

Theatre Network NSW

# New South Wales Theatre Meeting report

April 2012



# NSW Theatre Meeting

## Friday 20 April 2012

### PROGRAM

1.30pm

ARRIVAL & REGISTRATION

*Track 12, Carriageworks, 245 Wilson Street,  
Eveleigh NSW*

### SESSION 1

2pm

#### **Welcome**

Theatre Network NSW update

Theatre Network Australia update

#### **Newsround**

Newsround is a chance for delegates to update the meeting on developments in their company or work with a focus on ideas and initiatives, rather than shows.

3pm

AFTERNOON TEA

### SESSION 2

3.30pm

#### **Panel discussions: Theatre Futures**

Moderator: Kiersten Fishburn (Casula Powerhouse)

#### **Discussion 1: Digital Futures**

Bridgette Van Leuven (Sydney Opera House),

Eva di Cesare (Monkey Baa Theatre Company) and

Tara Smith (Sydney Opera House)

#### **Discussion 2: Regional Partnerships**

Simon Hinton (Merrigong Theatre Company) and

David Williams (version 1.0)

5–6pm

NETWORKING DRINKS

## **A Forward ...**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, TNN held its first NSW Theatre Meeting. We begged, borrowed and stole to make it all happen and the response was overwhelming, exceeding our expectations. Over 90 people attended the meeting, demonstrating the demand for greater dialogue within our sector. But what was even more encouraging was the diversity of attendees – representatives from metropolitan and regional centres, from the small-to-medium, major and independent sectors, as well as some interested onlookers. And feedback has reinforced this – while there were some great presentations on the day, what everyone relished most of all was the opportunity to get together and talk. We just don't do it enough.

We tried to keep the meeting pretty short and snappy, with an element of flexibility and broader participation, and I think we learnt a lot about what is possible in the future. On which note, we are also seeking feedback from attendees about the format and content, what worked or didn't work, and from non-attendees about what you'd like to see, so that we can do it all again and keep making these gatherings better and more relevant each time. Until TNN has permanent staff to implement the recommendations contained in our Scope Report, the Steering Committee is committed to maintaining the energy and momentum for closing the communication gaps.

In the meantime, here's a snapshot of what happened in April.

*– TNN Committee: John Baylis, Gareth Boylan, Claudia Chidiac, Luke Cowling, Kate Gaul, Tim McGarry, Anne-Louise Rentell, Viv Rosman, Simon Wellington and David Williams.*

## **NSW THEATRE MEETING 2012: KEY POINTS**

Welcome - Simon Wellington, GM Griffin Theatre

Theatre Network NSW update – John Baylis

TNN has emerged from a series of informal conversations, then formal meetings, over the past 14 months. The initiative came from David Williams from Version 1.0 and Nathan Bennett, then at Griffin, who called a meeting in February last year to discuss the paucity of opportunities in the NSW theatre sector for networking and all-of-sector advocacy and lobbying.

NSW is not alone in lacking these opportunities. For most of its history and in most parts of the country, theatre as a whole has lacked a focused peak body. Other artforms have their Ausdance or their NAVA, and within the broad church of theatre there are peaks for physical theatre (ACAPTA), for major orgs (AMPAG), for presenters (APACA) and for youth-focused work (YPAA). But there was nothing for theatre as a whole.

As many of you will know, that has changed in the last few years. Victorian theatre artists felt the same need as ourselves and did something about it. The result is the emergence of the very effective Theatre Network Victoria, which has acted as both an inspiration and a model for us.

Back to the story ... A small grant from Arts NSW allowed us to contract Kim Hanna to consult with theatre artists and organisations to find out what they wanted, and he came back with recommendations about what Theatre Network NSW might look like. Kim's report was circulated to our growing email list – if you haven't seen it and want a copy email us at [nswtheatrenetwork@gmail.com](mailto:nswtheatrenetwork@gmail.com)

That report provided the raw material for a proposal to Arts NSW, which unfortunately was unsuccessful. But this need not deter us. It is up to us all to decide whether TNN will continue. If we find it useful, it will. So it is over to us now.

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Theatre Network Victoria and Theatre Network Australia Update –  
Nicole Beyer, Director TNV

### **Theatre Network Victoria**

1. We represent the S2M sector but work with majors, that's essential; we began with project based funding from Arts Victoria's sector development initiative – it's was 18 months only and needed to be flexible. We are now annually funded, as of 2011 (and again in 2012).
2. We run an annual Victorian Theatre Meeting, which is also our annual consultation; we run other workshops in partnership with other organisations, such as the National Touring Workshop with PATA and APACA; we distribute a monthly e-news and industry updates in between to over 800 subscriber members (not financial); we conduct research, for example the Remuneration Report; and we also produce the Australian Theatre Forum (2011 and 2013).
3. Current Priorities:
  - √ Sustainability of the independent sector

- ✓ Environmental sustainability
- ✓ Advocacy, lobbying, representing the sector
- ✓ Touring and better engagement with regional areas
- ✓ Supporting diversity in Australian theatre practice.

