

lowdown

Youth Performing Arts in Australia June 2000 Volume 22 Number 3 \$5.50

Registered by Australia Post Pub No. 5834243

DEATH ROW
FOR AUST. GOV.
YOUTH EXPLODES
in ADELAIDE
AXING IN MELBOURNE
CRISIS IN CANBERRA

1979 JOURNALS LIVING 2000

LOWDOWN

Postcards
from

and

Lowdown and
Australian Youth
Performing Arts

'79 - '00

A project of Carclew
Youth Arts Centre

EDITORIAL

There were many different ways Lowdown could have celebrated its twenty-first birthday. I've opted for a very 'Lowdown' approach – to celebrate our birthday by celebrating Australian youth performing arts, through profiling a longstanding company or organisation in every State and Territory. Rather than grab centre-stage with a Lowdown retrospective, I wanted to keep the focus where it should be, on the practitioners and companies who have created and re-created our industry every day since Lowdown started.

The theme is 'Living Journeys', and the issue looks at how the youth performing arts industry has responded to the challenges and changes of the last twenty-one years. Together with some thoughts from AYPAA and YPAA presidents, along with past and present Lowdown editors, I wanted to explore some of the unique characteristics of Australian youth performing arts.

Some characteristics of companies who have negotiated years of change are easy to determine. They include significant youth ownership, a willingness to boldly experiment with form, the building of strategic partnerships, the provision of access to all Australians and not just a particular socio-economic demographic, and the ability to respond to social and technological change. So a youth theatre company doing text-based theatre in the '80s may now be a youth arts company offering a range of creative activities in a venue or over the internet. A TIE company producing educationally sound and morally didactic in-school shows with minimal set and props in the late '70s may now be a TYP company producing confronting in-theatre shows blending theatre,

video, computer graphics and electronica for its young, media-savvy audience. A youth arts organisation using drama for the social development of young people in the '70s may now use young people as its guides in a constantly changing world in order to remain on the cutting edge of creative endeavour.

Trina Parker, in her article on Arena Theatre, points out another important characteristic of one company that has managed to 'keep on keeping on'. A successful company usually has a strong board of management – people with a knowledge of youth arts, a range of skills and experience that support the full-time staff, a willingness to back exciting but possibly untried artistic directors and the good sense to know when to step in and when to hold back.

In having such a tightly focused issue I do have a few regrets. There were many, many people who have made outstanding contributions that we don't mention here. In selecting only one longstanding company from each State and Territory I have also omitted some of the most exciting companies in the country. I offer my sincere apologies to those companies and individuals and acknowledge that, in conveying an impression of the change that Australian youth performing arts has undergone, important parts of that living history are missing. Hopefully someone will remedy the situation by writing the history of youth performing arts in Australia, a book that should and must be written soon.

I hope you enjoy this look at our past, our present and our visions for the future.

Cheers
Tony Mack

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Thanks for the memories!

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The views expressed in this
magazine are not necessarily
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Subscriptions available
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Lowdown and Australian Youth Performing Arts

Lowdown looks at the past, present and future through the eyes of influential AYPAA and YPAA personnel and Lowdown editors.

A CERTAIN KIND OF ENERGY

The connection began in Adelaide 1972 at the inaugural Arts Administration Conference presented under the auspices of the then, Australia Council for the Arts. With representation from all states, several participants meeting each other for the first time realised they were concerned with arts activities for children and young people – so an informal group was formed. Naomi Marks, Diana Sharpe and myself were intrigued to discover that each had started a group or company, in the mid-sixties, within months of each other. The companies were Childrens' Arena Theatre (Melbourne), Australian Theatre for Young People (Sydney) and Childrens' Activities Society (Perth). Lesley Hammond, then with the Australian Marionette Theatre, undertook a network role and whether the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust quite realised it or not, it provided a continuing network and communication link.

Calling ourselves the National Youth and Children's Performing Arts Association and with increasing numbers of contacts, another person working at the Trust in Sydney, Margaret Leask, became the vital link.

In 1973 the Australian Council for the Arts had three panels of the Theatre Board, meeting monthly. I was on the Drama Panel for several years and with colleagues on the Dance and Puppetry panels, was pleased when our push for a separate Youth Panel was agreed to. It had a strong group representing each state and several forms of endeavour and as the panel met frequently and in a different state each time, it provided an ideal opportunity for the new association to plot and prosper. With Barbara Manning, Murray Foy, Jenny Blocksidge, Ken Conway and David Young involved in a number of ways, we were up and away. In 1974 the Youth Panel received a grant to engage someone to undertake a nation wide survey to make

contact with as many people as possible, to present the findings in open seminars and to provide a final report with recommendations. Anne Godfrey-Smith (Edgeworth) was appointed to undertake this huge task. Anne gave tremendous service, journeying on our behalf, far afield, into regional centres and remote areas. Her key recommendations focussed on the need to develop

arts that the future lies and it is quite possible that they will be unlike the arts to which we have grown accustomed...

A year later, during the first Canberra Festival, we became a duly constituted body, with state branches (or representatives), a new name – The Australian Youth Performing Arts Association and a regular newsletter.

So there we were! Number one recommendation – a communication service. The AYPAA newsletter, developed by Margaret Leask, was further enlivened by Geoffrey Brown (first Editor of Lowdown). Our umbrella base moved from the Trust to the Sydney University Theatre Workshop, thanks to Derek Nicholson and Robert Love, then to Carclew and the energies of the late seventies in Adelaide.

I well remember the impact the first time I hand delivered Lowdown to the members of the international committee of ASSITEJ. It seemed few other countries had a publication devoted to young people's performing arts. Several Australians had made personal contact with this international body (ASSITEJ) in earlier years and Margaret Leask attended the Berlin meeting in the mid-seventies using our AYPAA name perhaps for the first time. I went, as the lone Australian, to Madrid and formally made a bid to join ASSITEJ. A year later I was invited to the committee meeting in Washington DC – it was magic being able to deliver an impressive magazine style publication under their hotel room doors before breakfast, along with the morning paper.

And thanks to the name which came from Maggie Wilde-West – 'well, give 'em the lowdown kid'... it did and still is!

Thanks everyone for not allowing Lowdown to lie down.

JOAN POPE

Inaugural National President, AYPAA

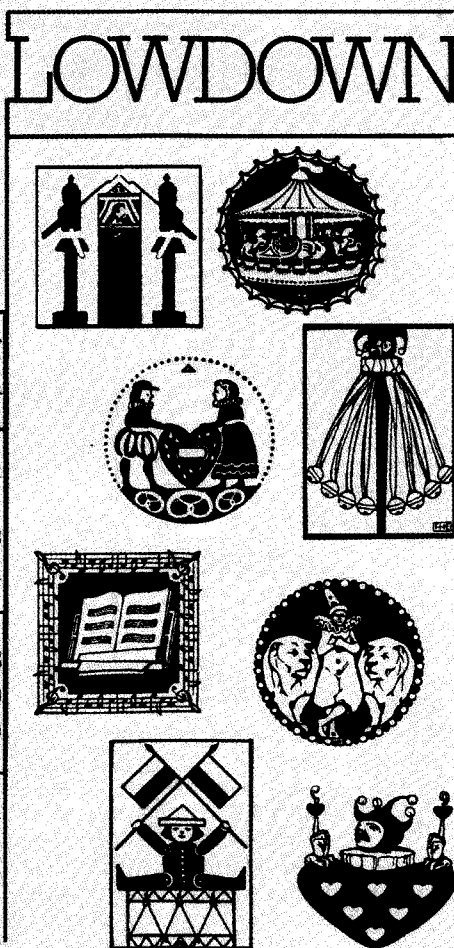


The Journal of
National AYPAA

Australian
Youth
Performing Arts
Association

Vol 1, No 3
NOV-DEC 79
\$1.00

National AYPAA
is the
Australian Centre
for ASSITEJ



communication services to provide up to date information to the field (and about the field), to look into the longer term possibilities of using film, TV and new media to assist the exchange of information and to bring regional arts personnel together in face to face conferences and festivals. Some of Anne's words proved prophetic: 'It is with youth

LOWDOWN - THE EARLY YEARS

The 'pre-launch' issue appeared in early 1979 and the first issue in July. Lowdown was up and running.

I had been appointed by 'National AYPAA' (the national body of the then Australian Youth Performing Arts Association) as their 'National Consultant' from July 1978. For the previous six months, I had been Administrator for the Toe Truck Theatre in Education Company, based in Sydney, having graduated from the University of NSW at the end of 1977. My involvement in youth arts was, to say the least, limited.

Here I was, though, working with an executive group of state delegates who were at the forefront of youth arts development at the time: Joan Pope from Perth, running CATS; Graham Scott, involved in the Victorian Youth Theatre Association and the Education Department's drama activities; Andrew Bleby, from the Come Out festival and the Adelaide Festival Centre; Robert Love from Toe Truck TIE in Sydney; as well as Peter Wilkins (ACT), Brian Haslem (Tasmania), Bernice Watson (NT), and Mary Gibbs (Queensland). And working with the wonderful Anne Godfrey-Smith, whose review of youth arts in Australia had just been published.

The pre-launch issue of Lowdown reflects the buzz of activity at the time – and also some fairly dire production values, it should be noted. It was an A4 publication, typed on a fabulous IBM Selectric golf-ball typewriter and then copied and stapled in-house at the University of Sydney's print shop, if I recall. Fifty-four pages and no photos! Well, the cover had some graphics – German graphic trade symbols of 'industries', representing carnival, gingerbread, circus, toys and music – what was I thinking of??

And the content! Well, it was all happening in 1979, the 'International Year of the Child'. National AYPAA had directed its resources into the INROADS Project, a series of state-based initiatives for young people in remote and rural areas. These included using a train to take the arts to young people in rural Victoria, a project on King Island off the coast of Tasmania, work in Jervis Bay, a 'Kids Convoy' project in WA and the NT, and a Riverina-based youth arts project in NSW.

This first issue also reported on a wide range of the youth arts scene at the time and companies active then, including the ATYP, Patch Theatre and the Shopfront Theatre. National AYPAA itself had just concluded its national tour of John and Sue Fox, from Welfare State International in the UK, who had undertaken youth and community arts projects all across Australia.

Wonderful stuff. After a few issues of Lowdown, National AYPAA accepted an offer it couldn't refuse from the SA government to be based within the glamour of Carclew and away from the support offered by Derek Nicholson and Theatre Workshop at the University of Sydney. Their support for National AYPAA

FROM THE UNKNOWN TO THE KNOWN

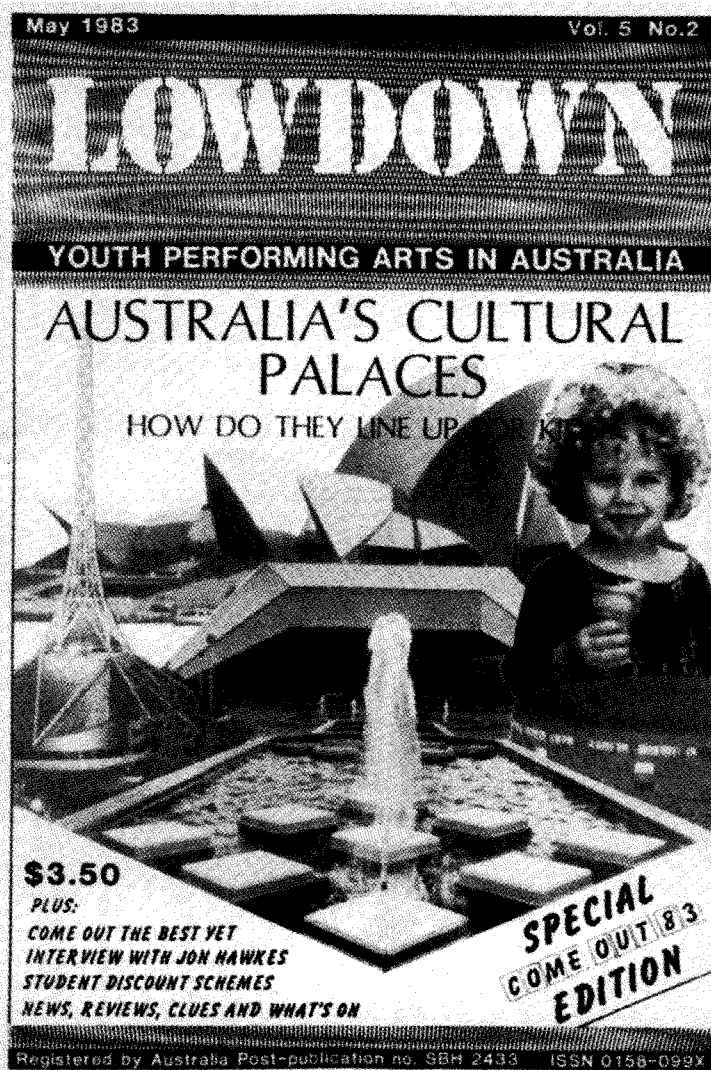
The key person to world recognition of Australian youth performing arts practice is Roger Chapman. As Director of the Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre in the 1980s he ensured the full support of the national centre of ASSITEJ Australia, with its main role to present the national interest at international levels. This was based on his own experience that Australia, while unknown to the world at that time, had a great deal to offer in the quality of the work and the calibre of its artists. He believed that Australia, through its multicultural, diverse and original work, was a model for many countries seeking contemporary practice with which to engage the interest of their young audiences.

