

3 Make it New

Back to Back Theatre

An ensemble of performers with an intellectual disability who create challenging work in multiple theatrical forms.

Restless Dance Company

An integrated youth dance company in Adelaide whose work is inspired by the cultures of young people with a disability.

Pinnacles Gallery

A regional gallery in north Queensland with a commitment to developing exhibitions with and for the disability community.

Tutti Ensemble

Inclusive music theatre for the main stage and community events from Adelaide to Vancouver.



Three of the five *Night School* ensemble members: Mark Deans, Darren Riches and Sonia Teuben. *Night School* was a collaborative workshop process which produced *Pod*, a theatrical event with its storyline drawn from *Night School* participants. Photograph by Jeff Busby.

Back to Back Theatre

Creating a perfect performance

Introduction

Back to Back is a Geelong-based theatre company with a core ensemble of performers who are perceived as having an intellectual disability.* It is currently the only full-time ensemble theatre company in Australia.

The company is committed to reaching a wide range of audiences, working in a variety of media and contexts, and producing world-class theatre. It sees centre stage as a strong position from which to act as an advocate for people with disabilities.

The company

Back to Back is a company with five actors. These are Rita, Nicki, Sonia, Simon and Mark. Also, General Manager Alice Nash, Suzanna and Bruce.

They do workshops and clean the office, they go on trips and do shows around the world and make cups of tea and coffee. They have board meetings on Thursday nights at six pm 'til eight pm.

BACK TO BACK ENSEMBLE STATEMENT

Back to Back Theatre was established in 1987 as a result of a series of community arts workshops with participants from Corilong, a Geelong-based disability service provider. The workshops, which incorporated music and visual arts with performance, were facilitated by community arts practitioners and recent



A scene from the award-winning production of *Soft*, directed by Bruce Gladwin. Cast: Mark Deans, Rita Halabarec, Nicki Holland, Darren Riches, Sonia Teuben, Marcia Ferguson and Jim Russell. Photograph by Jeff Busby.



Sally and Bunce cast: Darren Riches, Rita Halabarec and Nicki Holland. Photograph by Jeff Busby.

graduates of the Deakin University theatre course attached to the Mill Theatre, a professional community theatre company in Geelong. The outcome was *Big Bag*, a touring production which enjoyed seasons in Geelong, Melbourne and regional centres.

The *Big Bag* company continued to work together and in 1989 created *Stinking Houses*, a play that looked at the lives of residents of the Caloola Training Centre for people with intellectual disabilities in Sunbury. The production toured to Queensland, Tasmania and regional Victoria. Caloola was decommissioned in 1992 as the state government moved residents from the centre itself to smaller community-based facilities which greatly improved their quality of life.

After *Stinking Houses*, the company divided into two distinct creative projects: Big Bag Band and Back to Back Theatre, both operating under the organisational control of Corilong. In 1996 Back to Back separated from Corilong and became an incorporated association.

Back to Back is now funded directly by the Australia Council, Arts Victoria and, as a supported employment service, by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). It takes the view that the now rare ensemble model is the key to the company's sustainability and success into the future.

As an ensemble company, Back to Back employs its members on a full-time

basis, offering appropriate wages for performances, workshops and rehearsals, and a retainer during downtime. This framework is ideal for collaborative creative development of material and for the personal development of each performer. It means that a long period for creation and refinement of new work may be taken (14-18 months) and that there is time for the exploration of ongoing thematic interests. It also maximises the opportunity for building a safe, trusting environment in which the performers and creators may explore their stories and ideas.

We come together, we work out what we want to do, then we just do it. We do improvisations from ideas from our brains, we research ... We come back to the rehearsal room and pick out scenes that we want to do.

SONIA TEUBEN, ENSEMBLE MEMBER

Two other critical ingredients of the Back to Back form of theatrical practice are the recognition of multiple theatrical languages and collaboration, often over an extended period, with the wider community of professional artists and companies.

Back to Back's work is not dependent on scripts. Just as people with disabilities employ a variety of communications, Back to Back sees visual, aural, tactile, physical and verbal languages as equally 'telling'. This approach has been the springboard to exploring a range of technologies including sound, film and multimedia design.



Cow: Mark Deans. Photograph by Jeff Busby.



Nicki Holland and Rita Halabarec, ready for their 'Diet Girls' sessions, where they lead classes in exercise, vocal warm-up, theatre games and basic acting skills, at the Courthouse Youth Arts Centre, Geelong. Photograph by Jeff Busby.



