JUNE 2024 SUPPORTERS DEVELOPMENT





A MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDATION CHAIR EMPIRE THEATRES FOUNDATION

The Empire Foundation continues to grow in support and its outreach. Recently, The Foundation welcomed new sponsor, Hot Property. The Empire Foundation Directors and I are grateful for their support and for sharing our vision of the development of arts – particularly youth arts – in our region. Thank you, Hot Property, and welcome to The Empire family.

During the past year, The Empire Foundation has undergone significant change in structure and reporting. As such, we announce that The Empire Foundation has officially become a controlled entity of Toowoomba Regional Council.

This change mostly relates to foundation operations, and I am delighted to note we will continue our current relationship with The Empire Board of Directors and staff, residing within The Empire and working closely together towards our common goal of youth arts development.

Recently, our directors interviewed an impressive list of applicants in various parts of the world, all vying for the highly esteemed Brian Boak Bursary and we were thrilled to award Munich based multi-disciplinary performance artist, Christiana Aloneftis the prize.

This year The Empire Foundation received a record number of applications for the Brian Boak Bursary. It's extraordinary to see such widespread interest in the prize, ultimately showcasing the work of The Foundation and The Empire on an international stage.

Our work in assisting these extraordinary young people ceases to exist without the ongoing support and generosity of our sponsors and donors, The Empire Board, staff and our owners, Toowoomba Regional Council. Thank you.

JANELLE FLETCHER

Chair Empire Theatres Foundation



A MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER EMPIRE THEATRES PTY LTD

As we reflect on another successful year, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the growth and achievements of The Empire Foundation.

Firstly, I warmly welcome our new partner, Hot Property, to the The Empire Foundation family. Your support and shared vision for developing youth arts in our region are invaluable. Additionally, we are immensely grateful to our renewing Foundation Partners. Your continued support strengthens our mission and drives our success.

Over the past 12 months, the generosity of our donors has been truly inspiring. Each donation, no matter the size, has significantly impacted Foundation programs and initiatives. Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment.

A special thank you goes to the Foundation for their contribution to our major production, *Cinderella*. Your support has been instrumental in bringing this enchanting story to life. Additionally, your support of programs such as the Senior and Junior IMPACT Ensemble, *The Pageant* and Grace Jarvis has allowed us to nurture and showcase incredible talent within our community.

I also want to express my deep appreciation for the dedication and hard work of our Foundation Directors, particularly our Chair, Janelle Fletcher. Your leadership and vision have been pivotal in guiding us through this remarkable year. Likewise, the support from The Empire Directors and Empire staff has been indispensable. Your collaboration and dedication enable us to reach new heights.

As we move forward, I am excited about the opportunities ahead and confident that, with your continued support, we will achieve even greater success in promoting and developing the arts in our region.

GIULIANA BONEL

General Manager Empire Theatres Pty Ltd

THE EMPIRE FOUNDATION

2024

BRIAN BOAK BURSARY WINNER ANNOUNCED



Following a record number of applications, The Empire Foundation has announced Munich-based Australian multi-disciplinary performer, lirico-spinto soprano (opera) and actress Christiana Aloneftis as the 2024 recipient of the prestigious Brian Boak Outstanding Performer Bursary.

Due to the unprecedented number of high-level applicants, The Empire Foundation have awarded two additional Brian Boak Supporting Bursaries to opera singer Sarah Prestwidge and actor, writer and producer Charlotte Chimes, who will each receive \$5,000 towards their career advancement.

Ms Aloneftis will put her \$20,000 bursary towards the completion her two phase professional development project in opera and acting for film and theatre.

"To receive this award is a huge honour for me," Ms Aloneftis said.

"Now as a full-time performing artist pursuing two exceptionally demanding art forms and their challenging industries; film and opera, I feel equipped to manage what comes up ahead," she said. "It is a very exciting time for me, a time of endless possibility but also a time of preparedness and a time of intention and creation."

Ms Aloneftis' project includes top-tier industry mentorship with leading interpreter of Italian opera Donata D'Annunzio Lombardi, at Accademia di Alto Perfezionamento Vocale in Rome, which collaborates with Glenn Morton and Sandra Homozi at Manhattan School of Music and Juilliard School in New York.

