

Darlinghurst Theatre Company History

The early years, 1992 to 2000

In 1992 Glenn Terry began plans to develop a theatre company based in Darlinghurst, Sydney later to be called Darlinghurst Theatre Company. To fund the initial development of company, Terry established Darlinghurst Drama, a drama and performance school for adult amateurs. Darlinghurst Drama (or Darlo Drama as it has come to be known) provided a non-elitist, egalitarian and accessible environment in which people from all walks of life were encouraged to explore drama and performance.

Darlo Drama's initial classes were run from St Canice's Parish hall in Rushcutters Bay, with its offices based in Terry's Darlinghurst flat. After two years in operation, Darlo Drama was regularly seeing 100 plus students a week. The Darlo Drama teachers were pivotal to the company's success, these professional actors and directors included Mat Stewart, Cristabel Sved, Drew Fairley, Maurie Barlin, Chris Murphy, Fay Longbottom, Chrissy Ynfante and Glenn Terry.

Wayside Chapel Theatre

By 1993, through the profits of Darlo Drama, Terry had equipped the inactive 100 seat theatre located at the Wayside Chapel, Kings Cross (demolished in 2010). After the installation of basic technical equipment, teachers and students from Darlo Drama began staging productions at the Wayside Theatre.

The first production to be staged by the newly titled Darlinghurst Theatre Company (DTC) was *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. This production directed by David Jobling featured an all-female cast. The Beckett Estate took umbrage to the casting of only female actors and promptly cancelled the production after one week of performances.

DTC went on to produce four shows a year at the Wayside Chapel Theatre, focusing predominantly on new Australian and international work. Australian works included: *Plate Breaking in Venice* by Peter Duncan, *The Next Big Thing* by Jeff Nolan and *Rorschach* by Russell Beedles. New international works included: *The Ugly Man* by Brad Fraser and *Lovepuke* by Duncan Sarkies. Classic adaptations included: Alfred Jarry's *Ubu* adapted by director Drew Fairley, and Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* adapted by Glenn Terry. Directors of these early productions at the Wayside Chapel Theatre included: Ian Knight, Nick Meenaham, Drew Fairley, Cristabel Sved, Chrissy Ynfante, Mat Steward, Michael Darragh and Glenn Terry.

Darlinghurst Theatre Company Inc

In 1996 DTC was incorporated as a not for profit organisation and its offices relocated from Terry's flat to the ground floor of 13 Craigend Street, Kings Cross (currently the offices of Griffin Theatre Company). The administration staff between the years of 1996 and 2000 included; Chrissy Ynfante, Laura Hache-Doran, Mat Stewart and Cristabel Sved. The company's Production Manager during this time was Louise Teteris.

Potts Point, 2000 to 2012

A new home

DTC's time at the Wayside Chapel Theatre came to an abrupt end in 1999 after a severe storm damaged the venue's roof. A new home for the company was found in the form of the disused Reginald Murphy Hall in Potts Point, generously offered by the South Sydney Council.

Terry undertook a Capital Campaign to facilitate the transformation of the 1950s community hall into a professional black box theatre, bar and foyer; raising \$246,000 in cash, \$139,000 in goods and services and a further \$115,000 in Darlo Drama contributions. Designer Peter Vassallo worked with Terry to develop plans for the new space, submitting a Development Application to South Sydney Council.

In 2000, Her Majesty's Theatre in Haymarket Sydney closed down and its equipment and fittings were sold off. DTC purchased many of these items for the new venue including theatre seats, dressing room mirrors, theatre lighting, timber flooring and foyer furnishings. By July 2001, with the support from Darlo Drama, Arts NSW, The Taxi Club, Sydney Aussie Rules Club, local businesses and over 100 individual donors, upwards of \$500,000 worth of internal renovations were completed.

Darlinghurst Theatre Company's inaugural production in its new home was *The Woolgatherer* by William Masthosimone. Directed by Cristabel Sved and featuring Marta Dusseldorp and Alan Flower, *The Woolgatherer* opened on July 26, 2001.