The ensemble of *Mental*: Rita Halabarec, Rabbit, Mark Deans, Darren Riches, Sonia Teuben and Nicki Holland. Photograph by Jeff Busby.



Porn Star: Sonia Teuben. Photograph by Jeff Busby.

A constructive and supportive working relationship is an essential aspect of Back to Back's life as an ensemble interested in personal development and wider artistic collaborations. Company meetings allow everyone, in ensemble member Simon Laherty's words, 'to say what they want' and find out what's happening 'before it happens'. These meetings are a regular activity for ensemble members.

In any one year Back to Back members develop performances, tour and conduct outreach work. Touring, especially recent work in Europe, offers the performers an opportunity to extend their experience of theatre and life.

You get to have your own room. You get to explore. You get to go to another country that you might not have been to before. We sell our work to other audiences. There are pubs in Zurich. We look after our own money, we blow it on food and going out. We see other theatre companies' work. You get to explore yourself by meeting other people and cultures.

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS

The ensemble's work

Since its early days, Back to Back has concentrated on developing a unique style of theatre. The success of shows like *Stinking Houses* allowed the company to establish itself further during the 1990s through a series of collaborations with other performance groups.

These included:

- Circus Oz – *Freak Show* (1994)
- Handspan Visual Theatre and My Friend the Chocolate Cake – *Minds Eye* (1996)
- Snuff Puppets – *Boomtown* (1998).

In recent years, the company has focused on independent projects which draw on the creative strengths of the ensemble.

We aim to challenge and enrich the audience, to liberate from conditioned response and from the familiar. We aim to transform experience, to go beyond what is known.

BRUCE GLADWIN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Soft is a notable example of Back to Back's recent work. It was a large-scale production, developed over two years, which examined the social implications of genetic technology. The artistic team included artists specialising in sound, design and architecture. *Soft* won The Age Critics Award for Creative Excellence at the 2002 Melbourne International Arts Festival and toured to international festivals in Europe in 2003. In the post-show discussions about *Soft* – post-show forums with the performers are a feature of much of Back to Back's work – ensemble members speak as experts on their genetic conditions.

Another well-known production is *Dog Farm*, a compendium of three works: *Sally and Bunce*, *Porn Star* and *Cow*. It premiered in Melbourne at La Mama in 2000.



A scene from *Soft*, directed by Bruce Gladwin. Cast: Mark Deans, Rita Halabarec, Nicki Holland, Darren Riches, Sonia Teuben, Marcia Ferguson and Jim Russell. Photograph by Jeff Busby.



A scene from *Soft*, directed by Bruce Gladwin. Cast: Mark Deans, Rita Halabarec, Nicki Holland, Darren Riches, Sonia Teuben, Marcia Ferguson and Jim Russell. Photograph by Jeff Busby.

These talented performers, who also wrote the material for *Dog Farm*, have a devastating ability to illuminate complex issues with their own form of lateral thinking ... the delight in watching them comes from sending themselves up along with the rest of us. Their enjoyment of performance is infectious, and they now, deservedly, have a devoted following.

HELEN THOMPSON, *THE AGE*,
8 SEPTEMBER 2000

Since the La Mama performance, the *Dog Farm* shows have been developed further. As a result they've reached wider audiences and received formal public acclaim. *Porn Star*, for instance, became a short digital film which has been shown at international film festivals. It won the Adrian Clarke Development Award at the 2003 Australian Mardi Gras Film Festival.

Fishman (2001) is an example of a production that emerged from the company's outreach work with young adults with intellectual disabilities. It is based on a story, reported in local newspapers, of a man whose brain injury had extraordinary and tragic consequences.

More recent works include *Small Metal Objects* and *Dumb*. *Small Metal Objects* explores what it means to be a productive human being. It has particular relevance to those who have traditionally been perceived as less productive – the

disabled, the unemployed and other outsiders. It premiered as part of the Melbourne International Arts Festival in October 2005. *Dumb* is Back to Back's new work for 2006. Through creative improvisation it aims to develop a purely visual performance language that will be more widely accessible to people with disabilities and general audience members than the spoken word.

Conclusion

Back to Back is recognised as a leading exponent of disability and the arts. It has an expanding audience and increasingly sees its community as not just local but national and international. Through its productions, creative processes and wide touring activities it demonstrates that people with disabilities create art which commands attention and respect. The company sees itself as an advocate for the acceptance of individuals of difference.

Artistically, Back to Back is about exploration and expansion. As well as exploring theatrical forms, it takes on issues that are relevant to all of us and offers new ways of seeing and thinking about them that have not often been given artistic space. The ensemble members don't shrink from the complex or disturbing. Their plan for the future is to create work that continues to ask what it is to be human.

