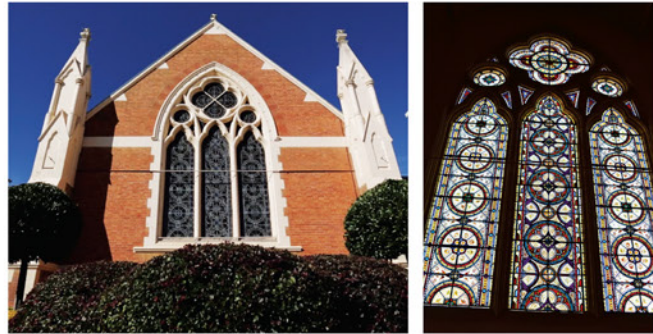


## THE EMPIRE CHURCH THEATRE

The simple Gothic inspired Wesleyan Methodist Church, now the Empire Church Theatre, was designed by the well known Queensland architect Willoughby Powell and was built in 1877 by Richard Godsall, later an alderman and Mayor of Toowoomba. The 1901 extensions to the church, carried out by William Hodgen Jnr, added two transepts with choir and ministers vestry.

The exquisite circular stained glass western window is a rare and fine example of the work of Sydney manufacturers, Ashwin & Falconer. Other stained glass windows bear testament to the faith of the well-respected Wesleyan pioneers of Toowoomba. The Wesleyan adherents eventually became part of the Uniting Church group in 1977 and the church was purchased by the then Toowoomba City Council in October 1997.



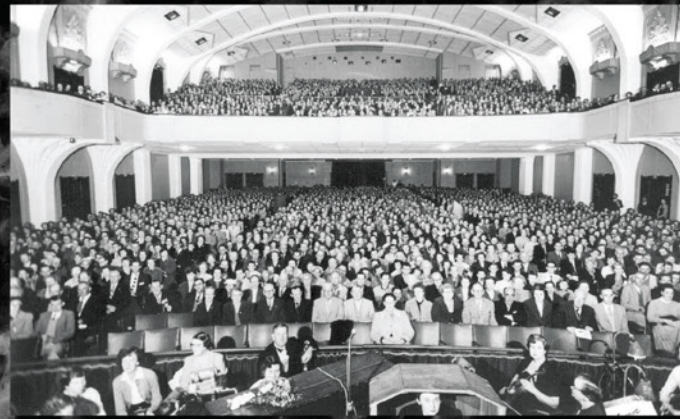
THE MAGNIFICENT CHURCH THEATRE AND STAINED GLASS WINDOW

## COVID-19 IMPACT

After close to four months off stage following the temporary closure of the venue due to government restrictions, the Empire Theatre re-emerged onto the live performance scene to capped audience numbers with the *Empire Strikes Back* Series in July 2020.

Featuring local and Queensland bands and musicians, from everything from rock to jazz and country to musical theatre. This series was well supported, reaching capacity until more tickets were released with the relaxing of Queensland Government restrictions.

With the return of 100% capacity in November 2020 and thanks to the hard work of staff, the Empire Theatre has been able to operate safely under Queensland Government directives, welcoming artists and patrons to this extremely busy and thriving venue.



FULL HOUSE FOR "SHOW BOAT" IN 1938



OPENING NIGHT IN 1997



OPENING NIGHT OF WICKED, 2017

## BOOK A TOUR

of the Empire Theatre by contacting  
**4698 9900** or [events@empiretheatre.com.au](mailto:events@empiretheatre.com.au)

*\*Please Note: Tours are subject to availability*

## TO MAKE A DONATION

Scan the QR code below and put dreams on stage!



[empiretheatre.com.au](http://empiretheatre.com.au) | 1300 655 299

Empire Theatres Pty Ltd 54 - 56 Neil St Toowoomba

*Production by the Empire Theatres Foundation History Program*



## THE HISTORY OF THE EMPIRE THEATRE TOOWOOMBA



IN 2022  
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

EmpireTheatre @empire\_theatre EmpireTheatre

## THE EMPIRE THEATRE

The Empire Theatre originally opened with the latest technology on 29 June 1911 as 'Empire Pictures', but when fire broke out in the early evening of 22 February 1933, most of the original theatre was destroyed. The northern and southern walls were the only thing left standing and were incorporated into the rebuilding of the theatre, completed and reopened on 27 November the same year. This rebuild was done in the detailed art deco style popular at the time. Its seating capacity was 2400 patrons.



