

## **Darwin Theatre Company – Future Visioning**

### **Darwin Theatre: A Snapshot**

At present Darwin contains two professional independent companies: Business Unusual (Nicky Fern) and Knock Em Down (Gail Evans, Maryanne Butler, Stephen Carlton); One professional/community dance company (Tracks); One youth theatre/ youth arts organisations (Corrugated Iron); A substantial venue interested in the growth of local performance (DEC); An independent/intimate/experimental multi-artform space (Browns Mart); And a large scale local/international multi-artform festival (Darwin Festival).

The two independent companies self produce the majority of their work and productions are developed by a mix of professional local and interstate artists. Of the remaining companies and venues, the glaring gap is in the potential for non-professional adult theatrical work.

### **How may this gap be filled and a service provided to this important element of any blossoming theatrical habitat?**

The community/amateur model of Cavanagh Theatre is prone to burn-out from within. Functioning only from a volunteer base and working actively to present work does not seem to lend itself to the longevity of an organisation. What seems to have been lacking (certainly in the past few years) is the provision of training and workshops to adult performers to hone and develop performance and production skills and to provide a stream of new creative individuals in those areas of performance and production.

DTC seems uniquely placed to act as a connective and training organisation to address this gap. Working with the professional theatre sector to tailor training, mentorship and, ultimately, production and performance opportunities for Darwin's non-professional adult actors, writers, directors, designers, technical and operations staff.

### **How could this work?**

All tenants of Browns Mart have been asked to vacate the premises by June 30. By this time DTC will have to consolidate its administration and operation perhaps to fit into a small office space we can source elsewhere. The setup and flow of training workshops would require approx. 1 day of admin per week and I would recommend that a portion of the reserves are set aside to cover the costs associated with the provision of these workshops.

By entering into a process of upskilling non-professionals in Darwin we could begin to create viable performance opportunities – perhaps the large scale community performances of the past can be the culmination of several workshop streams. Further to this it would offer another source of employment for the small number of local professional theatre artists and have the capacity to engage with non-resident professionals passing through town. This ongoing training I see as important for creating that bubbling, diverse, impassioned,

and importantly, productive culture of performance making that has been absent in Darwin for some time.

### **The Current Situation:**

DTC is not unique in its current situation of being defunded by both the state (territory) funding body [Arts NT] and the national funding body [OzCo]. There are a large number of companies across Australia in a similar predicament due partly to a constriction of funding and partly to a shift in expected outcomes to funding. The Australia Council is currently in the process of implementing a new funding model for theatre under the title of "Make it New" - links to this paper and the discussions that followed can be found at [http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/the\\_arts/features/make\\_it\\_new\\_consultations\\_on\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_theatre\\_funding](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/the_arts/features/make_it_new_consultations_on_the_future_of_theatre_funding)

The question becomes, how does DTC fit into this new funding framework and, if it does, is this useful to both its membership base and the wider theatrical community and general public.

- With the creation of the HUB and its associated position to further the development and dissemination of professional theatrical work from Darwin, there are a number of options for DTC:

#### **Become a maker**

The company streamlines its processes and only works project to project  
An artistic director works pro bono and is either contracted to direct specific new works or engages an external director

This is essentially a model for small scale professional poor theatre work where people are either paid nominally or with profit share arrangements (ie once production costs are covered, any remaining profits are split)

The board in this event also provides artistic input and advice re the works produced.

- Works must be small scale with minimal set-up costs
- Have medium length seasons to capitalize on word-of-mouth
- Have a greater ratio of media to production spend than previous company works

The first few works need be constructed quickly and cheaply and preferably without funding support – at this stage it is important that the company be seen to be personally investing in its own work.

If this work is vaguely commercially viable then its creation can be continued until the company position is sufficiently strengthened to start seeking funding from a range of diversified sources, including support from the HUB

## WHY?

There still exists the need for a company in Darwin to produce quality work as a first point of contact for new theatre audiences – this must therefore include extant works, classics and canonical works as well as new Australian and International pieces, keeping in mind the central focus of developing the theatrical literacy of local audiences

### **Become a Seeder**

The board administers funds for the development of new works (think 2-3K) from outside groups. These works, if they reach production would therefore have a stamp of DTC (fasttracked by DTC or something similar)

### **Become a Trust**

Similar to the above mentioned scheme but with an amalgamation with the Cavanagh Theatre Trust?

A link with the proposed trust from DEC?

### **Fold**

Relinquish resources to the new Hub / other similar org

### **Q's**

1. retain the police work and other tender contracts for actor services

Alex Ben Mayor  
DTC Board Member and Ordinary Member