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C O M M U N I T Y A R T S N E T W O R K S A



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The Community Arts Network of SA is a member based organisation. It forms part of a national network of sister organisations in most capital cities across Australia.

AIM

The Community Arts Network aims to support arts development and creative expression at community level towards the ideal of diverse and vibrant community cultures.

COMMUNITY ARTS

Arts practice and creative expression are at the heart of a community's vitality. People have always come together to sing, tell stories, enact rituals, to celebrate, to mourn and to mark significant events in their lives. Besides being able to see great art, people need to actively participate in these activities. This is what is meant by the term community arts, it might be a new name but it is not a new idea.

LOCAL CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

It is through the things we do together as groups and communities that we gain a sense of collective identity, a sense of place and a sense of belonging. When we value these things a positive concern for our social well being follows and we begin to take charge of our present and shape the future to meet our aspirations.

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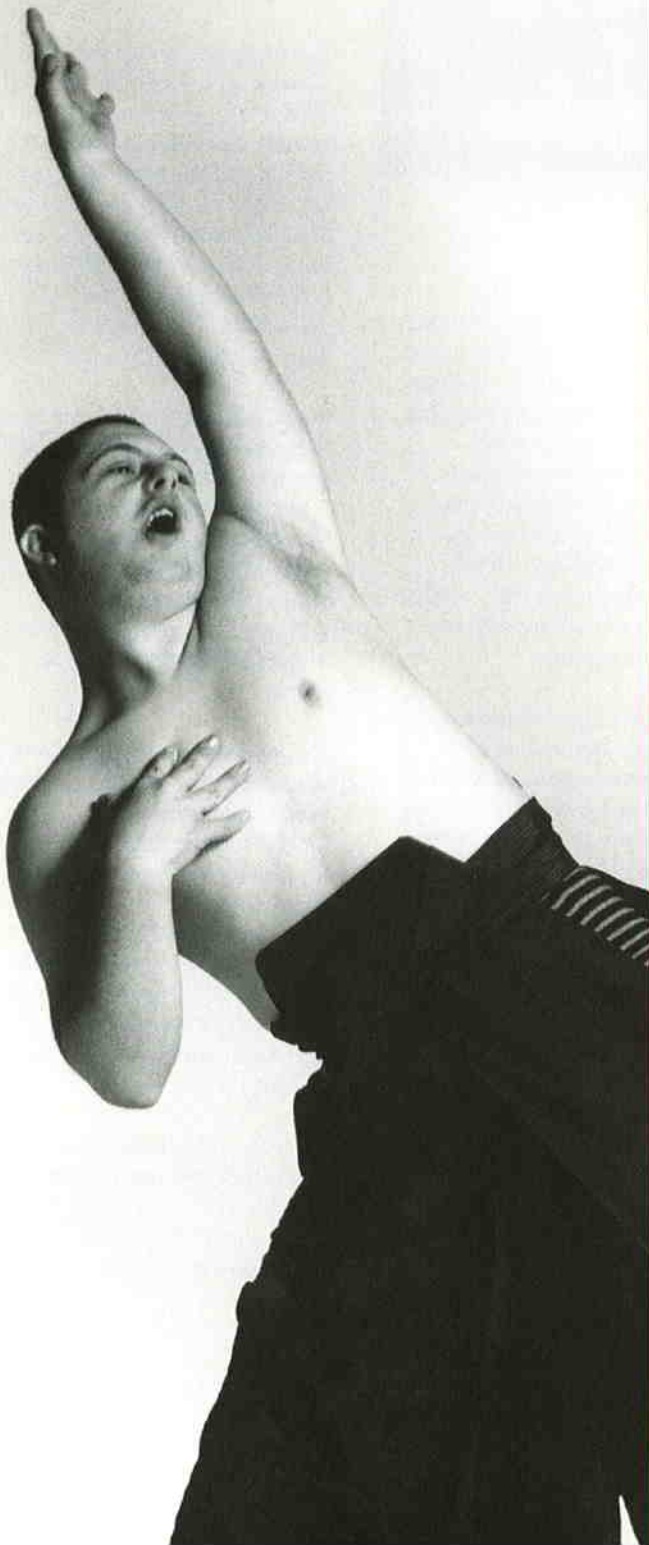
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c o n t e n t s

REMARKABLE JOURNEYS	1	Nick Hughes explores the artistic philosophy of Restless Dance's Artistic Director, Sally Chance.
NYNARRIN DREAMING: RECLAIMING THE LAND	5	Jane Cousins recounts the story of a project which saved an inner city bush block from unsuitable development and created a community recreational haven, complete with artworks.
ARTS GLUE	9	Ron Hoenig looks into the role and value of three arts service organisations in South Australia.
BANG	12	Alex Prior interviews three women who have recently established a professional community theatre in Cairns.
PERFECT STRANGERS	16	Hilary Beaton travels into the world of the Internet to discover what <i>Perfect Strangers</i> , Contact Theatre's youth art and culture site, is all about.
PUBLISHING POETRIX	20	Sherryl Clark explains how a unique community publication of women's poetry evolved and manages to survive without government funding.
PARK PROJECT: ISA IMAGES	22	Pat Wise provides a guided tour of a community-based project which transformed a prickly patch into a community recreation park.