* This is the preferred term used by Back to Back Theatre ensemble members.

Restless Dance Company

On the move

Introduction

Restless is a youth dance company in Adelaide whose integrated dance performance projects and community workshops are inspired by the experience and perceptions of young people with intellectual and physical disabilities. It was established in 1991 by Sally Chance, who remained as Artistic Director of the company until 2001. In creating Restless, Sally emphasised social justice, high quality artistic skills and production values, and the distinct capacities and vision of young people with a disability. Over time, and with the contribution of Restless dancers and other performance practitioners, these ingredients have evolved into a unique dance theatre identity.

An initial experience of the Restless style is captured by Andrew Coley, father of Gemma and Kynan, Restless performers. Andrew's association with Restless began in 1998, through Gemma's desire to take dance classes.

[We went to] see something called *Sex Juggling*. It was held in an old hall at Thebarton and I don't think I expected very much at the time.

We were delighted by the show ... We loved the costumes, the set, the props, the innovative choreography, the wonderful live music and the confidence of the performers ...



The cast of *The Laminex Man*, directed by Michael Whaites, May 2004. Photograph by David Wilson.



Anastasia Retallack in *Starry Eyed*, directed by Kat Worth, May 2004. Photograph by David Wilson.

Suddenly, the social politics were reversed. There I was in awe of these performers for the courage, the dedication and the perseverance it must have taken to reach the professional standard we had witnessed.

Soon after we saw *Sex Juggling* Gemma started a Restless workshop, and her brother, Kynan, agreed to lend his support by accompanying her. (We were amazed, as he had never shown any interest in dancing before.) Not only did they persevere with the workshop, but they were both incorporated into the Restless Youth Ensemble. Within months they were performing in an extravagant production (*The Flight*) before large audiences at the Festival Centre's Space Theatre.

ANDREW COLEY, PARENT

Integrated dance – a unique art process

Members of the Restless performance ensemble are between 15 and 26 years old. A majority of the 20 members live with a disability. The mix of dancers in Restless creates an integrated environment both socially and artistically.

Integrated dance has a different aesthetic quality that is unique. Creating a work is based around assessing each person's abilities and then working with them.

DANIEL DAW, RESTLESS ENSEMBLE MEMBER

In *Restless*, the dancers with a disability are the experts. The work that *Restless* creates is developed from the themes and issues of their experience (not necessarily disability issues) as well as their movements and imagery. The company describes this as working with ‘cultures of disability’. The result is a movement language which expresses a distinct world view and aesthetic sensibility. The dancers with a disability not only speak for themselves through the non-verbal form of dance but, as Sally Chance says, they ‘look like themselves’.

As a writer and actor I found *Restless* really exciting. It was a completely new way of presenting material and putting across emotion and thoughts to an audience. It is amazing seeing how affecting the work can be and to be a part of it. I now see myself as someone who is a ‘mover’.

FINEGAN KRUCKEMEYER, RESTLESS
ENSEMBLE MEMBER

The productions

Restless productions are known for creating a total theatre experience. The dancers’ skills are complemented by skilled and imaginative choreography, lighting and set design, music and direction.

The subject matter of *Restless* shows has particular resonance for young people but is tackled with the kind of depth that makes it universally meaningful. *Starry*



Lisa Engelaar and Dimitrios Vuthoulkas in *Headlong*, directed by Ingrid Voorendt, October 2002. Photograph by David Wilson.



Sally Miller and Andrew Nixon in *in the blood*, directed by Ingrid Voorendt, May 2002. Photograph by David Wilson.

Eyed, directed by Kat Worth, explored the themes of ambition, life choices and dreams.

The Laminex Man, directed by Michael Whaites and accompanying *Starry Eyed* as part of a double bill (2004's *Landmark*), is about masculinity. In the words of ensemble member Daniel Daw, 'laminex is a hard covering, the front that men and boys put on, covering up what's underneath'.

Precious, developed for the Come Out Festival* in 1999 and chosen for the 2000 Paralympics Festival, draws on the imaginative world of people with an intellectual disability to show both the beautiful and dark side of what is precious to us. Deborah Jones' review for *The Australian* gives a glimpse both of the work and the way director Ingrid Voorendt approached it.

Inside Gaelle Mellis's glittering set of fire and ice, the performers act as a consoling group or individuals in conflict with each other and the world ... Much of the movement has an improvisational character, giving it a sense of freedom and fluidity. Yet there are also moments of quiet intensity, particularly expressed in a deeply affecting sequence for Rachel High whose hands speak a universal language of tenderness, longing and aspiration.

