

Case study

Song Circle

Details

What:

Arts Queensland funding supported the creative development and performance of *Song Circle*, a pioneering collaboration between Blue Roo Theatre Company Inc. and Opera Queensland's Open Stage Program resulting in a powerful community engagement project.

Blue Roo Theatre Company is an inclusive ensemble of 28 performers that provides opportunities for people with disabilities to be actively involved in the performing arts.

The *Song Circle* collaboration involved writing and performing 12 songs which drew on the members' life stories. The performances at the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts (JWCOCA) drew capacity audiences.

Members from Opera Queensland mentored the Blue Roo Theatre Company and worked with performers on singing skills, story-telling, performance style and confidence building. The collaboration had a significant and positive impact on the performance outcomes of the project.

When:

December 2013 – October 2014

Where:

Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Art, Brisbane



Song Circle photo courtesy of Jan Brutton

Key stats:

- Number of activities 50
- Number of attendees 525
- Number of participants 1700

Arts Queensland contribution:

\$26,560 – Projects and Programs Fund

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Outcomes

- Blue Roo Theatre Company in collaboration with Opera Queensland developed an original song and music production based on the experiences and insights of company members.
- The mentorship of the singing teachers and musicians from Opera Queensland brought new voice, singing skills, performance style and heightened confidence to the performers.
- Two professional opera singers performed with the Company, bringing performance skills and creating a legacy for the Blue Roo Theatre performers.
- The collaboration delivered a new maturity and performance growth for the Blue Roo Theatre Company. The company gained stronger stage and sound presence and expanded capabilities. This confidence is demonstrated by Company members being able to be on stage for the duration of the whole *Song Circle* performance and to be focused and alive. This was a first for the company and a great achievement.
- An audience of over 80% capacity came to the JWCOCA to see *Song Circle*.



Song Circle photo courtesy of Jan Brutton

Audience Feedback

- *It was very touching with the pictures and the support they all gave to each other*
- *I loved that the cast were there for each other. To help when help was needed*
- *I cried in the part of the married couple*
- *It was wonderful to see the support the guys give to each other. They are an inspiration. Lots of lessons for us to learn.*
- *It reflected their thoughts, feelings and emotions about what is so important to them. Massive!*

Learnings and reflections

The biggest challenge was communication and the flow of information due to the number of people involved in the collaboration. As a result Blue Roo Theatre Company will develop a 2015 Project Plan for the second stage of the project, *The Bulimba Opera*, to assist in clarifying roles, responsibilities and expectations for each company member.

The project collaboration had a broad and positive impact on the Blue Roo Theatre Company, evident in the professional gains in musicianship, breaking down barriers to mainstream arts and raising the profile of inclusive performing arts in Queensland.

The project collaboration with one of Queensland's flagship performing arts companies brought a sense of confidence and pride to the Blue Roo Theatre Company members.

The level of growth experienced by the Blue Roo Theatre Company will be taken into future projects with vibrant confidence.