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JOURNEYS

Restless Dance Co's Ziggy Kuster performing in Gigibori. Photo: Alex Makeyev

NICK HUGHES

Nick Hughes explores the artistic philosophy of Artistic Director, Sally Chance — a philosophy which drives a unique young people's dance company that Sally has developed in South Australia.

To see a performance by the Adelaide-based dance company 'Restless Dance' is to be taken on a journey, for you cannot help but be transported by the extraordinary tenderness and caring that the dancers express to one another. These are not actors feigning emotions; there is no pretence here. These warm human exchanges are really happening in front of you. Each and every performer is present all of the time, and they have the courage to reveal themselves through the medium of dance. It is the very way that the group operates — in a spirit of respect, tolerance and clarity — that enables its members to use their art to transport their audience.



Gigibori

It is the very way that the group operates — in a spirit of respect, tolerance and clarity — that enables them to use their art to transport their audience.

Restless is a unique dance company in that it is composed of a mixture of people — some with a disability and some without a disability. The company members have all undergone their own personal journeys and development since they began working under the guidance and direction of Sally Chance in November 1991. At that time Sally was working with two separate dance groups.

One was made up of about ten young people with a disability (mostly Down syndrome) who had been inspired by working with her on a previous project. This project had culminated in a performance in Norwood Concert Hall in August 1991 and had involved about ninety people. Sally describes the result as wild: 'the energy was just unreal. And, I thought, "This has to carry on!"'

The other group with which Sally was working involved young people (without a disability) who were doing dance and voice workshops over four weekends at Carclew Youth Arts Centre.

Sally describes what happened: 'It occurred to me that it would be good to cobble the two groups together. That's literally what I did, I mean, all my instincts were saying "Do it!", even though my belief at the time was that community cultural development of this nature needed to be organic, and take time, and evolve. But this didn't at all — I just whopped the two groups together.' The rightness of her instinct is attested to by the quality of the dance theatre that Restless has produced.

The integrated group only had time to work on one very modest production, which was almost entirely unfunded, before Sally's visa ran out and she had to return to the UK. However, the risks that Sally had taken and the response to her work were enough to convince a number of people in Adelaide that the work should continue and that more risks should be taken.

Virginia Hyam (Carclew's Project Manager), and Robin Goldsworthy and the Come Out Festival management shared a gut feeling that the company was, potentially, pretty skilled and worth supporting. So they took a huge risk and promoted the company as a major project of the 1993 Come Out Festival.

Virginia Hyam had also, serendipitously, come across the hauntingly beautiful musical work of Colin Offord and she applied for funding for him to work with the company. Thus, when Sally returned with a new visa in January 1993, she was able to start work straight away on a major work for the following May. This evolved into *Ikons*, one of the significant artistic successes of the festival.

Since then the company has produced three other major works: *Love Dances* for the Adelaide Fringe Festival in 1994; *Talking Down* for the Come Out Festival in 1995 (this

production was directed by Caroline Daish, the Associate Director of Restless Dance); and *Gigibori*, which is the company's most recent production and its second collaboration with Colin Offord.

On her way to Adelaide for the first time, in 1990, Sally journeyed by car across some of the empty spaces of Australia. She describes the importance of this journey for herself and for her work: 'As I was driving through the desert in South Australia, I had a revelation — that the smallest hillock is so stunningly interesting in the context of all that vast space.'

'Then when I began my work, which happened to involve all sorts of people with physical disabilities as well as people with an intellectual disability, I realised that it was the same landscape: a landscape that had been uncluttered by anyone's particular aesthetic code, or a history of participation, or any particular voice.'

'And that is what I love about the aesthetic of people with a physical disability in dance: the movement might be small; but if, as is usual, that movement is very concentrated, it's very powerful. Then, actually, it's not small — it's huge. So this questions the momentum and the motivation for every move. It makes you wonder why dancers who have undergone some form of formal training waste their time with so much peripheral gesturing when so much can be said with such a tiny, because meaningful, gesture.'

Sally's own journey and development with Restless has been guided by a strong commitment to the quality of the art they produce together. She stresses that their work needs to 'express, transport, engage and inspire. If it doesn't ... why bother! The work needs its own heart.'

She rejects totally the idea that what she is doing is a form of therapy: 'I'm not a therapist and I'm not qualified to be one. I still think that there's a ripple of

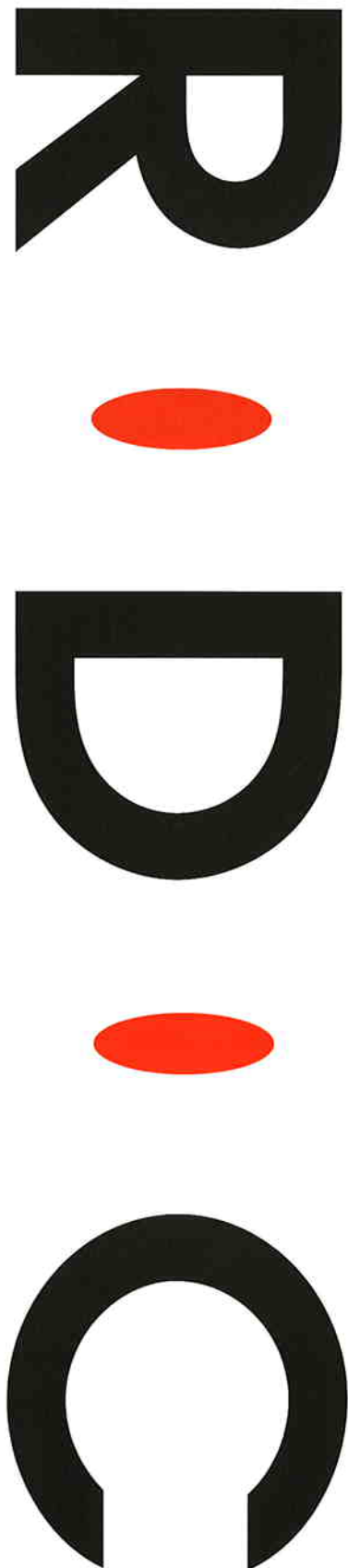
misunderstanding that because people have a disability they somehow need therapy.'