She will also undertake acting short courses at Stella Adler Academy of Acting and Theatre in Los Angeles and Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London as she prepares for an international film release, in which she features alongside an A-list cast.

Made possible through the generosity of the late Mr Brian Boak, the program is designed to provide support to those wishing to pursue a program of study or professional development at a recognised university, secondary institution or other centre of excellence in the areas of acting, dancing, singing or instrumental performance.

SUPPORTERS NEWS 23/24



AUSTRALIA LEFT DAZZLED BY BLOCKBUSTER SEASON OF CINDERELIA

The Empire's annual musical, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella* departed by pumpkin carriage on Saturday 23 March after a sparkling six-show season.

Proudly supported by The Empire Foundation, the Tony Award winning Broadway modernised musical opened to a full house on Friday 15 March, receiving rave reviews thanks to its beautiful songs, mesmerising dances, dazzling stage design and theatrical magic.

The six-show season attracted a total audience of 6,500 people, all eager to take in the talents of local performers including Shannon Gralow as Ella and Gabriel Tiller as Prince Topher.

Director Tim Hill, along with Musical Director Craig Renshaw, Choreographer Tess Hill and Scenic Designer Frances Story brought the work to life, alongside 85 arts-workers, 25 local performers, 13 local musicians and eight backstage singers.

Spearheaded by Costume Designer Debra Nairn, audiences

were dazzled by the musical's 150 individually made costumes, including two on-stage costume transformations.

The cast and crew of *Cinderella* included several former Empire Youth Bursary winners including leads, Shannon Gralow and Gabriel Tiller, Stage Manager Michaela Francis, Violin 1 Oliver Murphy and Backstage Singer Ebenny Williams-Cherry.

The Empire's General Manager, Giuliana Bonel said the season was a runway success, not only for The Empire but for the vibrant community it serves.

"It was truly a pleasure to welcome thousands of locals and visitors to The Empire to experience the enchantment of Cinderella in Australia's most beautiful art deco theatre," she said.

Ms Bonel noted the partnership and support of the local businesses and organisations involved in Cinderella, including The Empire Foundation was critical to its success.



THE EMPIRE FOUNDATION

Gabriel Tiller 'PRINCE TOPHER' 2015 Youth Bursary Empire Youth Workshops 2017 Youth Bursary Sound Thinking (Chamber Strings)



Shannon Gralow 'ELLA' 2006 Youth Bursary Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts

FORMER YOUTH BURSARY WINNERS



Michaela Frances STAGE MANAGER 2015 Youth Bursary Queensland Theatre Company- Theatre Residency Week 2017 Youth Bursary Sound Thinking – Music Theatre and Jazz

P. 04



Oliver Murphy VIOLIN ONE 2023 Youth Bursary Australian Youth Orchestra National Music Camp



Ebenny Williams-Cherry BACKSTAGE SINGER 2021 Youth Bursary Melbourne Youth Orchestra 2022 Youth Bursary Cuskelly College of Music (Strings)

SUPPORTERS NEWS 23/24

COMEDIAN GRACE JARVIS RETURNS TO THE EMPIRE

Up and coming comedian and writer Grace Jarvis returned to where it all began on May 4 with her second solo comedy hour, *This Is The Last Goldfish That I Am Going To Eat For You.*

In her delightfully unique style of comedy, *This Is The Last Goldfish That I Am Going to Eat For You* covers growing up queer and neurodivergent in regional Queensland, being raised by veterans and her general proficiency for getting herself into scrapes.

Grace returned to The Empire fresh from *Melbourne International Comedy Festival* for a one night only performance ahead of taking her newest show *Oh! The Horrors!* to *Brisbane Comedy Festival* and *Sydney Comedy Festival*, before moving to London to establish herself as a working comic.

A former IMPACT Ensemble member, Fairholme College student and 2015 Youth Bursary winner, Grace successfully debuted *This Is The Last Goldfish That I Am Going To Eat For You* at Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2023, and chose to bring it back to The Empire thanks to its Toowoomba heavy themes.

"It was a very full circle moment to do what I do for a living on the same stage where I used to perform classical voice eisteddfods and lay around with my IMPACT Ensemble thinking of jokes they could use," she said.

"It felt very special to bring my show to The Empire, because it was just such a massive part of my adolescence and development as an artist."

"The Empire gave me more of an understanding that the arts could be a legitimate career and that loving to perform and tell stories wasn't an instinct you had to shy away from."