I became Director of the centre at the time and well remember our discussions that the future lay in establishing and continuing representation in international activities. The best way to achieve this, we decided, would be through ongoing membership of the ASSITEJ Executive Committee, Australian productions in world festivals and the

participation of artists in key events and study tours. At the same time there should be support of invitations to world companies and key personnel to major Australian events. All should be implemented through one of Roger's well-known working principles – 'go straight to the top'. In such ways, an Australian presence and profile could be maintained and Australia could become a leader in the field.

The springboard was the 1987 ASSITEJ World Congress in Adelaide, which brought international attention to Australia for the first time and opened the way for future development. While Australian practice has much changed since then, it still remains in the forefront of original and noteworthy work.

It is remarkable that in all of this 'Lowdown' was – and indeed still is – an outstanding support. Its quality reporting and its documentation of significant productions



– and for the launch of Lowdown – was essential and I personally pass on my grateful thanks.

The names changed – in 1980, new delegates included Trina Parker (Victoria), Catherine Beall (ACT), Garry Fry (NSW), Heather Ross (Qld) and Liz Andrew (NT). I left in 1981 to work overseas – initially to meet up with Margaret Leask, who had been the first paid staff member for AYPAA and who was then working in London (and acting as AYPAA's London correspondent). But Lowdown continues – it is a fantastic achievement, and my congratulations to all those who followed and who have turned it into the successful and respected journal it is today.

I would love to hear from anyone involved in those days – send me an email at <euclid@cwcom.net>.

GEOFFREY BROWN
Lowdown founding Editor

and events reinforce the changed view that Australia is a country to be reckoned with.

The rest is history, as they say. I carried forward the facilitation and enablement of Australia to the world. Australian companies and artists did the rest so that today, far from being the great unknown, Australia is well known and well regarded. Today Australia is recognised internationally for its youth performing arts practice, its strong and thoughtful voice in international deliberations and its contribution to the advancement of ASSITEJ, the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People.

MICHAEL FITZGERALD

*Director, Youth Performing Arts Australia,
1985–1999*

*World President, ASSITEJ International,
1993–1999*

LOWDOWN – A FORUM FOR DEBATE

I remember my time as Assistant Editor, and then Editor of Lowdown, between 1990 and 1992 with great fondness. I also recall how constantly buoyed I was by the energy, skill, intelligence and creativity of the artists working in the youth performing arts and TYP sector. They influenced my decision to leave the world of editing and journalism to become an arts administrator, thus joining the process of producing performing arts work myself.

Notwithstanding, Lowdown had then (and still has) a difficult role in preserving its role as a forum for argument and debate as well as being a repository for press releases, news, profiles and advertising. The youth arts sector is often poorly funded with concomitant poor resources – thus its achievements are best attributed to the commitment, tenacity and passion of the youth participants and professional arts workers. As the only journal in Australia dedicated to these artists and this sector, I remember feeling a profound sense of responsibility, as well as a real anxiety, about the 'support' role that we were perceived to hold. If we sent a reviewer to see the work of a youth theatre company it may well have been the only press attention, almost certainly the only national attention, the work received. Understandably, this meant artists were very sensitive to negative comment in the magazine about their work, although everyone seemed to agree it was terribly important for the health of the artform to

continue to analyse, debate, argue and question the issues that affected and arose from youth performing arts practice. It was interesting to see from Danielle Cooper's comments in the most recent issue of Lowdown that these issues are as fresh as ever.

I recall commissioning an interview (Lowdown, June 1992) with one of the great British theatre critics Michael Billington. While he is of course the theatre critic for The Guardian and not dedicated to working in the youth arts sector, I found his comments illuminating and as relevant for the youth arts sector then as they were for all arts practice:

'Firstly, you are analysing and interpreting work to a reader. Secondly, you're fighting for the health of the art you're describing. You're fighting for standards... as critics we should be constantly campaigning for a better theatre.'

I hope that Lowdown, then and now, has been part of that campaign, but I suspect its dual role as both a support base and critic of youth arts policy and practice is still troublesome. For example, I noticed

rigorous and intelligent debate and critique of its work does not mean a lack of support for the artform. Nor is it necessarily an example (in the case of youth arts companies and practice) of how the reviewer misunderstood the process. Perhaps it was one of those rare occasions in which everything being reviewed in the last eight weeks was terrific. Nevertheless, I would hate Lowdown to become a pinboard of press releases or a source of breathless praise for youth arts activity – and when competition for funding is high it can be very easy for that to occur.

Other memories for me that still resonate are Zane Trow's article in 1992 in which he discussed the Next Wave festival and the way it had showcased the work of those music/theatre workers engaged with technology and multi-media artforms. He noted how reluctant TYP companies were to incorporate cross-artform influences and also pleaded for a decent interaction between artists working in a variety of disciplines into TYP and youth practice. Re-reading that piece is fascinating now – on the one hand Rosemary Myer's work at

Arena Theatre almost obviates Zane's 1992 concerns about TYP's prejudices, while on the other hand I think some of his concerns are truer today than they were in 1992.

Congratulations Lowdown for reaching 21 years and for delivering many moments in which its readers have been challenged, delighted, angered and made proud. You have had an extraordinary, singular place in Australia's cultural life. Long may you thrive!

With love for the next 21.

RACHEL HEALY

Lowdown Editor (1991–92)

YPAA FUTURE DIRECTIONS

I feel lucky to be joining YPAA at this particular point in time – just after an inspirational national conference at which the Australia Council launched the Youth and the Arts Framework, and YPAA launched its new website. There are a lot of warm feelings out there about youth performing arts.

However, I feel that there is still a huge gap between the arts industry as we all know it, and young people out there wanting a piece of it but having no idea how to go about it. Not everyone wants to go to NIDA, and we should be able to encourage and support people to



that in the last issue of Lowdown there was not a single critical word about any aspect of the productions reviewed. Youth arts activity in Australia is old enough, and sophisticated enough, to recognise that a

access the arts in their own way, whether it's through the local choir, or volunteering for a local festival, or making a short film. If we can provide this, we will be creating not just our future Buzz, Patch, Arena or Kite artists and managers but, more importantly, an interested and inquisitive and supportive generation of arts lovers, audience and bureaucrats.

YPAA's role in this is an advocacy one, on behalf of its membership, and it covers two ends of the spectrum. One is getting in the ear of government as much as possible and helping them to listen to young people. YPAA exists to ensure that every time a decision is made at government level, youth arts practice is considered as a key issue.

The other end of the spectrum is promoting a more open and welcoming attitude to young people within the arts industry itself. This can be with very simple things like spending a bit more time on the phone with young people who inquire about how they might get involved, having well structured work experience programs, and offering bargain tickets to young people.

The main challenge for YPAA in the future, I believe, is constantly finding new ways of being representative of and advocating for all young people – street kids who are out of the education system as much as young people with more opportunities. YPAA should help promote programs such as Sydney's Sounds of the City, which enables at risk young people an opportunity to make music and be part of a social scene. We need to work with the Department of Youth Affairs on issues such as careers information in the education sector to make sure that YPAA's work is complemented by what's being taught in schools. We need to work with the Australia Council on how to allow more flexibility in the definition, assessment and practice of youth arts, and how to get more money where it's really needed.

On a bigger scale, YPAA needs to be able to present a glorious face of Australian youth arts practice to the rest of the world. This can best be done by believing it first ourselves – celebrating our achievements so far, emailing each other when we've enjoyed some work, sharing processes and models that work, and above all, embracing the diversity that youth arts gives to our cultural life in Australia.

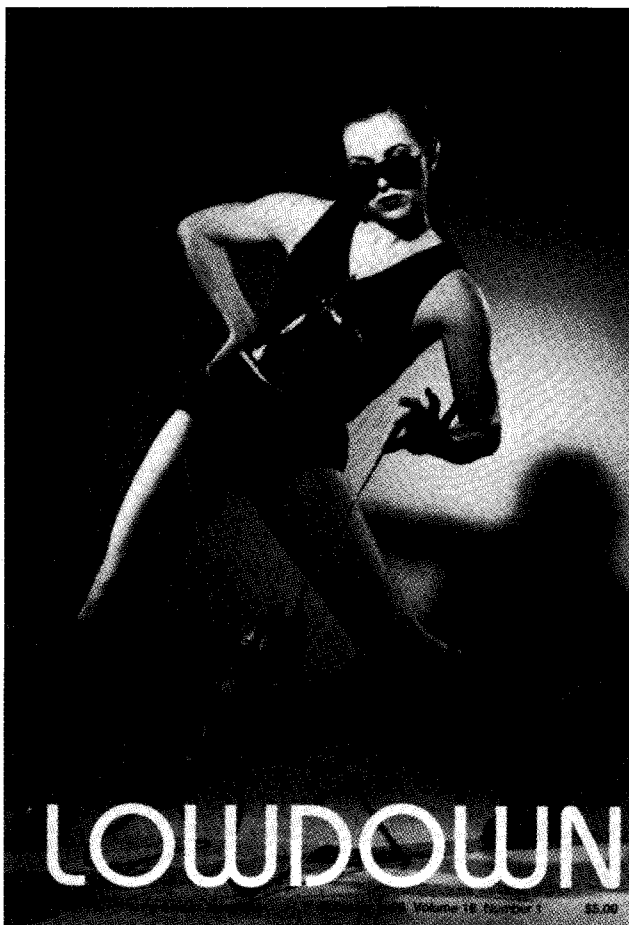
NICOLE BEYER

YPAA Executive Officer, 2000–

LOWDOWN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Lowdown has managed the impossible, in terms of Australian performing arts publications, by managing not just to survive but to thrive over its twenty-one year history. It will continue to provide a forum whereby the Australian youth performing arts industry can express itself, and will continue to profile major events and outstanding work, report on innovation and emerging artists, and reflect the diversity of youth arts practice.

Readers will also have noticed new trends in the magazine. I've introduced a new generation of young writers over the last five issues. People like Kate Mulvany, Lana Gishkariany, Rachel Paterson, Neville



Talbot and Angela Warren are only a few of a dozen or more young, highly talented, multi-skilled artworkers writing for Lowdown that may not be all that well-known outside their home states now. I'd like to make a bet that some of these names will be very well-known in the arts nationally over the next decade.

Combined with Lowdown's large team of experienced writers and the commissioning of writers who are experts in their field, I want to create a 'must-read' magazine for the industry. I'm also putting a greater emphasis on variety, with hard-edged policy discussions followed by 'colour' articles that give a real sense of the performing arts experience, followed in turn by profiles of companies or projects.

There will be a continued interest in international developments in youth arts. As shown by recent articles from France, Germany, Denmark, New Zealand and Ecuador, I believe that we need to inform ourselves on more than a national level in order to aspire to, and achieve, the very best in artistic standards, enlightened policy-making and innovative programming. A number of people at the last YPAA conference spoke to me too about their desire for more craft-based articles. Over the next year I hope to look at a variety of areas, such as acting, characterisation, directing and script models for multimedia performance.

Our 'coming of age' occurs at a time when there is a strong focus on youth arts.

Whether that will produce tangible results is too early to tell – we are told by the Australia Council that youth arts is a priority, but that hasn't been backed up by cold hard cash. Meanwhile underfunded and under-resourced youth arts companies performing to packed houses and international acclaim watch as the Nugent Inquiry gives a leg up to some major arts organisations with falling subscriptions and staid programming. Even when youth performing arts companies do all the right things there seems to be a ceiling made of shatter-proof glass.

As an industry though we need to ensure that, whatever the inequities, we mustn't allow them to get in the way of excellence. For Lowdown this means being more rigorous in our discussion of the challenges, obstacles and issues facing youth performing arts. Hopefully readers have already noticed a trend in this direction, with recent articles on the Nugent Inquiry, best practice in youth arts, YPAA in the international arena and Judith McLean's YPAA address on 'Strategic Alliances for Aesthetic Product'. Reviewers should take Rachel Healy's comments on board too – within the context of each performing arts experience Lowdown needs to take a long hard look at whether the production delivers the outcomes it promises with high production standards, innovative form and strong content.

One of my favourite memories so far as Editor of Lowdown was, at short notice, to get a reviewer conversant with youth theatre practice to a cemetery at night in Townsville to review a show. At its best, Lowdown reflects the diversity of Australian youth performing arts in a way that no other publication in the country comes close to achieving. I'm proud of that but am under no illusions. We've earned the privilege of covering some of the most exciting art in Australia by hard work, tough decisions and constant dialogue with the industry at a grassroots level.