This emphasis on the quality of the art is reflected in the title of the latest work produced by the company: *Gigibori*. 'Gigibori' is a New Guinean word meaning the quality of an artwork that enables it to touch and transport us. Sally draws a parallel with James Joyce's concept of 'radiance' in art. And it is this quality of *Gigibori* that enables the work of the company to touch and move its audiences. 'I always like the idea of journeys. I guess one of my hopes is that an audience is taken from a place to another place through the piece.'

Sally's interest in journeys led her to use a Shamanic journey, in the form of a dancing path, as her own inspiration and starting point in the development of *Gigibori*. The dancing path is a journey through five states or stages or rhythms, and was developed by a dance worker called Gabrielle Roth who is based in New York.

The five states are: Flowing, Staccato, Chaos, Lyrical and Stillness. These rhythms were used as an improvisational structure and as a warm-up. Sally found that they took the company members on a satisfying journey each time. In fact the five rhythms worked so well that she made them the basic structure of *Gigibori*. They allowed the company to explore the archetypes that lie at the core of its work.

Sally describes a moment from *Gigibori*: 'Then she bends down and scoops. When she does that, to me it's like lifting the fire out of the centre of the planet. It's just so serene. She could be any woman at any time. And yet she's a very '90s young woman, very assertive, and a spokeswoman for her culture of Down syndrome. She's absolutely into the political act of herself in the world, the support she needs, and who she is right now. So it's both very contemporary and very archetypal.' It is this focus on expressing human archetypes through the dance culture that gives the work of Restless its extraordinary quality.





The dance theatre
of Restless
expresses the
culture of people
with a disability in
ways that tell us
about ourselves.

Restless Dance Co's Ziggy Kuster performing in *Gigibori*. Photo: Alex Makeyev

During another moment in *Gigibori* one of the dancers, Raphs (who has cerebral palsy and is usually confined to a wheelchair), is lifted out of his wheelchair and placed on the floor where he dances horizontally — for this is the only way in which he can. His movements are mirrored on either side by two female members of the company who do not have a disability. At times they lie very closely with him, in a tender and caring embrace. This is one of the most touching sequences in the piece.

Sally describes the archetypal resonances of this (and other moments) as follows: '... it stirs up whatever it stirs up and you can't necessarily name it. It might be that he looks very vulnerable and so it reminds you of feeling vulnerable. But he's not; he's only too happy in actual fact. So it might stir up your awe at his dignity and his strength.

'Someone whirls like a dervish, and they all do that so differently. It reminds you of heaven and hell, or it reminds you of being dizzy when you were a kid playing whizzies. Or it reminds you of the power of the circle and the mandala — all of those things. That's what I've been exploring for this piece, which I have shared with the company to a certain

extent. But it's simply not relevant, quite often, because it's so intellectual a concept. They're doing it anyway.'

Sally's work with Restless is reminiscent of the work of Oliver Sacks¹ and his interest in the world view of people with extraordinary neurological difficulties. Sacks' work is so compelling because he views these people as different rather than incomplete human beings. He does so because they provide us with: 'an unexpected perspective on the human condition'.

In exactly the same way, the dance theatre of Restless expresses the culture of people with a disability in ways that tell us about ourselves. The work of the company celebrates the expressive skills of the participants with a disability. Sally calls this 'reverse integration'. The usual pressure on these people is that they be treated in some way to make them 'normal'. The work of Restless has reversed this normalisation process, because the dancers with a disability have a sense that they are making a contribution to dance theatre.

She points out that for people with an intellectual disability, dance is perhaps the most appropriate medium because it

is non-verbal. When such people join Restless, they often have an early sense of: 'Ah! At last! My medium! An opportunity to have my voice heard.' It is an art form that relates to their culture. The valuing and expressing of those voices through the dance theatre of Restless provides an important validation and strengthening of that culture.

A good example of this process in action was the company's production of *Talking Down*. The title expresses the patronising way that many people talk to people with Down syndrome. This drives some of the company members crazy; others just put up with it. The production allowed them to be up-front about who they are and to name Down's publicly.

For some members this was extremely empowering, and they became more assertive and confident. For others it was threatening, because their life experience has taught them that Down's is something that's a problem. But as Sally puts it: 'How can what you are, who you are, be a problem?.... I think pinpointing a culture of Down's can be a source of strength and power and pride.'

Sally seeks in her work to celebrate those things in the culture of Down's that make them different. 'This is why I struggle so much with the universal, archetypal qualities that the dancers have. Because I don't want to get into the kind of family of humanity ... and all that stuff that irons out social and cultural differences.'

Restless is a place where these people can speak out about who they are with pride, integrity and enjoyment. It is also, for the rest of us, an embarkation point for remarkable journeys.² ■

Author Nick Hughes is an Adelaide-based theatre worker and playwright.