DEBORAH JONES, *The Australian*,
20 OCTOBER 2000

It was a much earlier production that marked the beginning of Rachel High's career with Restless. When Restless took their production *Talking Down* to Port Augusta in 1995, Rachel High was the only person in her school with Down Syndrome. As her mother, Miriam, remembers, 'suddenly there were other people like her and they had been able to produce this wonderful performance'. Despite the 320 kilometre distance, Rachel began to attend Restless workshops in Adelaide and then joined the ensemble.

Inside Restless

Restless employs a full-time Artistic Director, Kat Worth, a company manager, Nick Hughes, and guest artists for specific shows. The majority of the company's funding comes from the arts rather than the disability sector and much of this is project funding for specific program and production items.

Community workshops and major performance work are often complementary. The *Sustenance* project in 2004 involved dance theatre workshops with young job-seekers with a disability, and formed the basis for the company's performances at the 2005 Come Out Festival. A number of the workshop participants were invited into the performing ensemble for the production.

All projects and programs provide entry points into the wider Restless

environment. Participation in Restless workshops is the basis for consideration for the ensemble. Ensemble members may take up opportunities to be tutors, board members or directors. There is a tutor development program to support this. Participation as a front-of-house volunteer may lead to administrative work in the Restless office. Ensemble members also play a part in media interviews, presentations, training and advocacy.

The company's working process in developing performances is one which maximises opportunities for participants. The dancers' own ideas provide the basis for developing work through a constructively critiqued, professional environment which allows a range of different viewpoints to emerge in each production. Dancers are involved in a group dynamic which encourages individual responsibility and mutual respect. Each dancer is provided with an introduction to this process as part of a kit which sets out the company's goals and approach to creating work collaboratively.

Working together constructively also requires the ensemble members to fulfil practical tasks determined by the dancers, such as arriving in time for warm-up, wearing appropriate clothing and giving notice of specific needs or issues before a workshop starts. Such preparation is the groundwork for managing the pressures of production, performance and touring.



Finegan Kruckemeyer carrying Daniel Daw in *The Laminex Man*, directed by Michael Whaites, May 2004. Photograph by David Wilson.

Rehearsals for each production involve a 'contract ceremony', in which all the participants look closely at the company's goals as a group and define the agreements between the performers, director and staff for the project's duration.

Conclusion

As an integrated youth dance company, Restless offers a distinct performing arts experience for people across mainstream and disability cultures. In order to reach this potentially wide audience more effectively, the company has developed targeted marketing strategies with the help of a marketing company. A marketing plan for each project now comes into operation three months before the production opens, and strategies such as contacting teachers to bring school groups to performances are used to access a range of audiences.

The distinct Restless style has attracted a number of young performers without a disability. They are keen to become involved because the work is stylish, intriguing and challenging. Over the last 13 years the company has nurtured a group of emerging artists who are now experienced in working with people with a disability and whose whole practice has been influenced by the experience of integrated dance.

The company's impact on the lives and careers of dancers with a disability has been enormous, but its benefits beyond the ensemble are also significant. Restless currently assists ex-members to further their interests in dance and performance. Some ensemble members have gone on to join Tutti Ensemble and No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability, while others have undertaken tertiary study.

We have watched Rachel grow in so many ways as a result of her association with the company. Her developing social skills have opened up a whole new world of relationships for her. She has matured into a thinker and her ability to analyse her feelings and act responsibly has given her a wider range of options in her life.

MIRIAM HIGH, PARENT

* The Australian Festival for Young People: see www.comeout.on.net.

Pinnacles Gallery

Artwork engaging all the senses

Introduction

They were not the usual gallery crowd, wandering sedately through the space, talking in quiet, reverent tones about artworks viewed from a distance. This crowd talked loudly, yelled even, and became increasingly excited at the noises they created, the textures, smells and sounds they encountered, as they engaged with the art.

JACQUELYN MURPHY, *Gallery Messenger*, NO. 13, November 2002 (reviewing *Grapple* 2002)

Pinnacles Gallery is a regional gallery in Thuringowa, north Queensland, which demonstrates a commitment to developing exhibitions with and for the disability community. It has developed a long-term relationship with the disability community in the Townsville region through exhibitions, residencies and community workshops, as well as new approaches to welcoming and informing gallery visitors.

An important stepping-off point for Pinnacles Gallery was addressing the challenge that vision impairment presents for an artform predominantly understood as visual. This has led to exhibitions that encourage interaction through touch, taste, hearing and smell as well as vision – an approach which extends the experience of all gallery visitors.



