

THEOREM



THE DREAM
THAT BECAME A REALITY.

Reflections on an extraordinary theatrical event.

On November 20 around 8 p.m. a queue of more than 100 people wound from the grand foyer of the new Concert Hall out onto the pavement.

All but a few waited in vain.

The house was full as it had been the previous night.

Such enthusiasm would not have been surprising had it been a concert starring some international celebrity. But the performance they were so eager to see was "Theorem" and the stars were 120 handicapped and disadvantaged people.

The public reaction to "Theorem" was a triumphal conclusion to a remarkable creative process. A conclusion that was never guaranteed. For "Theorem" was a daringly innovative project – a dream that many people believed could never become a reality.

That it did so is a tribute not only to those who participated but also those who supported them with either material or financial resources.

"Theorem" of course did not end on November 19 and 20. The experience changed and enlarged the lives of so many people associated with it – the institutions, the handicapped, the artists who worked with them and the members of the public who saw that even the most severely disadvantaged in our society have a creative potential waiting to be released.

But we thought it important, before time blurred the memory, to look back and record the major impressions of the extraordinary nine months that led up to the public performances in November.



"For me this project has been about showing people that they can do anything – even things they have never dreamed of." Artist, Bronwen Barton.

"Theorem" was based on the belief that there is a creative potential in us all. The trick is to release it.

The first step in "Theorem" was a series of workshops held around the State involving over 800 people.

The impact on those physically or mentally disabled people from institutions who took part and who flowered as their hidden abilities were explored and revealed was astonishing. It was perhaps even greater on the artists and others who helped conduct the workshops. Marge Roxborough, physiotherapist, believed it lifted her self-awareness to a much higher level opening up a new concept of creativity. As a result she has introduced creative workshops as a permanent feature of the Werribee Community Health Centre where she works.

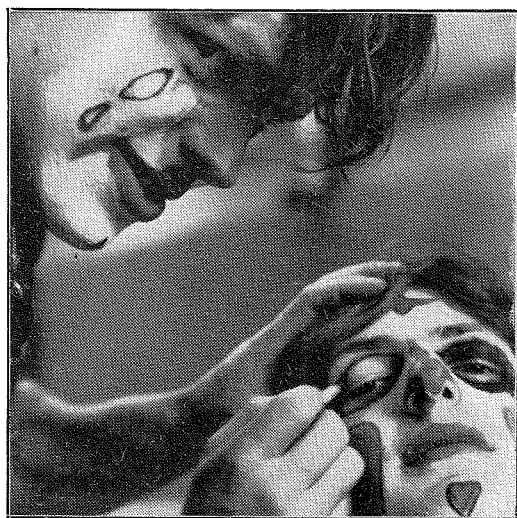
"It was during this period that we were aware of a tremendous capacity for giving." Belinda Kirkwood, Arts Access Project Officer.

Aldo Gennaro, who conceived and directed "Theorem" for the Arts Access Society, had intended that it should integrate different groups of society. As the scale of the project expanded, this intention was realised. Aged and youth. Able and disabled. Employed and unemployed. All worked together to create the stunning sets and puppets that provided such a spectacular focus for the performance.

For the institutions, participation meant much more than just the satisfaction of restructuring wheelchairs to drive the giant puppets, or the painting of banners, or the making of costumes.

At Janefield Training Centre, for example, we were at first told it would be impossible for residents to leave the centre to work on "Theorem" at our Brunswick workshops. Finally they came – with such success that their future world will be forever enlarged.

Staff at the centre have also commented on the extended concentration that resulted from the work residents did on the sets.



"They started out nine months ago as sheltered and shy children. They have grown up into people who have a chance." Michael Duffy, Editor, Border Morning Mail.

During rehearsals at the Contemporary Performing Centre in Melbourne we became aware of the impact of "Theorem" on the Blue Group from Albury/Wodonga who had been doing workshops during the year in preparation for the performances.

For most of them it was the first time they had left their home town. They came to Melbourne in early October for three days and were here again for the full week in November leading up to the performances.

Both the participants and the institutions from whence they came were introduced to possibilities they had not thought feasible. We were assured that they could not travel, that they could not settle in Melbourne, that they would want to return home. The opposite happened. They travelled on public transport, went to a performance of "Oklahoma," enjoyed a barbecue and of course performed magnificently on the Concert Hall stage. They were, in reality, little different from the average tourist visiting a big city.



"A moving theatrical marvel."

Laurie Landray, Melbourne
Herald Theatre Critic.

The sellout performances on the Friday and Saturday nights produced a profound effect on the audiences. For the first time they were focusing on the ability of handicapped people not their disability.

Yet for many of us it was the rehearsal performance on the Friday morning that was the highlight . . . the true vindication of the "Theorem" process.

The audience was 1500 people from special centres who were unable to come at night. They were enthralled and their enthusiastic response was a moving tribute to the work of the previous nine months.

The Concert Hall had anticipated they could accommodate only 12 wheelchairs for this performance. We had at least 48 who watched from wheelchairs and hundreds more who were lifted from them onto seats.

Once again "Theorem" had proved that anything is possible. And that, above all, is why its influence will go far beyond the prolonged bravos and applause of the final performance on November 20, 1982.



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