

Patch Theatre Company's Repertoire Model of Operation

CULTURAL RATIONALE

*If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much. **Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis***

The philosophy that underpins Patch Theatre's work is the notion that the culture of a 4-8 year old is intrinsically and universally linked to their processes of *learning* and *development*.

*Many things can wait; the child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed, his mind is being developed. To him, we cannot say tomorrow; his name is today. **Gabriela Mistral***

Our theatre experiences for children provide an antidote to the clutter, banality and allure of commercial culture.

*The commercial imperative has replaced the creative spirit. We now have a generation of kids who believe that unless it's for sale it's not worth having. **Noni Hazlehurst***

In a culture pre-occupied with the material world, the theatre we make offers a powerful connection to the *inner lives* of children. We provide a place where children can share transforming experiences that sustain them with the joys and insights that connect with those qualities that make us human.

*Children can be encouraged to grow, develop and participate in the world if we expose them to beauty, truth and the power of their imagination. **Noni Hazelhurst***

4-8 year olds are inherently imaginative, creative and playful. *Keeping the artist alive in the child* is Patch Theatre Company's cornerstone objective.

ARTISTIC RATIONALE

*What we remember from childhood we remember forever - permanent ghosts, stamped, inked, imprinted, eternally seen. **Cynthia Ozick***

The theatre we create for children seeks optimism in humanity and honours the spirit of resilience that can endure and overcome difficulties.

Designed to provoke, tickle, prod and beguile children, Patch performances celebrate: the experience of childhood, the joys of play, the whims of the imagination and the challenge of children growing and developing through the most complex and telling phase of their lives.

In our culture of clutter and excess, we seek to offer children, experiences of *elegant simplicity*. Quality theatre, carefully distilled, lovingly thought-through and meticulously rendered provides children with powerful experiences of "felt meaning" that become *stamped, inked, imprinted* and *eternally seen*.

*I would not give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity. **Oliver Wendell Holmes***

Our objective? Simple yet wondrous theatre experiences that are deeply rendered at a child's level of comprehension and perspective. ***Elegant simplicity!***

*Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. **Leonard Da Vinci***

ARTISTIC OUTPUT - PRODUCT DELIVERY

The Patch Theatre Repertoire

Patch Theatre maintains a repertoire of eight of its best works available for national and international touring.

This critically acclaimed repertoire of theatre for 4-8 year olds has been carefully crafted over many years by artists dedicated to developing quality theatre for children. Each year, Patch Theatre's new work seeks repertoire status.

The 2011 repertoire productions are: *Little Green Tractor, Me and My Shadow, The Happiest Show on Earth, The Fastest Boy in the World, Special Delivery, Emily Loves to Bounce, Mr McGee and the Biting Flea* and *Sharon, Keep Ya Hair On!*,

The new works being generated over the next few years are: *A Lion in the Night, The Moon's a Balloon* and *Gentle Giant*

As the new works become part of the repertoire, older works are removed.

In light of the relatively low ticket-prices achievable for children's theatre, we optimise the sell-on and touring potential of our repertoire by ensuring:

- our shows have a hook that supports marketing to audiences
- our shows can be freighted in a three tonne truck
- our shows can be performance-ready within six hours of arrival at a venue
- our shows are tour ready and double cast
- our shows are supported by technical crew experienced in touring
- our weekly fee to venues is affordable
- our staff provide support and advice on marketing to schools and families

Our repertoire of productions each have boxed sets/props/costumes, detailed production documents, lighting designs, floor plans, media and marketing kits, teacher resource kits and play packages.

The Patch Theatre Repertoire Booklet

Patch Theatre Company's repertoire booklet provides an overview of all the repertoire productions. This publication, along with its companion DVD and website, is the prime vehicle for the promotion of the repertoire nationally and internationally. The third edition of the booklet was released in Jan 2009.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Our work is guided by strong philosophical principles that promote risk-taking and innovation within defined parameters of artistic exploration. The challenge of being inventive, while remaining accessible is a fine line that the company manoeuvres with care through a great deal of consultation between artistic teams, children and educators. In this, the company shares a unique research relationship with the Sturt Street Community School, which has generated a "learning through the arts" model for engaging teachers in arts-based activity that links children's learning to Patch Theatre performances.