### **Theatre Network Australia**

TNA's aim is to strengthen the theatre sector by working with the energy and activity that already exists around the country – from established organisations such as TNV and Theatre Council Tasmania, to other states and territories' committees, annual forums, informal meetings and fledgling networks such as TNN.

Its long-term vision is to find a mechanism to support and connect all of the different networks in each state and territory. That might be a person or just a project embedded in another organisation, or it might be a full office. It is important to capitalise on the existing infrastructure, including other service organisations like APACA, YPAA, ACAPTA, AMPAG etc, to avoid duplication and, more importantly, to strengthen our collective voice.

Challenges:

1. Sustaining momentum with no paid staff
2. Capacity to think nationally when there are pressing state/local concerns
3. Sustainability and morale issues.

Next steps to address those challenges:

1. Work with any existing infrastructure – eg in SA work is being done with the Arts Industry SA, which has some resources
2. Celebrate the little wins such as these events. They count even if they're not ongoing!
3. Use opportunities such as the Australian Theatre Forum and other national events to keep the national thinking happening
4. Find the champions. When the champions move on, find the next ones! Identify the negative voices – listen, but give them less influence.

### **Arts North West *On Tour***

Nicole read out a letter from Arts North West congratulating the committee on the meeting, and requesting possibilities of travel and Skype / Twitter feeding into future meetings. Elizabeth Rogers (RAA) offered to broker future contacts with all of the fourteen RA boards. Opera House offered to host a meeting, as it has the technology to do live streaming.

## **News Round**

1. Barry French – New Theatre.  
New Theatre as a training theatre, giving experience to theatre practitioners.  
Encouraging access of new entrants to the profession to come to the New Theatre to develop professional skills and theatre knowledge. What is the space between training institutions and the professional sector?

[newtheatre.org.au](http://newtheatre.org.au)

2. Stephen Champion – Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre.

BMEC runs programs to engage with and develop a thriving arts hub in the Central West. Stephen encourages independent theatre sector to engage with regional venues. Artists “need to think beyond the city”.

Key points:

- Local stages build capacity in regions.
- Residencies are important.
- Independents need resources and places to work.
- There are missed opportunities to engage with regional performing arts centres.

[www.bmec.com.au/bmec/index.php](http://www.bmec.com.au/bmec/index.php)

3. Polly Rowe, Sydney Theatre Company.  
Update on project and professional development opportunities at Sydney Theatre Company. Resident artists are no longer just actors, but now include designers, directors, etc. The Richard Wherret Fellow in 2012 is Imara Savage. Other opportunities include fellowship programs and creative developments. “Next Stage” is returning in 2013 within the Wharf 2 program. There will be more creative developments and fewer shows. And we have a new bar!

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au)

4. Katherine Beck and Troy Harrison – Workhorse Theatre Company.  
Fundraising and sponsorship ideas for new, start-up independent theatre companies. Perhaps we could have a fundraising gala for the sector?

Key points:

- struggles that an independent theatre company faces are onerous – sharing ideas and pathways is great – we talked to Red Stitch about their genesis and struggles and that was useful for us.
- opportunity to talk to established companies would be really valuable for us.
- suggestion about running a forum on perils and pitfalls of setting up new companies.

[www.workhorsetheatreco.com](http://www.workhorsetheatreco.com)

5. Tanja Farman - Performance Space.  
Green Matinees, 30th Anniversary for Performance Space. Following on from Arts House’s (Melbourne) initiative – offering free tickets if you come in a green way such as walking, riding or public transport. The idea is if you show your helmet, your ticket or your sweat, you get in for free!

[www.performancespace.com.au](http://www.performancespace.com.au)

6. Camilla Rountree – Riverside Theatres Parramatta.  
Short outline of True West, Riverside’s Independent Theatre Season. Western Sydney “begins in Ultimo” so many people may be eligible. Very generous program, with cash and in-kind support. It’s not just youth-oriented, but focused on professional artists too. A producer's pack available on website.

True West is a season of independent theatre co-ordinated and supported by Riverside Theatres, Parramatta with assistance from Arts NSW. The first season of True West in 2011 successfully presented three new works in standout productions. In 2012 three

more projects will be assisted to reach audiences in two weeks seasons presented in Raffertys studio Theatre at Riverside.