A decade of independent artist-driven theatre

Over the following ten years DTC established itself as a prominent Sydney theatre destination for patrons as well as a popular creative platform for emerging and professional artists. In the role of Company Director, Glenn Terry oversaw the programming and general management of DTC. Terry developed a theatre company model which provided artists with the freedom to present the work of their choosing on a professional stage.

What set DTC apart from other theatres was the absence of a resident artistic company. Rather, seasons were curated on a submission basis, whereby directors, artists, writers and independent production companies were asked to submit works and ideas for consideration. Each production programmed as part of the annual season received marketing, technical and production support from DTC. DTC endeavoured to be adaptable to the needs and

processes of each artist or artistic team and was effectively able to provide a creative platform for over 100 artists a year.

The DTC model was similar to ones found more commonly in the United States; whereby a theatrical company endeavours to present the visions of multiple artists over the course of a season. This differs from the model most prevalent in Australia in which programming is primarily based on the single vision of an Artistic Director. Audiences responded well to the variety and choice in productions each season and by 2008 the theatre was running 48 weeks of the year with an annual attendance of over 20,000 patrons.

Key Darlinghurst Theatre Company employees who worked behind the scenes in administration and production from 2001 to 2012 included; Mat Stewart, Paul Turner, LEEANNE FAIRLEY, Amy Tomachio, Sean Parady, Micah Johnson, Marlaina Darmody, Anna Sampson, Katy Coote, Alex Barber, Edwina Meade and Theo Fatseas.

Theatre practitioners that contributed to DTC's artistic program during its time at the Potts Point venue included: Jo Turner, Lee Lewis, Craig Ilott, Tanya Goldberg, Stephen Colyer, Toby Schmitz, George Ogilvie, Drew Fairley, Nick Enright, Stephen Kinnane, Tony Youlden, Verity Morris, Alice Babidge, Christopher Johnson, Jonathan Gavin, William Zappa, Patrick Brammal, Christa Hughes, Rose Byrne, Ryan Kwanten, Kate Box, Linda Cropper, Amanda Bishop, Phil Scott, Christopher Stollery and Maeliosa Stafford.

Many new Australian plays premiered on the Potts Point stage including: *Lessons in Flight* by Maryanne Sam, *Brilliant Monkey* by Alan Dukes, *The Young Tycoons* by Christopher Johnson, *Men Love and the Monkey Boy* by Caleb Lewis and *The Stallion of Death* by Drew Fairley. Many new international plays were also staged including; *Pool No Water* by Mark Ravenhill, *This is How it Goes* by Neil LaBute, *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* by Alan Ball and *Dying City* by Christopher Shinn. DTC was one of the first companies to regularly stage innovative musicals in Sydney, presenting the Australian premieres of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* by Kander&Ebb, *Hello Again* by Michael John LaChiusa and *No Way to Treat a Lady* by Douglas J Cohen. For more information please visit www.darlinghursttheatre.com/about-us/past-productions.

Sustainable arts practice

Sustainable arts practice was an important and long-term goal for DTC. During its time at the Potts Point venue, DTC was able to assist many artists in the development of their body of work, enabling them to secure further employment in the industry. Whilst DTC's Potts Point home acted as an appropriate development ground, the venues sustainability often relied on professional artists donating their time to a production. This was a common trend in small theatres across the Australian theatre industry, often seeing experienced professionals working for little or no pay.

The Potts Point venue was leased under the City of Sydney's subsidised accommodation program. Each year DTC was to meet with the City of Sydney, reporting on company activities and issues. At each of these meetings it was reiterated that a larger and more prominent theatre venue would greatly contribute to a viable and financially sustainable platform for artists. In 2009 DTC was invited by the City of Sydney to be the managing

company of a new 200 seat venue located on Burton St, Darlinghurst. The former Baptist Tabernacle, now known as the Eternity Playhouse, was being renovated and repurposed by the City of Sydney into a state-of-the-art theatre, with construction expected to be completed in 2013.

With the move to the Eternity Playhouse in sight DTC began refining its business model and methods. From 2009 DTC's artistic program was strengthened by collaborating with established artists who came with a body of exceptional work. There was a wealth of talented and experienced theatre practitioners in Sydney who had honed their craft through independent theatre and DTC was working towards the development of a high profile and professional platform upon which these practiced artists could stage their work.

