

Case Study

Junior IMPACT Ensemble, 2017: Child(ish)

What: Since 2011, the Empire Youth Arts IMPACT Ensemble has operated as an elite performance program for young artists aged 13-20. Thanks to the generous support of the Sidney Myer Fund and the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation's Capacity Building program, Empire Youth Arts was able to form the first ever Junior IMPACT Ensemble for young artists aged 10-13.

The program is structured in a similar manner to the Senior Ensemble, but with the content and outcomes adjusted to become age appropriate. It aims to offer young people professional performance experiences, whilst making an impact on audiences. Entry is based on audition, and the ensemble work across the year to create, develop and rehearse a polished performance piece for audiences at the Empire Theatre. This program has established a platform for youth voice to be heard within our region, and continues to cultivate new opportunities for the development and empowerment of young artists.

The 2017 Junior Impact Ensemble was led by Empire Youth Arts Director Ari Palani, facilitated by Christie Tickell, with artistic assistance from Marcus Oborn and Harrison Paroz. Assistance was also received from various members of the community who came in and took part in interviews which became part of the final performance.

Child(ish) tells the story of seven young people who decide that the best solution to their problems is to run away. As they make their way to the end of the street, the characters discuss the issues they're facing in their lives, which are the reason they've all decided to run away. Their discussions lead them to realise that running away is not the best solution, and they return home.

The task set to the ensemble, was to discuss the major issues they feel they face as young people. From there, Ari and Christie worked to transform the outcomes of these discussions into the story of the play. Around this, each ensemble member

was also tasked with writing a monologue about something they're passionate about, which would then be included in the play text to further discuss the issues being presented.

Child(ish) was performed in the Armitage Centre's Heritage Bank Auditorium over two days, September 2 and 3, as evening and matinee performances, respectively. The total audience for the production is approximately 200.



The Junior IMPACT Ensemble, 2017, present Child(ish)

When: September 2-3, 2017

Where: Empire Theatres Precinct, Armitage Centre

Partners, Contributors and Sponsors:



Isaiah Lee-Knights

Christie Tikell

Marcus Oborn

Harrison Paroz

Gordon Mann, Angela Ponting, Gaye Raabe, Grace Loffing, Allana Noyes, Hayden Wheeler, Tim Rid, Becc Wheeler, Tony Rehn

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Outcomes: The project engaged seven young artists over the course of five months. During this time they worked alongside and engaged with a wide range of professional theatre and performance artists, including lead creative and director Ari Palani, facilitator Christie Tickell, actor Marcus Oborn, photographer Isaiah Lee-knights, and locally based performance artist Harrison Paroz.

Each ensemble member carried their own formative and creative responsibilities, with an expectation that each would endeavour to fulfil these to the best of their abilities. Team work, communication, creative problem solving and the development and refinement of artistic sensibilities were essential attributes that were developed by each member of the ensemble during this process under the guidance of the supervising artists.

The final result of this project was two seventy minute performances which took place in the Heritage Bank Auditorium over two days, engaging approximately 200 audience members in total. Child(ish) not only attracted local audiences and family members of the ensemble, but also locally and Brisbane based theatre practitioners, as well as staff from tertiary institutions.

Positive feedback regarding the show was received from audiences post-show and in the days following the production.



Final curtain calls for the cast of Child(ish)

Learnings and reflections: This is the first Junior IMPACT Ensemble production. As such, the first objective of this project was to develop a frame-work for a formative creative process with 10-13 year old artists.

The initial interest in the project was small, as seen in the number auditionees. However, the interest in the performance outcome reached well beyond the expectation of family and friends, with audiences reaching 200 for the season. This is a pleasing result for Junior IMPACT's first year, and indicates that there is a market for this kind of work. To continue growth, Empire Youth Arts needs to continue to offer creative engagement opportunities for young artists to generate interest and build the skill base of young artists in the region. This also extends to engaging with them through social media platforms they utilise, including Instagram and Face Book, to ensure they are aware of the opportunities that are available.

The content of the Junior IMPACT program is of paramount importance. As this kind of work is still relatively new in the youth arts sector and specifically for the Empire Youth Arts team, the framework established with this year's ensemble should be used as the main guide for future productions. The process of generating the content out of the ensemble's responses, questions and concerns ensures that the program offers them a chance to develop creatively and personally. This transparency in content also needs to be maintained when communicating with parents, as they may need to become involved to discuss any sensitive issues which arise.

These measures also ensure that content stays relevant to the audience these productions are targeted at, specifically the age of the ensemble. Junior IMPACT was started to help fill in a void in available content for young people of this age. To ensure Empire Youth Arts continues furthering their capacity to generate new creative works and to help bolster the content for this age group, self-devised performances should remain the priority for the foreseeable future.

This process requires a higher level of facilitation and supervision, through data generation through to forming, editing and rehearsing. As they are still developing as young artists, they sometimes require a greater level of assistance than the Senior Ensemble, helping to shape their experience and understanding of the project in a positive light. Consideration should also be given to extending the development and rehearsal period for future productions.

This project directly correlates with eight objectives in the Empire Theatres Projects Company Business Plan.

Aim One	To be accessible and engaging to broad sectors of the community.
Objective 1.2	To foster and maintain relationships with a broad range of community and government groups in order to be in tune with current priorities and desires
Aim Two	To be vital to the cultural and social health of the wider Toowoomba and south central Queensland region.
Objective 2.1	Respond and contribute to discussion of social, political and environmental issues important to regional Australians
Objective 2.2	To provide arts services locally including training and education resources delivery
Objective 2.3	To address the issues of remoteness and accessibility to the arts in regional Australia
Aim Three	To empower and enrich the cultural capacity of south central Queensland arts practitioners.
Objective 3.1	Increasing engagement in creative projects throughout our community
Objective 3.2	Develop the skills of regional Australians as performance creators
Objective 3.3	To develop and nurture a community of artists and arts workers in and around the Toowoomba region
Aim Four	To maintain sustainable business practise.
Objective 4.1	To develop thriving arts business practices through strong partnerships, commercial income streams and alternative funding programs