



WTC
is **75**

Songs, Stories & Canapes

11 NOV 2023

Lighthouse Theatre

A celebration of
Warrnambool Theatre Company

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ACT ONE

Welcome & Acknowledgement of Country

Ailiche Goddard-Clegg

Good afternoon. Thank you for coming to celebrate Warrnambool Theatre Company's 75th birthday! Let us start the celebrations by acknowledging that we are on beautiful Eastern Maar country today. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. The Peek Whurrong people of the Maar Nation are our first storytellers and is it fitting that we are gathered today to celebrate storytelling.

My name is Ailiche Goddard-Clegg, I am the current President of the Warrnambool Theatre Company, and it is my pleasure this afternoon to take you on a journey through WTC's 75 year history.

I'd like to note apologies from the Honourable Dan Tehan, MP and Ms Roma Britnell MP. I would like to acknowledge WTC's previous and current funders some of whom are in the room today- Warrnambool City Council, Ern Hartley Foundation, A L Lane Foundation, Regional Arts Victoria, FRRR, Wannon Water, Volunteering Australia, and South West Community Foundation. I would also like to thank the Lighthouse Theatre, and in particular Xavier Dannock, Rob Foard, Dave Wilson, Rachel Furnell and Nathan Lovell for supporting this celebration today.

We have a number of WTC life members in attendance, and I'd like to welcome - Annemaree Stonehouse, Cindy Lee Morgan, Ellen Bourke, Heather Goddard, Helen Van Der Starr, Kaye Whitehead, James Tait, John Gunn, Margot Johnson and Richard Ziegler. Welcome also to current and past committee members, WTC members, partners and supporters. It is wonderful to be celebrating our community theatre organisation with you all.

WTC's purpose is to create theatre with and for the Warrnambool community. Over the years we've brought a plethora of theatre to Warrnambool - musicals, plays, dinner shows, revues, cabarets, street theatre, chorales, play readings, workshops, theatre labs - the list is extensive. In WTC's heyday, each year we produced a large musical, a play, and a dinner show - the dinner show would often travel across the region. Today we still try to offer that breadth of theatre opportunity - in musicals, plays, revues and workshops. We believe that theatre is for everyone and we hope that anyone can find their home and their people within our theatre community.

Today we will be enjoying songs from some of WTC's favourite musicals. Thank you to Heather Goddard for directing this celebration and Gavin Franklin for musical direction. Thank you also to Gavin for performing as accompanist and Bernie Opperman for accompanying the chorale.

In reviewing WTC's catalogue, one thing stands out - we have had a love affair with particular composers. Over the 75 years we have performed Lerner & Loewe 3 times, Shakespeare 3 times, Rogers & Hammerstein 9 times and Gilbert & Sullivan 12 times. We loved Calamity Jane, South Pacific, Pirates of Penzance and HMS Pinafore so much we did them twice but the most loved musical seems to be Oklahoma - which we did three times in 1962, 1968 and 1996!

It is only fitting then to open tonight with a song from Oklahoma and how could past the titular song. I give you Riley Holcombe, Ed Ezzy and Matt McNamara singing - Oklahoma!

'Oklahoma' - Oklahoma

Riley Holcombe, Ed Ezzy & Matt McNamara



Over the last 75 years there have been a few standout productions. For Helen Van Der Starr it's Fiddler on the Roof in 1994. Helen tells of the cast immersing themselves in the culture of the musical and sharing a Jewish meal in preparation. I'm told that the lead of the show was a professional actor working at Bojangles at the time, and so it was virtually like a professional show.

For Deon Cameron, Cinderella in 2009 was his all-time favourite. Despite a major mishap that saw promised costumes not arrive 3 weeks out from opening night, Deon says it had the best camaraderie. The costume group, in particular, when faced with the challenge of sewing and sourcing costumes for an entire cast in under 3 weeks, pulled together, sewed through the night and achieved the impossible.