FOOTNOTE

1. Oliver Sacks is a Professor of Neurology and the author of *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*, *Awakenings* (now a motion picture) and *Seeing Voices* (about the culture of the Deaf).
2. The Restless Dance production of *Talking Down* is to be remounted as part of the 1995 Adelaide Fringe Youth Education Program. The production will be touring schools in Adelaide during the last week of February and the first week of March 1996.

N Y N A R R I N D R E A M I N G



Echidna sculpture - Hillview Tee Community Bushland Project WA
Photo: Andrea Taman

R E C L A I M I N G T H E L A N D



Artist, Gerry Morrison on site - Hillview Tee
Community Bushland Project WA
Photo: Andrea Taman

PROPOSAL

To preserve a one-hectare
bush block in East Victoria
Park, Perth, WA.

PROBLEM

The Commonwealth
Government wants to sell
it to a developer.



JANE COUSINS

In 1989 the Department of Veterans' Affairs decided to sell a one-hectare block of bush adjoining its archives in the Perth inner city suburb of East Victoria Park. As far as the department was concerned the land was vacant; a bit of old bush that nobody cared about, graced only with a 'Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted' sign. It was close to the city, its value had risen phenomenally in recent years and now was as good a time as any to capitalise. A notice went up — 'For Sale by Tender'.

Suddenly the department learned it had been wrong. The land had friends, and very determined friends — determined to save the bush block from the bulldozers and adamant that it belonged to the people, not the government. Kathy Walker — one of the Friends of Hillview Terrace Bushland, and now Victoria Park Councillor — remembers her indignation the first time she called Administrative Services to discuss the sale on behalf of local ratepayers. 'I overheard the bureaucrat who answered the phone say to a colleague "It's the ratepayers, they want our bush block." Our bush block, he said!'

Friends to the rescue

Like similar groups around the country, the Friends of Hillview Terrace formed when a community resource they valued (and whose ongoing existence they had assumed) was threatened. Alarmed that they might be witnessing the end of an irreplaceable piece of bush, they saw its fate as a heritage issue.

The case was clear. Only three pieces of natural bush remained in what was a large urban area. Housing density was now so high there was talk of bulldozing houses to create parkland. There could be no justification for removing a unique natural bush park — a complete functioning ecosystem with over sixty native plant species — in order to build more houses. It was clear to the Friends, too, that by the time planners and managers understood this, it would be too late. If something was going to be done, the community would have to do it itself.

Now Kathy can laugh when she thinks of that bureaucrat. Several years later, after lots of solid networking, hard work and the right amount of good luck, Hillview Terrace bush block — through the vesting authority of the National Trust — is about to be handed over to 'the people'.

This is the story of that remarkable achievement. It is the story of how a small, relatively powerless and informal group of locals succeeded in asserting ownership of a local community resource, and, in the process, strengthened both the community and the resource. Of course, they could not have done it without help, primarily from Community Arts Network WA and the WA branch of the National Trust. This is what makes the story so interesting. Many different players, organisations and interests came together to pursue a common aim.

The project develops

Good timing played its part too. It so happened that when the Friends of Hillview Terrace Bushland went to the National Trust with a proposal to have the bush block listed, and to ask for

advice on how the community could get it handed over to their care; the Trust, in conjunction with the Conservation Council and the recently formed Urban Bushland Council, was meeting with Community Arts Network (CAN) to discuss how they might develop a model for raising awareness of urban bushland, using the mechanisms of community art. When the Friends of Hillview Terrace made their request, a natural opportunity presented itself.

The outcome of this initial phase was the heritage listing of Hillview Terrace bush block and the granting of \$16 000 funding from the WA Department to CAN, to employ artists to facilitate the development of a community management plan. Although, at this stage, future ownership of the land itself was by no means clear, it was decided to go ahead with the project and lobby simultaneously for the government to hand over the block. Fortunately the players were able to enlist the support of Kim Beazley (the Federal Member). As a result, formal discussions were begun between his office, the National Trust and the Department of Veterans' Affairs in Canberra.

Locally, a steering committee was formed to oversee the project. It consisted of Kathy Taylor and Mike Stokes, who were two of the key players in the community; Jane Blake from the National Trust; Helen Carroll, the community arts officer for Perth; and Andrea Taman, representing CAN. At their first meeting they decided that the project should be in two stages: the first involving community consultation; the second, implementation of the recommendations produced.

CAN advertised for artists, and Leah Young was selected from the ten who responded. Although she was not a local artist, Leah's proposal for an arts-based

community consultation process seemed to reflect most closely the priorities of the local community. One of these was the need to tread gently. Given that until this time the bush block had been managed by a small group, there was concern that the process of publicising the bushland should not result in large numbers of enthused local people rushing out to look, and trampling it.

Leah had ideas for off-site consultation. She also had ideas for tracking down people who might have a relationship with the bush block but who weren't already part of the informal bush block network.

The consultation

Leah's job was part archaeologist, part historian and part map-maker. Through a range of activities involving the community she set out to discover the history of the bush block — how it was used, what shared memories it evoked, the different experiences had by local groups. 'Community consultation is about making pathways into a community', she says. 'Many different pathways, some leading into a dead end, others into exciting discovery and endless detours along the way.'

