



## NONI BALL BLACK BOX THEATRE

On Friday November 18, OLMC Parramatta officially named and blessed the oldest room at the College, the Noni Ball Blackbox Theatre. Home to the College's Drama Department for the last 30 years, the theatre is the only surviving section of the original school building from the late 1800s.



The special event was attended by Sister Noni Ball, Sisters of Mercy, ex students and staff and current College staff. Sister Catherine Ryan, Congregation Leader of the Sisters of Mercy Parramatta officially named the theatre and the Most Rev Kevin Manning DD Bishop Emeritus of Parramatta gave his official blessing.

An ex-student of the College, Sister Noni Ball is an iconic figure in the history of Drama at OLMC. Sister Noni ran adult evening acting classes at the College throughout the 1980s and 1990s and used this room for performance work with these groups. In the first decade of this century, she directed yearly productions in the room with the Mercedes Players theatre group.

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As the oldest surviving space at OLMC, the room is very significant to the College's 127-year history. It is the first place on the premises that was intentionally erected for the purpose of education; although the Callan Sisters had been teaching on the site for a decade prior to its construction in 1899, they taught in pre-existing buildings built for other purposes.

In these early days, the room was a one-room schoolhouse, with several year groups taught simultaneously by more than one Sister. It was not until 1914 that the College built a much larger structure next door with more conventional classrooms. For the next seventy years, the room which is now the Noni Ball Black Box Theatre was used as a general purpose space. It was converted into a library for seven years in the 1960s; bookshelves lined the walls and there was a large open space in the middle and a small stage at one end of the room.

The Catherine McAuley Library, a purpose-built space, was then built in 1970. In the mid-1980s, Drama emerged as a new subject and the College's first Drama teacher, Jane Coburn, suggested that the room was the perfect place for performances and workshops. The College Principal at the time, Sister Janet Woods, had the foresight to recognise the importance of Drama, hence it was offered as a subject substantially earlier than in most schools.

In the intervening years, the room was gradually transformed into a specialist space with black walls, stage curtains, a lighting grid and a fully equipped lighting box. With over a hundred performance evenings over the last decade alone, it has become a theatre as well as a classroom.

The College's Drama Leader of Learning, Sean Travers, says Sister Noni was passionate about using theatre to give people a voice and to promote empathy and confidence; "this passion very much continues to thrive in the Drama Department. In many ways, the Noni Ball Blackbox Theatre represents an unbroken line of educational thought that is firmly based upon the intention of the Founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, which was to empower young women."