We hope to continue to earn that privilege for the next twenty-one years.

TONY MACK

Lowdown Editor (1999–)

Sitting snugly amongst the privileged on North Adelaide's Montefiore Hill is the outstanding historical mansion, Carclew. Once a private home to Adelaide's earliest elite, today it is the administrative home of the South Australian Youth Arts Board (SAYAB) as well as a firmly established hub of activity, training and resources for young developing artists. As a youth arts centre Carclew lays claim to an

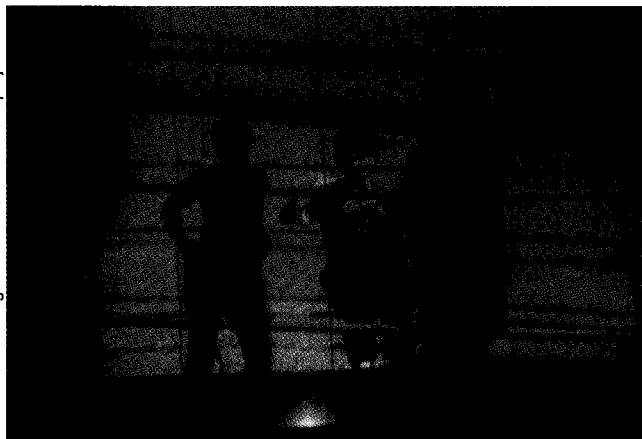
architecture. Dennison sold the property in 1908 to Sir Langdon Bonython who, paying homage to his ancestral heritage, named the house after the Carclew area in Cornwall. The residence remained in the Bonython family until the death of the youngest Bonython daughter, Ada, in 1965.

With assistance from the State Government the property was purchased by the Adelaide City Council with a view to establishing a Festival Centre on the site. That original plan changed, however, and despite having been claimed by Premier Don Dunstan to become an arts centre for young people in 1971, the site lay dormant for several years while the board of management struggled



Promotional material for Off the Couch. Photograph: Jeremy Watson

An image from Carclew's DVFWM project.



carclew

and the art of excellence

impressive record in having secured continual financial support across an ever changing government landscape, as well as managing to thrive even in the leanest of times. Perhaps even more remarkable is that Carclew and its managing board remain nationally unique in representing a dedicated youth arts framework for policy, funding and activity that other states are only just beginning to consider.

The first impression, upon visiting the Carclew site, is wonder at its sheer beauty. The elegance of its grounds and aesthetic facilities says something about the value of youth arts in South Australia. First time guests should always experience the house's original front entrance, surrounded by the stately, palm-studded grounds. Once inside, the visitor encounters an impressive hall dominated by an elaborate Queen Anne style staircase that leads past three arched stained glass windows on the landing on the way to the upstairs offices. From upstairs you can see across to the Adelaide Oval and beyond to the CBD. These days the standard business entry is via the back door, past the coke machines and old stables (now the Lowdown office and studio space). It's a somewhat less grand experience, though a lot more practical.

Carclew stands on the site of the original residence of James Chambers, a successful transport business operator who bought the land in 1840. The stone wall surrounding the property and stables that still exist today were erected by Chambers, though his original modest home no longer exists. The residence that is now Carclew was built in 1897 by Sir Hugh Dennison, an early Adelaide MP and wealthy business man with a penchant for German

to come to agreement on its long-term use. An alternative proposal was accepted in 1974 that allowed Helmut Bakaitis, Director of the South Australian Theatre Company's Youth Team, to run his 'Saturday Company', a youth drama group based with the then South Australia Theatre Company (SATC).

The '70s proved to be an extraordinary renaissance for the arts in Adelaide, due largely to the dedication of the Dunstan administration. So passionate was Premier Don Dunstan's personal commitment to cultural development in South Australia that the Department for the Arts was a division of the Premier's office. The Festival Centre complex was built and South Australia demonstrated leadership in the youth arts field with the initiation of Australia's first dedicated children's festival, Come Out, in 1975.

At federal level, a change of government to Labor in the early '70s saw the establishment of both the Australia Council and the Schools Commission, both of which gave Carclew access to federal funds for the first time. Carclew gained recognition further afield when the Australian Youth Performing Arts Association (AYPAA), with its strong links with ASSITEJ (The International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People), located to the centre. A strong association still exists today with Youth Performing Arts Australia (YPAA).

A significant boost for Carclew came in 1977, when the State Government bought the property outright from the Adelaide City Council. The sale saw an increased commitment of financial assistance (including a \$90,000 upgrade to grounds and facilities the following year) and a new

board of management aimed at directing the centre into the kind of multi-artistic activity originally envisaged. Three permanent staff were appointed including Sue Averay who, as Artistic Coordinator, took advantage of the favourable circumstances to introduce equity of access to programming policy, particularly with regard to children from low income families. Averay introduced several extracurricular programs including the centre's first school holiday activity program – a highly successful model that is still used by the centre today.

After a surge of artistic activity that lasted almost a decade, the Department for the Arts initiated an inquiry in 1979 into services catering for youth arts in South Australia. With the intention of rationalising resources, the Report of the Working Party recommended that Carclew's primary focus change from a young people's activity centre to an administrative hub and information resource for youth performing arts. The centre gained a new Director, Roger Chapman, and was renamed Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre Incorporated. The new Youth Performing Arts Council (YPAC) was appointed in 1980. YPAC's charter was to advise government on youth performing arts policy and funding and, through Carclew, to coordinate activities, assist companies working with or for young people and to mount projects of its own.

YPAC's response to community concerns with regard to arts and education in the '80s was to provide, through Carclew, a nexus between the Education and Arts Departments so that youth arts policy development would remain consistent with



education policy. Carclew hosted the national Theatre-In-Education Director's Conference and provided an information service about performers' availability to schools. A Lending and Information Service was established for educators, as well as the Youth Arts Press where, of course, *Lowdown* was printed. The link between arts and education has held over the years – Carclew continues to offer a range of services to school communities including advice on artist availability, project sponsorships and grants to encourage touring performances as well as providing for artist residencies in schools by way of the Artists-in-Schools program.

In 1986 the Odeon Theatre, located at Norwood, was purchased for use by young people's companies, schools, community and youth organisations. It continues as a project of Carclew today and is still the state's only fully equipped professional theatre complex dedicated to young people. It offers subsidised or even free use of the theatre as well as rehearsal and exhibition space to assist young and emerging artists to gain access to professional facilities without financial pressure. In addition, the Odeon staff conduct a comprehensive training scheme to provide work experience for budding theatre technicians. The complex is undisputedly one of Carclew's enduring successes, with future growth planned for its already busy schedule.

By the late '80s Carclew's operational costs had grown significantly and required attention. By this time the overall management of youth arts were seen to be unnecessarily fragmented. In 1988, the Youth Performing Arts Council Review recognised the need for a single authoritative body to deal with youth arts in all artforms. Hence, the South Australian Youth Arts Board (SAYAB) was established, replacing YPAC. SAYAB is directly responsible to the Minister for the Arts for policy and program planning, development, implementation and evaluation for all art forms.

By the time Carclew's new (and existing) Director, Judy Potter, was appointed in 1990 the centre was badly in need of a directional change. Changes in the arts, society and youth culture, and increased knowledge of how to work with young people, meant that the directional shift was extensive. Bringing a strong youth work model, Ms Potter's first

task involved balancing major staffing restructures that embraced a diversity of skills, particularly in the youth work field as well as current arts practice experience.

The entire facility was upended – relocating offices to the upstairs floor allowed maximum use of the facility for exhibitions and as a meeting place for young artists and arts workers.

The original stables were converted into soundproofed studio space. Today the facilities include a photographic darkroom, band rehearsal room, sound and video studio hiring equipment, graphics and internet computer, arts and craft room and two exhibition spaces. These facilities are in a constant state of improvement in order to run high quality workshops in the technical arts, from film techniques to sound recording, using up to date equipment.

To recognise its focus on the full range of the arts, Carclew underwent a name change to Carclew Youth Arts Centre Incorporated and the youth profile was expanded to include young people from 5 up to the age of 26 years. First priorities were to construct a program regime that gave the youth clientele ownership of their activities as well as cater to the differing demands of the whole span of youth. For the 5 to 12 age range the school holiday program was built up with a plethora of arts and craft activities, including physical theatre, cartooning, storybook construction, jewellery making, puppetry, photography, music and dance. Throughout 1999 Carclew has significantly developed its reach by networking with childcare centres across Adelaide to provide over 40 outreach workshops to children who otherwise would have great difficulty accessing the centre. This initiative has meant that some 2,000 children a year can now come into contact with Carclew's school holiday program.

In catering for adolescents, one of the first projects to emerge was *Artery*, a participation program designed to involve young people aged from 13 to 26 in implementing and managing their own artistic activities. *Artery* is developed in partnership with community based organisations across metropolitan and regional South Australia. A recent achievement for Carclew was to secure funding from the Australia Council for *Artery*, after some ten years of trying!

The *Artery* Party, just as popular, originated as the launch for the *Artery* project, but soon took on a life of its own. This annual event now draws crowds of over 3,000 and relies on the volunteered efforts of hundreds of young team members. It is an opportunity for young arts workers, both performers and event organisers, to develop a number of skills in their field of interest. Their efforts were recognised last year when the *Artery*

program won the National Community Link Award in the South Australian Division for Art and Culture.

A highly successful music project, *Off the Couch*, has blossomed from its modest beginnings in 1995 to become a major contemporary music event that, in 1999, presented 110 acts in 12 venues, involving 440 performers playing to an audience of 13,400. Like *Artery*, *Off the Couch* allows young people direct involvement in the management of their own artistic endeavours. Last year Carclew presented the project model to Melbourne's Art and Community Conference and the Youth Performing Arts National Conference, hosted by YPAA.

Current and future interests of the organisation reflect a growing community focus on training and skill broadening in the arts. As a registered training provider, Carclew coordinates a 12 month traineeship in Arts Administration involving some 27 students in this year's intake, as well as two short term training and employment schemes for young performing and visual artists. *City Sites*, catering for the visual arts, allows young visual artists to undertake commissioned works for public installation under the guidance of professional tutors. When initiated in 1996, *City Sites* was the only project of its kind in the southern hemisphere – it still is.

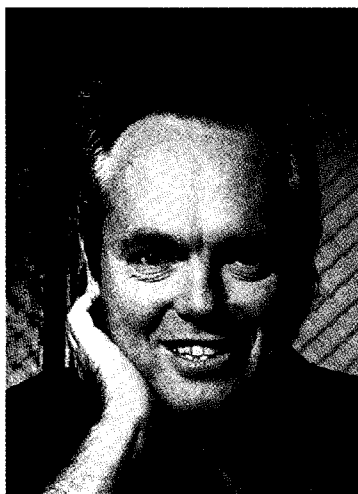
In response to the need for the development of indigenous arts, Carclew embraces young indigenous interests in a number of programs linked to the *Come Out Nunga Day* and *Blak Nite* events. The organisation's current dilemma – how to promote artistic activity to regionally based young people – is closely aligned with the need to broaden its reach to indigenous groups. Part of the answer has been to tour statewide indigenous performance pieces as well as conducting regional seminars and workshops, but generating regional based arts activity is a logistical problem that Carclew is likely to grapple with for some time. Early signs for regional South Australia are good though, with the success of the regional contemporary music program *DVFM* and the announcement that *City Sites* will move into regional areas in 2001.

At present Carclew employs 20 full time staff and administers an annual budget of \$1.9 million. Its website receives over 150,000 hits per year and its statewide reach last year topped 35,000. As an established authority in the youth arts sphere, Carclew continues to play a key mentoring role to countless thousands of young South Australians in the development and proliferation of youth arts practice, as it has done for almost 30 years. Its current emphasis on performance, work and training opportunities place the organisation undoubtedly amongst the world's contemporary leaders in the field of youth arts.

●
LAURIE WEBB

In 1986, nestled under the umbrella of the WA Theatre Company, in the bowels of the Playhouse Theatre in Perth, what was formerly (and disparagingly) referred to as the T.I.E. Team got a new identity, a new sweat shirt and a new vision under its Artistic Director John B. Saunders. 'Acting Out' had come into being and, in a few years, would out-survive and outshine its parent company.

From his appointment in 1985, John's belief in young people's theatre saw him put the company on the main stage at the Playhouse, as well as in prisons, regional venues and nightclubs. He was Artistic Director of the WA Theatre Company when Grahame Gavin accepted the task of running Acting Out in 1989. Grahame liked the idea of being part of a larger company and the opportunities that would hold for making fully blown theatre for young people. John had managed to raise the profile of Acting Out, but with Grahame things went global – in his first year, 'Kit and Kaboodle' went to Japan. Grahame describes this more as a cultural exchange than an artistic coup. The first significant move for Acting Out's acceptance as a world class company was the invitation for 'Dolphin Talk' to go to the Vancouver Children's Festival and other North American festivals in 1990. It was with this play that the company developed certain integral relationships and work processes that eventually led to the creation of the Visiting the Relatives Trilogy, comprising 'Dolphin Talk', 'Visiting the Relatives' and



GECKO TALES

Lowdown interviews Grahame Gavin, Artistic Director of Barking Gecko Theatre Company.