It offers three slots in the second half of year. You get cash, in-kind support such as marketing or tech support, and a split of the box office. Incentives are offered to bring producers come to Parramatta.

[www.riversideparramatta.com.au](http://www.riversideparramatta.com.au)

7. Mark Seton – ASPAH Australian Society for Performing Arts Healthcare. ASPAH is the peak body in Australia for the promotion of holistic healthcare for performing artists. ASPAH is working with Equity Foundation and the University of Sydney to survey the wellbeing of actors

Art is about taking risks, and this can be harmful to health, not just physically but also emotionally and mentally. They undertake research, run an annual conference (November 2012) and advocate for artists.

[www.aspah.org.au](http://www.aspah.org.au)

8. Luke Cowling – Critical Stages. Now resident at Seymour Centre. Coming up is an Independent Producer residency for the second half of the year. Residency provides infrastructure – office space, phones, Internet, tech for shows, and the team’s experience. No application; just a meeting.

[www.criticalstages.com.au](http://www.criticalstages.com.au)

9. Eva di Cesare – Monkey Baa Theatre. There is a new theatre space – a new purpose built children's theatre – at Darling Harbour. It has a Lend Lease – it’s built as a “gift” for the arts.

[www.monkeybaa.com.au](http://www.monkeybaa.com.au)

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## Panel discussions – Facilitated by Kiersten Fishburn

### Digital Futures – Sydney Opera House’s “Digital Excursions” project as a part of the House Ed program

#### **Bridget Van Leuven**

House Ed Program: onsite (at Opera House); offsite (at Glasshouse Theatre Macquarie) and Online (digital). Increasing access to the “insular peninsula” of the Sydney Opera House. Different entry points to the performing arts that are not only about buying a ticket.

Research showed that most online programs are science based – Great Barrier Reef does dive online, NASA has its online space program. Overall, the quality of the content is “lazy classroom” – not much interactivity etc. Artists can do it better.

Development of roaming technologies for video delivery is new and therefore development has been expensive. Other organisations using this kind of technology haven't “cracked” roaming.

The other challenge is interactivity – how can the experience genuinely be interactive?

Discussion of Bell Shakespeare masterclass with multiple offsite classrooms engaging and interacting both with each other and the actor facilitating the workshop. The technology is not fully developed, but the workshop was very successful and students reported the technology was no barrier to engagement. SOH is documenting this program and will share results.

### **Tara Smith**

Digital education program. Most schools – nearly 100% – have video conferencing facilities – interactive whiteboards. The incursions use a roaming camera, so that a “tour” can happen throughout the opera house spaces, including backstage. Teachers can also access PD online. It is live, so students can ask questions and feel like they are there. They get excited when they get “onstage”! Some options include drama workshops.

### **Monkey Baa Theatre’s Eva di Cesare**

Eva shows students what it’s like to be an actor backstage, in the dressing-room, etc. Takes the drama classes. It took a while to work out which exercises work online. The simple tableau style, words games etc work well. There are challenges of interactivity, but engagement and access was fascinating. For most young people the digital interface is entirely natural, and very intimate encounters are possible. Screen based engagement still produces strong experiences.

## **Regional Partnerships – Simon Hinton, Merrigong, and David Williams, Version 1.0**

Simon and David talked about the partnership of *The Table of Knowledge*, a successful show that sold out and is now touring.

- Shared investment in the project. Version 1.0 managed the artistic risk, Merrigong managed the community risk.
- Content is a big local story of corruption in the local council, which was put into administration. The show is about the investigation.
- Raised issues of should we use playwrights as journalists – to allow stories, like National Theatre of Scotland.

Version 1.0 took on the project, as their 2009 show resonated with audiences. There was a panel discussion and Q&As including with the new Lord Mayor; 20–40% of the audience stayed to talk about the issues.

Kiersten asked – who owns the product? The answer: they share it. But there are tensions. They might have made different decisions about box office split eg, but overall they really respect each other. For Merrigong, the relevance of the company to the community is now really clear (in a survey, up from around 30% to 58%).

In general for Version 1.0, the way a partnership is structured depends on the partners – e.g. there was less artistic input from Merrigong than, say, when they worked with ATYP.



## **THANKS**

Version 1.0  
CarriageWorks  
Kiersten Fishburn  
Bridgette Van Leuven  
Tara Smith  
Eva Di Cesare  
Simon Hinton

## **STEERING COMMITTEE**

John Baylis  
Gareth Boylan  
Claudia Chidiac  
Luke Cowling  
Kate Gaul  
Tim McGarry  
Anne-Louise Rentell  
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