She worked in local schools, talked with elderly people, consulted with local businesses and community organisations, publicised through the local papers, letterbox drops and fairs. There was a community event at the bush block, with art-making for kids, and a series of public meetings, two of which used playback theatre to collect stories about the bushland.

All of this was useful not only in uncovering the past, but also crucially for renewing and building a sense of community in the present. With each meeting new contacts were made; leading, exponentially, to more and more. Gradually a picture emerged of people's different relationships with the bushland — a

picture the whole community could share. At this point, Leah says, the challenge was 'to make the connections, find the places where the paths meet and create art that will have meaning for all the people in that community'.

With this in mind, Leah was aware of the absence of the substantial local Aboriginal community during community consultation. Not only had many non-Aboriginal people expressed interest in the Aboriginal stories of the area, and not only was Aboriginal history crucial to the site; but given the history of dispossession of Aboriginal people of their land, their involvement at this point seemed absolutely necessary.

Leah approached Jerry Morrison, an Aboriginal artist living in the area. He expressed such strong interest and strong ideas about the development of the bush block, she encouraged him to apply for the artist's position in stage two. He did, and was selected.

One of the recommendations that came out of the community consultation process was for a path. The community's priority was to preserve the bush, so it was agreed that whatever was installed would have to have minimal impact. At the same time — since the bush block lacked shade and seating, and had only one diagonal weed-filled 'short cut' — it was felt that artistic pathways, signs and seating would make it more user-friendly. Paths would invite people into the heart of the bush block, to sit and enjoy the natural surroundings — which most saw as a quiet place to escape to.

Jerry came up with a design for the Hillview Terrace bushland based on the dreaming stories of the Whadjuk state of the Bibbulmun nation, of which the bush block is one of the last remaining natural areas and thus crucial to preserving the history of the Nyoongah people. The series of winding paths and circular resting places he designed relate specifically to the Nynarrin (echidna) dreaming.



Community participants painting the Echidna sculpture - Hillview Tee Community Bushland Project WA. Photo: Andrea Taman

This is the story of how a small, relatively powerless and informal group of locals succeeded in asserting ownership of a local community resource, and, in the process, strengthened both the community and the resource.

The Dreamtime Story

From the Dreamtime (which is ever present), an ancestral Nynarrin (echidna) dug up the ground within the boundaries of Rivervale, Lathlain, Carlisle, Bentley, Wilson, Waterford, Manning, Como, South Perth and Victoria Park. (The European names are used so that people can identify their area). As the Nynarrin excavated the area, it made hills and gullies where fresh water accumulated and was bountiful. When at last all the work was finished he went to rest at a place that is now called Mount Henry, which then made Salters Point cliffs area a sacred site.

The paths and sites have names like Nynarrin boomak nano (echidna throwing mud), dilabut durign (magpie lark nest), manitch courbourne (cockatoo totem), and have been visually interpreted by an Aboriginal student in the Aboriginal Arts course at Midland TAFE, whose designs will be 'etched' into circular metal plates mounted on copper logs at the relevant places on the paths. This part of the project has been financed by the National Trust, which is also working with Edith Cowan University's Aboriginal Language Centre to develop an appropriate name for the bush block.

The involvement of Aboriginal artists, says Community Arts Network representative Andrea Taman, was a qualitative turning point in the project. Although there were sometimes frustrations over Jerry's idiosyncratic way of working — as when he fought with Mike Stokes, the Environmental Manager, over which

plants could be dug up to make way for his path — everyone is very happy with the final outcome.

On the community day when local people were encouraged to have some input to Jerry's large wooden sculpture *Sleeping Echidna* (the one large piece of art on the bush block, placed strategically in a degraded corner at the back of the block), scores of adults and kids came to help paint the nynarrin's 'spines'.

Andrea recalls that it was a really nice day, especially with so many children present. One thing still makes her laugh. 'At one stage I turned around to a young girl who had been asked if she wanted to do some painting and she said, "Oh, I'll have to go and ask my friends. We'll have to have a meeting about it." And they ran off into the bush and huddled down and talked about whether they'd help us with the painting. She'd obviously been listening to her mother for too long!'

Another working bee early in 1995 accomplished the compacting of the gravel paths, with the help of the local Fire Brigade, which wet them down. As a result, the Fire Brigade has been now briefed on the significance of the bush block and its role in relation to the land, and the brigade will be involved in the development of the community's management plan.

It is, Andrea points out, just another link in the chain of community service — one of the many tangible benefits created by the community arts process. 'The work that Leah did, filtered through to lots of people in the community. Every second person knew that something was happening at the bush block, even if they didn't know exactly what. This is so important in our fragmented communities.'

The project has been effective not only in raising community awareness, says Andrea. It has also been empowering for the key individuals involved, increasing their awareness of what is possible — on the one hand through the accessing of government; but also through collaboration and networking, in the relationships built with organisations like the National Trust.

National Trust representative, Jane Blake, goes further. For her, the Hillview Terrace project is a unique model for community action and 'absolutely, vitally significant. It's the best urban bushland project I've seen because it involves not only the whole community, but through the National Trust and its links with schools, it has implications for the whole state.'

Hillview Terrace will become part of their program *Tour Through Time*, an education package currently being developed in conjunction with the WA History Teachers Association. The bush block will be the first in a series of National Trust properties representing different historical periods. It is a window into the past, prior to white settlement in the 1830s — a window into the natural and Aboriginal heritage of Perth. Students who visit the bush block will learn about Aboriginal dreaming stories, the significance of 'place', and the biological importance of the bushland as a small but critical link in a chain of remaining urban bush remnants.

