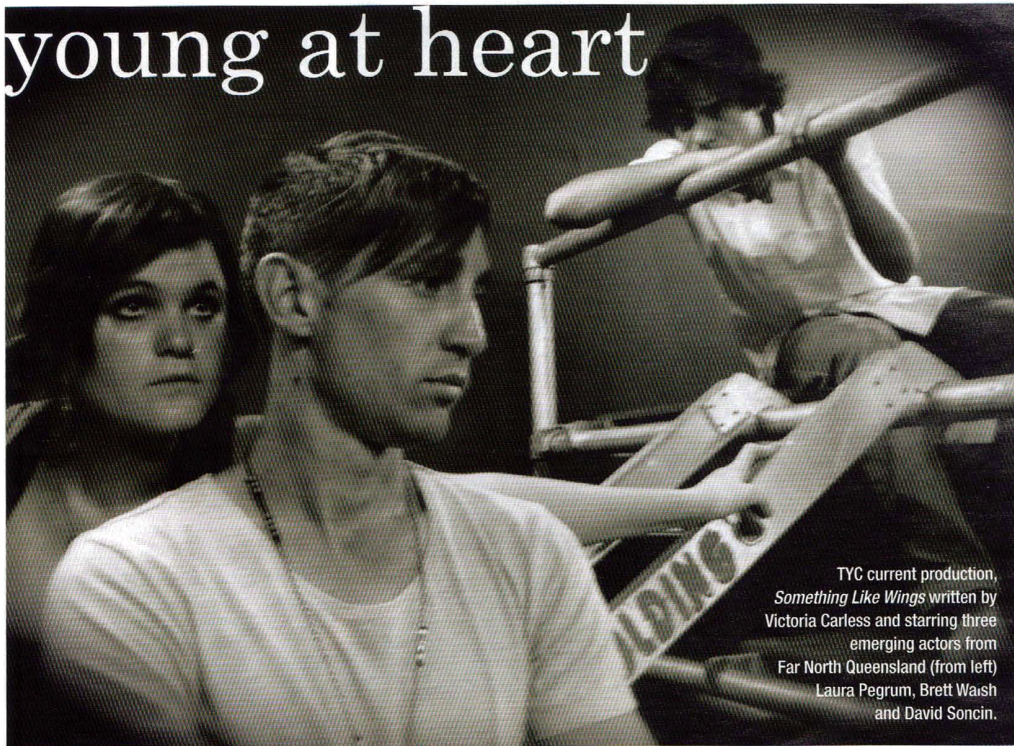


young at heart



TYC current production, *Something Like Wings* written by Victoria Carless and starring three emerging actors from Far North Queensland (from left) Laura Pegrum, Brett Waish and David Soncin.

While attending World Interplay in Cairns, Far North Queensland, freelance writer and director, **glen r johns** took time out from his tutorial duties to talk to Leigh Boswell, artistic director of The Young Company Theatre for Children and Young People.

Cairns feels like a different world. It's a frontier town that, according to the locals, is nowhere near as wild as it was twenty years ago. That said, it's still pretty crazy. It's a tourist town. Backpacker heaven. There are more English accents behind the counters than in Hammersmith. There are lots of young people, most of them in transit, dribbling sand from one golden beach to their next sunset paradise.

What about the locals? Enter Leigh Boswell. Boswell is a dynamo of energy, excitement and passion, a miniature tropical cyclone of enthusiasm. She talks quickly, partly I suspect, because she has a lot to say and partly because there's lots to do and not much time to do it. Her energy is infectious. She always seems to have a smile on her dial and a great idea for the next project. How she does so in this overly affectionate heat is beyond me.

I get a tour of The Young Company space. It's a fifteen minute walk from the centre of Cairns. At first, I walked straight past because its façade is an unassuming part of a commercial block.

Inside the door is a chill out area where kids wait for their next class, a small office and the beginnings of a drama/theatre library. We step through into the theatre itself, which is essentially a converted warehouse. The walls and concrete floor have been

painted black. A portable scaffold is up, the set for their next production *Something Like Wings*, a new play written by Victoria Carless. The production will tour the Tablelands with three young actors. The company will also take it to Brisbane in October for the Queensland Arts Market, which is being run by Young People and the Arts Australia (YPAA).

As for children's theatre, I want to see an uprising where theatre becomes a more interactive experience.

Sarah Boule, associate artist, is running a workshop with eight young people. The Young Company's six tutors run ten workshops a week, both at this space and in surrounding schools. Boule herself has just returned from Thailand after spending time with Makhampom Theatre. This trip was funded by the Australia-Thailand Institute and Arts Queensland and is hoped to establish a longterm partnership with Makhampom.

As part of Interplay, Boswell volunteered to host an Aussie BBQ on the beachfront for the delegates. She made sure that members of the company were

there to meet and mingle with the national and international writers and tutors.

Considering they are such a long way from almost everywhere else in Australia, the members of the young company don't seem to be missing out.

They've had workshops and performance seasons from Zen Zen Zo, Queensland Theatre Company and shake & stir theatre co in the past eight months. Backbone Youth Arts ran a three-day theatre boot camp for 35 young people in comedy, scriptwriting, and other skills necessary to devise a performance.

The company has established strong partnerships with local schools where the company runs drama clubs. Leigh Boswell says, 'At first it may have been seen as a "babysitting" service, which I'm comfortable with because these sessions act as an entry point into the arts. Keen young people then come to the theatre and do an extension workshop.'

This is all remarkable when you consider the company only came into being at the start of this year.

It is a prodigious achievement, primarily due to the 'can-do' attitude of Boswell. She grew up in Cairns before the obligatory move away to study and work in both Brisbane and London. She missed Cairns and returned home, where her only option was to teach Drama and English.

Boswell approached the Cairns City Council and the Cairns Regional Arts Development Fund, funded through Arts Queensland, to conduct a consultation about what young people wanted from performing arts experiences.

The extensive consultation took place with the drama students of twelve local high schools. They discussed such topics as: how the company would differ to school drama; drama as a career pathway; and the need to have more opportunities to develop creativity.

Boswell established a youth management team made up of eight young people drawn from the area. At the start of the year, they met once a week, conceived the name, designed the logo, drew up a mission statement and brainstormed ideas for the company. Now they meet less frequently to discuss projects, help write grants and check applications that Boswell has worked on.

Another surprising near-anachronism in today's climate is that The Young Company is essentially without core funding. Currently they are not recipients of any annual program funding, although they have received project funding.

On the day I'm there, Boswell's been told they've been successful in receiving a grant to install air conditioning, something everyone is pretty pleased about. I should think so. Come summer it would be pretty muggy in here with a dozen boisterous teenagers sweating recklessly.

'This is something I've had in my brain for so long, first as a university assignment to envisage our own theatre company then through my experiences overseas, all of which has moulded into what The Young Company has become.

'As for children's theatre, I want to see an uprising where theatre becomes a more interactive experience. Our production of *Charlotte's Web* later in the year will be a performance which explores the audience/actor relationship.' She cites UK companies Polka Theatre and Unicorn Theatre as role models.

Having had a chance to read the consultation document (the last part of which doubles as the blue print for a five-year Action Plan) Boswell has some exciting projects she hopes to get off the ground.

If organisations can be built on the energy and enthusiasm of one person, then The Young Company will become a skyscraper. ☺

glen r johns is a freelance, writer, director, tutor and filmmaker. Since attending World Interplay 2009 as a tutor, he has rediscovered his love of words. Since then he has been working on a play script, a screenplay, a novel... and poetry.