

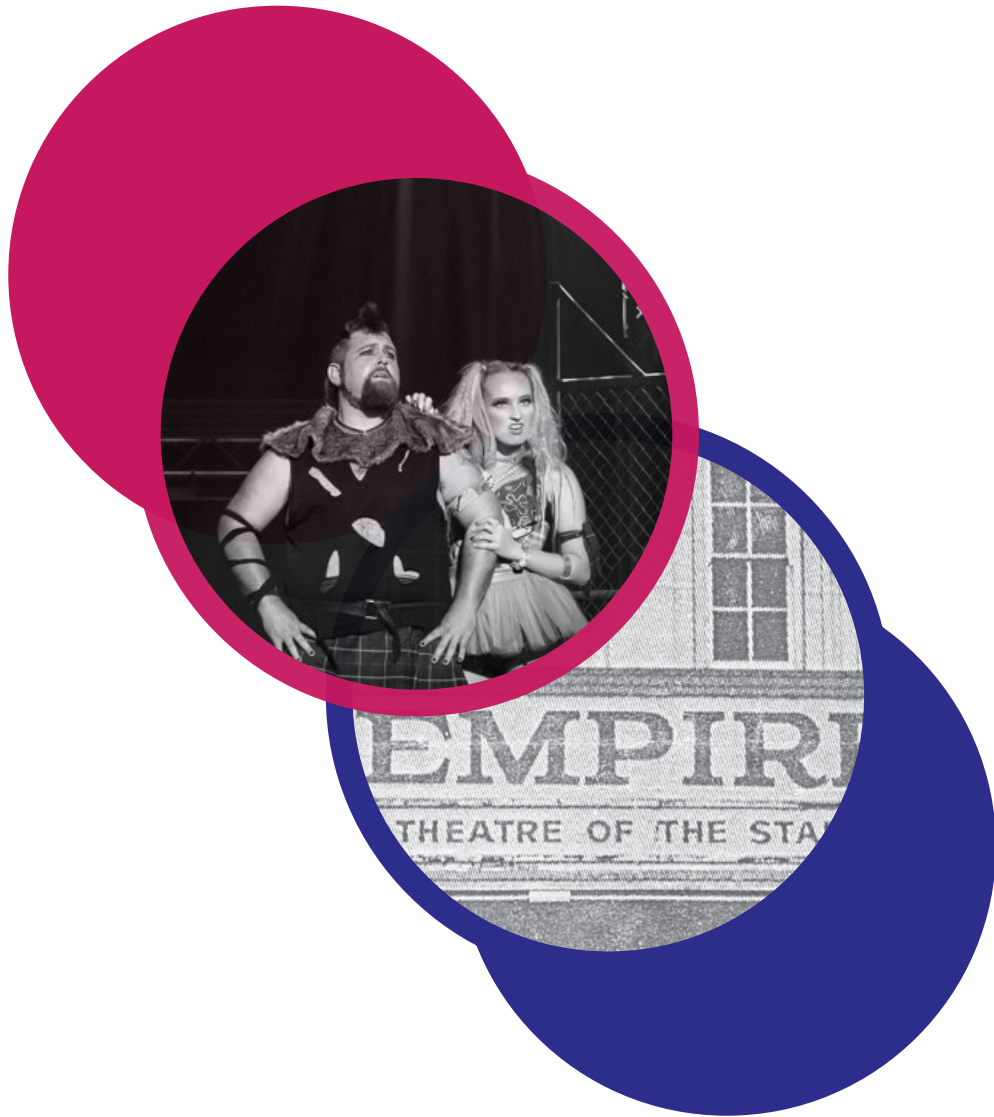



Empire Theatres Supporters 2022

NEWSLETTER

Empire Theatres 56 Neil Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350 | PO Box 1227 QLD 4350

MAY
2022





EMPIRE 25

During the next financial year – global pandemics notwithstanding – the Empire Theatres will come close to surpassing two and a half million patrons or as promoters often tell us, bums on seats, since it reopened in 1997!

Think about that number... 2.5 million patrons.

More patrons than 25 MCG AFL Grand Final crowds. More patrons than 30 NRL Grand Finals or 30 Melbourne Cup Day crowds at Flemington on the first Tuesday in November.