'Ivory Circle'. These strongly movement based plays on ecological issues have defined the company overseas and in Australia.

When the WA Theatre Company folded one year into his contract, Grahame admits to being bitter. It highlighted the vulnerability of young people's theatre, as 'the Chairman of the WA Theatre Company, had not even heard of Acting Out'. It was at the suggestion of Acting Out's first Chairman, Tony Wilson, that they set up independently. At the end of 1994, to mark the start of a regular body of in-theatre work to augment

became independent within two years as planned, and how it has flourished. In 1996, The Awesome International Children's Festival was born out of funds Barking Gecko had for a show that didn't happen, and an agreement between them, 2 Dance Plus and Spare Parts Puppet Theatre that what Perth needed was a children's festival. It has since grown into an internationally recognised event for young people. The third and not as yet independent tail is Gecko Bytes, a workshop program for school aged children. Grahame would like to see this develop into a fully functional youth theatre company.

An international profile has led to requests for tours in Asia and Europe. To deal with the problem of a non-English speaking audience, Barking Gecko decided to develop their trademark strong design and tie it to a greater emphasis on visuals and music resulting in 'Starlight, Starbright'. The show recently toured to Singapore where it



the schools touring, the company changed its name to Barking Gecko.

Grahame has always believed that the big picture for arts for young people is more important than what an individual company actually achieves: 'If the big picture is healthy, then it has benefits for all'. This belief has led to the Gecko growing three tails, in answer to the needs of the time. Two of these tails have developed fully functional bodies of their own. The initiative for Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre stemmed from Aboriginal artists wanting more self-determination in the field and the need for a company that was better equipped to deal with the different work processes that Aboriginal Theatre requires. Initially set up with money Barking Gecko had in reserve, Yirra Yaakin

was well received. This was a brave new step for the company wading deeper than before into the waters of dance, mime and puppetry. Grahame does not see this as a major change in direction – 'The extremity of the shift is more show-specific than directional' – but he is looking to do more material that will appeal to a non-English speaking audience.

One of Grahame's dreams is to see Barking Gecko in its own venue, where the aesthetics are specifically tailored for children: 'All it takes is an act of will by a visionary politician to make this a reality'. Meanwhile, he'll work on stabilizing the international touring schedule and the collaborations that the company does. There are discussions for a co-production with an Indian company, and a possible commission by the Singapore Government for a production in Singapore. In fact, there is a vision to set up a regular base in Singapore. The company has achieved a lot in a decade, from merely surviving to being runner up in the ASSITEJ Honorary Presidents' Award. Who knows what dreams may come?

SHIRLEY VAN SANDEN

PACT –

Continuity Through Change

Performers from 'Heterosced Youth'. Photograph: Michael Bates



New South Wales' PACT has been operating since 1964 as a company committed to experimentation with theatrical form and the performance of new Australian works. Ten years later it became PACT Youth Theatre, but the change of focus did not see a lessening of the group's original intentions. Lowdown Editor Tony Mack talks to three recent Artistic Directors – Anna Messariti (1994–97), Chris Ryan (1997–99) and current AD Caitlin Newton-Broad (1999 –) – about the ideas and practices that have informed the company's work in recent years.

Looking back over the years, it's interesting to see the aesthetic similarities and differences of the various PACT Artistic Directors. What are the defining characteristics of your work at PACT?

Caitlin: As an audience member and as a young artist working with PACT's participants I have always felt that PACT's through-line or defining characteristic has been the preservation of the integrity and strength of the individual within the collective process. PACT's work taps into the specificity of each person's contribution, experience and imagination to offer rewards beyond the lustre of public acclaim. PACT is defined by its endeavour, that is to create meaningful cultural space where people can

challenge themselves and belong to something exciting.

Anna: Aesthetically, I would say that my own work (at Pact and elsewhere) is distinctly informed by the politics of presenting and exploring diversity. I would describe my theatre projects as being both inter-cultural (interrogating a cultural site or sites) and cross-cultural (exploring equally the cultural similarities and differences which can be found in the theme and/or idea which is being explored). The most obvious similarity in the work of Caitlin, Chris and myself, is the fact that we have all worked with the same designer. The greatest difference is that I worked with writers on several major projects and I think I have a very different view of, and relationship to, 'text-based' theatre. I feel especially privileged to have worked with Noelle Janaczewska at PACT on 'Madagascar Lily', and also to have had the strength of her dramaturgical skill on 'Looking for Alibrandi'.

My rehearsal processes were long. I often worked with large casts. I especially liked working with a wider than usual age group, which rejected the grouping of young people according to whether they were at school or at work or at university. I also endeavoured to bring together casts and crews of young people who shared a strong desire to make theatre, who came from the widest possible geographical area and the widest range of socio-economic backgrounds. There is a point at which aesthetics and politics merge.

Chris: PACT participants manage to produce new work through direct engagement with the pragmatics of production. This covers all areas of production and is driven by a strong philosophy of skills development and skills sharing. All professional artists are engaged

with the brief to communicate what their role is in the production and to be in constant dialogue with the participants.

The acronym of PACT – Producers, Authors, Composers and Talent – implies a strong craft base dedicated to getting a show up and running. What's the balance of process and product in PACT – how important is the end product as opposed to the journey that the group has taken to get there?

Chris: The acronym is totally relevant to PACT's practices. Most modern industries, and therefore larger theatre companies, specialise in specialisation. This can have an isolating, alienating affect where people have no encouragement or desire to step out of these boundaries. PACT broadens the view of the requirements and machinations of 'getting a show up'. PACT's process is one of collaboration and production on a small cooperative company level. I believe, for example, it is the performer who has helped put the lights up and then operated a lighting board who will capitalise on this new knowledge. I know that this performer will in the future utilise this to the advantage of their own performance and their fellow artworkers in a very different and positive way to someone who has not had this experience. I consider the most important journey that PACT offers is its continuation, its 'ongoingness', the next project, which grows from the experience of the last project.

Caitlin: Getting a show up and running is only the tip of the iceberg but it is this simple premise that gets everything started. It is important to start with a concrete beginning so that the parameters are clear from the outset. It is also infinitely rewarding to produce a wonderful show, as we all know. In any creative undertaking, there is always a shifting balance between process and product that must be harnessed by the core professional artists with a keen awareness. This awareness must be passed on lightly and with clarity to the people you are working with.

Personally, I am interested in the fundamental exchange that takes place in a collaborative process. I have to ask myself: what is the quality of the dialogue taking place? If it has been rewarding, I think you can see that in the work. However, I would never pretend that through such diligence you will remain above reproach. Tension and debate are essential ingredients of an intelligent process, qualified by degrees.

Anna: The process is project driven. There are no workshops for the sake of workshops or for the purpose of gaining revenue. Training is connected to production, which gives it meaning. Development is also project specific. I would say that process and product at PACT are inextricably linked. Both are as important as one another.

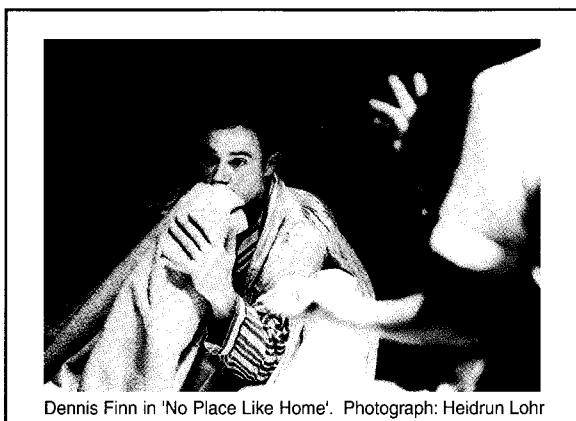
The acronym is reflective of an early history that involved film makers, writers, composers and 'actors' (more accurately theatre makers), and it still has a degree of relevance. PACT's latest project is directed

by an extraordinary female composer. The next one is a new media exploration with a strong video projection component. Yes, it does still fit.

From its inception there appears to have been a desire to experiment with theatrical form as a means of communication. PACT seems as a consequence to have been open to new theories of performance. Would you agree and, if so, what have been the major influences over your time as AD?

Caitlin: PACT, happily, doesn't have commercial imperatives driving the creation of our work. This can be intensely liberating and has been capitalised upon as PACT's licence to dream. It is this unique situation that influences my choices and processes in the direction of the company.

The live arts are about contact, communication, delight and the stimulation of this basic engagement. PACT tries to elucidate the exchange between audience and performer in all processes so that young creators can experience the effects of live cultural expression and can harness it with confidence. I feel that this exchange has been a continuous focus for the artistic direction over the past seven years. As obvious as this comment may seem, I go to lots of work where this primary communication (be that contemplative, aggressive, intelligent or crass) is missing



Dennis Finn in 'No Place Like Home'. Photograph: Heidrun Lohr

and the process has become so internalised it is hard to engage.

Chris: I feel the advent of Performance Studies, which historically dislodged the Drama Department from the Literature Department, has had a strong influence on the contemporary theatre experience. In my rein as AD at PACT I particularly targeted Sydney Uni and Uni of NSW for participants to work at PACT. This had come out of a certain frustration from my contact with 'acting' that seemed to be obsessed with notions of truth, the real and the psychology of character to the detriment of analysis, structure and notions of languages of representation. This I found grounded in some of the so called teaching of 'acting' by professional actors making gurus out of themselves and wasting young people's bucks by talking about themselves, what they have done and what they're going to do. There's nothing like a bit of negative stimulation to activate an adventurous new creative environment.

Anna: Being aware of the position that Chris Ryan has about PACT and its relationship to new theories and forms of performance, I want to say that I appreciate his position, but I still feel as passionately now as I did when I worked in youth theatre about the need for balanced programming – specifically because it is youth theatre and because it should remain open and responsive. I believe in a model where a young person wanting to explore theatre has the opportunity to work closely with a writer and/or a dramaturg, can participate in a physically and intellectually demanding contemporary performance work with and amazing director, can devise a work from scratch, can explore an extant text – all in the course of a year long program or maybe two.

There are also 'guru' types in contemporary performance and community theatre. Bad practice in working artistically with young people is not exclusive to theatre that is involved in the creation of psychological realism in performance. New writing has often been innovative and adventurous, even when young people have played characters. And there are undeniably large numbers of young people wanting to explore a character in a narrative – this can also be innovative, adventurous and excellent! For example Maryanne Puntoriero, who played Josephine Alibrandi in the play 'Looking for Alibrandi' by Melina Marchetta and commissioned by PACT in 1994 based on her novel of the same name, was reviewed by the Sydney Morning Herald as giving 'a performance of which many adult professionals would be jealous'. She was subsequently the first Australian in twenty years to be offered a place in the prestigious American Academy of Drama in New York.

How is it that PACT has been able to continue to innovate over all these years, and not enter a comfort zone after particular successes? Or has it at times?!

Chris: PACT has always engaged professional artists that are interested in interrogating their craft and encouraging PACT participants to question form as well as content. This practice has produced events and projects that are a long way from the 'well made play'. Philosophically this position must embrace the notion of failure and the work should have the right to fail but I don't consider over the past seven year that I have ever witnessed a production at PACT that has failed.

Caitlin: PACT changes because the young artists and participants that utilise this space change. Also, the company shifts because it has an immense range of inputs from the artistic community, the local Sydney community and the political climate that are also subject to change.

An example of this continuity through change is the transition from Anna



Performers from 'AlienNation'. Photograph: Heidrun Lohr

Messariti's focus on the value of cultural experience and diversity (given life through work such as 'Looking for Alibrandi' and 'Rivers of Light') to Chris Ryan's focus on the constitution of identity (including 'Sade/Marat' and 'Heterosoced Youth', with Victoria Spence). Anna and Chris had a strong collaborative relationship prior to the change of artistic direction and so one primary focus followed and augmented the next. I feel what I bring in line with Anna and Chris's endeavour is continuity through my interest in 'contemporary presence', for want of a better phrase. What I am interested in is the current need to interrogate how one can remain present, audible and articulate at this time when contexts are disappearing for direct bodily engagement with ideas and other people.

Anna: When I was at PACT, the Chair of its Board at the time, George Mannix, instilled in me the sense that PACT projects had to be about creating 'life changing experiences' for the youth participants. At first I thought he was talking hippy shit, but I began to understand that the PACT model had the potential to inspire young people to have a strong relationship with theatre for the rest of their lives. I saw young people claim the space. I witnessed their empowerment. I saw the power of incredible commercial success on its young creators. I wasn't expecting it to change my life as well, but it most certainly did. Innovation is about striving to create this in the context of each and every project. Maybe this is the secret.

