

Sprung!!

Integrated Dance
Theatre Inc

Sprung!! Annual Report YE 2017

Dr Robyn Brady President and Pro Bono General Manager

So YE 2017 + (including to date) has been an astounding year for Sprung!! Integrated Dance Theatre and has really marked the transition from a small town nonprofit association running community workshops once a month on a Sunday, to a regional arts organization “of national significance” producing original dance works worthy of inclusion in the Australian Dance Awards finals, running a unique weekly training program for committed dancers with disability, and collaborating with a university research centre to ensure the validity, integrity, and sustainability of its disability voice.

From an activity point of view, the Highlight of the YE 2017 was the Disability, Arts and Health weekend run at Lennox in October, featuring the full length work, “Encounters”, choreographed by Michael Hennessy and performed by 5 dancers with and 4 without disability. This weekend also included a Disability Arts and Health Forum with four extraordinary speakers, a community meal by an amazing local chef, set among a sculpture exhibition by local sculptors responding to issues of loss and disability, and three creative workshops encouraging community arts participation. This and the two other performances of Encounters at Drill Hall in Mullumbimby led to a nomination for an Australian Dance Award for Outstanding Community Dance, we were eventually short-listed and in September 2017 travelled to Melbourne courtesy of a Create NSW Artist Quick Response Grant to be part of the celebrations.

Other highlights included our participation in March in the Canberra BOLD Festival run by Canberra Dance Theatre and legendary contemporary dance mentor Liz Lea. Michael Hennessy presented on his journey as Artistic Director to a large audience, and Tara Coughlan and Max McAuley performed to stunned audiences at the QV2 theatre as part of a program that included senior Australian contemporary legends Dame Elizabeth and Meryl Tankard. This investment has had multiple payoffs (Liz won the award for which we were Finalists) in that two Sprung!! dancers have since been invited to take part in the ACT Escalate program for emerging professional dancers (mainstream), and to work with Liz towards further touring performances in 2018.

In terms of creative new work, in 2017 we took the plunge to involve a young fresh director in our creative developments for the first time. Michael and Kate McDowell became dance and drama mentors, respectively, for a new work that grew from the dancers own lives. This work, “SHARE HOUSE” began from a week’s immersion with filmmaker Jan Cattoni whose expertise in working with aboriginal non-actors to develop characters and scenarios that are “them and yet not them”. Jan suggested the group develop a work around the experiences of sharing a house, something resonant for many of our dancers who are working towards supported independent living. Kate brought funky new music from her NORPA collaborators, and a fresh eye, while Michael’s deep experience with the dancers and in producing works of quality ensured that the work had substance and refinement. The show launched at Newcastle Crack festival and was informally the “show of the Festival”, with fantastic audience accolades recorded,

Sprung!!

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and will be a part of Lismore ArtState and Don't DIS My Ability Festivals in December. Applications are in progress for touring to Brisbane next year as part of Anywhere Festival. Senior dancers also performed at Lismore Kabaret, and Tintenbar UpFront.

Looking at activities more generally, the Open Doors program included 8 weekends of clowning and dance workshops. We are beginning to take Open Doors more seriously as a fun inclusive event with its own requirements and will be seeking a Coordinator for this in 2018. We have 10 regular participants excluding the SHARE HOUSE team. Some come regularly from as far away as Nescastle and the Sunshine Coast Qld. We also ran three a summer intensive workshop, a deaf-inclusive contemporary dance workshop, and a Winter clowning workshop, all of which were open to Open Doors participants without higher level support needs. The Open Doors group also performed at the Lismore Lantern parade. In YE 2018 we would like to increase the visibility, and also potentially the types of disability we can support, within this program, and NDIS funding should make this easier.

The last part of our constitutional commitment is to training of dancers with disability, and as well as the project based training, we are excited to say that the advent of NDIS in the northern rivers has allowed us to start a Senior Dance Program two days a week for dancers with disability wanting to dance seriously. Each 6 hour day includes 3 hours of dance individualized for the participants, and special skills chosen by the group, such as photography, costume design, and drama. As well as this, we have applied to run a peer-support group among the dancers that will increase the "choice, voice and control" of our dancers with disability, mentored by the research office at Southern Cross University's Centre for Children and Young People.

Financially, our income has been static at about 50k for the last three years despite grant income going down to a third (reflecting the national arts grants pool) and doubling the number of workshops that we have run. In YE 2017 we applied for 14 grants, and were successful with only three small ones, for 7k, 1.3k and 800\$. While we have had positive feedback on recent near misses with Ozco and Arts NSW, it is clear that we need more sustainable means of funding. While we intend for marketing and audience development to be a major emphasis in 2018, and to attract philanthropic support more broadly, the most significant funding model change has been NDIS, which allows our dance clients access to funding for exactly the sort of individualized, disability specific workshops we run. The senior dance program is run on this basis, and we will transition the Open Doors and other projects to this platform next year, with the usual flexibility for any participants for whom this is for some reason not possible.

What are our priorities for YE 2018? From a project point of view, we hope to tour SHARE HOUSE and to develop off-shoot ultrashort films out of the project, led by the dancers, with topics like, SHARE HOUSE goes to the Beach, SHARE HOUSE paints the Living Room, etc. We also hope to commence development for

Sprung!!

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our new major contemporary work, "O, How I Dreamt of Things Impossible", which is an exploration of the creative minds of our dancers.

We intend to run the Senior Dance Training program for four 10 week blocks a year, and to continue the Open Door First Weekend Series and the three Open Doors week-long workshops, funding permitting (the deaf inclusive workshop is expensive and we have been unsuccessful with three grant applications to run a second block this year).

From a management point of view, two things stand out as critical: the first is to use the profit from NDIS funded workshops and training to begin to devolve management from me (as pro bono GM currently working up to 7 days a week on Sprung!! management). We will seek the right consultants to fill this role, initially on a pilot 10 week one day a week basis, with a focus on fulfilling the governance requirements for NDIS formal validation. We will also seek coordinators for the Open Doors stream and possibly also the Senior Dance Program stream (All of these could and possibly should be the same person. This would leave me free to do the projects which are most interesting to me, which are the overseeing the development and touring of cutting edge integrated dance works, and coordinating overall strategy for the next five years. The second urgent management priority, having now overhauled the website and email addresses in time for the Australian Dance Awards, is to address a "whole of organization" marketing framework along the directions outlined by the Australian Cultural Fund and Creative Partnerships Australia. Our growing prominence nationally and our consistent quality, inclusivity, and activity should start to bear fruit from a philanthropic point of view, even if grant funding continues to dwindle.

What are our five year goals? I envisage these across 8 domains and have outlined them along with one year goals in a Strategic Vision spreadsheet (attached). We intend to have an Envisioning in December or January with all interested persons and representatives of all major activities and stakeholders, in order to flesh out priorities in more detail. The main activities in the 5 year vision that have not been discussed already include the embedding of community partnerships with eg Ballina Shire, NORPA, and SCU, the commencement of meaningful research, (particularly into disability led process with respect to intellectual disability, and the impact of participation in arts and dance programs on persons with disability), and the development of a stronger structure for paid employment for our highly trained dancers with disability within the organization.

Thanks for your time and attention, we welcome your involvement in the next five years of this exciting journey.