Finally, for Andrea, one of the most significant achievements is the recreation of a sense of local Aboriginal ownership through the involvement of Aboriginal artists. 'If we are going to talk about reconciliation, this kind of project is one way in which the marginalised become the caretakers. The fact that it has become primarily an Aboriginal story that relates to the bush block and that the site will have an Aboriginal name, all these things acknowledge a history not always told. They also acknowledge that part of it has been largely driven by non-Aboriginal people.

'People will benefit,' she says, 'whether it's Aboriginal people feeling welcome to use the space, or the understanding by the non-Aboriginal people in the community of the Aboriginal stories. Jerry's unlocking of those lovely Aboriginal stories will bear fruit for a long long time.' ■

Author Jane Cousins is the Managing Editor of Fremantle Arts Review.

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RON HOENIG

Ron Hoenig examines the roles three well-known South Australian service organisations play in the arts and how their activities help support the work of freelance artists.

There is of course a garret view of artistic development. You know the kind of thing. Sacrificial, driven figures toiling away in the solitary ill-lit squalor, producing the masterpiece which will never be appreciated until the artist suddenly passes on, usually after an epiphany of romantic self-mutilation.

For artists, however, the garret just isn't what it's cracked up to be. Whether it's private or public, patronage — someone or something to help put a roof over your head and food in your stomach — has usually been the preferred option. At least, since the time Leonardo made his first successful grant application to the Medicis.

However mysterious the internal process of creativity, the real needs of artists include food, shelter, warmth, time, and a context in which to create, develop and discuss. When it comes down to it, artists work in a climate where survival depends on information, contacts and supportive networks.

In South Australia, service organisations like the Crafts Council, the Writers' Centre and the Community Arts Network currently provide information, professional development and support services, which for many freelance artists is the lifeblood for finding employment.

'These services provide the 'glue' which helps the freelance world to gel in a way which makes a sector — or practice — connect', says Deidre Williams, Executive Officer of the Community Arts Network.

Crafts Council of SA

The Crafts Council of South Australia (CCSA) provides a variety of services to members. Director Gail Fairlamb comes from a background of innovative retailing success at Canberra's Gorman House. Talking in her spare but appropriately craftily decorated office after her first few hectic months in Adelaide, she rapidly outlines the practical assistance the Crafts Council provides on a modest fee for service basis to members who are mainly professional craftworkers. These services include general office services, typing of CVs, photographic services, slide duplication, and consultations on business practice.

CCSA also provides professional development in the form of workshops and several members' evenings a year. These cover specific topics aimed to equip craftspeople to self-promote and market their own activities. The theory of self-reliance behind its activities takes account of the independent spirit of most craftspeople. Due to the commercial nature of their work, they have never been as tied to the grants system as other

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visual artists. Fairlamb believes that services provided by the CCSA, 'give craftworkers a fishing rod to catch their own fish'.

The CCSA also develops a number of annual programs to highlight the activities of its sector and to assist in the targeted marketing of South Australian crafts. A very successful program has been crafts on sale at the Adelaide Zoo. This year, the council will be developing a calendar to showcase SA crafts together with the state's highly regarded food and wine industry products. The project will establish an ongoing relationship with a targeted section of the food and wine industry, and commence a more aggressive marketing program for craftworkers.

SA Writer's Centre

The Writers' Centre provides unique networking and support services for writers. Founded by a small group of writers ten years ago, it now has approximately 950 members. According to Executive Officer Barbara McFadyen approximately 20% of their members make some money out of their writing; the rest are aspiring writers, their supporters and related organisations.

Unlike its counterparts elsewhere, the Writers' Centre maintains a uniquely cooperative relationship between its professional and its so-called 'hobby writers'. Barbara explained, 'We've always been able to avoid conflict because each side recognises that the other has a place in how the whole thing functions'.

When I spoke to her she was flushed with the recent success of the centre's second Young Author's Night. She

explained, 'We thought we'd provide some recognition for kids who write. I mean it's usually the athletes who win the trophies.'

The night also introduced the school-aged writers to seventeen of the state's best known children's writers. It was a success for the kids and the authors, both of whom received some unaccustomed adulation. 'The children were all running around getting autographs from the writers. One of the teachers said it was like the footy grounds.'

The Writers' Centre provides practical support in terms of cheap desk-space, word processing, laser printing and photocopying for members. It also provides professional development through a series of in-house workshops for aspiring writers who want improve their skills. The centre assists employment and promotion of writers by employing professional writers as workshop tutors or assessors in their writing assessment services. As Barbara explained, 'we're supporting the published writers by paying them and we're supporting the unpublished writers by helping them improve their writing skills'.

Another objective of the centre is to raise the profile of South Australian writers through activities such as the New Writing Performed series, where a nationally renowned writer provides the drawcard but published South Australian writers read. The centre has recently been giving more attention to young writers, by sponsoring a page of new writing in *dB* magazine and inviting young writers under 25 to read in the New Writing Performed series.



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Community Arts Network SA

Many artists leave tertiary arts courses with few practical survival skills. The Community Arts Network (CAN) provides useful professional advice on 'how to get connected in the system', says Deidre Williams, its Executive Officer. CAN provides artists with professional information ranging from appropriate pay scales, contracts and industrial conditions for community-based work. Other services include access to computers, laser printing and photocopying, as well as information on professional development opportunities and grants which support placements or travel to conferences interstate.