Inge Kaye, former Pinnacles Director Bronwyn McBurnie (obscured) and Con Lokkers interacting with Stephen Wei's *Toneaphone*, at the *Grapple 2002* exhibition opening.



Stephen Wei, *The Soaring Sole Toneaphone*, 2002 (detail). Metal, plastics and sound equipment, 200 x 130 x 40 cm. Exhibited at *Grapple 2002*.

Approaches to exhibitions with the disability community

In order to draw people with disabilities into the gallery and highlight the work of artists with a disability, Pinnacles Gallery has concentrated on working with communities through exhibitions. Its approaches to these exhibitions have included initiating projects, responding to community interest and developing partnerships with local organisations.

In 1998 Allison Gray, Pinnacles Gallery Exhibition Officer, made an initial connection between the gallery and the disability community when she facilitated *Grapple '98*. Lyn Tyson, a local artist with vision impairment who has an ongoing involvement with Pinnacles Gallery as an artist, played a key role in the project.

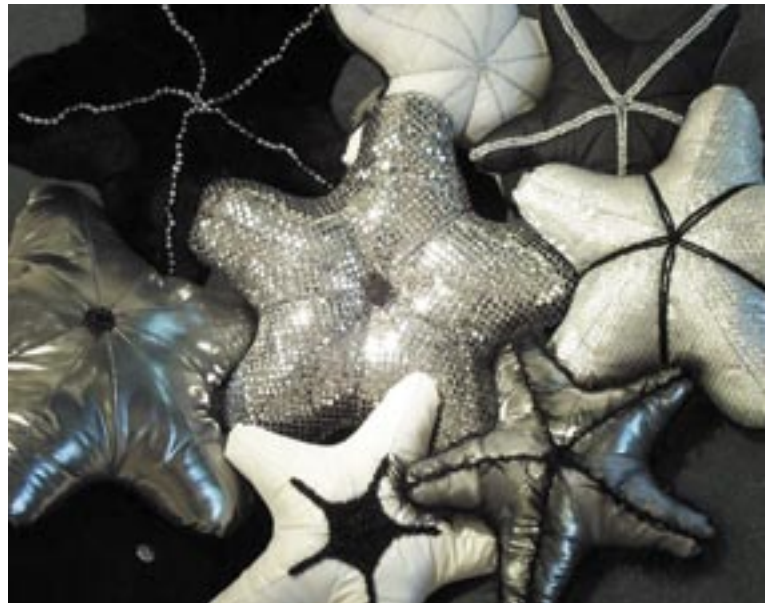
Grapple '98 involved people with vision impairment and was based on the principles of inclusive development and community management. Participants were on the management committee and material for the exhibition was created in collaborative workshops led by several artists-in-residence whose work utilises senses other than sight. By all accounts, it was an extremely popular exhibition as well as a rewarding experience. For Lyn Tyson, the two vital ingredients for its success as a collaborative and creative process was time to get to know people and the opportunity to go beyond a one-off exhibition activity.

I built ongoing meetings into the process as often we get dropped from projects once the artists or organisation get what they want. The meetings with participants and local artists let the project evolve naturally through shared interests and friendships that led to other exhibitions.

LYN TYSON, ARTIST

In 1999, with the support of local artists Dinie and Marion Gaemers, the *Grapple '98* group held another successful exhibition at Pinnacles Gallery, *Festival*. The exhibition had a dinner-party theme and featured creative dinner settings. *Artability* and *Visibility* were two further community-based exhibitions which followed *Grapple '98*.

Pinnacles explored another approach to working with the disability community in *Grapple 2002*. This was a touring exhibition designed to highlight the sensory dimensions of contemporary art, engage the disability community as audience and artmakers, and raise awareness of issues for people with vision impairment. Curator Jacqueline Murphy invited a number of established contemporary artists to create work exploring sensory engagement and challenging the idea of the 'viewer' as sighted. The tour included workshops and residencies with the participating artists at each venue.



Candace Miles, *See Stars*, 2002. Installation: woven cloth, papier-mâché, glass beads, mirror, plastic, metal, acrylic paint, silicon and clay. 2.5 cubic metres (variable). Exhibited at *Grapple 2002*.



Alan Valentine, *Sea Gongs*, 2002. Hardwood and metal. 45 x 80 cm (variable). The knob of each gong operates a bell. Exhibited at *Grapple 2002*.