Calendar Girls in 2017 also rates a mention, owing to the fact that the cast had to be nude on stage. In the studio as well, a very intimate and close audience. The story is based around CWA ladies raising money for cancer with a nude calendar. While the cast tried all manner of flesh coloured undergarments to allude to nudity, in the end, with the help of Claire Norman's excellent and well sized props, the entire cast bared all and brought the house down with their bravery.

But Sweeney Todd in 1999, directed by Jo Brian with a set built by the incomparable John Goodwin, is the oft mentioned front runner when we talk of favourites. The set was a large double height rotating structure featuring a pie shop down below and a barber's chair up above. When a character was killed by Sweeney Todd, they would slide down the chair through the trap door to land at the bottom in a room lined with mattresses. The set was at least 3 metres high, so the drop was considerable. My mum and dad, Heather and Jon, were both in the show and so I spent a lot of time at rehearsal and backstage. I vividly remember the set because as a 12-year-old I tested it out. I sat, nervously in the chair as it tilted back and hurtled me down the chute. While I landed on my knees with arms outstretched my fingernails had clawed their way down the padded chute. It was truly terrifying and befitting of the show.

Let's now take a trip back to Fleet Street and enjoy Mrs Lovett's daydream with Emmalee Bell and Ed Ezzy singing By the Sea from Sweeny Todd.

'By The Sea' - Sweeney Todd

Emmalee Bell & Ed Ezzy



Some of the most memorable productions are where things don't go entirely to plan. And the magic of theatre is that the audience often have no idea what mayhem lies behind the curtain. A favourite story from Richard Ziegler is when WTC toured Reedy River in 1981. Reedy River was toured across the south west for about 6 months. It had a huge and rotating cast to accommodate the elongated performance period. Richard remembers one night performing back in Warrnambool at the Garage, after a lot of touring, the set was rather knocked about. The set had a Cabin which would rotate so you could see the outside and inside.

Unfortunately, during the show, one of the weatherboards fell off. Ever the problem solvers, Fergus McDonald, stage manager, and John Goodwin, set designer, nailed the weatherboard back on in time with the music. Apparently the hammering gave the music a lovely base note. The audience were none the wiser. The weatherboard though did come loose on a different show. Fergus was once again timing his hammering to the drum beat but this time the weatherboard sprung out and gave a wallop wallop wallop out of time with the music, which was loudly followed by Fergus' exclamation - 'Truck'

While the audience that night were interrupted by Fergus' momentary expletive, there are other moments where the intrusion is so blatant that you can't help but stop the show. Calamity Jane in 2000 was stopped and everyone evacuated because there was a city wide blackout and the Lighthouse lost power for the entire night. And back in the Garage days, where WTC performed in an old garage opposite TAFE, the room was long and narrow. The stage was on the same level as the audience and it got really hot, so often they would perform with the door open. One day during performance, a large stray Labrador found its way into the garage, and trotted right up to take its place centre stage. There was nothing else for it but for Jamie Tait to halt his performance, pick the dog up, carry it off the stage and out the door!

As mentioned previously, WTC has had a love affair with Gilbert and Sullivan, and there was a very memorable scene in the 1992 production of *Pirates of Penzance*. Lynne Moloney remembers the pivotal fight scene between the police and the pirates. It ends with the Pirate King brandishing his sword and pointing it down towards the sergeant of police, who is cowering on the ground. The sergeant whimpers 'I yield'. During one performance, Bill O'Keefe who was playing the sergeant missed the scene and was allegedly down in the green room having a cup of tea. We've all done it. The rest of the police force though were on stage engaging in fierce battle but were all approaching the pivotal point in the scene where someone was going to have to say 'I yield'. Just as Jamie Tait and Lynne were wide eyeing each other and preparing for one of them to deliver the crucial line, they heard a commotion of hurried footsteps side stage. Then Bill came hurtling onto stage, sliding in like a baseball player skidding for home base. Bill slid underneath the Pirate King and stopped in perfect alignment with his sword - just in time to deliver his line, 'I yield!'

In celebration of our love affair with Gilbert and Sullivan, let's now hear from Peter Johnson, Riley Holcombe, Ed Ezzy and Matt McNamara singing 'When I was a Lad' from *H.M.S Pinafore*.