Four times the average total tournament attendance during the two weeks of the Australian Open Tennis. Not bad numbers for a regional theatre since it reopened 25 years ago!

But the current site of the Empire Theatres precinct dates back to 1911 when Austral Pictures relocated here to Neil Street showing silent movies and then talkies from 1929 but burning down in February 1933. Rebuilt in the popular art deco style of the day, the theatre reopened later that year on November 27 with a seating capacity of 2400 and became a hub for entertainment and gathering until it eventually closed in 1971, largely as television became the most popular source of entertainment and many places of entertainment began to falter nationwide.

After its closure, the theatre was used as a warehouse and by the local TAFE before falling into disrepair. It sat, slowly decaying & 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

with a concert headlined by Australian entertainment royalty Julie Anthony, who three years later would sing the national anthem with Human Nature at the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Anthony's Empire Theatre performance was the first in the cavalcade of stars to grace the Empire Theatres stage over the next 25 years from Oscar and Golden Globe nominee and multiple Grammy Award winner, country superstar Reba McEntire, to American pop supergroup The Pointer Sisters and a who's who of Australian performers from Jimmy Barnes to The Seekers to Human Nature and current The Voice judges and ARIA Music Award winners Guy Sebastian and Jessica Mauboy, and our own country music icons like Lee Kernaghan and Kasey Chambers. But at the heart of the business – and it has to run as a well oiled business to survive – the Empire Theatre is about the fostering of the performing arts, providing both patrons and performers the opportunity to experience and showcase all aspects and all varieties of performance art entertainment. This ethos is behind the continual expansion of the precinct – to showcase and provide space for performances of all varieties, calibre and size – and now includes the main auditorium seating 1561 plus the Armitage Centre, Empire Church Theatre and Empire Theatre Studio.

At the core of this commitment since its reopening in 1997, Empire Theatres Pty Ltd has staged an annual major

production to provide opportunities for local actors, singers, musicians and dancers to work with a professional production team to give and extend their performance experience in the arts.

And what memorable shows have been staged here from the recording breaking Phantom of the Opera in 2014 which more than 9000 patrons came to see, to Mary Poppins, Cats, High School Musical, Wicked and this year's smash hit We Will Rock You.

And behind these spotlight moments, the drive to continually foster the performing arts within our community has been driven over the past 25 years through the actions of the Empire Theatres Foundation, Empire Theatre Projects Company and the work of our staff and the Friends of the Empire Theatre volunteers.

Today in 2022, Toowoomba's Empire Theatres precinct stands proud as Australia's largest regional theatre precinct. Its acknowledgement as one of Australia's premier and most loved venues by performers, has long caught the attention of domestic and international promoters as a destination for their artists, shows and tours, further enhancing the reputation and recognition of the Toowoomba region as a vibrant and investable hub in the Australian landscape for both industry, and the future of the performing arts.

The Magic that was **We Will Rock You**



To the backdrop of a global pandemic and then a tragic “rain bomb” event in Queensland and New South Wales only weeks before opening night, this year’s Empire Theatre major community production of jukebox musical **We Will Rock You** now celebrating its 20th year on stages around the world, saw our talented cast and crew fully embody the showbiz mantra, the show must go on!

The Empire Theatres production of **We Will Rock You** featured an on stage cast of 25 local performers and Queensland based crew who had to endure partial rehearsals, lockdowns, and even floods.

Yet despite the difficulties in getting to opening night, the result was 6 stellar shows to a crowded theatre, performance after performance with rave reviews from both critics and audience members, particularly noting the spectacle of world class set design and cast performances. Positive feedback abounded regarding the outstanding staging, direction, musical direction, singing chops and comic delivery!