SUPPORTERS NEWS 23/24

BIG SCREEN BREAK FOR BENJAMIN ROSENBURG



At 19 years old, Benjamin Rosenberg is already an awardwinning filmmaker.

His mini documentary *Mitchell*, completed during his time at Toowoomba Grammar School, focusses on fellow student Mitchell Wilkes as he steadily experienced the deterioration of his eyesight.

The film, which aims to portray Mitchell's unique vision as well as highlighting his optimistic view on life, won 'Best Documentary' at the Focus on Ability Film Festival, 'Best Film' at Nextwave Youth Film Competition as well as taking out the 'Best Achievement in Documentary' award of the Bond University's 2023 Film & Television Awards (BUFTA).

Benjamin was also named BUFTA's '2023 Best Overall Filmmaker', an award that comes with a full scholarship to study Film and Television at Bond University in 2024.

In 2022, Benjamin became the first Empire Youth Bursary recipient to receive funds toward a self-devised program, which put towards buying and hiring equipment to allow him to complete *Mitchell*.

"I was incredibly privileged to receive the support of The Empire Foundation; the bursary meant I had the funds to get my hands on equipment that ultimately improved the quality of the film."

His bursary and hard work paid off, with the film completed in July 2023 in time for consideration for the awards.

Benjamin is currently in his first trimester of study at Bond University and continues to make short films to widen his skill set.

HOT PROPERTY NEWEST SUPPORTER OF THE EMPIRE FOUNDATION

The Empire was thrilled to welcome the newest supporter of The Empire Foundation, multi-award winning independent real estate agency, Hot Property in February 2024.

Hot Property have celebrated more than 20 years in business in the Toowoomba region and has grown a reputation reflecting their strong set of ethical values.

"We're passionate about supporting the rich culture and

creative nurturing that The Empire does and has done for many years for our wonderful community," said Hot Property Director Greg Riehl.

"It's our pleasure to contribute to and support such a worthy cause and give back to our region."



Hot Property's Jacob Carlile, Leon Carlile, and Greg Riehl on stage with The Empire General Manager Giuliana Bonel

DONATE NOW

SUPPORTERS NEWS 23/24

BRINGING AN AUSTRALIAN ICON TO LIFE

When actor, singer and 2010 Empire Youth Bursary winner Chris White, received the call with the news that he would be stepping into the role of Bandit full time for the American tour of *Bluey's Big Play*, it was one of the happiest days of his life.

Joining the cast for the stage adaptation of the Australian children's television phenomenon as cover for four of the lead roles, Chris toured Australia from 2021-2022, including a performance at The Empire.

He took over the role of Bluey's dad Bandit Heeler fulltime for the American tour around 18 months ago, with at least six months remaining on the tour.

Now having performed in almost every corner of Australia, 46 states across the USA and most of the major cities in Canada, Chris has learned that kids really are the best audience.

"I don't think there really is another role like this one. It's so uniquely Australian and it's a pleasure to be taking our stories worldwide," he said.

"It was really inspiring to take the show to rural areas throughout Northern Territory, Western Australia and North Queensland, bringing live theatre to families who may have never seen it before," he said.

"It was such a joy to return to The Empire, the place that helped me develop my talent and passion as a professional some years later.

"Taking the show overseas for the first time was very special too, opening at Madison Square Garden in New York City with massive crowds."

Hailing from South East Queensland, Chris said there was nothing better than being able to bring something so iconic from his backyard to international audiences.



"We consume so much American television and media at home so it's nice to even the score a little by bringing *Bluey* to the United States.

"Often when Australian stories are shared worldwide, they focus on the outback or big cities like Sydney and Melbourne. It's special to bring Queensland life to the other side of the globe.

"When I tell the kids and families we meet after the show that I'm from the same place as Bluey, the looks on their faces are worth a million dollar-bucks."

Chris White received his 2010 bursary to attend Victorian College of the Arts (Acting for Camera Short Course).

DARLING BOY HEADS TO IRELAND

Actor Rupert Bevan has taken his original theatre piece, *Darling Boy*, to Ireland for the *Dublin International Gay Theatre Festival*.

The 2011 and 2014 Empire Youth Bursary winner and Victorian College of the Arts graduate wrote the play during his time at university after seeking the creative freedom of performing his own words.