She describes a large percentage the users of CAN's specialised library and information resources as 'people with a brand new degree in the arts, wondering how they're going to pay the rent'. Increasingly, community-based work is providing employment opportunities for people trained in the arts.

'These are the same people who sometimes work for a theatre company, sometimes work in a rock band, sometimes work writing copy or articles for magazines, or sometimes they pay the rent by working as a writer on a community-based project. These days if people want to survive as a freelance artist, they have to apply their talents to a wide range of work contexts.'

Since 1987 CAN has provided short-session training and advice for artists and community members who want to develop community-based arts projects. Recognising the lack of training in the theory and practice of community-based arts work, CAN will next year offer an accredited, advanced diploma level course. The one-year course will cover philosophy, models of practice, project development and management. It will include legal and industrial issues, arts funding policy and the issue of attracting funding or sponsorship. While the course focus is on community-based arts practice, it also caters to people who might have an arts degree but don't have project management skills — the 'tool kit' for being self-employed.

Deidre believes this course will be a valuable resource for freelance artists to hone their survival skills as well as for those important people who partner artists in this work in their organising role: cultural development officers, arts officers, recreation officers, and community or social workers of all types.

The major currency of service organisations is information. Whether it's in the form of CAN's *The Bulletin*, *Artwork*, *Artworkers' Register*; the Writers' Centre's *Newsletter*; or the Crafts Council's *SA Crafts* — information flows from nodal centre to individual artists. Barbara McFadyen is proud of the role the centre's monthly newsletter has played in assisting writers to find information about competitions, grants and other work. Members have told her that 'It's the only newsletter they read cover to cover'.

CAN's *The Bulletin* also provides information on situations vacant, work opportunities and current projects. For many artists, these information bulletins are a lifeline. Says Deidre Williams, 'In any area of work, consultants will tell you that to be successful as a freelance person requires you to have your networks, to be in touch, because survival depends on being able to capitalise on opportunities. And knowing when those opportunities are around is the first step.'

But what about the artists? Should the public funds allocated to these organisations be going into artist's pockets?

According to these organisations, the view that organisation funding should give way to more project funding is short-sighted. 'Funding that goes into service organisations helps to sustain the climate in which art work can happen. It's not being taken away from the practice, but is actually contributing to the diversity and the health of that practice', Deidre argues.

Rather than take money away from artists, the diversification of the practice and the advocacy work being done by these organisations is actually increasing

the pool of money going into the arts. The maturation of a diverse community-based practice is beginning to bear fruit as organisations — from local councils to large corporations and non-arts government departments — are investing money in significant community-based arts projects. Not only does this increase employment opportunities for artists, but some negative, stereotyped views of the role of artists in society are beginning to change for the better.

Increasingly, these small service-oriented organisations are generating a considerable portion of their income. Barbara McFadyen points out that the Writers' Centre has to self-fund about a third of its current expenditure. Most of the Crafts Council's activity involves fee-for-service activities. The Community Arts Network generates income through graphic design services, short-session training, and will be providing the advanced diploma course on a user-pays basis.

Service organisations are strong advocates for arts practice. They generate public awareness, public education of the arts and the issues for artists. As Deidre Williams says, 'without those structures — to network information, promote the work, provide training opportunities and professional development to keep up to date with changes in the system — the capacity for freelance artists to survive is eroded. Without these services artists would have to locate all current professional information themselves, each time they needed it; a time consuming and often costly pasttime, disadvantaging people who already find it hard to survive as an artist.'

Besides, Mr Da Vinci, they beat the Medicis! ■

Ron Hoening is an arts administrator, theatre worker and writer.



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ALEX PRIOR

Alex Prior finds out just what kind of dynamic created JUTE, a unique professional community-based theatre company in Cairns.

Just Us Theatre Ensemble (JUTE) is a professional theatre company based in Cairns, on Queensland's far north coast. In three years the company has built a statewide reputation both for quality theatre and for the quality of its process. Employing up to thirty local artists at any one time, JUTE has acquired a reputation for having a diverse repertoire and a buccaneering spirit worthy of the isolated tourist boom town in which its members work.

Sue Prince, one of the founding members, has given me a list of the Just Us Theatre Ensemble's future projects and is starting to talk about their origins in the community — the resources they will be bringing together, the process, the reasoning behind each one and the outcomes. The list Sue has given me includes projects involving people with intellectual, physical and psychiatric disabilities; the Aboriginal community; local writers; young people; local performers; and Shakespeare.

Founded in 1993 by Sue Prince, Katherine Ash and Suellen Maunder, the company initially paid its way with workshops, street theatre and sponsorship. The three met through the



Just Us Theatre Ensemble (JUTE) current production *Love and Allegiance*
Photo courtesy Cairns Post

amateur theatre company, and decided that 'we wanted to put more in, and to get more out. Cairns was missing out on quality innovative theatre, and none of us felt like travelling south every time we wanted to see a show'.

Catherine had originally trained through the Australian Theatre for Young People in Sydney, and all three had continued to upgrade their skills through workshops with NIDA, Bob Griffith, David Fenton and others. At the time, none of them was working in theatre. Sue Prince was managing construction sites, Suellen was working as an office manager for a radiographer, and Catherine was running a company for Japanese newly-weds who wanted to renew their vows in the European style.