'When I Was A Lad' - H.M.S Pinafore

Peter Johnson, Ed Ezzy, Riley Holcombe & Matt McNamara



We can all get a bit carried away when it comes to theatre. Margot Johnson recalls her first foray into WTC - for *The King and I* in 1979. The production was looking for little boys to be part of the show. 'I've got just the little boy', thought Margot - that little boy being of course Peter. One of the casting directions was that all of the boys needed to have black hair. Peter's hair was brown so Margot dutifully took Peter to the hairdressers and dyed his hair black -with permanent hair dye!

Margot remembers *The King and I* and as having a most magnificent governess' skirt, which Margot helped costumer Thea McDonald create out of a shower curtain. This was chosen so it would hold its shape when the governess sat down and the children could all nestle into it. Annemaree Stonehouse has been the WTC costumer for many years, taking over from Elaine Walther who took Annemaree under her wing. Thanks to Elaine and Annemaree the WTC costume department has been a wonderland that has helped many cast to get into character. It is wonderful to see some of our special props and costumes on display today.

Another key memory for Margot is when WTC did Flying Feathers in 1992 at the Mozart Hall. John Goodwin was tasked with fashioning a squeaky door. He rigged up a violin so that its bow scraped every time the door opened. There was even more magic in Steel Magnolias in 2004 when John managed to get running water on stage for the hairdresser scenes. He really was a magician when it came to sets and props. The Reid family, John, Gladys, Judy and Robyn, were also front and centre when it came to innovation, with John Reid building the follow spot milk can. It burnt lime and apparently we were one of the first companies to have a follow spot. Nowadays Claire Norman has stepped into the prop innovation space, creating a field of sunflowers from recycled coke bottles and witch's hourglass from repurposed oversized wine glasses. In the set space today, Mark Pech, Lyle Russell and Rob McDonald create elaborate set pieces that continue the innovation that is embedded within the company.

WTC's 1978 production of Calamity Jane, performed in the Garage is remembered for its great sets and costumes. The Garage only had a capacity of around 150 people so the shows would run for weeks. In that time WTC was the ticket of the season, and the whole of Warrnambool couldn't miss seeing what we had to offer. My mum Heather was playing Calamity and Richard Ziegler tells me that Heather had this great big pistol that was hung from a belt which would swing from side to side. One night at a dress rehearsal to an audience of about 30 my sister Megan, who was all but 5 at the time, was in the audience. Unfortunately, Heather's pistol had swung around to the front, and was hanging down between her legs. In a moment of silence between two songs, Megan yelled out 'mummy's got a pistol in her gina'.

Of course, we also did Calamity Jane years later in the year 2000. In that production Tom Ballard, now a famous comedian, was a young 11 year old in his first ever show and part of the cast in a non-speaking role. Having no lines assigned to him did not stop Tom from stealing scenes - famously drooping dramatically when giving Adelaide Adams his flowers - and also stealing lines. Poor Rob Dowlin was often heard saying 'he's bloody done it again!' as the exuberant Tom couldn't help but step in to deliver Rob's one liner.

We've all been swept away in the moment on stage, and bringing those feelings to life now are Ali McLaren, Megan Twycross and Emmalee Bell singing I Could Have Danced All Night, from WTC's production of My Fair Lady in 1986.

'I Could Have Danced All Night' - My Fair Lady

Ali McLaren, Emmalee Bell & Megan Twycross



ACT TWO

For a number of years, according to the theatre company's constitution, we had two 'special interest sections'. They were of course, the Break of Day Players and the Chorale.

The Break of Day players was initiated by WTC to ensure there was an avenue for inclusion, specifically for those with disabilities. Break of Day Players became an autonomous body, self-determining and self-managing, with WTC committee representation. During the 1980s and 1990s the group wrote and performed a variety of theatre works and spotlighted the artistic value of inclusion. It is amazing today to see that the Find Your Voice Collective is a force in our community, with the all-abilities group writing and performing works of theatre, incidentally, facilitated by committee member Megan Twycross. WTC was visionary in initiating Break of Day Players, and we are proud that inclusion and diversity is something built in to the WTC culture.