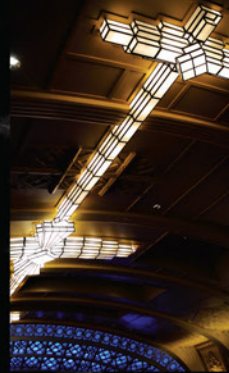
THE THEATRE FOLLOWING THE 1933 FIRE

For many years the Empire was the cultural hub of Toowoomba, a meeting place and regular entertainment spot for the entire community. By 1971, competition from other forms of entertainment, including television, resulted in the eventual closure of the large theatre. After closure, the theatre was used as a warehouse and by the local TAFE before falling into disrepair. It sat, slowly decaying and seemingly lost forever, until a need for Toowoomba to have a performing arts complex saw the Empire Theatre undergo an award-winning restoration before holding a grand reopening on 28 June 1997.

Heritage listed by the National Trust, the theatre now boasts the latest purpose-built facilities, as well as retaining the grandeur and superb acoustics of the original building, with the interior faithfully restored to the finest detail. The unique backlit grand proscenium arch, thought to be the only one of its kind in the

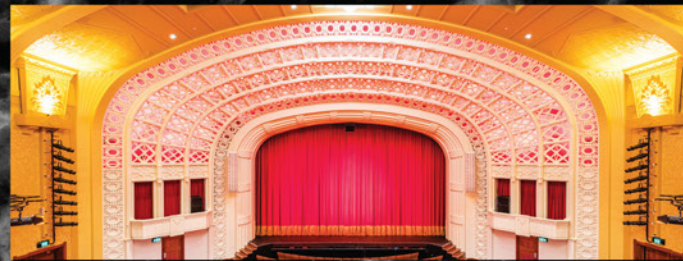
Southern Hemisphere, features custom lighting to perfectly frame any occasion, combined with houselights provided by a series of decorative sconces.

Another architectural hero of the theatre is the long art-deco style light set into the ceiling which became known as the 'bomber light' during World War II, either because the shape was reminiscent of a bomber or because there were fears a bombing would create falling shards from the light and cause danger to audience members. The foyers feature the original warm brick walls from 1911 with the modern additions complementing the original theatre.



THE BOMBER LIGHT

Since reopening in 1997, the Empire Theatre has become a full performing arts precinct with the addition of the Empire Church Theatre, Empire Studio and newest space, The Armitage Centre, fixing its place as the largest performing arts theatre in regional Australia.



THE GRAND PROSCENIUM ARCH

## RECENT REFURBISHMENT

From late 2018 - 2019, the Empire Theatre underwent a significant refurbishment, requiring the closure of the main venue for several

months, during which the Empire Church Theatre and Armitage Centre were fully operational and heavily utilised until the main theatre reopened for the opening night performance of Empire Theatre's major production, *Kinky Boots*, in March 2019.

The Empire Theatre auditorium and foyers were completely repainted and recarpeted and a new seating system was installed. The Ticketing Office was beautifully updated along with significant improvements made to bathrooms and foyer areas including The South Bar, which was expanded to include a larger space toward the front of the theatre, now frequently used for pre and post show entertainment.



THE THEATRE TODAY

The final stage of the refurbishment, which saw an external lighting upgrade, dressing room renewal, Studio space functionality and amenity updates and a Stage Door reception area renovation, was completed in mid-2021.

The current building features modern seating for 1561 patrons, state of the art air-conditioning, bars and lounge areas, with purpose built backstage areas and excellent technical capabilities to stage the most complex of productions.



## THE ARMITAGE CENTRE

The Empire Theatre's newest performance space opened in 2014. The Armitage Centre is a unique, medium sized and flexible venue, featuring high quality technical equipment and state of the art facilities including retractable rows of tiered seating that can easily be stowed away to provide 400m2 of open versatile space.

Boasting pleasant surrounds including an attractive forecourt as well as relaxing foyers (St Baker Foyer and Geoffrey Rush Room) and bar, it is the ideal location for a wide variety of events and performances.



THE ARMITAGE CENTRE EXTERIOR (TOP), TIERED SEATING ABOVE LEFT & TABLES SET UP ABOVE RIGHT