“Direction and choreography came from artistic powerhouse couple Wayne Scott Kermond and Katie Kermond respectively. They utilised a range of levels and depth within the staging and considered use of space and traffic flow so that scenes avoided unnecessary repetition.” - Trent Sellars, TheatreHaus

“The leads were outstanding: Bryn Jenke as Galileo had the right touch of rock charisma and energy, matched to the tee

by Kate Hudson-James as a streetwise Scaramouche, with standout duets on ‘Under Pressure’, ‘You’re My Best Friend’ and ‘Who Wants to Live Forever’.” - Beth Keehn, Stage Whispers

“The show was wonderful. Had a great night. The lighting was amazing and the voices were beautiful.” – Audience member

Special thanks must be made to the **We Will Rock You** crew including Video Designer Craig Wilkinson, Head of Construction Rob Darvall, Sound Designer Steve Alexander and Lighting Designer Ben Hunt, who managed to work from home using state of the art technology whilst in Covid isolation.

“The use of two major and several minor LCD screens provided a range of digital moving backdrops, and large-wheeled staircases were utilised to create levels and depth. Audio-visuals included the use of text for storytelling and a collection of quality stock footage mixed with animation, which emphasised the atmosphere of a technological dystopia.” - Trent Sellars, TheatreHaus

And finally, let’s applaud our incredible **We Will Rock You** band because **We Will Rock You** is about the music of Queen.

“This was a great collection of musicians who kept pace with Queen’s often-difficult repertoire with absolutely no qualms at all, achieving a sound that die-hard fans will be very happy with.” - Beth Keehn, Stage Whispers

Kate Hudson James impressed audiences as the lead role Scaramouche in *We Will Rock You*, as a local rising talent we got to chat about her experiences with the Empire and what she plans for her bright future.

Kate's journey as a young performer with The Empire Theatre began when she was just ten years old.

"I had just moved to Toowoomba from living for a few years in a caravan, learning through distance education, and my mum thought it would be a great way for me to make some friends. She was right!" For the next five years Kate attended The Empire Theatres Youth Drama Classes and participated in seven IMPACT Ensemble programs, completing work experience at The Empire Theatre and now she has been in two major mainstage Empire productions.

"My time and experiences at the Empire has shaped who I am and who is in my life, and I will be eternally grateful for that. The basis of acting (I believe) is simply reacting to the world. I've learnt that theatre is all around us and being adaptable and responsive to the world has helped me in school, work, and general life. I have gained lifelong friends and mentors from the program and have collected my best memories on the Empire stages."

Kate found out about the Empire Theatres Youth Bursary program through her involvement with the Empire's Youth Arts Program.

"I applied in 2019 and was awarded a bursary to attend Queensland Theatre's Youth Residency Week in 2020. Due to covid, the bursary was postponed to 2021, and attending Theatre Residency Week in the September holidays of my senior year remains one of the best weeks of my life. The experience was invaluable, and I remember just waking up every day being so deeply happy to be there. It was truly a decider for me in terms of knowing that I definitely wanted to pursue Musical Theatre."

"Funny story about the day I was cast as Scaramouche, before I got the call from the Empire, I'd received a rejection email from the musical theatre university course I'd applied to. It was quite a cosmic moment

Kate Hudson-James



to receive the Empire's call right when I was facing a new mountain of doubt around my future in musical theatre – very 'one door closes, another door opens', you know? Scaramouche was this huge, strong, self-sure character, and stepping into her shoes and songs made me feel empowered onstage like never before. The opportunity to work with Wayne and Katie Kermond and to witness their craft and passion firsthand was a defining experience. I'll be forever grateful that they decided to take a chance on me."

For the future, Kate hopes to pursue a bachelor's degree in musical theatre, but she has some wise words to impart about studying arts;

"I've come to realise that a qualification isn't everything in this industry. If opportunities to perform professionally arise, I will leap at them, but I am happy for now to take a breather after the intensity of high school to just enjoy musical theatre without the pressure to always be reaching for the next thing. *We Will Rock You!* was a massive challenge and a timely affirmation of my passion for theatre, but most importantly it reminded me that at the end of the day I just love to sing, and it doesn't matter where, with or for whom. If you're thinking of pursuing a career in the arts – I would say go for it! The bursaries available are so varied, and the experiences they can afford a young person are incredible. I truly believe that experiences like a bursary can change or decide the course of your life – it decided mine."

THE EMPIRE THEATRE YOUTH BURSARY RECIPIENTS

Around \$25,000 has been awarded to students around Toowoomba, which will allow recipients to attend short courses with a variety of prestigious organisations, giving them a step-up in their fields of choice.