"The play is inspired by all the thoughts and feelings I was having at the time and through the prism of dramatisation, *Darling Boy* has allowed me to express myself and connect with other people," Rupert said.

Throughout 2020-2021, Rupert developed the show with friends, finally entering it in the Melbourne Fringe only to have the season cancelled when Melbourne was placed into lockdown conditions.

Not one to be discouraged, Rupert approached the 77-seat venue in Melbourne's CDB, The Butterfly Club to stage the show the following year, collaborated with some fellow artists on direction, lighting and music and premiered the show in May 2022.

"I was terrified, but the show was well received and caught the eye of journalist Lisa Millar...and with her help I brought the show back later in the year for Melbourne Fringe for a seven-show sold-out season."

"We added three extra shows, and they sold out in about two hours; then I took it to Sydney for four shows before debuting it in the UK at the *Edinburgh Fringe Festival*."



It was after his Edinburgh performances that Rupert was invited to tour *Darling Boy* to Dublin in May 2024.

While overseas, Rupert will also undertake theatre training in Berlin and hopes to apply the skills he learns to the creation of his next original work.

BRIAN BOAK BURSARY WINNER RETURNS TO THE EMPIRE

A former Brian Boak Bursary recipient will return to The Empire on July 19 as part of the impressive cast of Shake & Stir Theatre Co's *Fourteen*.

2014 Brian Boak Outstanding Performer Bursary winner and Matilda Award winning actor Steven Rooke will perform in the coming-of-age



drama that is equal parts uplifting and heart wrenching.

Based on the best-selling memoir by award-winning journalist Shannon Molloy, *Fourteen* is the inspirational true story of growing up gay in central Queensland, adapted into another must-see production by the nationally acclaimed Shake & Stir Theatre Co.

Playing the role of Brett/Andy and more, Rooke is joined by a cast including Leon Cain, Karen Crone, Judy Hainsworth, Ryan Hodson and Amy Ingram.



SUPPORTERS NEWS 23/24



YOUTH ARTS SPONSORSHIP MAKES IMPACT

Some of the region's youngest creatives have been able to develop their skills thanks to The Empire Foundation's support of advanced audition-based performance program, IMPACT.

Coming on board as the primary sponsor of IMPACT in 2023 after supporting Empire Youth Arts since its inception, has led to two successful productions by both Junior and Senior Ensembles in 2024, and this year's teams in rehearsals for their upcoming productions.

In July last year, the 2023 Junior IMPACT Ensemble (aged 10- 14) presented *Shack* by George Kemp, a new work telling the story of a group of school students on an expedition in Antarctica during a blizzard, who follow in the ghostly footsteps of real-world explorer Ernest Shackleton.

Shortly afterwards in October, the 2023 Senior IMPACT Ensemble (14-18) showcased their newly devised work, *Static Air.*

Collaborating with playwright David Megarrity and outgoing



Shack by George Kemp (2023)

THE EMPIRE FOUNDATION

Empire Youth Arts Director Nicole Haeusler and using the prompt 'I have something to say' as stimulus, the ensemble devised the original script set in the future when the world had forgotten to use its voice to make changes for good.

The 2023 IMPACT performances attracted more than 550 audience members across all four performances.

The 2024 Junior IMPACT Ensemble have commenced rehearsals for their July original production written by The Empire Youth Arts Lead Grace Sankey and co-writer Sheldon Mcloughlin, *Our Egg Named Larry.*

The 2024 Senior IMPACT Ensemble have started work on their unnamed production which will be performed in October.

The IMPACT Program offers young artists the chance to tell their stories with the same level of quality and care as a professional theatre production.

Tickets to the 2024 Junior IMPACT Ensemble performance Our Egg Named Larry are now on sale.



Static Air (2023)

YOUNG CREATIVE MAKES HER MARK ON THE FILM INDUSTRY



Actor, writer and 2018 Empire Youth Bursary recipient, Jasmine Barui has taken a major step in her filmmaking career with her latest project, *Finding Addison* winning 'Best Short Film' at the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards (AACTAs).

Finding Addison is a heartwarming drama based on the true story of an anonymous adoption. Set

across two timelines, it follows a young woman who grapples with not knowing who her mother was and going on a quest to find out.