CRITICAL APPRAISAL

One of the great strengths of Patch Theatre, is its capacity *to receive* and *to act on* critical feedback to ensure that each new work develops to its fullest potential. In some situations, this has meant breaking the back of an existing work, in order to take it to a satisfying endpoint.

Patch Theatre's **critical appraisal process**, inspired by the Danish Critical Appraisal Model, has been in place since 2001 and has been instrumental in developing and refining new works.

Patch Theatre uses a team of independent professional artists, presenters, early childhood specialists and educators to critically appraise each new work. The appraisal team views each new production up to three times during its premiere season. In a meeting chaired by a Patch Board member, the team critically dissect the new work, keeping in mind the director's vision, the company's mission and the needs of the target audience. The group collates their opinions about the shortfalls and strengths of the work. The Director of the work then joins the meeting and the appraisal team's opinions are shared and debated.

The appraisal is not an assessment procedure; it is a quality development process that draws on the objectivity and expertise of the panel in order to provoke new insights, problem identification and an impetus to create a better outcome.

The Director uses the appraisal team's feedback as a template to develop and refine the work. Extra rehearsal time is scheduled when remounting productions for sell-on seasons to support the refinement process. The Director provides progress reports back to the Board as a means of tracking the development and maintaining critical discourse around the challenges presented by the refinement process. Each repertoire work is continually under development ever evolving towards our goal of *elegant simplicity*.

THEATRE AS A FOCAL POINT FOR LEARNING

Patch recognises theatre for 4-8 year olds as a highly specialised and exacting field of artistic endeavour, requiring artists who are skilled, informed and dedicated to the challenges it presents. Our creative work is framed by a sound understanding of early childhood development.

In association with early childhood practitioners, Patch has developed a model through which early childhood educators build children's learning and development around our theatre experiences.

Knowing that teachers have very little time to offer, Patch has developed an online community for teachers by building over the last two years a substantial and growing data-base of all teachers who bring their classes to see Patch performances. The data-base is well-developed for Adelaide and regional South Australia and is beginning to grow as part of our national tours as well.

Through this online community, Patch provides monthly learning prompts to teachers in the 4 months leading up to the performance. These are succinct, easy to read, pictorial presentations that allow teachers effective ways to link their curriculum to the Patch Theatre performance experience.

Teachers are then invited to attend a preview performance just prior to the season itself, so that they can see the show without the pressure of looking after children and have the

opportunity of meeting cast/crew and gaining insights into how and why the performance was made. At this preview, they are given a learning resource booklet that provides a support for ongoing learning opportunities that should arise from their children sharing the theatre experience.

Our connection is four fold: 1. on-line learning prompts, 2. preview performances 3. published learning resource booklet 4. online follow-up and feedback beyond the performance.

ARTISTIC OVERVIEW

The creation of our new works is underpinned by a strong philosophical framework that has seen three threads of artistic investigation emerge over the last six years.

Assemblage – *Mr McGee, Sharon, Keep Ya Hair On!*

Concert Narrative – *The Fastest Boy in the World, Little Green Tractor*

Poetic Physical and Visual Theatre – *Me and My Shadow, Special Delivery, Emily Loves to Bounce.*

Across all these works, there's ongoing exploration of conventions for the use of music in theatre and an engagement with the concept of performance-languages as a means of generating new theatrical forms. We have also pushed the potential of interactivity as a performance convention. These threads of investigation are ongoing and the outcomes cumulative.

We are committed to properly-resourced, long-term, artistic processes that allow each new project an optimal chance of success in the face of risk-taking challenges.

Each new work will evolve over an 18-month period, incorporating three isolated weeks of creative development and two rehearsal stages of two weeks each. Each creative development week and rehearsal stage is separated by many months of incubation, processing, planning, testing and appraisal.

Each new project is built around a germinal idea that we believe will produce something that is relevant, entertaining and important in the lives of children. High calibre creative teams consisting of a composer or choreographer, provocateur, designer and lighting designer will collaborate throughout the creative development and rehearsal processes.

Each new project takes the company out of its comfort zone and compels its artists to use every iota of their creative resourcefulness to get close to the vision to which Patch aspires. Projects live with the risk of failure in the hope that they may push beyond mediocrity towards a theatrical wonder that is special and enduring.

At the end of the premiere season, each new work undergoes a fearless, peer-driven critical appraisal process.