In Thuringowa, some of the people from the original *Grapple* were part of Candace Miles' *Grapple 2002* residency. The result was a mosaic of ceramic tiles called *Interconnections* which was displayed in association with *Grapple 2002* and later installed as a public art piece.

Caloundra hosted a residency with Ross Barber, which led to the establishment of a website to connect local people with disabilities. This prepared the way for a residency with another artist, Bonnie Jenkins, in the following year. Caloundra Gallery also exhibited work by local artists with disabilities alongside *Grapple 2002*.

Grapple 2002 was also a catalyst for *Touch Tour*, an exhibition developed with the Townsville Community Learning Centre (TCLC). *Touch Tour* featured selected fabric artworks created by local textile artists and Special Education teacher Linda Cameron. It was made for and with children and adults with physical, intellectual, vision or multiple impairments.

The experience of *Touch Tour* led to further partnerships between Pinnacles Gallery and the TCLC. In 2003, Linda Cameron played a key role in the initiation and implementation of *The Treasure Within*. This exhibition involved three local artists working with TCLC students to create a variety of artworks displayed at Pinnacles Gallery in Disability Action Week.

In 2004, Pinnacles Gallery decided that its annual youth exhibition would specifically

involve young people with disabilities. Pinnacles Gallery staff liaised with Special Education teachers who organised the production of collaborative artwork from ten local Special Education Units.

Taking visual art beyond the visual

Imagine a room full of artworks engaging all the senses, intoxicating the visitor with a sensorium of sights, smells, tastes, textures and sounds.

JACQUELINE MURPHY, FORMER DIRECTOR,
PINNACLES GALLERY

The work I did for *Grapple '98* was based around a sea cave structure with textured insides, shells and a continuous tape of sea sounds and spoken word based on poems and stories I had written. I did three mermaids of papier-mâché and fabrics in different textures like feather boas. The mermaids had no faces – they were blank as faces aren't too important. The mermaid created by a sighted artist had a face.

LYN TYSON, ARTIST

In *Grapple '98*, the artists and workshop participants created collaborative pieces which explored materials, sensory responses and the experience of vision itself. For example, Marion Gaemers' workshop group used natural, found and recycled material to create a series of woven and beaded screens. Pickled and

preserved foods, sheets of braille script, fruit and leather were the components of the piece made with Liz Woods.

The eight artists who contributed to *Grapple 2002* were selected because they had already developed a distinct body of work that engaged senses other than sight.

Inclusive gallery practice

Pinnacles Gallery has always had a community focus and our exhibition and public program are designed to be varied and inclusive.

ANNE DONOHUE, EDUCATION OFFICER,
PINNACLES GALLERY

As well as creating new opportunities for people with a disability as artists and gallery-goers, Pinnacles Gallery has also explored ways of making the gallery and its exhibits more accessible. Education and public programs for *Grapple 2002* included an audio catalogue, sensory trail activity and the opportunity to put on goggles to simulate different types of vision. The media launch featured a performance by a signing choir whose members use sign language to sing. In *Grapple 2002*, all wall texts and labels were presented in large non-serif fonts on non-reflective paper, and much of the written material, including parts of the catalogue, were presented in braille. Audio tapes and players and vision-altering devices were also part of the exhibition touring package. In addition, the Royal



Sebastian Di Mauro, *Curl*, 2002. From *Shimmer Suite*. Stainless steel pot scourers, aluminium. 50 x 70 x 30 cm. Exhibited at *Grapple 2002*.



Ross Barber, from *The Rope: a reply to Charles Baudelaire and Edouard Manet*, 2002. Installation: 8 cast polyester braille-embossed tablets on perspex plinths, rope, text, audio player and speakers. 80 x 40 x 500 cm (variable). Exhibited at *Grapple 2002*. See: <http://users.qld.chariot.net.au/~barberr/>

Blind Foundation provided a workshop in each *Grapple 2002* venue for gallery staff and the wider community interested in finding out more about communicating with the vision-impaired.

As a wrap-up to *Grapple 2002*, Pinnacles Gallery sought community feedback. A focus group identified the importance of personal liaison between gallery staff and people with a disability. Suggestions ranged from activities such as morning teas to being aware of language usage when describing people with disabilities in promotional material. Lead-time for community contact and some transport support were also highlighted. The issue of exhibition layout was a major area of discussion with debate swinging between a preference for people support – provided by gallery staff or individual carers – and physical aides such as guide ropes.

As well as exhibitions developed with and for the disability community, Pinnacles Gallery has looked at ways of making its general exhibition program more accessible. For example, AUSLAN (Australian Sign Language) presentations to go with the exhibition program over an 18-month period were made possible with funding from Disability Services Queensland.

