

Case study

Playlab Program 2014

Details

What:

Playlab is a Brisbane based organisation that was formed in 1973 by playwrights to support each other to develop work. More than 40 years later, Playlab is still actively supporting the creation and development of new performance work. The organisation has also grown to become one of the largest theatrical publishers in Australia and the only professional organisation that works across the lifecycle of a play – from the initial idea, to the stage and on to the page.

Playlab supports independent companies and playwrights to enhance opportunities for production and publication by offering development initiatives that provide structure and investment to create work, programs to build skills, and advocacy to local and national presenters and producers.

In 2014, Playlab delivered a program of activities to support Queensland playwrights:

- Six playwrights were supported to develop their scripts through Lab Rats (www.playlab.org.au/index.php/development/8-content/25-lab-rats).
- A partnership between Playlab and Just Us Theatre Ensemble (JUTE) led to the commissioning of new work.
- A series of four masterclasses was delivered (Writing Theatre for Young Audiences; Creating Stories out of the Lived Experience; Writing from the Spleen; masterclass with Hannie Rayson).
- Playlab also delivered a Platform Paper as the keynote address at Drama Queensland's conference in March 2014.



Playlab masterclass in progress. Image courtesy of Playlab Inc.

When:

January to December 2014

Where:

Brisbane, Gold Coast, Cairns

Key stats:

- Over 100 participants at masterclasses
- Over 900 attendees at play readings
- Eight new works supported

Arts Queensland contribution:

\$49,640 – Projects and Programs Fund

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Outcomes

- In 2014, Playlab as an organisation had its biggest year of activities on record. Playlab published work from around the country, sold a record number of copies of plays, and offered a program of activities that connected with a broad range of artists.
- The Lab Rats program produced great results creatively and professionally for playwrights involved. Two of the six works received additional readings after their Lab Rats development, one is being produced at Metro Arts after gathering a creative team through the process and another has made it into the La Boite Indie 2015 season. The remaining two writers are now redrafting their plays after using the program as an opportunity to develop their ideas.
- The Masterclass series was widely praised for its quality, as demonstrated in the following comments from participants:

"The masterclasses are so worthwhile, I hope there are many more to come"

"It was beautifully planned and even more beautifully executed... playwrights in Brisbane are crazy if they don't take up the opportunities that Playlab provides us."
- Playlab's profile has grown, with increased interest from organisations across the nation looking to engage. Requests have ranged from publication to appearances at symposiums.



Playlab Lab Rats – Development Reading at Queensland Theatre Company's Billie Brown Studio in South Brisbane. Image courtesy of Playlab Inc.

Learnings and reflections

Playlab's Executive Director, Ian Lawson, reflects on the 2014 program and plans for 2015:

"2014 was an amazing year for Playlab that saw the organisation achieve beyond all previous measures. This growth and expansion was achieved with many valuable lessons. The first key lesson was the importance of scheduling the program in a way that is both positive for attracting audiences and secondly easier for the internal management of each program. In 2014, Playlab spread the Masterclasses across two semesters, but in 2015 Playlab will condense the classes into a four week block that will not only reduce the management into a focused period, it will make the commitment from a participant point of view more controlled/manageable. This should improve the ability of Playlab to advertise and "sell" the classes as a package, thereby increasing the number of participants that buy a season pass.

This program "packaging" will also be utilised for Lab Rats as on reflection, separating the readings by two to three week gaps in 2014 made it hard to gain traction and momentum from one reading to the next. It was as if we had to start from scratch each time. In 2015, the three readings of each season will be run one week after another to gain greater traction with a potential audience.

The scheduling of Lab Rats has also been reviewed after programming two readings in the 2014 series during some of the busiest times in Brisbane's performing arts scene. In 2015, the two series will be scheduled late June/early July and November, thereby avoiding competition with major events.

From a creative perspective, extending the amount of time that the playwrights have to redraft during Lab Rats will be of great benefit to their growth as writers and the outcomes they achieve through the program."