The other special interest group was the Chorale, which formed in 1976, as an outcome of WTC's production of the Sound of Music. The nun's chorus had so much fun singing together that they didn't want it to stop. What a way to beat the post show blues - just extend the show! The Chorale continued for 37 years and welcomed over 90 singers during that period. They were the first regional choir to record a lunchtime concert for ABC FM and sang Christmas carols in the Melbourne Concert Hall foyer next to an enormous Christmas tree. The Chorale was predominately a ladies choir, however they did invite male singers to join them for special performances. Their concerts were always well patronised, and they sang all over the region at Citizenship awards, hospitals, nursing homes, weddings, funerals, parties, anything!

Jill Oppermann says that some Chorale highlights were during Trial by Jury in 1987, which was performed at the Port Fairy Courtroom and Fiddler on the Roof in 1994 which featured a number of Chorale members. The Chorale continued on until 2013. Ten years later it is my pleasure to welcome back to the stage, a key part of WTC's history, who are once again bringing their trademark balanced vocals and energy. Please welcome to the stage the Chorale singing April Come She Will and Operator.

'April Come She Will' & 'Operator' - Warrnambool Chorale

Margaret Beaton, Catriona Campbell, Chris Cussen, Brenda Harrison, Margaret Lamb, Gail Lemmens, Maureen McDonald, Paddy McGennisken, Jan Manley, Jill Murnane, Barbara O'Brien, Jill Oppermann, Beverley Sketcher, Vivienne Skilbeck, Erin Toulmin & Helen Van der Starrre. Accompanied by Bernie Opperman



Now Sweeny Todd taught us that theatre can be terrifying, but dangerous isn't really the first thing that springs to mind as a descriptor. In compiling these stories, however, a key theme of injury and hazard emerged.

John Gunn remembers Oklahoma at the old Town Hall as a bit of hazardous theatre. John, who is our resident lighting expert, remembers a rather dramatic incident during rehearsal. John looked up from his lighting desk, and the grid was on fire. The curtains of course weren't fire proofed. Next minute, someone on stage screams out FIRE. The response from prompt is - that's not in the script! Cue the fire hose, which went drip, drip - no water there. So now according to John it's a raging fire with the blacks alight. Luckily the fly man cleared the stage, cut the line, dropped blacks and stomped the fire out on the floor. Though apparently, it did cause a stir at Council, and that fire ultimately sowed the seeds for the creation of the Performing Arts Centre.

Camelot in 1970 was also dramatic in all the wrong ways. The company had hired elaborate costumes for the show. Lorraine Simmons was dressed as a Sprite. Unfortunately her dress dragged over the grind rail and burst into flames. Quick thinking Heather Powell stamped the flames out in time with the music and Lorraine kept on with the show. She was burnt though, and so the remaining shows she sang in the wings while I'm told, Rosemary Gun took on the role.

In 1995 Cindy Lee Morgan didn't notice the hazard in Sweet Charity until after the show had wrapped. At one point Charity is sitting in a Ferris Wheel with her boyfriend high above the ground. To create that effect, Cindy sat on a seat which was then hoisted up above the stage. At the show's conclusion Cindy found out that the safety measures, to keep the seat hoisted involved one of the guys tying a rope around their waist, walking out of the side door near the fly bar area and shutting the door on the rope to create the tension. All's well that ends well.

Cindy is still here with us today and reprising the role that she played in WTC's 2006 production of Gypsy. Please welcome Cindy Lee Morgan performing Everything's Coming up Roses.