The end of an era

On November 11 2012, after 11 years, 184 productions and contributions from over 1000 artists, DTC said goodbye to its Potts Point home with *Miss Julie* by August Strindberg, adapted by Cristabel Sved and Kate Box. It was a welcomed coincidence that DTC was to end its time at the old Reginald Murphy Community Hall with a production directed by Sved, the same director who, 11 years earlier, had opened the theatre with *The Woolgatherer*.

In 2013, with the intention of preserving the Potts Point theatre and by way of a thank you to the City of Sydney for its ongoing generosity, DTC donated the theatres fit-out, furnishing and technical equipment to the City of Sydney. Once DTC's move to the Eternity Playhouse was completed the City of Sydney would welcome a new resident theatrical company to the Potts Point premises, sustaining the venue as a theatre for years to come.

Eternity Playhouse

In 2004 the City of Sydney purchased the former Burton Street Tabernacle in Darlinghurst. This 126 year-old heritage listed building operated as a Baptist church between 1887 and 1996. It was in the former Burton St Tabernacle, on November 14 1932, that Sydney identity Arthur Stace heard the sermon that inspired him to chalk the word 'Eternity' on Sydney streets for over 30 years. Lord Mayor Clover Moore named the theatre the Eternity Playhouse in honour of Stace's legacy.

In 2009, construction work began to renovate and repurpose the Burton Street Tabernacle into a 200 seat state-of-the-art theatre and new home for DTC. DTC was given the opportunity to consult with the City of Sydney and architectural firm Tonkin Zulaikha Greer in order to create a technically advanced theatre, café and meeting hub for patrons and artists alike. The company pushed for a D-shaped thrust stage and continental style seating to ensure that the audience remained close and connected to the performance. This style of theatre differs greatly from the black box auditorium more commonly found in smaller venues. For more information about the Eternity Playhouse please visit www.darlinghursttheatre.com/eternity-playhouse.

By 2011 DTC had pared back its various other initiatives (detailed below) in order to focus on its core business and launch of the Eternity Playhouse. The key DTC staff who managed the move and launch of the Eternity Playhouse were; Gemma Coward, Marketing Manager;

Emma Peel, Administrator; Elizabeth Jenkins, Production Manager and Glenn Terry Company Director.

Other DTC Initiatives

Milk Crate Theatre, 2000 to 2010

Milk Crate Theatre began as a joint project between DTC and Wesley Mission's Edward Eagar Lodge when the South Sydney Council invited Glenn Terry to devise a theatrical production involving the homeless community. A meeting was arranged with Terry and Ruth Polley, the activities officer at Wesley Mission's Edward Eagar Lodge, to formulate a suitable project.

Terry proposed a project based on the use of improvisation techniques, meaning that participants were not required to learn lines or act in the traditional sense. Given the transience of the homeless community the project aimed at making theatre accessible, interactive and responsive for participants.

A year's worth of funding for the project was provided by South Sydney Council. Wesley Mission's Edward Eagar Lodge provided in-kind support by supporting Ruth's time in story gathering and referring participants, offering a workshop and show venue, and feast at the end of each show. Terry recruited expert key artists to help develop and launch the project including Cristabel Sved, Maurie Barlin, Mat Stewart and Graeme Rhodes. Ruth named the initiative Milk Crate Theatre, after its portability, multiple uses and her clients' habit of sitting on milk crates on the street. Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre was chosen as an inspiring model to adapt from, and in 2000 the first workshops and interactive shows were held at Edward Eagar Lodge, where they continue to this day.

Between 2000 and 2010 Milk Crate Theatre was managed by DTC as an ongoing community initiative. In 2004 Margie Breen was employed as Artistic Director of Milk Crate Theatre, further advancing the initiatives focus and avenues for funding. In 2006 the initiative received its first major funding grant from the Australia Council of the Arts. Beck Ronkson took the reins as Artistic Director in 2007 and was later joined by Katy Coote as General Manager. Ronkson and Coote were a dynamic team and grew Milk Crate to sustainability.

