankind going to hell.

“But we have done it in a way that is very enjoyable.

“If we are going to hell, let’s have fun with it.”

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