Caitlin: In terms of languishing in a comfort zone, I doubt that youth arts is ever a comfortable place to reside. In this field there is little artistic kudos, no money to play with, scant critical reception, political definition which fails to comprehend young people and a competitive range of fantastic work. The bonus is that the people you make contact with want to experience something. It is hard to settle or stagnate in this field because the imperatives drive you to seek new contact and to remain relevant.

TONY MACK

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

- jigsaw in 2000

Photograph: 'Pling



Jane O'Donnell, Simon Clarke, Tim Wood, Doug Collins and Sarah Snell in 'Bright Sparks'.

2000 marks Jigsaw Theatre Company's twenty-sixth year of presenting theatre. Currently Canberra's only full time professional company, Jigsaw's roots were in Theatre in Education. This is still a major focus for Jigsaw, but the company is also exploring new ideas for the production and performance of theatre. Current Artistic Director Greg Lissaman speaks to Lowdown ACT Editor Caroline Knight about Jigsaw's past and the new directions the company is taking.

CK: What were the foundations of Jigsaw? Who formed the company and why?

GL: It was started with a grant that Carol Woodrow (amongst others) received. Carol was part of Canberra Youth Theatre Company and she applied for a grant to put together a professional production to go into schools. And from that first production grew Jigsaw. The resulting company's primary aim was to create professional theatre for young audiences.

CK: What is Jigsaw's funding base – and does it greatly influence the theatre that you do?

GL: The majority of our yearly funding comes from the Department of Education. So as a result, all of our shows cater to the school market. We've got a great relationship with the schools. Teachers know that when they give us their opinion we take their thoughts on-board. Our productions are not static and we'll happily try new ideas. But our theatre is not exclusively available in schools. It's theatre for young people – our

shows are commissioned, created, designed and built for the broader youth market.

CK: Is the way that you do your theatre greatly influenced by the fact that you tend to perform in schools?

GL: Yes – mainly in a physical sense because of the opportunities and

limitations offered by the space. It's like any site specific performance. We can perform shows anywhere from a school's gym to a playground. We have to be aware of the fact that many of our performances are for 200 people sitting on the floor, rather than raked seating. Our shows have to be capable of being performed almost anywhere.

CK: Your emerging artist program, New Erektions, has been a great success and yet this year you've dropped it in favour of a new program, New Direktions. Why the change?

GL: New Erektions was a production season and we wanted to really focus on the artists themselves rather than productions. We were finding that the artists in New Erektions had reached a developmental ceiling and to some extent it was becoming a forum for people wanting to 'do a play'. The New Erektions program has had a great deal of success. But a lot of the people in the New Direktions season have come from New Erektions, and have said to us, 'At this point in time what I need to do is concentrate on me, rather than my production'. They now understand their role within the whole production and they want to build their own skills.

CK: But aren't you worried that once this crop of people go through the program there will be another crop of people who would have benefited from New Erektions?

GL: Absolutely, that's a logical progression. But I suspect that within a couple of years the people that we're working with now will be working happily and successfully as professionals and we can look at supporting the next group of people that come along. At the moment I'm catering to the needs of the people that we can see presenting themselves in the community. We like to develop long-term relationships

with emerging artists so they really benefit from the program.

CK: Who is New Direktions catering to? Do you have opportunities for administrators or stage crew to develop professional skills?

GL: We're supporting the development of emerging artists. As part of this we have included technical artists. We do have training programs for technical people – we give them two weeks of training with a professional lighting designer and stage manager. Our focus is not just on presenting theatre for young people but also helping them find ways into theatre and giving them a realistic view of it. We don't give youth a training in performance, but they can sit in on our rehearsals and we have an open door for anyone who wants to discuss their ideas and training.

CK: What style of theatre has Jigsaw traditionally undertaken? Is your current program a step away from the past?

GL: A lot of the work Jigsaw did during its earlier years, particularly under the artistic direction of Stephen Champion, was non-traditional and devised work. In recent years, with Lynette Wallis, the company moved towards more scripted work. During this time Jigsaw formed some great partnerships with writers and directors outside Canberra and we've continued to build those links. At the moment we're working with Mary Morris, who's writing 'The Blue Roof', and with writer Sophia Catharios and composer Themis Mexis on a Greek/English bilingual production called 'Atreus'.

Those two productions are examples of the process that we're now committed to at Jigsaw. We no longer go for the approach whereby I'd say, 'I'm going to commission a play. You go and write it.' And then 'Thanks, I'll take that play and give it to the designer...' Now our approach is 'Let's get the entire team together to start with and everyone can share and devise the work'. Stimulation for the writer may come from an



Jane O'Donnell and Nick Hardcastle in 'Cliffhanger'.

idea the designer has had. It's all about teamwork and a common vision and everyone feeds off one another. It's a true collaboration.

CK: Do you think Theatre in Education is all about teaching children certain morals or concepts – or is it about entertainment?

GL: I think all theatre does all of the above – although we don't generally set out to teach a mathematical concept or whatever. In the case of 'Kera Putih', we had a great response to 'Oracle Bones', which focused on Beijing opera. The teachers said, 'We loved that, it was fantastic because it gave the kids an opportunity to experience another culture – can you do something along those lines again'. That's a broad parameter that gives us plenty of opportunity.

We decide what's in each production. There is always an element of something to be learnt. But it's not didactic. We avoid that at all costs. It's all about finding or creating a production that you think you can make links to. For instance 'Atreus' is based on the Greek myths of the curse of the house of Atreus. It's going to have links that effect an impact on people's perceptions of generation and tradition – but we're not going out of our way to say, 'Right, now we're going to meet this learning outcome'. It's inherent in the work.

CK: How do you compare with other Theatre in Education companies?

GL: We have established partnerships with the schools and I think that is something we've really mastered. We've managed to retain our artistic integrity while meeting the needs of school and broader audiences. The Department of Education has been a fantastic partner in that they don't say, 'You will do this' because they know and trust our work and our objectives are clear. How we achieve them is really up to us. We're responsive and totally accountable to our audience and the teachers know that.

Other companies have an advantage over us in that they have more money. We've had a good year financially, having been successful with our applications, but it's important to us to keep building our financial stability.

If you're in a bigger city you have a much larger pool of artists to draw upon. We work with a wide range of artists. We bring people here because we know that if we're going to create quality work you can't sit in your little corner of the world and hand jobs to friends. You have to look further and go beyond your comfort zone.

CK: How widely does Jigsaw tour its work?

GL: We tour through the ACT schools, give public performances and often tour to nearby regional areas. But we're trying to

push further. We're building relationships with the Victorian Arts Centre and the Sydney Opera House and exploring the possibility of performing 'The Man Whose Mother was a Pirate' and 'Kera Putih' in those venues. We really do seek that wider exposure if for no other reason than for artists to know that we exist and that we're up for having partnerships with them. Developing audiences interstate will also give our work longevity and more opportunity to develop.

CK: I know that one way you're reaching wider Australia is through the Dyna'write script project, which is open to young Australians. How is it going?

GL: It's going well. We've had 1,500 hits on the web site and now we're just waiting for people send their scripts in. Applications close at the end of June and indications are that we should have plenty of entries – everywhere I go people tell me that they're working on one.



Jigsaw Theatre Company's 'Mercury' – Virginia Anderson, Mary Brown and Neil Roach (l-r).

CK: What exactly does Dyna'write involve?

GL: We're looking for scripts around 600 words long – either an extract or a full theme. It doesn't have to be complete – it could be an idea, something that we can work up a bit. Ultimately an unfinished script that shows promise could win. The final script will be used for a live performance on the web – so they don't need to be long. Anything longer than two or three minutes on the web takes too long to download.

CK: How is the production/performance process going to work?

GL: We'll be producing two scripts and we'll have a team of people filming the process and putting it up on the web each day and I'll also post summaries of what we're trying to achieve and why we've done things a certain way. Then people can get on the web, check it all out and respond to what's going on.

So it's really all about creating a virtual rehearsal room that anyone can get in to. And hopefully that will help make theatre more accessible. To add another twist we're also designing the rehearsal process. We're having all the rehearsals in a shopping centre window and even production

meetings will be filmed for the web. We're wanting to open up the rehearsal room to a public audience – they can come and be like a studio audience and see what really goes on. The process becomes the theatre.

CK: What motivated the move from Gorman House to Tuggeranong Arts Centre? Has it been a positive move?

GL: To start with, we're not a company that is attached to a theatre. We'd been at the Currong theatre a long time but we only used the Currong for two weeks in 1999. Beyond that it was used for the New Erektions production program. Because we were changing the focus of that program away from productions, we really didn't need the permanent use of a theatre.

The Tuggeranong Arts Centre is directly across the road from the Department of Education, so we are highly visible and can link in with their programs very easily. We've also found that for the sake of sponsorship that the location and the modern, corporate

look of the Tuggeranong Arts Centre certainly helps with people's perceptions of the company. If you're trying to develop audiences in the middle-of-the-road market – attracting people to the theatre rather than to a movie – then that environment really helps. We've had only one public performance at Tuggeranong but we noticed many new faces.

CK: So what's the overview for Jigsaw in 2000?

Locally we're focusing on our emerging artists and giving them a broader perspective by linking them with people outside Canberra as well. Then there's our regional work, which this year involves us linking up with Lieder Theatre in Goulbourn. They're a Goulbourn pro-am company and we're going to share resources and work on each other's productions. Because our region has many artists who live close by to us and actually have a lot to share with us we're opening up a dialogue with them. And of course, there's the work we do in schools, our touring and our public programs. Our major work for 2000 is Julie Janson's 'Kera Putih' (The White Monkey). That and the creation of 'The Blue Roof' are what I'm finding exciting this year.

CK: What do you think has affected change in Jigsaw over the years?

I think the greatest changes and influences for Jigsaw have been led by the artists we work with and the needs of our youth audience. We are looking at a much more sophisticated youth audience, a youth audience that has greater access to knowledge, technology and products – so they expect a lot more.

CAROLINE KNIGHT

the

BACKBONE'S

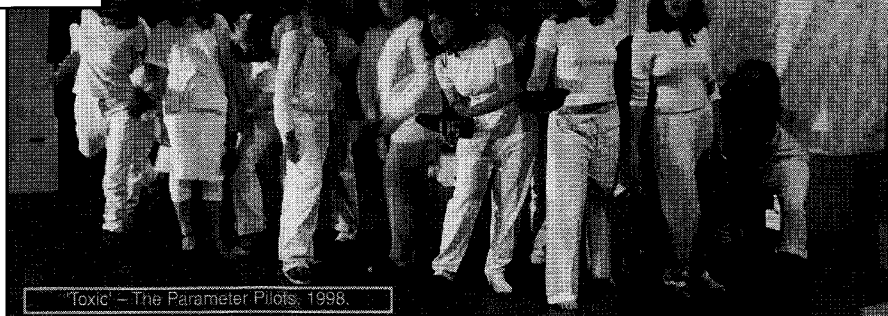
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A short history of Backbone Youth Arts Inc.

It was 1990. I was eleven years old. My mother dropped me off in downtown Milton to an old brick theatre named La Boite. Excited, yet fairly scared, I walked through the threshold to be confronted by the sight of a group of young people talking and laughing. Hesitantly, I swallowed and inched towards the group, who as I got closer turned and stared with interest. I took a seat and no more than five minutes later, I too was talking and laughing as if it had never been any different. Little did I know then, but this was a moment that would have a profound effect on my life and shape my future. It was the moment that I first discovered the world of youth theatre.

Back in the early '70s there was a desperate call for arts-based activities for young people in Brisbane. This call was answered by the prominent La Boite Theatre, which started an informal series of holiday workshops and youth orientated productions in 1972. It was not until 1986, however, that things really took off when La Boite received a small amount of funding from the Australia Council and invited professional artists Ludmila and Michael Doneman to conduct a project for the theatre that focused on working with young people.

I spoke with Ludmila Doneman and together we took a trip down memory lane to the early beginnings of youth theatre in Brisbane. When Ludmila started at La Boite as the director of the youth theatre there was little else happening, in terms of practical theatre experience, for young people in Brisbane. La Boite was still conducting the multi-aged skills-based workshops with term-by-term presentations (for family and friends), yet the idea of youth theatre – that is, theatre created for, by and about young people as legitimate mainstream theatre – was not



common place. However, with the funding from the Australia Council the Donemans collaborated with a group of young people from the workshop program to create and devise a project that was to be called 'The Great Circle' – an innovative multi-arts performance project. This project established new options of performance for young people within the La Boite space and was to prove to be a groundbreaking success for youth theatre in Brisbane.

