



0 COMMENTS • NOV 26, 2015

# **BRISBANE KIDS BUILD THEATRE FROM THE GROUND UP**

BY DAILY REVIEW

Brisbane is a city falling more deeply in love with theatre every year, so it's unsurprising that a Brisbane-based performing arts school for kids is offering young people the chance to create their own pieces of theatre from the initial conception through to final production.

Unlike most performing arts schools, whose end-of-year productions are made up of works initially created by adults, the Australian School of Performing Arts, Film and Television is focused on giving students a taste of each stage in the production process with its Creative Theatre Production course. The creative process is deliberately collaborative, reflecting the direction which theatre companies around the country are moving in.

The students from the course will perform their three short plays in [\*Music: A Muse to Seek\*](#) at QPAC's Cremorne Theatre early next month.

We asked ASPA-FTV Artistic Director Amanda Hardwick about the process.

**Most performing arts schools would just perform pre-existing works for their end of year productions — why has ASPA-FTV decided to create new works?**

The very foundation of the *Creative Theatre Production* course (from which our end of year shows are derived) is to write, produce and perform a new play. We tend to believe that the best ideas come from the students themselves, and when given the help of a

teacher/director/writer, can be steered to create refreshing, entertaining and contemporary performances. Also, often acting students are limited to being interpretative artists, and we wanted to provide an experience and training methodology, which encourages the acting student to be an integral part of the creative process.

### **How much creative control have the students had over the process?**

The students have been involved in the creative process from the very first week of Term 1. After being briefed on the theme, the students had the opportunity to 'pitch' an idea to the class, and class teacher, that explored the theme in a unique way. Once a decision was made regarding the narrative, a basic synopsis was created and the students then spent time working on creating and developing characters. The scripts and characters continually evolved throughout the term until all major decisions were locked in at the end of Term 3. It was definitely a collaborative process, but we did honour the director making the final decision where there were creative divisions. Saying that, because everyone shared the common goal – to create an entertaining short play, there really weren't a lot of divisions, and where there were, differences were dealt with immediately and respectfully.

### **Could you tell me a little bit about the three plays?**

The show *Music: A Muse to Seek* is made up of three plays all of which explore the title in their own unique way, while honouring the ever-present role that music plays in our lives. There's *Family, Friends & A Funeral*, which follows the McPhillips family and friends as they farewell their beloved Rhonda ... a Honda Odyssey. After 12 long years, she's suffered an engine malfunction and the McPhillips family children decide to hold a ceremony for the car. But conflict erupts when a full blown family argument breaks out about which song best represents Rhonda.

The second play is *The Real Workers of Brisvegas: The true story of a local music store*, which explores life in a Brisbane music store after the digital revolution, and the third is *Fish Out of Water*, a fairy-tale set in the fantastical land of Merryville where music is key.

### **Do the plays deal with any experiences from the students' lives?**

On the whole, the plays deal more indirectly with the experiences from the students' lives. The narratives, themes and dialogue are relevant and tailored to the students' ages and life experiences. The students are not shy in telling their teacher if a part of the script (dialogue, relationship etc) is unrealistic or not relatable.

There is one example of an experience taken directly from a student's life. In *Fish Out Of Water* there is a part in the play where one character is being mean to another, and then later regrets what they did and realises they were 'bullying' the other. We think it's so important that young and little people have a place to talk about and explore their thoughts and behaviour, and I'm always amazed at how open they are to feedback.

**Have many of the students reconsidered what roles they might like to play in the theatre over the last year? Has anybody, for example, come in wanting to be an actor but fallen in love with writing or design?**

There have definitely been students who have been more involved in one aspect of the process than another. For example, some students have really taken to script writing whilst others have been more instrumental in making blocking decisions and assisting the director etc. However, on a whole I would say the students are still very focused on becoming an actor.

Also, some of the students have expressed a desire to work for us as teachers at ASPA-FTV. This is obviously such an incredible compliment to our hard-working team. We couldn't be more humbled.

One of the things I have noticed most about the *Creative Theatre Production* groups (there are three in total) is the sense of solidarity amongst the students. I think that because all the parts are fairly equal in the amount of stage time they offer the actor, the rehearsal room is less competitive than other productions where there is a wider disparity in stage time between the lead and support roles, and, as a result, the students are free to focus more on the experience of being a 'team' and 'ensemble.' It sounds clichéd but they really do form such strong friendships and bonds over the year. From my experience, it's the students' new friendships, sense of community and belonging (which is created by the experience of the *Creative Theatre Production* course), that is the unsurpassable outcome.

Featured image: Amanda Hardwick (second from left) with teachers and students from ASPA-FTV