'Everything's Coming Up Roses' - Gypsy

Cindy Lee Morgan & Megan Twycross



The thing about theatre is that it's all about the team. From cast, to orchestra, to Directors and crew - a good piece of theatre needs a range of individuals all combining their talents to produce a spectacle. The orchestra is an integral part of any musical, and thanks to our amazing community of musicians, who cut their teeth and hone their craft in the Warrnambool Symphony Orchestra and the Warrnambool City Band, WTC musicals have been known for their incredible orchestras and bands. The Les Misérables orchestra is a stand out for many, as they navigated the complexity of the score to produce a breathtaking sound. The other integral member of a production is the rehearsal pianist, and Betty Witham and Heather Powell were powerhouses who played rehearsal pianist for years and years. They could both sight read anything and dedicated years to WTC.

Frank Coggins was Musical Director for a great many years. Heather Goddard remembers that Frank would often want to play the songs slower than she would like. One day Heather went rogue and started at the tempo that she wanted to go. Frank was heard to say- oh she's off. Let's keep up now.

Andrew Philpot recalls during a performance of Godspell, in 1997, during the very dramatic and emotional crucifixion scene, the drummer was sniffing and sounding as though he was having a religious epiphany. Looked over at him after a while and he had a barely controlled nosebleed. Andrew remembers another performance where the orchestra followed the piano player not the Musical Director. During the final dance number before the interval, the piano player's light went off and the piano stopped playing. After about 8 bars so did the rest of the orchestra. The dancers kept going without the orchestra for a few seconds then trundled off the stage and the curtain went down for the end of the act.

During Cosi in 1999 the orchestra played the wrong song at the end of the show. Deon Cameron remembers it as one of the best moments where a whole cast improvised. Laurie Stonehouse stayed in character, yelling 'that's not my music' 'I will not sing without my music'. Poor Director Maria Whitmore was in the audience holding her breath. Soon after the orchestra found the correct notation, played the right music and it all ended perfectly - with adrenaline pumping through everyone's systems I'm sure.

The Joint HA &WTC production of CATS in 2022 featured an amazing orchestra, and I invite Maja Pearson to take us back to CATS singing Memory.

'Memory' - CATS

Maja Pearson & Ali McLaren



Our theatre company, of course, is only as strong as its members and contributors. We have been fortunate over the years to have some individuals who have really made the mark on the company.

Cyril and Joyce Hayward are remembered as a driving force of WTC. A driving and particular force. I'm told Cyril would have everything timed to perfection. For marketing there would be a great big chart outlining the entire plan. Cyril would gather the group who were doing the poster drops and show them a map of Warrnambool with locations neatly marked. According to Cyril, marketing all had to happen on a certain day and at a certain time. So the whole Warrnambool could be bombarded with marketing material. Cyril also approached stage management in a similarly precise fashion - with crew fondly remembering Cyril's famous decree before the show would go live - synchronise our watches!

Joy Irvine also warrants a mention, for her years of Directing. Joy was a pocket rocket and a terrific Director who also liked her moment on stage. I'm told even though she was short of stature her presence held the stage when she played Adelaide Adams in Calamity Jane. And Bruce Prichard, who was known for his exacting and bold colour schemes, and Barrie Johnson for his stage management prowess. And who could forget Rosemary Gunn who painted the most magnificent backdrops before everything was electronic and each show required someone to undertake the gargantuan task of painting meters of canvass.

Kaye Whitehead also warrants a mention, for her work in the company and also because Kaye was in WTC's first ever show - Bits and Pieces - in 1948. According to Kaye, in the show she had to faint. She was so convincing that her mother jumped up from the audience as if Kaye had really fainted! It is wonderful to have Kaye, as a WTC life member, in the audience tonight.

In WTC's current form, we are lucky to have 4 life members who are currently on Committee - Heather, John, Margot and Annemaree. It is so helpful and grounding to have that institutional knowledge helping to inform the future of the company. These life members are also integral to our current productions, most recently Wizard of Oz, which Heather directed, Annemaree starred in, Margot did Front of House and John did lights. Wizard of Oz was described as the best show to have been performed in Warrnambool and we were fortunate to jointly produce it with Holiday Actors. Bringing the magic of Wizard of Oz back today is Amelie Gleeson singing Over the Rainbow with special guest Greta Punch as Toto.

