

Case study

Astronomical – theatre production and astronomy experience

In a world-first, *Astronomical* combined an outdoor theatre production with an astronomy experience to view the night stars as part of a 2017 Queensland tour.

What

Townsville's Full Throttle Theatre and the Townsville Astronomy Group presented *Astronomical* - an outdoor theatre production which contemplated the universe through the lens of scientists, followed by a nighttime viewing of the stars.

Astronomical traced the history of space exploration through the perspective of science pioneers Galileo, Einstein, Neil Armstrong and Stephen Hawking as portrayed by two actors in a 30-minute play.

Eerie radio signals from Saturn and other planets inspired the production's music and sound effects.

After the play, the cast invited the audience to view the constellations and planets in the night sky through large computer controlled telescopes.

Arts Queensland investment

\$76,420 – Playing Queensland Fund

Arts Queensland supports regional tours to deliver performances, exhibitions and community engagement activities in Queensland communities.

Key stats

- 2 actors and 2 astronomers
- 4830 attendances at 56 locations
- 38 solar workshops at schools



Susan Prince and Daryl Heath in *Astronomical*.
Photo: Paul Freeman, Noisy Pixel

When and where

June to Sept 2017 tour to 56 Queensland locations:

Ayr, Baralaba, Barcaldine, Bauhinia, Beaudesert, Biggenden, Biloela, Blackall, Blackwater, Boonah, Boulia, Carmilla, Cardwell, Charleville, Charters Towers, Chinchilla, Clermont, Cloncurry, Cooktown, Cunnamulla, Dajarra, Dirranbandi, Duarina, Dysart, Eidsvold, Einasleigh, Emerald, Emu Park, Forsayth, Gayndah, Georgetown, Goondiwindi, Hughenden, Ingham, Innisfail, Jambin, Julia Creek, Longreach, Mareeba, Marlborough, Mitchell, Monto, Moura, Mt Surprise, Munduberra, Murgon, Nanango, Nebo, Richmond, Rolleston, Roma, Springsure, Stanthorpe, Taroom, Theodore, Tieri, Tinaroo, Tully, Warwick, Winton, Wowan, Wujal Wujal, Yeppoon

Outcomes

- *Astronomical* attracted all age groups, from small children to 90 year olds.
- High degree of community engagement and support. In some communities the audience numbers exceeded the town's population.
- Local community groups set up BBQs and brought hot pots and *Astronomical* became the focus of a larger community event.
- The tour was expansive, covering 56 Queensland locations. For some smaller communities *Astronomical* was the first ever arts touring production to visit.
- Supported mental health outcomes: Many areas were experiencing prolonged drought and widespread depression. Local anecdotal evidence from Council officers suggested *Astronomical* helped to alleviate these issues.
- Support for schools and educational outcomes: Using solar telescopes, the workshops showed the sun to thousands of enthralled children.



Susan Prince in *Astronomical*. Photo: Paul Freeman, Noisy Pixel

Feedback

"Thanks for bringing such a wonderful experience to Winton." *Jodie A.*

"It was amazeballs" *Ceilia H. (aged 13)*

"Fabulous production marrying theatre and astronomy. Fourth night I've seen it and still brilliant." *Rebekah, Etheridge Shire Council*

Learning and reflections

Full Throttle identified the need to improve upon administration and tour management and implement better processes for liaising with councils and schools. In future, the company will consider the need for an understudy to be flown in at short notice if required.

Artist comments

The tour was targeted at small communities, often with no theatre or power. The setup took less than an hour and bump out took less than 30 minutes.

Astronomical was completely self-sufficient. It did not require a building, external power, lighting or seating and was designed to be delivered in any open area. In some cases we performed in the road reserve, a hotel carpark, parks, sports ovals, school ovals, showgrounds, national parks or beauty spots.

Everything required (including power, lighting, audio visual equipment, six large telescopes, and the actors) travelled in a single vehicle. The astronomers travelled in a separate caravan which saved money on accommodation.

Our production left no physical trace aside from the evidence of a significant community and social positive impact.

Tips for others

Identify a local champion in each area. Have a scout go in advance to solve any venue problems and ensure that promotion is adequate.

Using Facebook Events for each performance was effective. Selling tickets through council libraries, rather than through the local councils, is an option.

What next?

In September 2018 the company will tour Central Queensland with *ASTRONOMICAL 2*, new characters, more music, song, dance, projection and El Gordo the man sized telescope and a new theatre truck.

Find out more

Full Throttle Theatre Company
<http://www.fullthrottletheatre.com>