It is this combination of business skills and artistic intent that is behind the company's rapid development. In a

manner reminiscent of Bomber Perrier's preparation for the Murray River Performing Group, JUTE was a three-year plan before it was a theatre company.

The company's first major production was a straight professional theatre piece, Franka Rame's *Three Women Alone*. Its success led to project funding from Arts Queensland for Catherine Ash's *Bag of Marbles*, an intense combination of music, dance and ensemble theatre which examined alcoholism and domestic violence in the bush.

Velvet Eldred was flown in from Brisbane to direct. According to Sue Prince, the company learned a lot from her, 'like you don't have to do everything yourself'. They invited Velvet to move permanently to Cairns, to act as a resource for the theatre and to build up the community arts infrastructure.

A diverse program

The most surprising thing about JUTE's program is its unself-conscious mix of mainstream, avant-garde and community theatre. *Bag of Marbles* was followed by *Demolition*, *Pile-driving*, *Hard Hats* and *Donkey Dick*.¹ This production looked at the building boom which is sweeping Cairns and at the roles of men and women on construction sites — how they work together, their different expectations, and the conflicts they can cause.

Like much of JUTE's work, the show is an appeal for tolerance and understanding. It is also very hard to categorise. The process wasn't quite 'Art and Working Life', its subject matter and intent are wrong for main-stage theatre, and at two and a half hours it would be easy to think you were dealing with the avant-garde.



JUTE's yearly program is capable of inducing the same feeling of minor schizophrenia. At the time of the interview the company was busy preparing for a performance of Shakespeare, and for *Short Sharp Shocks* — a festival of short works by Cairns playwrights. The first production aims to deconstruct Shakespeare, examining the roles of women within his plays, their loves and allegiances. Lighting for this outdoor performance will be provided by fire twirlers from Firestorm, a circus company.

Building an audience base

Talking to Sue Prince, JUTE's list of projects so far reads: community theatre, Art and Working Life, Shakespeare, and new writing. 'And helping to establish a youth theatre company was the first thing we did.' Without the constant references to the planning behind the program, it would sound like a lack of direction. According to Sue, however, the diversity is deliberate.

'The reason the company has to be diverse is that we're broadening our audience base. We have to allow Cairns' voice to be heard, but we also have to challenge both the audience and ourselves with each production, and combine both contemporary and classical work. It's a model that's right for up here, where you don't have a metropolis to support you.'

Suellen Maunder adds that 'as the only professional theatre company in Cairns we have to respond to the needs of the community. We're working in response to the community, not in response to how people think theatre should be set up.'

It is this awareness of the need to develop audiences as well as projects, which led to the creation of *Black, White and Shades of Brown* — a long-term project to create a collaborative, contemporary theatre involving Aboriginal and white Australians.

Suellen says that 'despite the huge Aboriginal population in Cairns, there are no Aboriginal people in contem-

porary theatre, and there is no place for Aboriginal people to feel comfortable sussing out contemporary theatre from an audience point of view, or even as performers. There's no Aboriginal representation, and the plays bear no relationship to people's lives'. She laughs, 'You might be offered a role in *South Pacific*'.

Inevitably, *Black, White and Shades of Brown* began life as a five-year plan, created by JUTE with Sue Hayes and La Donna Bellangarry-Kearins, an Aboriginal musical director with experience in Adelaide and Sydney. The result was a brief initial performance for the NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee) conference and a set of 'cultural safety guidelines', designed to allow performers to work together and recognise each other's differences.

Good theatre is defined by its performance values, but if it isn't relevant then it isn't good. To achieve good community theatre, you need a disciplined process.

'We also recognised that the message had to go mainly to young people, because that's where racial issues first rear their ugly heads. It will take a long time to get a troupe which is confident and able to come up with new work, but we're planning to have one which stands alone as a separate, collaborative company in about two years. A couple of things have to go together: we have to train the performers and we have to generate an Aboriginal audience who can feel proud of the representation they have on stage, and who can feel comfortable with contemporary theatre.'

The first full-length show will tour remote communities and Cairns schools in 1996, with a follow-up tour in 1997. JUTE is also working on a CD-ROM. This will combine interviews with Aboriginal people talking about the modern myths that white Australians have created about them, along with performance based on the interviews. The CD-ROM format is being used to take advantage of the increasing computer-literacy in remote communities.

Professional Development

It's typical of JUTE that part of the plan involves the development of close ties with Kooemba Djarra, an Aboriginal Theatre Company in Brisbane, to provide advice and training.

The company has an insistence on both skills development and high quality theatrical product, but when the question of process versus product is raised, it is ignored. Velvet Eldred provided part of the answer: 'When I first went to Cairns I was just about burnt out. I was sick of hearing excuses for community projects about how the process had been really good, or how you had to use professional actors on stage because there wasn't time to do anything else. JUTE just expected both sides to work, and they put projects together properly from the start. They didn't think about anything else.'

Company members make sure that they train outside the area at least once a year. As Suellen Maunder says, 'We know we're babies but at the same time we're fresh; we still have the raw need to do it. When we started our one idea was to do brilliant productions. Then we realised that wasn't enough — we had to talk about the issues that affect this area.'

Add Aboriginal arts, professional development and training to the list. But again, it is difficult to make JUTE's program fit into recognised categories.

Questions are often answered in totally unexpected ways. It would be very easy to say that the members of JUTE were naive — but naive people don't build a successful theatre company from scratch