The popularity of 'The Great Circle' project was a significant step for youth theatre in Queensland, as the late 1980s was a time when youth arts was becoming recognised in both the wider arts sector as well as within governmental agendas. The Australia Council had only recently appointed a Youth Officer of Performing Arts and youth arts policy was in its first stages of development. According to Ludmila, it was a time when 'youth theatre needed to keep proving that it was worthy of its existence and of the support that it was getting'. The growing recognition of youth arts also provided links into greater networking opportunities for artists and companies in different states and the documentation of the variety of processes and products used by these agencies was an important part of the development of youth arts in Australia.

For Ludmila, a highlight of this exciting time was the Queensland Youth Arts Festival in 1988, directed by La Boite Youth Theatre and funded through the Queensland Government. This festival was not only a consolidation of youth arts in Queensland, but also an indicator of the evolving diversity and innovation within the field. Significantly, the festival formalised the rhetoric which had been developing around youth arts practice, which had to do with the key words of access,

participation, empowerment and, very importantly, established a precedent for proactive involvement of Indigenous young people and artists.

As La Boite Youth Theatre grew and started to form its identity away from the mother company, it was renamed La Byte in 1989 and was led by the newly appointed Artistic Director Tony Auckland. During this period in the youth theatre's history, a more traditional approach to text-based theatrical production was adopted. The workshops continued to be extremely popular and the number of productions was increased from one to two major shows a year.

In 1992 the youth theatre continued with its old name, La Boite Youth Arts, and a new face – Artistic Director Susan Richer. Susan had been with the company for a few years as a part-time tutor in the workshop program and her role as Artistic Director saw an innovative shift in the company's direction. Research conducted by the Gender Equity Unit of the Queensland Education Department found, among other insights, that whilst women made up the bulk of those involved and employed within the arts industry, they held less than 5% of the top decision-making positions. In line with this research, as well as her own research into women's roles within the arts industry, Susan decided that the focus of the youth theatre needed to be repositioned in order to more clearly represent and service its clientele – that of predominantly young women. She felt that this shift was an integral step in addressing the inequities that existed in the industry, as well as an opportunity to provide training and support for women working within all areas of the arts. At the same time, however, Susan believed that young men's development

within the arts was a vital part of this process and the company's mission statement visibly reflected this:

'La Boite Youth Arts.... focuses on young women's development in and through the arts and embraces young men's development as a necessary part of this focus.'

During Susan's time as Artistic Director of the company, Brisbane saw the creation of two new initiatives that focused directly on the development and representation of young women artists – The Hereford Sisters young women's physical theatre troupe and the TWO HIGH: Young Women and the Arts Festival. These initiatives were both aimed at providing young women with a wide variety of arts-related skills to support them in their ongoing development within the arts and are projects that continue to successfully do this today. Aligned with these initiatives, the company also conducted outreach projects that were aimed at providing arts-based skills to young women within different communities around Brisbane.

Not only was La Boite Youth Arts initiating new projects at this time, there was also a shift in philosophy regarding the work that was produced by the company. A new direction was adopted with a strong focus on young people's cultures as the centre of both the processes and projects that the company undertook, both in the workshop program and in the projects. These new works focused on a multi-artform style that was based on collective authorship, therefore creating a stronger sense of ownership of the work by the young artists involved. Young people were given the opportunity to represent themselves and to narrate their own experiences – a move that took youth arts to a new level. Although this move was met with some opposition at the time, it is only now in reflection that we can value the importance of the direction that these innovative initiatives have taken youth arts today.

After an extensive history of almost twenty-five years with La Boite Theatre, it was time for the youth theatre to branch out on its own. In 1996, La Boite Youth Arts reinvented itself and became Backbone Youth Arts Inc., guided by Artistic Director Louise Hollingworth. As a newly incorporated association, Backbone consolidated its strengths and diversified

services in response to the ever-growing and active client base. The company had reached a high point in terms of state and national recognition of its work in 'innovative, groundbreaking multidisciplinary theatre practice that was genuinely grounded in youth culture(s)'. 1996 saw a broad artistic program that had expanded to include new modes of performance work, as well as the beginnings of a formalised mentoring process. This growth continued into 1997 when Backbone produced an extensive program of innovative and diverse projects that worked to further highlight the organisation as one of Australia's foremost youth arts companies.

An accommodation crisis in 1997 saw the company move to a new site in the Metro Arts building in the Brisbane CBD. This move facilitated opportunities for Backbone to extend upon its identity, program delivery, networking and the potential resourcing of artform and industry development. A clarification of the company's mission statement enabled Backbone to focus upon a 'generation of new work that was (and is) culturally relevant with the interdependency between form, content and context':

'BACKBONE YOUTH ARTS INC. develops, creates and presents new multi-artform performance work for, by and about young people and contemporary Australian youth cultures. BACKBONE believes that young people are cultural agents which inform our management, planning and practice.'

Driven in 1998 by a new three year organisational strategic plan, Backbone moved into project-based work that was designed to explore 'the dynamic of young people's navigation and negotiation of transition and risk in contemporary youth culture(s)'. Through a multitude of artistic collaborations and mentoring programs, Backbone continued to 'navigate the inter-cultural, intra-cultural and sub-cultural identity(s)' that valued, affirmed, celebrated and promoted the role of young people as creators and cultural-makers'.

1999 saw a year of reflection and consolidation for Backbone as it continued to power its way forward motivated by its strong strategic vision and artistic programming. Lana Gishkariany took hold of the reins as Artistic Director and under her direction the company produced collaborative work of high artistic integrity and cultural value. Backbone endeavoured to formalise the strengths built in earlier years and through increased funding from local government, projects such as the TWO HIGH: Young Women and the Arts Festival broke new ground with innovative mentoring frameworks and



'Blaze' – Intravenous Cheese, 1998.

opportunities for young people. Such processes allowed Backbone to further liaise and respond to government and other stakeholders in order to highlight its successes, as well as to constructively communicate the issues and concerns of both young people and the youth arts sector.

In the new millennium, Lana is aiming to encompass new opportunities to take the organisation further into the future. Backbone has re-implemented a multidisciplinary performance workshop program as a response to the needs of young people in Brisbane and is investigating options, through its artistic program, of how to best represent the changes and developments of youth culture(s) in and around the city. Backbone identifies a number of priorities for the future, aimed largely at securing the long-term sustainability of the organisation. According to Lana, two aims of the company are to acquire corporate sponsorship to address operational and project resource needs, as well as securing a dedicated performance space in order that Backbone may continue to produce work of a high artistic standard. Backbone will continue to develop artistic alliances within the youth and broader arts sector, therefore contributing a stronger voice for youth arts to present to major stakeholders. Most importantly, however, Backbone intends to continue to push the boundaries of youth arts through navigating uncharted territories, with young people at the core of this cultural exploration.

It has been an interesting journey for me being involved with the company as both a participant and as a mentored artworker over the last ten years. As I have traversed my development within the youth arts sector, Backbone and the dedicated professionals with which it works have been there supporting and mentoring me along the way. Countless other young people as well as myself have been heavily influenced by the innovative and collaborative work that Backbone creates. Backbone has had a diverse and triumphant history and by the looks of things to come, it will have an even greater future.

SONJA ELLIOTT



'Crunch' – The Hereford Sisters.

Arena Theatre is arguably one of the most well known and innovative theatre groups for young people in Australia. For the last 30 years Arena has tackled issues with style, clarity and perfection, and it hasn't shown the slightest sign of slowing down or easing up. Energy, and lots of it – is something Arena has become known for.'

Inpress Magazine, Melbourne



Marcia Ferguson (l) and Elizabeth Hendry (r) in Arena Theatre's 'The Women There', 1968

GOING THE DISTANCE

looking at the secrets of Arena's longevity



Arena primary school tour 1972, 'The Clowns'

What is this energy? Where has it come from? How has it been sustained over a period of 35 years when we have seen numerous other theatre companies come and go? How could a small theatre company for children grow, flourish and survive over such a long period of time?

I started working at Arena as a designer/tour manager in May 1974 and was a full-time employee for about five years. I became a member of the Board as soon as I could and remained there until 1994. While I now support Arena from a respectable distance, the company and its constantly revolving artists and evolving art is very close to my heart. I have participated, watched, nurtured and encouraged, along with many others over the years, so here are my thoughts...

The origins of Arena Theatre can be traced to 1965. Naomi Marks, a young mother who had been involved in student theatre at Melbourne University, was disturbed by the

lack of good quality plays appropriate for children in Melbourne. On an overseas trip she was particularly impressed by the work of the Theatre Centre in London and brought a script back to Melbourne with her.

With the help of an amateur group, The Toorak Players, Naomi presented 'The Crossroads' by Brian Way during the May school holidays and for fifteen performances in schools. From this modest beginning The

Toorak Players Children's Theatre was formed and the group met weekly for play readings and discussions. Brian Way's style of theatre for young people interested them most. As Naomi Marks said, 'Brian's plays were chosen for several reasons. They had a small cast, little or no stage scenery or lighting was required and, most important of all, the scripts treated the children as intelligent people.'

Naomi and her friends displayed an unusual attitude towards the entertainment and, it must be said, education of children at that time. In Melbourne (and indeed all over Australia) the theatrical diet for young people consisted mainly of traditional Christmas pantomimes, lack-lustre clowns, and badly performed fairy stories. Audience participation was of the 'He's behind you... behind you!' genre, and the themes were based largely on the stories and traditions of Great Britain and Europe. Although there were sporadic and some very successful

attempts at making theatre about and for both indigenous and other Australian children (for example The Tintookies, a puppet company which was founded by Peter Scriven in 1956), the staple fare for most young audiences was limited and generally mediocre. Naomi Marks had travelled overseas at a time when the seeds of the aptly named 'Theatre-in-Education' companies were being sewn in various regional areas of England. She had searched out (and found!) theatre which 'treated the children as intelligent people'.

By 1968 demand for the work was such that a professional company was formed and named Children's Arena Theatre. In 1972 the company obtained a Victorian government grant of \$10,000.00, then a General Grant from the newly established Australia Council. It employed a full-time administrator, and moved to an office and theatre space in South Yarra where it remained until 1992.

The company continued to perform Brian Way and other participatory plays in primary schools through the end of the '60s and into the early '70s. In its own way, the company was fast becoming a branch of the English TIE movement – David Young, the first fully professional Artistic Director of the company, had come directly from a pioneering TIE team at The Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. It was not until 1971 that the need for relevant local material for secondary schools was fully recognised and Arena commissioned its first new Australian play.

The concept of active but 'steered' audience participation and the simple arena staging which these plays employed were innovative and immediately attractive to

teachers and children. In its most extreme form, TIE companies were employed to deliver theatre pieces that were used mainly as an interesting new way to deliver curriculum. The best of these early plays used traditional theatrical forms (strong identifiable characters, imaginative costume, simple 'transforming' sets, as well as audience involvement) to deliver their messages. They were engaging and entertaining, emotionally and intellectually challenging, often putting points of view at odds with the often conservative teaching staff in Australian schools. While 'participation' was the basis for the early years of Arena's work, it slowly disappeared – only to re-appear in different guise as new forms were developed and new artists were employed.

Arena's growth and work over the years was very much aligned with the political and social movements of the times. Gough Whitlam was elected Prime Minister in 1972. His Labour government's interest in and support of the arts was markedly different than in previous years. There was a strong interest in the development of new Australian work (shown by the success of *The Pram Factory* in Carlton), there was support for drama in schools, and there was a small but growing group of artists who saw the development of theatre work for young people as a legitimate, specialised area of theatrical practice. The popularity of 'community' theatre groups was growing, and there was a strong sense of a need to define and produce theatre work outside the mainstream and what were seen as elite and conservative venues. In the 1980s the growth of feminism was particularly influential – especially expressed in the desire by women artists and theatre-makers to work in different environments and in more collaborative ways than the mainly male leaders of major theatre companies were doing.

'Would be' young directors, writers, designers and actors discovered that there was a place they could be employed on a proper wage, a place where they could explore their own issues, a place where they could explore new forms, and a place where the audience proved a constant challenge.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Arena's work is that it has changed direction as each new artistic director has been appointed. I believe this is one of the major keys to the company's longevity and success. Each artistic director has brought his or her own team of collaborators or 'family' with them, who have been welcomed into the company and to whom it has 'belonged' for the years they worked there. The artists have been empowered to make the kind of work they believe in and have been encouraged, with responsibility and within the resources available, to develop their own visions. Each artistic director has been selected with care and each has contributed something unique to the development of Arena. As the current artistic director Rose Myers says, 'Every show I've made there, I have wanted to make'.

In 1975 Arena employed John O'May as Artistic Director and he began to commission more new Australian works. In 1976 a permanent company of eight actors was established and most of the productions were 'devised' – another new approach to making theatre. In 1977 Peter Tulloch was employed and he expanded the work into holiday programs and workshops. Arena began to 'umbrella' the work of other small companies, such as Mixed Company and Bow-TIE. In 1981 Peter Charlton, a writer and director, began to put high quality production values back into the work, presented more in-theatre productions, and wrote and directed 'Wolf Boy' and 'Streets in the Sky' – for the Next Wave Festival and *Come Out*.