Conclusion

An important aspect of Pinnacles Gallery's work with the disability community is the exploration of the non-visual dimensions of the art gallery experience. It has encouraged the work of artists with vision impairment, supported artists working with a variety of media and invited audiences with and without disabilities to 'see' with all their senses. Outcomes include the development of new audiences and community relationships and a greater awareness of disability issues.

Pinnacles Gallery's experience with the *Grapple* exhibitions demonstrates the value of working inclusively, building ongoing relationships with the disability community and making room for community feedback. Lyn Tyson makes the point that people without a disability can't unlearn their everyday sense experiences to reach a point of 'not knowing' – and it is the 'not knowing' that needs to inform inclusive creative collaborations and gallery practice. Creating effective collaborations takes not only time but a willingness to confront assumptions and learn new ways of doing things.

Tutti Ensemble

Making music with our glorious selves

Introduction

Tutti Ensemble is a fully integrated choir including people with disabilities and members of the wider community in Adelaide. It has become known for its non-stereotypical music-theatre productions for the main stage and community events.

Tutti began in 1997 as a recreational singing group at Minda, a residential institution for adults with an intellectual disability. Over the next few years, the Holdfast Community Choir – as it was first named – grew from 11 to 60 members and in 2001 was incorporated as Tutti Ensemble. The founding Artistic Director of Tutti, Pat Rix,* has been part of the choir's development since she was first asked to lead the singing group.

The musical term *tutti* is itself a representation of inclusiveness – it translates as 'everyone will now perform together after only a few have been allowed to play'.

Performing Tutti

In Tutti you are accepted for where you are at and what you can give now. You are valued for your life experience, abilities and capacities.

TUTTI WEBSITE, WWW.TUTTI.ORG.AU

The ingredients of a love of singing, acceptance of difference, willingness to learn and a sense of community are reflected in Tutti's repertoire and



The Tutti Ensemble.



The Tutti Ensemble, with Pat Rix.

performances. Their performances include material from their own music-theatre creations alongside original works by contemporary composers and songs from a variety of cultures. The ensemble has undertaken overseas and Australian tours and appeared at major venues as well as community events.

In 2001, the year Tutti was incorporated, choir members toured to Vancouver to participate in Canada's first Celebration of Arts and Disability, KickstART. In 2002, they performed Pat Rix's opera *My Life, My Love* at the Adelaide Festival and in that same year a sell-out concert with David Helfgott in the Adelaide Town Hall at the High Beam Festival.

Adelaide's internationally acclaimed Tutti Ensemble is fast being recognised as a serious musical force in Adelaide. Look closely and you can see the diversity of the community that makes up the membership. Close your eyes and all you hear is a finely balanced group of singers enjoying their music-making immensely. They earned their standing ovation the hard and fair way.

EWART SHAW, REVIEW OF *MY LIFE, MY LOVE*,
Adelaide Advertiser, 9 May 2002

The following year Tutti was involved in several adventurous cross-artform collaborations. *The Singing of Angels* (Pat Rix and Tutti) with Restless Dance Company was performed for the Come

Out Festival. This was followed by *Towards Unlit Skies* (Pat Rix and Natalie Williams) with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and Yvonne Kenny, a new choral work created especially for the Bundaleer Forest Event. *Sounds of the City* saw the choir performing with the Holdfast and Glenelg concert bands, and *Melrose Under the Big Top*, written by Pat Rix for the celebration of Melrose's 150th anniversary, took Tutti north again to the Flinders Ranges. There they were, in Pat Rix's words, part of a cast of '100 men and women on the land in a real circus tent with live horses, sheep, sheepdogs, utes, tractors and school children, as well as professional musicians and opera singers and a very well-behaved bull'.

Throughout 2004 and 2005 Tutti collaborated with Interact Center in Minneapolis on the creation and development of two new works to be performed in the US and Canada. Interact also plans to stage *My Life, My Love* in Minneapolis in 2007. In the past two years Tutti has also collaborated with Arts In Action and regional Leisure Options to create the Big Country Choir in regional South Australia.

For Tutti members, the experience of singing and performing with the ensemble is about personal, artistic and social expansion.



The Singing of Angels, Come Out Festival, 2003.



Backstage preparation for *The Singing of Angels*, Come Out Festival, 2003. (L to R) Sue Downing, Karl Bryhn and Pat Luscombe.

Lots of friends, more confidence, shared interests, improvement in singing and stage presence ... would love to pursue a career in singing and drama.