Working in the small production team on the film, Jasmine first became attached to the project in 2022 when a writing partner showed her the script and she immediately jumped on board to help in any way she could.

"Sometimes when you walk onto a set or read a script, you just know a project is going to be special, and this was definitely one of those sets," she said.

"The young actresses on the shoot were so talented and

brought so much to it and the rest of the crew were wonderful; it was great to work with other passionate, driven creatives."

From working on *Finding Addison,* Jasmine learned one simple lesson about how to keep working in a tough industry; just jump in and get things done.

"If you want to make something, make it. If you want to write something, write it. If you are passionate enough about something, you will figure out a way to get it done."

Jasmine is excited to continue pushing forward with all things film, having wrapped on another short film in April in which she was writer, producer, director and actor. She is also in the development stage for two other film projects, a series and a feature film and has booked several upcoming film roles.

"I hope to just continue creating in any capacity I can. I want to tell stories and tell them well."



asmine Barui and Finding Addison writer and director Fran Braithewai

FOUNDING TRUSTEE STEPS DOWN FROM THE EMPIRE BOARD

Long serving advocate of The Empire and The Empire Foundation, Sheena Liley has resigned after 24 years of service.

Mrs Liley served as Deputy Chair of The Empire Board for 15 years, stepping down in October 2022 and remaining as a Director until her retirement in December 2023.

As a founding Trustee of the Empire Theatres Foundation, Mrs Liley performed the role of Foundation Chair simultaneously with her Director duties for nine years until she stepped down from The Empire Foundation in 2019.

She was named as a recipient of the Order of Australia in 2020 for her service to her community including her work with The Empire and her passion for fostering the arts in regional areas.

In her time as Foundation Chair, Mrs Liley assisted in facilitating more than 400 young people in developing their artistic skills as well as giving developing and established performers a boost in their careers via the prestigious Brian Boak Bursary.

The Empire team and The Empire Foundation thank Mrs Liley for her years of service and ongoing support.



SUPPORTERS NEWS 23/24



2023 BURSARY RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

The Empire Foundation has continued their commitment to supporting and nurturing the young performers of the region with the 2023 Youth Bursary Program.

In a ceremony held at The Empire in November last year, 30 talented young people received around \$25,000 in funds, awarded to develop skills and give new experiences to those with an active involvement in the performing arts.

The majority of 2023 recipients have already attended their courses at leading Australian arts institutions including National Institute of Dramatic Arts, Queensland Theatre, Queensland Conservatorium, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Queensland Ballet, and more in a wide range of disciplines including acting, writing, classical music, dance and choral singing. Since 2010, more than 500 bursaries have been awarded to young artists within the community, many of whom have progressed and established successful careers in their disciplines.

The 2024 Youth Bursary program opens for new applications from Monday 1 July, closing Friday 26 July.



THE 2024 BRIAN BOAK BURSARY SAW A RECORD NUMBER OF 38 APPLICATIONS RECEIVED



30 PEOPLE WERE AWARDED YOUTH BURSARIES



\$41,375 INCOME WAS RECEIVED THROUGH SPONSORSHIP



150 PEOPLE ATTENDED THE YOUTH BURSARY CEREMONY HELD 7 NOVEMBER 2023



APPROX \$26,000 WAS AWARDED TO YOUTH BURSARY RECIPIENTS



\$3,311 WAS RECEIVED IN DONATIONS FROM JULY 2023-APRIL 2024



SINCE 2010 MORE THAN 500 BURSARIES HAVE BEEN AWARDED TO YOUNG ARTISTS IN OUR COMMUNITY



MEDIA COVERAGE REACHED AN AUDIENCE OF 64,200 DURING THE PROMOTION OF THE BRIAN BOAK BURSARY



FOUNDATION RECORDED 25 MENTIONS IN THE MEDIA FROM JULY 2023- MAY 2024

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SUPPORTERS NEWS 23/24



HELP PUT DREAMS ON STAGE

For those who love the arts and want to see it grow and thrive, donate to The Empire Foundation!

Contributions can be made easily via the website Support page, with each generous donation supporting young performing artists and assisting to build and enrich the cultural life of Toowoomba.

An investment in The Empire Foundation is an investment in the young creatives in our region and in the development of the arts into the future.

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible

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THE FOUNDATION GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES OUR FOUNDATION SPONSORS



THE ARBOUR













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