'Over The Rainbow' - The Wizard of Oz

Amelie Gleeson & Greta Punch



As with any organisation with a 75 year history, there are prosperous and lean times. After WTC's 2010 production of Pyjama Game the company wasn't in great shape, with not a lot of members, not of money and on the brink of closure. In 2013 we began our rebuild, starting with variety shows staged at the Mozart Hall and the Koroit Convent. These shows were engineered to be of a manageable size, to generate a small profit, and were a wonderful combination of comedy, song and dance. My favourite act from those shows was our Barber Shop Quartet singing Justin Timberlake's I'm Bringing Sexy Back. During that time WTC also staged plays and small musicals in the Lighthouse Theatre Studio. With not a lot of money, the plan was to rebuild the bank and the brand to one day make it back to the main stage of the Lighthouse Theatre and produce a major musical.

In 2019 the dream of returning to the Lighthouse Theatre main stage became a reality far more quickly than we had planned. Lyle Russell and Janet Punch had come up with the novel idea for Holiday Actors and Warrnambool Theatre Company to partner and put on a joint production of Les Misérables. It was an incredible success that forged a lasting connection to between the companies. Director Cindy Lee Morgan remembers it as a juggernaut with 110 people auditioning for under 50 roles. We sold out the entire season and it was the beginning of a new era for WTC.

CATS in 2022 and the Wizard of Oz in 2023 were also great joint production successes. CATS it should be noted was produced during Covid over a 2-year period with 3 postponements due to lock downs. Despite the uncertainty of the time, Annemaree says that CATS helped her get through the pandemic - giving her something to focus on besides COVID.

WTC's partnership with HA has been transformative. Since 2019, with the help of a Warrnambool City Council grant, we have extended Goodwin Hall - our set, prop and costume building and storage facility - to accommodate HA's collection. I thank the Holiday Actors committee for helping WTC to rebuild and embracing the idea that we are stronger together.

Partnerships have become foundational for WTC's recent vision and success, and we also have close alignment with One Day Studios, the F Project, South West TAFE, the Warrnambool Library, the Warrnambool Art Gallery and regional theatre companies Camperdown Theatre Company, Port Fairy Theatre Group and Portland CEMA. Skill building has also become a focal point for the company, with each production featuring workshops, mentoring and masterclasses to build skills and capacity.

A huge amount of growth and progress has occurred over the last 10 years. Thank you to our current WTC committee and all of the past committee members who have shaped and guided the company. It is thanks to your volunteerism that the company continues to serve our community.

Now for our final musical act of the night, taking us back to the glory of 2019's Les Misérables are Matt McNamara, Riley Holcombe and Ed Ezzy singing Do You Hear the People Sing.

'Do You Hear The People Sing?' - Les Miserables

Matt McNamara, Ed Ezzy & Riley Holcombe



For 75 years Warrnambool Theatre Company has delighted audiences and connected like-minded creatives. We have been a place of inclusion, innovation, diversity, skill, talent, and passion. The future is bright for WTC, with musicals, plays and workshops in the planning for 2024. We are committed to continuing WTC's history of delivering a breadth of theatre with and for the Warrnambool community.

Please keep in touch and if you haven't been part of a production lately - reach out. This is your sign to get back on stage, join a production team or step into Directing.

Thank you for celebrating with WTC today. We've had 75 years of spectacle and I am sure there will be 75 more. Hip hip hooray to Warrnambool Theatre Company.

Director: Heather Goddard

Musical Director & Accompanist: Gavin Franklin

Producer & MC: Ailiche Goddard-Clegg

Costumes: Annemaree Stonehouse & Heather Goddard

Makeup: Ace O'Dwyer

Set Design: Claire Norman & Rob McDonald

Digital Display: Paul Fimmel & Claire Norman

Front of House: Margot Johnson & Penny McLeod

WTC history: Ailiche Goddard-Clegg, Margot Johnson & Elizabeth Pinson

WTC acknowledges the support of The Lighthouse Theatre, in particular Xavier Dannock, Rob Foard and Dave Wilson, and History House.