AIMEE CRATHERN, TUTTI PERFORMER

At choir I am treated like a person, not looked upon as a disability. Although I cannot verbalise, the little things I can achieve play a part in the overall production. I've even become quite famous after my picture was in the paper and now other people are looking at me in a different light.

JEREMY HARTGEN, TUTTI PERFORMER

The practical arrangements that have to be made for Tutti performances – concerning access and facilities for a range of needs – also raise awareness of disability issues. Interaction between carers, families and community leaders is part of the preparation for every Tutti appearance. So too is the negotiation of appropriate fees for their work.

Creating and managing Tutti

It is Tutti's focus on both social inclusion and artistic excellence which gives the group its impact on participants and audiences. In Tutti's hands, these are not two distinct goals but practices which support and enrich each other. The choir visibly achieves high quality, creative performances in the context of a wide range of support needs.

Tutti embraces difference and inspires acceptance. In musical terms, this means that all participants are appreciated and recognised for what they can offer. All contributions, even 'a very small or very loud uncontrolled sound' are incorporated into the music-making process. The fact that no sounds are censored provides an open and confident base for learning and exploring the 'new aesthetic territory' that is Tutti's brand of large-scale music-theatre and opera.

We are proud of our unique aesthetic and know it derives from the extraordinary range of voices. I love the variations in our voices and know them so well that if one person is missing I can hear the difference. Over time, most have learned to pitch even if they have a hearing or vision impairment or palsied vocal folds. Such effort takes enormous self-discipline. It also takes self-awareness and sensitivity to others.

PAT RIX, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The approach to learning that supports such achievement is one that uses and builds on participants' existing skills and sees learning as a cooperative activity in which all participants, including the Artistic Director, are both learners and problem-solvers. The understanding that everyone is a supporter and encourager provides a strong basis for working together in a context in which, as Pat says, things may easily go wrong and different

behaviours may be confronting.

An important element in Tutti's success as an integrated choir is that the process of integration took place as a move into the 'margins' rather than into the 'mainstream'. Wider community members joined what was originally Minda choir. From this time through to the incorporation of Tutti Ensemble, all choir rehearsals prior to technical and dress runs have continued to be held at Minda. There the residents' world rules, and those from 'outside' have to integrate with it.

From its beginning in 1997 to its current form, Tutti's work has been financially supported by project grants, productions partnerships and some donations – which are tax deductible. Arts sector funding and generous support from Minda have been vital to the ensemble's development. Partnerships with flagship theatre and opera companies have broadened the group's audiences and their field of potential support.

The future: Tutti Arts

Tutti's strength and success as a choir and an inclusive creative organisation has seen it develop to the point of growing out of its present structure and funding. How to manage and shape its future is an important issue.

In May 2003 the Tutti Ensemble expanded to create Club Tutti, a non-performance choir for people who do not want the



Tutti Arts. Photograph by Jackie Smith.



Tutti Arts. (L to R) John, Alex, Aimee, Rachel and Joel.

pressure of performing. Club Tutti also caters for people on the waiting list and has a ceiling of 30 singers. Club Tutti is led by long-time Tutti member and soloist Jayne Hewetson with two other Tutti members.

Another new development is Tutti Arts, established with Minda Inc as a program for emerging artists with an intellectual disability. These emerging artists work alongside professional musicians, singers, writers, choreographers and directors on the creation and performance of their own projects.

As Tutti Arts is an ongoing project for artists with a disability, ongoing funding can be generated from a mixture of disability support and human services. This means Tutti Arts will ensure sustainability of the whole Tutti organisation and also allow for long-term planning.

Conclusion

As it has evolved, Tutti has created a culture of respect for difference. The creative feel of the organisation and the high standard of artistic work attracts people from all walks of life. In addition, the choral and music-theatre performed by Tutti is most often developed with the unique abilities of Tutti participants. It is not something a mainstream choir could ever replicate.

As Tutti has taken its place in main-stage festivals (and even the AFL arena through a memorable performance, the first of

many for the Adelaide Crows), the wider public has recognised that people with disabilities can be outstanding artists, expanding ideas of what art can be and what people with disabilities can do.

I am so deeply touched by what people are able to do in this choir and the doors that open as a result of our achievements. Seeing some individuals perform, you know they have never in their whole lives had such an experience and you know it will change them forever, as it has changed me.

TUTTI PERFORMER

* This article draws on Pat Rix's paper, 'Everything is Possible: The Story of Tutti', presented at the AASE/ASEAQ State Conference, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, September 2003. Unacknowledged quotes in the text are from this paper.