

Drama at BCS

Elisa Bryant speaks with Paul Cockram



ELISA BRYANT

COMING HERE WAS SO different to me that at first I thought, "What am I going to do with myself". So I decided that I'm just going to make theatre, and then more theatre and make sets and all that.

It's as a result of coming from Sydney and having been very highly involved in theatre there. The upcoming production is, I think, the seventh I've done since I came to BCS.

Recently we did Peter Pan, the last production was the 'Wizard of Oz' and

we're currently working on 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'.

I've been teaching for nearly 2 years now. My story starts when I was 14 years old. I didn't get into my school's musical so my parents got me singing lessons and it came out that I could sing opera. As a result I got a singing scholarship to St Vincent's College in Potts Point, studied opera and decided it wasn't me. The culture of opera is really pretentious but I loved theatre and performing.

So I went and did a performing arts degree at Wollongong University. After three and a half years I had my drama degree and I explored some very interesting theatre, predominantly independent theatre. I worked with a theatre company 'Strings Attached' which gave me the great privilege of performing on Cockatoo Island at the Underbelly Festival, in OJO directed by Younes Bachir.

In that production we explored the deconstruction of the end of the world. Through this process I was exposed to the organic process of starting with an idea and turning it into a story. At the same time I was working as a nanny for a family whose children I adored



MYRTLE WILD AS A POPPY.

and that is what inspired me to start teaching.

I hadn't wanted to teach before that. My mum was a teacher and I thought, "Bleah". No one wants to be a teacher when their mum's a teacher I think. But then I thought, she's a science teacher and I want to be a drama teacher and they're such different things. I mean we roll around on the floor in drama, we don't have desks and we have lots of fun.

When we produced 'A School For Scandal' it was an interesting time as it was my first time directing school students. It was a fun show and a really good experience. The Year 11 and the Year 9/10 productions are intended as a learning experience as part of the syllabus.

Then we did 'Prince Cinders'. A primary school musical is a first for BCS. Primary school students previously only had parts, like doing a number, in high school musicals. I thought there was more wealth in primary students having their own production. 'Prince Cinders' was an adaptation of a picture book by Babette Cole and it involved Years 3 - 6.

We ended the year with 'Thumbelina' which was the Year 9/10 production. This year we started with another primary production, 'Peter Pan', again using 3 - 6. Then in term two we did

"I think human suffering is one of the most interesting concepts to explore in theatre."



GEORGINA CAMPBELL AS DOROTHY AND LILY MUNNINGS AS GLINDA.

our Year 11 production which was 'Medea'. Then in term three we had the big production that we'd been working on since term one in sport time, the 'Wizard of Oz'.

Now we we're doing 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe', but right now I can't tell you how that's going to go. You can't ever know if it's going to be a huge success, you just have to believe in it. We are adding music because there is something special about having music in shows, putting it in underneath. It carries the show. In 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe' Lucy is going to sing Abba's 'I have a dream' as she's playing hide and seek with her brothers and sister and ends up finding the wardrobe.

I think about shows ages in advance and if I gather enough resources I can go, "Yeah, we'll do that one. We've got Abba's 'I Put a Spell on You' as performed by Creedence Clearwater Revival and 'Killing in the Name', which most of my boys love because they're part of the metal crowd who do the Wednesday/Friday afternoon radio show.

As a group they just love playing up the characters. They are really melodramatic. They just love that tacky moment, that lame joke.

In Year 9/10 drama we start the year off with kids who haven't done drama

before. First we study improvisation working to accept each other's offers. I might say, "We're falling off a cliff" and they could all screaming imitating falling off a cliff. Or I might say, "Let's get on a boat and go on an amazing journey". The need to learn to accept all offers.

We all have to open slightly to accepting because a lot of people don't. They could just go, "Well that's stupid,

there's no boat here". But it's in the imagination and that is why drama can be so much easier to do with a primary school group.

Because there isn't that closed off attitude. They still pick up dolls at home and will have imagination games with each other on the playground. In high school we need to recreate that because it gets somewhat lost in those early years of high school. That's why we don't study Realism in years 9/10.

We want them to be huge on stage, to be disgusting, to be the demon, to be involved in physicalised forms of theatre.

Hopefully by the time we get to the production they have opened a little bit, and then a little bit more. They can trust that their ideas are going to be accepted and are going to be good. Sometimes students suggest something ridiculous and you say, "Oh we can't do that". But then at other times they're brilliant ideas.

Like, it's a bit hard for some of the characters in this piece to be melodramatic. They are upright British children from the 1930s and 40s who have been forced by the war to live in the country. They need to be very proper and to be grotesque is not an option for them in this play. But they find moments where they can be humorous and this is part of the process we've been going through. They've found the way to do it.

Drama is something they already had that in themselves and it's our role to allow that to bring it into the open. They begin by sharing that with me and the class — and of course on the night, with the audience.

TALITHA MANN, ELIZABETH VELLA, TEISH BOOY, JACK CHALLER AND LILY MUNNINGS WITH ELISA IN FRONT OF THE UPCOMING WARDROBE.