Mai-Lun Ruhle

With the assistance of her bursary, the 15-year-old will attend The Cuskelly College of Music in NSW, for a five-day program, this winter. "I've always been interested in the arts because I enjoy expressing myself in ways that don't require talking and dancing and music is like a different kind of communication," Mai-Lan said.

Sophia Bartlett

14-year-old Sophia Bartlett, will use her bursary to attend the Empire's Youth Arts Drama Workshops, which starts early this year and runs once a week, for a year. "I'm super grateful for the opportunity that the Empire has given me because it will really set my plans in motion and will open up so many great opportunities for me," Sophia said.

Amelia Rawson

When Amelia saw an advertisement for the bursary on social media platform Instagram, she jumped at the chance to submit her application. Awarded the bursary by the Empire Theatre late last year, Amelia will be using it to attend The Cuskelly College of Music this year.

Kyle Snow

This time last year, Kyle Snow, a 17-year-old dancer completed a course through the Junior Musical Theatre of Australia and was sent to Broadway in America for a musical trial-run. Last year, he was awarded the Joan Winter Memorial trophy, for South Burnett's Most Promising Dancer. Now, the young talent is one of the Empire Theatre's 2021 bursary recipients, which will help Kyle to attend a Summer program at the Conroy Dance Centre this month.

Clay Hughes

Clay has more than one reason to take a bow after he was last year's youngest bursary recipient at 12 years of age. Proud of his achievement, the award will assist the Clifton State High School student to attend Queensland Theatre's Theatre Residency Week in 2023. "I was pretty excited when I found out, especially because I wasn't sure if I would get it or not being so young," Clay said

Ava Gleeson

Following in the footsteps of her family through dance, Ava Gleeson couldn't wipe the smile off her face when she was awarded with a bursary. "I feel pretty good about myself and honoured to have been chosen ... I know a lot of people applied this year so I'm very thankful," she said. "Anything in the performing arts spectrum interests me and I sing and act too, but dancing is my main passion."

Jade Moon

"During a drama class in high school I fell in love with being on stage, acting and the theatre." Jade said she will be using her bursary to attend a residency week course at NIDA in Sydney. "to be able to go do this course in Sydney will help me to meet new people, branch out and experience new things so I'm not limited."

Ruben Fitton

The bursary will allow the creative young man to attend the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), which is recognised as one of Australia's best schools in the sector. "We're so lucky to have the Empire Theatre and all these bursaries are just so amazing for young people to develop their interest in the arts."

Tui Rei

The talented year 7 student also plays the euphonium, sousaphone and piano and starred in the Empire Theatre's production of Kinky Boots.

"When I asked Tui what he wanted to get out of the course, he said he wanted to push himself outside of his comfort zone within the Toowoomba community, by challenging himself, meeting new people and pass the knowledge he gains back to others in Toowoomba," Tui's Mother, Ms Riddle said. Tui Rei will attend Theatre Residency Week at the Queensland Theatre.

- Words by Rhylea Millar, Toowoomba Chronicle





Apply for Youth Bursary 2022

The Empire Theatres Foundation exists to further the cultural experiences and professional development of young people in our region and nationally. The Youth Bursaries offer the opportunity for creative people ages 12-25 to undertake short courses at leading Australian performing arts educational institutions.

Study areas have included dance, drama, music, film, technical production, arts administration and more!

The Empire Theatres Foundation offers Youth Bursaries to provide opportunities for multiple young people per year to develop their performing arts skills (including instrumental music, singing, dance and acting) at leading Australian performing arts educational institutions. Organisations include National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA), Queensland Conservatorium of Music, Victorian College of Arts, Queensland Theatre Company's Theatre Residency Week and Expressions Dance Company.

The program aims to assist young individuals who demonstrate current involvement and achievement in a performing arts discipline to further their cultural experiences and professional development.

Applications for this years Youth Bursary will open on the 11th July 2022.



2022

YOUTH

OPEN TO
AGES
12-25

BURSARIES



Brian Boak Outstanding Performer of 2016, Sam Nester is described as a Trumpet player and Conductor but he has proven he embodies much more.

