

Case study

4MBS Brisbane Shakespeare Festival 2014

Details

What:

The 4MBS Brisbane Shakespeare Festival is Australia's largest festival of all things Shakespearean, featuring plays, poetry, music, film and food, with many free events for the whole family.

The 2014 festival marked the 450th anniversary of William Shakespeare's birth. The festival was held in various locations around Brisbane and South East Queensland including a new venue, the Gasworks at Newstead.

As part of the festival, free performances of Shakespeare's *Richard III* were held in Brisbane parks. The Festival also presented a series of *Kids Classics - Shakespeare Stories* in regional areas for children.

The 4MBS Brisbane Shakespeare Festival is produced by 4MBS Classic Arts.

When:

September 2014

Where:

Brisbane



Richard III performed at the Gasworks. Photograph by Margaret Whyte.

Key stats:

- Over 3500 attendees and participants
- 23 paid artists and arts and cultural workers
- 87 children aged 0-11 years

Arts Queensland contribution:

\$25,000 – Projects and Programs Fund

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Outcomes

- Community engagement at Bulimba and Sandgate has grown significantly, resulting in the highest attendance in the history of the festival.
- 4MBS Brisbane Shakespeare Festival 2014 provided new opportunities for engagement in and by the community. Utilisation of new venues in inner-city area such as the Gasworks at Newstead resulted in new audiences for the festival. Additionally it has proved very popular with the local business holders, with invitations to come back in 2015.
- The Festival has created a new event/production - 'Kids' Classics - Shakespeare Stories'. Libraries have taken the opportunity to present these workshops for preschoolers to teens, with enthusiasm.

*What a fabulous event it was, the actors were just brilliant, they ...truly brought the story to life. - **Beaudesert Library***

- Showcased the talents of 23 Queensland actors and art workers. Several of the already skilled actors gained experience acquired for the first time in a Shakespearean production, which is a rare opportunity for many theatrical workers. Many of the actors were required to play multiple roles, which is a challenge in itself. The costume co-ordinator skills were expanded with the need for discreet and swift costume changes in a semi-open space.



Richard III performed at Bulimba. Photograph by Margaret Whyte.

Learnings and reflections

The 4MBS Brisbane Shakespeare Festival is now in its eighth year and continues to aim to host productions that appeal to all ages, families and groups of friends.

The addition of new programming in libraries has proved successful with children and families:

The Festival appeals to families. The library events encourage very young children (and their parents) to participate in Shakespeare plays in a relaxed and humorous way.

Festival organisers reflected the addition of new venues such as Gasometer at the Gasworks Precinct were popular with audiences:

This was the first time that a play had been presented in this venue. Its success has opened-up the possibility of future theatre performances in this venue. The audience feedback was overwhelmingly in favour of more productions being presented in their upgraded space for arts product.

The festival innovatively overcomes challenges in performing Shakespeare in various venues.

Organisers had the following reflections and tips:

- *Shakespeare needs to be presented in a reduced form in an outdoor situation. Skilled tailoring of the script worked well for a contemporary audience, keeping their interest until the conclusion of the performance, whilst highlighting both dramatic and comedic elements of the play.*
- *A prologue, in verse form, was specially written for the production by the Festival's Artistic Director, Tama Matheson. This helped explain the multiple roles played by the cast and made a complex story easily understood and within the grasp of every audience member.*
- *PRACTICAL TIP for outdoor productions - as well as suggesting chair or blanket, we will suggest also bringing a pullover for the later part of the play as it becomes chilly towards evening if the sun isn't shining.*