In 1985 Angela Chaplin was appointed as Artistic Director and began to create and develop work with a new ensemble of four actors. She created a house-style which included providing access to young people to the processes through which she created theatre for them. Chaplin gave the actors more participation in the decision-making process regarding programming and company structure. Her production of *The Women there...* by Julianne O'Brien was the first of Arena's to tour overseas to the Vancouver Children's Festival in Canada, and also toured to *Come Out* and the ASSITEJ Conference in Adelaide. Arena was 'on the map' in international terms.

Barbara Ciszewska replaced Angela in 1988 and continued to develop the work through a heavy program of touring to schools. In 1989 Barbara's production of *'Fix It Alice'* by Ernie Gray gave excellent voice to the issue of women in men's work places. In 1992 David Carlin, another writer/director, brought more comedy and, amongst other successes, a co-production of *'Blabbermouth'* with the Melbourne Theatre Company and *'Malache'* – a production nominated for the Australian Human Rights Commission Literature Award. Towards the end of 1994, Arena was transformed again with the appointment of Artistic Director Rosemary Myers.

Myer's work is well-known and includes particular attention to the use of new technologies within a live performance context. The company has moved into the 21st century with a strong record of work, using terminology far removed from the early days of Arena – such as 'digital image makers', sound engineers, Cinemedia, conceptual art, new music and electronica. The work is based on thorough research, is not didactic, shows alternatives, and is diverse and popular.

While the changes and new developments in the artistic work of the company have been reflected by the continual appointment of young and energetic artistic directors, another factor is that the management of the company at Board level has been extremely consistent.

There have only been four Chairpersons of the Board of Arena since 1980. Board members have been replaced when necessary (although not often) and have

always remained supportive to the work of Arena's artists. Hard decisions have been made over the years but when it has come time to appoint a new artistic director and/or general manager, they have constructively sought innovative and risk-taking newcomers who they feel have a 'voice' and are ready to lead. They have offered their various experience and skills to assist each new artistic director to achieve their aims, but have not intruded into the areas of specific artistic decision-making. The Board members have not seen Arena as a place to air their own artistic ambitions. Aside from ensuring that the basic aim of the company – to present theatre to young audiences – is adhered to, the artistic directors, general managers and their chosen collaborating artists have been free to 'remake' Arena as they wish.

The 'place of work' or base for Arena artists has also been fairly consistent. Both Cromwell Road (1972–1992) and Napier Street (1992–1997) had theatre spaces attached and have been used over the years for holiday productions, bussed-in school shows, and weekend/holiday workshops. Arena's new space at North Melbourne Town Hall provides a near perfect base through the combination of a good rehearsal space and office/storage areas. It should last the company another 20 years...

I believe that the very nature of young audiences has given companies who perform to them a natural stimulus to renew themselves and their work. All the work that Arena has made since the seventies is new. The demands on a company to continue to produce original scripts and theatrical forms are huge and often unsung – Playbox continually reminds us while being heavily subsidised to do this for adults – but most theatre companies for young people regard this as normal. This continual necessity to 'keep up with' and to 'deliver the goods' to young audiences almost ensures an attitude of risk-taking, energy, and renewal. Arena has always understood that as producers of theatre for young audiences we must stay in touch. We must continue to employ and support younger artists – even if we don't always understand what is in their hearts and minds. We need our young people's theatre companies to have commitment, style, clarity, energy, and innovation, if we are to succeed at all.

That Arena has managed to achieve this over a thirty-five year period is a testament to all who have been a part of it – a major achievement.

In 1999 Arena Theatre won the ASSITEJ International Honorary Presidents Award for achieving excellence in producing work for young audiences. This is the highest international award that a company making theatre for young people can receive. A major achievement indeed.

TRINA PARKER

IN 1998 CORRUGATED IRON BECAME AN INCORPORATED ASSOCIATION. PRIOR TO THIS TIME IT WAS A PROGRAM OF BROWN'S MART COMMUNITY ARTS. THE INCORPORATION PROCESS PROVIDED CORRUGATED IRON WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON WHERE IT HAD COME FROM AND TO CONSIDER WHERE IT WANTED TO GO. THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN DRAWN FROM CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN JANE TONKIN, LOWDOWN NT EDITOR AND ADMINISTRATOR OF BROWN'S MART COMMUNITY ARTS, AND SUSAN DITTER, THE CURRENT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF CORRUGATED IRON YOUTH ARTS.



Timor on the Move project in 2000.



CORRUGATED IRON YOUTH ARTS

Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre arose out of a series of youth arts projects operated from Brown's Mart Community Arts. The activity with a youth focus that happened during the '70s succeeded in demonstrating the potential of youth arts activity to young people and the broader community. By the early '80s schools and recreation programs had picked up on, and were encouraging, youth arts activity, and the way was set for the establishment of Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre.

The aim at the outset was to play a developmental role with ongoing programs and from day one there was a focus on group devised work that has continued to now. As the Values & Vision of Corrugated Iron Youth Arts state:

'Corrugated Iron values its history as a youth theatre company, nurtured by Brown's Mart. We are committed to learning from our history and to moving from strength to strength. The purpose of these values is to provide a strong

high quality programs, maintaining our consistency and attracting the resources needed to achieve our Vision.'

1997 and 1998 was a period of change. Corrugated Iron moved from Brown's Mart to the Nightcliff Community Centre – sort of like a teenager moving into a share house. Corrugated Iron began the incorporation process, consulting with stakeholders extensively, and developing not only a constitution but a strong organisational framework. This process provided Corrugated Iron with a situation that probably does not befall many organisations that are 14 years old – that of reassessment and the opportunity to redefine. One result of this reassessment was a name change. Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre became Corrugated Iron Youth Arts, reflecting the broadening of activity.

Despite the long and established history and the impressive track record, Corrugated Iron feels like a young

organisation. Perhaps it's because working within the clear five-year plan provides for a number of choices about which paths to travel. The process of defining what the organisation is for and what it does is an ongoing one: 'We have to make it clear what our role is and why it is that.'

Corrugated Iron operates a workshop program that presents a range of skilling opportunities for people aged between eight and twenty-five years, and also produces a number of projects each year – although not all end in tangible product, for example presentation. The organisation recognises that the process is as important as the product and an equally viable outcome.

Its job is to maximise the opportunities for the development of young people, both social and artistic – this is a role that has not changed. How the organisation achieves it has. Corrugated Iron's job in collaborative work is to make sure that young people are involved in arts projects for their ideas and their energy and what they can offer because they are young people rather than because they are learning or because they're 'cheaper'.

Some of the issues that faced Corrugated Iron in the beginning are the same today. Location means that Corrugated Iron participants operate largely in isolation. The two immediate spinoffs of this are a lack of opportunity for Darwin young people to see what other youth arts companies do, and the instability caused by continually losing participants who make the journey southward to greater opportunity in skills and/or career development. Corrugated Iron is in the process of building membership so it's not just made up of the young people on the way to southern-based tertiary education. If this strategy is successful there will be long-term Territorians who will maintain the membership of Corrugated Iron.

For people who sometimes end up with the opportunity to go on to tertiary education because of their involvement with Corrugated Iron, the company recognises that staying in the same city to do this education is not always possible. There is also often the unrealistic expectation that when young people receive professional development support they will return to 'pay back' the community. In Darwin's case, the theatre-based opportunities, for example, are limited to mostly unpaid theatre roles or ads for local television – hardly a sustaining career.

'The future of the dramatic arts in Darwin will rely on the development of a pool of skilled young people.'

This was a statement made in the context of the lobby for a youth theatre company in 1983. I asked Susan Ditter if it is still a relevant driving force, in the broader context of performing arts, for Corrugated Iron.

'It's a fine balance still between having a company that's able to respond to what young people need, want, ask for, desire and know about, and being able to contribute to the knowledge of performing arts for young people who may have had no contact with it what so ever. And I think that it's something the Corrugated Iron board is grappling with all the time, like the financial issues that we deal with concerning the age group that we attract and how we do it.

'Are we developing young peoples' skills because we believe that it's their right or are we only doing it for the further development of the Territory lifestyle? To what degree do we put energy into creating an environment that encourages people to pursue their artform here when there really isn't enough work to sustain them financially?

'It's an issue that would sound very familiar to other regional companies.'

Corrugated Iron's brief used to be the whole of the Northern Territory. The Board has pulled in the reins in the last two years to focus on Darwin, Palmerston (the satellite city of Darwin)

and the surrounding rural areas. Less touring has also been happening over the last few years as there has also been a change in what is being produced – that is, not everything is tourable. It is an area of activity where the focus has changed. Time and money will always be constraints but 15 years ago there was less regionally based activity so the major organisations did feel a responsibility to meet the Territory-wide brief and get out there. Now the regional centres have a lot of activity of their own, there is less pressure on organisations like Corrugated Iron.

'It's okay to do resourcing of other organisations further out but that again is a balancing trick. How can we impact the core of the organisation where we are in Darwin with what we do in regional and remote areas? Previously we could be doing a fabulous project in Groote Eylandt or Lajamanu and our membership wouldn't know anything about it. In my opinion that's not what a youth arts organisation is about – going out in separate bits and doing things that the membership doesn't learn or grow from.'

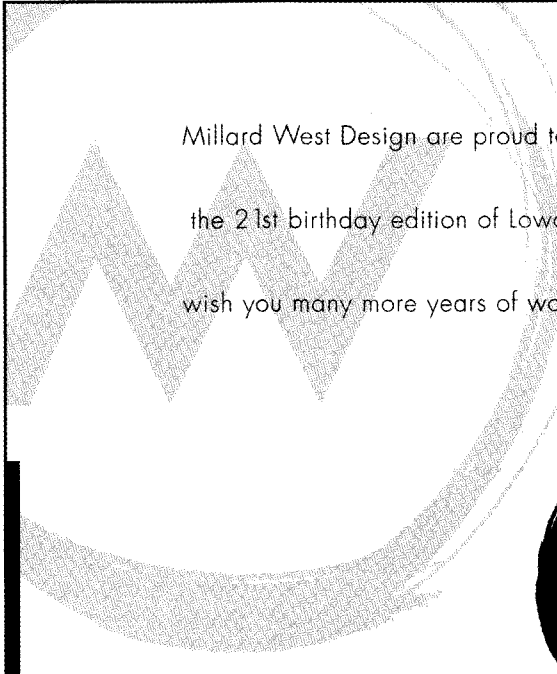
'It's also the issue of time and money. To do a project that lasts four weeks in a remote community, we'd need to staff it without it being at the cost of the program, unless we decide that is our priority in which case we shut down in Darwin for four weeks.'

New technology also provides for overcoming of distance in some cases. Corrugated Iron is currently operating a pilot project of a writing workshop via the net, involving participants from all over the Territory and a tutor based in Alice Springs – activity not possible 15 years ago.

Corrugated Iron Youth Arts has a set of strong values and visions that will take them through the next ten years. Many of them reflect attitudes of the organisation, for example access, that have been in place for some time. The reassessment period provided an opportunity for these attitudes to be written down and spelled out, as well as how Corrugated Iron fits into the community and its role within that community.

I joined the board at its inaugural AGM in mid-1998. I already had a distinct sense of where the organisation had come and the organisational framework, brand new at that time, provided a very clear set of guidelines about where the organisation was heading and how it was to get there. Looking back over its history it's easy to discern a perceptible thread which has brought Corrugated Iron Youth Arts to the excellent position it is in now – both within the Darwin and Territory communities and within the national arts industry.


JANE TONKIN



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salamanca theatre company

The Salamanca Theatre Company is moving with the times. Stirring, shaking – and most definitely watching you... Founded twenty-eight years ago in 1972, the Salamanca Theatre Company (STC) has presented and generated work after new work guaranteed to catch the attention of its audiences.

through Theatre In Education (TIE) programs. One of her aims in her many years as Artistic Director of the company was to achieve a genuine partnership with the students – partnership as an audience and partnership as collaborators and creators of work. The STC worked in co-operation with Tasmanian schools to incorporate theatre into their curriculum as effectively as possible.

In 1980 the STC reassessed its role, noting duplication between themselves as visiting 'teachers' and the classroom teachers – who were in fact better positioned to continue analysis of a performance through activities such as extended discussion and workshops. Seeing this, the STC moved to refocus its energies, freeing up resources to tackle the obstacles standing between the company and its vision. In this vision, work created by STC would stand up to the same kind of critical assessment faced by non-TIE companies and the challenges offered by TIE projects would be attractive to, and respected by, top class artists.

A report on this study written by then STC Education Officer Richard Taylor was published in *Lowdown* in 1981. In it, Taylor identifies problems faced by the STC, such as the lack of community support and difficulty in finding suitable scripts. He also described the vicious circle whereby top class artists were unwilling to get involved with TIE because, according to rumour, the work was not stimulating enough – a self-perpetuating myth. Another initiative of Barbara Manning's, The Australian National Script Resource Centre (now known as the Australian Script Centre), went a long way toward solving some of the identified problems. Other suggestions

of Taylor were also implemented, including the continuance of the Writers in Residence scheme and the program of visiting guest directors.