Using his Bursary to make a trip to Birdsville, his recordings, interviews and soundscapes were made and edited in New York City where Nester resides. In the years following, Nester made trips to the North Slope of Alaska, the northernmost community in the USA to conduct interviews.

'Back of Beyond' is one of the projects he has put his bursary towards. From deep in the Australian outback to 320 miles north of the Arctic Circle, 'Back of Beyond' examines the idea of remoteness and isolation in the twenty-first century. This audio-visual project uncovers the hopes, dreams, passions, and fears of a diverse range of people living in some of the farthest reaches of Australia and the USA. Through oral histories, music, and video, this project reveals lessons

about climate change, Indigenous rights, immigration, family tragedy, and existence across physical and psychological distances.

You can follow more of Sam and his work through his website; www.samnester.com

The Brian Boak Outstanding Performer Bursary is offered biennially and is worth up to \$20,000. This bursary has been made possible through the generosity of the late Brian Boak, a staunch supporter of the performing arts on the Darling Downs. The Brian Boak Bursary is designed to provide support to a person wishing to pursue a program of study or professional development at a recognised university, specialist post-secondary institution or other centre of excellence in the areas of acting, dancing, singing or instrumental performance. This years winner will be announced soon!

BOOK
TICKETS



The Brian Boak Developing Bursary Recipient of 2013, Paul Tabone opens his solo show at The Empire Theatre Church.

Paul has become a world-renowned Australian lyric tenor and dubbed “Australia’s own Bocelli”, Paul Tabone’s story of Queensland farm boy to West End star is one only dreams are made of. After four years performing in London’s West End in the role of Ubaldo Piangi in the Andrew Lloyd Webber production of ‘The Phantom of the Opera’, Paul makes his triumphant return to Australia to perform Golden Days: Songs from the Movies and Musicals – a show curated by Paul himself. From August 2022, Paul will reprise his role as Ubaldo in the highly anticipated 2022 Australian production of Phantom of the Opera, with seasons announced at the prestigious Sydney Opera House and Melbourne’s Arts Centre. Paul continues to be a huge advocate for nurturing Australian talent still on the rise, by featuring local and regional talent in his Golden Days production, whilst also often hosting local community masterclasses at local schools sharing Tabone’s own tales and providing advice for a career in theatre. With a beautifully warm and rounded tone that can cover all material from Bocelli and Pavarotti to high opera; Neapolitan songs, his Caruso is formidable. Come and be mesmerised by the talent that is Paul Tabone.

**Paul Tabone performs at
The Empire Church Theatre
Saturday 18 June | 7:30pm**

BOOK
TICKETS



Emily Goddard, The Brian Boak Developing Performer Recipient of 2009, presents her new work, This is Eden.

1839. Cascades Female Factory, Hobart Town. In a solitary cell, on the edge of survival, Mary Ford waits alone in the darkness. Left for dead, ten thousand miles from home, she plots escape and reveals, with biting mockery, the untold tales of her captors. In a tour-de-force performance described as ‘fearless’ and ‘nauseatingly exquisite’, Emily Goddard and acclaimed theatre director Susie Dee (Anthem and Savages) bring to life a dark, humorous and provocative anti-bonnet drama inspired by the rebellion and resistance of the female convicts of Van Diemen’s Land. Using the same Bouffon-esque performance devices the women used to rebel, Goddard and Dee tread a fine line between the grotesque and humorous to uncover an extraordinary chapter of rebellion and survival that has seemingly escaped our nation’s history books. Winner of the 2018 Drama Victoria Award, This is Eden is at once an examination of our dark past, a parody of the way we perceive it and a vital call to arms.

“As affecting and impressive as anything you will see.”
Australian Stage

WINNER - 2018 Drama Victoria Award

**This is Eden performs The Empire Church Theatre
Saturday 6th August 2022 | 7:30pm**

BRIAN BOAK 2022
*Outstanding
Performer Bursary*



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For more details, please contact 4698 9938 or supportus@empiretheatre.com.au

*all donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible

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A ticket to a child's theatrical experience.



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\$150

An additional language development workshop for refugee/migrant young people.



\$300

A bus service to bring disadvantaged students to a performance.



\$800

A scholarship for a young person to attend Empire Youth Arts classes for a whole year.

CLIFFORD GOULDSON
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