Between 2007 and 2010 Milk Crate Theatre increased its reach and began offering workshops to other charitable providers including the Wayside Chapel, Mission Australia Centre, Mercy Arms, Rough Edges and the Matthew Talbot Hostel, as well as an ongoing partnership with The Michael Project and Mission Australia. During this time annual participation in Milk Crate Theatre workshops increased from 50 to 250 partakers and audience attendance grew from 360 to 900 per production.

By late 2010 Milk Crate Theatre had become a self-sufficient initiative; the company was incorporated and began operating as a standalone autonomous theatre company out of its new offices in Oxford St Darlinghurst. For more information please visit www.milkcratetheatre.com.

Critical Stages 2006 to 2010

In 2005 DTC applied to Arts NSW to secure funding and support for its new touring initiative, Critical Stages. Critical Stages was born from the desire to find further life for outstanding productions from across the independent theatre sector. At the time it was often difficult for successful productions staged in small Sydney venues to forge a life outside of the inner city and stand-alone seasons. Any theatre that toured regionally was most commonly targeted towards larger towns with established performing arts centres.

Arts NSW provided initial funding to employ a tour manager, with Sean Pardy, a seasoned touring stage manager taking the role. A handful of well-received and successful productions were selected from a variety of independent companies including B Sharp Belvoir, Tamarama Rock Surfers and Darlinghurst Theatre Company.

Pardy and Terry spent weeks touring regional NSW, visiting presenters and engendering trust in the program and the productions. Direct meetings with presenters proved successful and in 2007 Critical Stages launched three regional NSW tours; *Banger's and Mash* by Drew Fairley and Kate Smith, *Wilde Tales* by State of Play directed by Julian Louis and *The Memory of Water* by Sheath Stephenson.

In order to maintain the sustainability of Critical Stages and to further develop its reach, Terry and Pardy felt it necessary to introduce the initiative to a national audience. A national Critical Stages program of productions was created with independent works sourced from Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. This led to Pardy and Terry spending a further 4 weeks visiting presenters and funding bodies in regional QLD, Victoria and WA. Thanks to presenter support a 26-week national tour of Peter Houghton's production *The Pitch* was developed, funded by Playing Australia and Arts Victoria. By 2008, through ongoing funding from the Australia Council Critical Stages was able to successfully and sustainably tour on a national level.

In 2009, Luke Cowling took over the reins as Critical Stages' Producer and successfully launched and managed two national tours and a NSW regional tour in 2009. By 2010, Critical Stages had grown to be the leading touring producer for independent theatre in Australia, employing over 100 artists and touring productions by leading independent practitioners, including Craig Ilott, Michael Fetcher, Kim Hardwick, Peter Houghton, Julian Louis, Drew Fairley and Kate Smith.

In 2011 Critical Stages separated from Darlinghurst Theatre Company to form as a not-for-profit company with a dedicated management staff and board of directors. Critical Stages moved into its own office space in the Seymour Centre, Sydney, with Luke Cowling as Artistic Director/CEO of the new company. For more information please visit www.criticalstages.com.au.

Darlo Drama

Darlinghurst Drama (or Darlo Drama as it has come to be known) was established in 1992 to facilitate the initial funding and development of DTC. Darlo Drama is a drama school for adult

amateurs which encourages people from all walks of life to participate in drama and performance.

Darlo Drama proved to be a successful enterprise and after only two years of operation was seeing upwards of 100 students a week for 40 weeks of the year. Key to the company's success was the professional actors and directors who took on the role of teaching staff. Darlo Drama's teachers included Mat Stewart, Cristabel Sved, Drew Fairley, Maurie Barlin, Chris Murphy, Fay Longbottom, Chrissy Ynfante and Glenn Terry.

Between the years of 1993 and 2012 Glenn Terry used the profits from Darlo Drama to set up, fund and develop DTC and its various initiatives. This included contributions of \$115,000 towards the 2000 Capital Campaign to construct the company's Potts Point venue and a further \$664,000 towards DTC's running costs and programs from 2001 to 2012. By 2012 DTC had become financially self-sufficient and no longer required assistance from Darlo Drama. Darlo Drama continues to operate in the Potts Point/Kings Cross neighbourhood www.darlodrama.com.au.