Looking at today's artistic program it may seem a world away from the earlier works of the STC ('Annie's Coming Out', 'I Can') and in many ways it is, dedicated as they are to extending theatrical form into new areas. It is, however, a result of the same motivation – to reach out and invite young people to experience theatre, to be captivated, fascinated and involved. Deborah Pollard has made clear in her artistic leadership that the STC is keen to increase services and extend its audience, both in terms of theatrical forms, the ideas it brings to its audience and the breadth of people they reach. The same thing motivated David Young who, following Barbara Manning's resignation as in 1985, joined the STC in the role of Artistic Director. As reported in *Lowdown* following his appointment he said, 'I think that my interest in community theatre is one of the things I share with the company and one of the reasons I got the job'. Under Manning's direction the company was working well in schools, achieving their aims. This comment from Young indicates the Board was looking to extend the company's repertoire by moving into community theatre whilst retaining its high profile in TIE.

Young was clearly committed to TIE work (under his direction productions such as 'Wildfire'

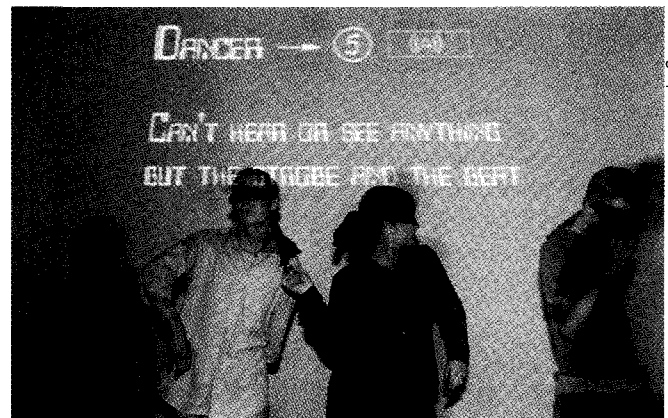
and 'Koori Radio' continued the STC's tradition of work in schools), but was having trouble making the move into community theatre with the STC. In 1986 he began to publicly speak out, as Richard Taylor had done earlier, about the obstacles that were blocking the company from reaching greater heights. In 1985 the STC had presented its first full-scale adult production, playing mostly to regional

country audiences. Reviewer David Gerrand wrote 'David Young has chosen a play which should encourage non-theatre goers to come and see a play about people like themselves'. Despite this praise, in 1986 Young was feeling pigeonholed by the community and by funding bodies as a strictly TIE company. So began another period of reassessment and re-focusing for the STC, the results of which can be seen today in the recent cross-art form, multi-platform Oatlands project.

In 1998 the STC was invited to apply for support by way of a generous donation from the Thomas Foundation, a Canberra based philanthropic trust, to set up a program of workshop residencies in remote regional areas of Tasmania. The workshops have been dedicated to Barbara Manning, who passed away in 1997. The first residency to be funded through The Barbara Manning Regional Development Program was 'Still Life', which took place throughout March last year in the small rural town of Oatlands, culminating in a public performance on 27 March. The project was a performance/site-specific installation collaboration between Salamanca Theatre Company, the Oatlands school, Hobart multimedia artists and the Oatlands community, situated one hour's drive from Hobart.

Tackling questions of how a community is defined, it explored the lives and opinions of the residents, giving them the opportunity to receive training and express themselves through web, sound and video technology. All grades of the Oatlands School contributed to the project's devising, construction and performance. On the web the project can be seen at <<http://www.oatlands.tco.asn.au/~stilllife/stillife.html>>. Included in the large installation was a video component situated at Luke Dulverton which literally projected representations of the local community's

Salamanca Theatre Company's 'To Eat Flowers and Walk on Grass'.



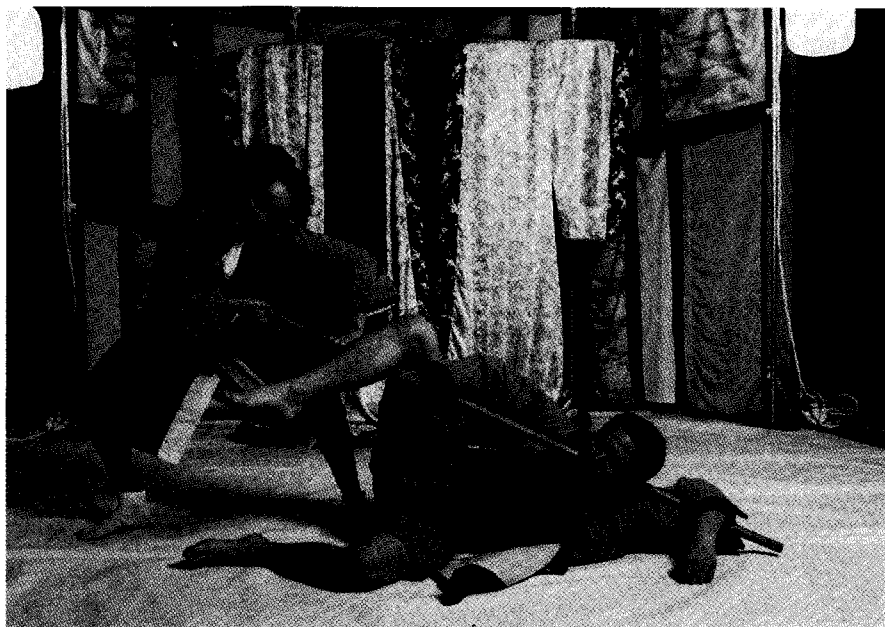
Photograph: Lucia Rossi

hopes into its dry basin, whilst on one level of the Callington Mill performers built a dry stone wall from loaves of bread.

Now that their attentive audience is so broad what does the STC intend to do with them? Continue to innovate, captivate, or simply capture? 'Panopticon', staged throughout May of this year at a Drill Hall in Hobart, is just one project in a promising 2000 program. At the time of writing, ads were just appearing in earnest, but the buzz about the project had been going for months. Just what is 'Panopticon' and how does this, perhaps the company's most ambitious performance project to date, fit with the trail that has been blazed?

The Teacher's Resource kit for 'Panopticon' gives an insight into what an audience can expect. You will be separated from each other. You will watch the performance from a separate booth modelled on the booths of the chapel at Port Arthur where convicts experienced the religious services alone, and silent. There will be a surveillance camera in each booth, watching you as you watch the performance in the centre. Historical subtext and a strong conceptual base will underpin everything. Differing art forms will work together and sometimes merge. Sound exciting? A little bit threatening? Whatever the result it is certain to have an element of surprise and to stimulate discussion.

Consultation is an important part of the company's artistic process. A number of slogans for use in 'Panopticon' advertising were tested before the final results – 'The Circus has never been so cruel' and 'Panopticon is watching. Panopticon is perfect.' – were chosen. Project specific market research as in the case of the slogan is not unusual, however in 1999 STC carried out more general market research, made possible by a State Development grant through the Cultural Industry Development Program. The STC were keen to investigate and reassess



Photograph: Craig Blowfield

Salamanca Theatre Company's 'The Inch Boy'.

once more the requirements of remaining relevant to its audience. The market research undertaken by the company is often done face to face with the public. STC have found that the answers to their ongoing questions about the relevance of their mission and the resulting product are best discovered through conversation. Theatre in Education is luckier than much mainstream theatre as in the latter communication between the audience and performers or creators happens on the night through the performance. As opposed to schools, it's rare for there to be the opportunity for conversation. It may stand to reason then, that as the STC branches out more and more from its TIE roots, mounting larger scale works, rising the age bar on their target audience, the need for assistance with concerted market research grows.

Current artistic director Deborah Pollard is due to leave Salamanca this year, to

pursue opportunities overseas. Her contribution to the company and to Tasmania has been phenomenal. Under her direction and the sound management of the Board the artistic program has flourished, and the audience base has broadened. Through workshops with the community and the Salamanca Youth Theatre (syt) program a greater appreciation for the arts and a skilled and creative community of practising artists has been nurtured. syt actors have been employed professionally by the STC in their touring shows and have also performed for Hobart audiences regularly. Interstate and internationally based writers, directors and designers have visited and collaborated. Later this year, Perth-based young playwright Sarah Brill will help bring to the stage and the classroom/gym/hall 'Super Serious', a story of an extraordinary girl with a wild imagination and her concerns about the new millennium.

Finally this year the STC will present 'Suitcase of Stories'. In this performance, aimed at kindergarten to grade four students, the village idiot and the hermit of a mythical town are sent on a quest beyond their shores to record and retell stories from other cultures. It could almost be the stories that the Salamanca Theatre Company have told during its lifetime. In the case of the company, its suitcase would bulge with the many subjects, the innumerable number of lives of the students, performers, collaborators and watchers that have been touched, the ideas and the styles and the different cultures and countries travelled. As the STC web site says, 'A departure, an arrival, a meeting in transit, the return, and a suitcase full of stories. Our story begins at the end.'

ANGELA WARREN



Photograph: Craig Blowfield

Salamanca Theatre Company's 'The Ecstasy of Communication'.

Deprived of historical roots, coupled with an absence of people skilled in the genre, puppetry in Western Australia was often patronizingly dismissed as 'only for kids'. Spare Parts Puppet Theatre in Fremantle has been working for twenty years to remedy the situation. Starting with a training course for two puppeteers that quickly expanded to three the company now regularly runs a School of Puppetry for youth and adults as well as holiday workshops for school children. Peter L. Wilson, the company's first Artistic Director, also brought in artists from overseas and interstate to run Master Classes. As a result, there are now a few West Australians who can call themselves professional puppeteers.



20 years young

Lowdown interviews Noriko Nishimoto, Artistic Director of Spare Parts Puppet Theatre

Peter L. Wilson established Spare Parts Puppet Theatre in 1981. Since then the company has consistently striven to raise the profile and artistic standards of this artform. Peter came to Perth as an Artist-in-Residence at the then Western Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University). A year later, he applied to the Western Australian Arts Council for a resource team in puppet theatre and Spare Parts was born. Noriko Nishimoto joined the company in 1982 as Master Puppeteer and Technique Master. In 1987, she became Associate Assistant Director, under Peter Wilson. In 1997 she became the company's Artistic Director.

The drive to develop new talent continues under Noriko Nishimoto, not just for puppeteers, but also writers, directors and designers. Noriko describes puppetry as a tricky artform that has very specific needs, with a long creative development process that involves all the artists. Work on a show starts two months prior to rehearsals to ensure sets and puppets are ready for the performers to work with. For a director, blocking alone takes on a whole new dimension, and a new writer in the field has to contend with the extremely visual nature of puppetry. There is as yet no academy of puppetry in WA, so Spare Parts is the proxy. This year, in particular, the company is using new talent as a heavy touring schedule plus the in-theatre program has meant increased demand for puppeteers. Noriko occasionally teaches a one-week course in puppetry at the WA Academy of

Performing Arts: 'Personally, I quite like teaching because I can learn'. She also enjoys inspiring young people about puppetry.

Three years into her run as Artistic Director of the company, Noriko can say that Spare Parts is through the transition period that spanned her taking over the artistic vision of the company that had been driven by Peter Wilson for 16 years. She says that things are more 'my way'. Since 1997, she has come closer to realizing the strong potential of the company. 'Spare Parts has refocused and re-built its energy and is now a vibrant and innovative artistic force. We understand that the length of the company's existence does not necessarily provide assurance of ongoing funds and artistic management success. What it does provide is a history from which the company can realize its potential.'

The main patrons of Spare Parts are family audiences. Noriko has a great passion for this market: 'I feel it is a very important area in any society'. Her artistic vision encompasses puppetry's unique ability to engage audiences in a visual dialogue – to tell stories through visual imagery and, by the very nature of this sort of animation, encourage the development of children's imaginations as well as their cultural and social development. She stresses the importance of high standards in the product, as it not only entertains but is also a great educational tool that can

ultimately have a long-term cultural impact within the community.

The Company Associates scheme, started in 1997, enables the regular freelance artistic staff to be more involved in the company's activities, allowing for professional development and the development of personal projects with directional assistance, workshop space, rehearsal space and administrative support from the company. Each year there is the opportunity for one of the company associates to have their work included in the program, possibly as a vehicle for the youth market. This is part of the plan to try and access the broadest possible audience. Spare Parts boasts 27 Company Associates who also take responsibility for the School of Puppetry.

For the future, Spare Parts is focused on developing new works on universal themes both for Australia and overseas. There is hope for a more settled national and international touring program. This year 'Cat Balloon' goes to Japan while 'The Bugalugs Bum Thief' tours nationally, and next year there is the possibility of tours to Vancouver and Singapore. The WA audience is still the company's main focus, but its high standards deserve the broader recognition of an international profile – after all, good things should be shared.

SHIRLEY VAN SANDEN