

# Living the dream

The creative futures of the region's young people are safe in the hands of Leigh Boswell, who has used her love of theatre to build The Young Company. DENISE CARTER catches up with the artistic director to find out how she got started and what her plans are for the future

**L**eigh Boswell talks a mile a minute and she has good reason. She has so many ideas and plans to tell about her baby, The Young Company, a theatre group she started in January.

"I went around and consulted with a thousand young people in the region in local high schools who did drama already and just heard the types of projects that they'd like to do and things growing up they would like to have seen or to have participated in," Leigh says.

At 29, Leigh may still be young, but she has a world of drama experience behind her. Born in Sydney, she recognised a leaning towards all things dramatic when in a nativity play she felt a pang of jealousy as a child playing a leading role passed by.

"I can actually remember when I was about four, I was one of the crowd in the Christmas performance and the kid who was Mary was walking past and I was thinking, 'I can do that role better'," Leigh says, laughing.

Growing up in Cairns, Leigh found she didn't like sport, she didn't like music, but she loved drama and so she entered Eisteddfod competitions.

"I didn't know there were other ways that you could do drama," she says, that is until she left Cairns for university in Brisbane and joined Backroom Youth Arts, becoming a member of their board.

"I was involved in lots of projects and they were asking me what I thought about things and that was really empowering for a 19-year-old," she says.

Now Leigh has her own company and she wants to empower the young theatre makers of Cairns to unleash their creativity without the shackles of exams and to link up with experiences and companies outside of Cairns so they can further their careers.

"I don't really think that creativity should be tested," Leigh says. "I think young people need to feel free to experiment."

Leigh has known for a long time she wanted to work in youth theatre.



"It's been developing in my mind for quite some time," Leigh says.

Most young people, when they travel overseas, work in bars and restaurants and party hard but Leigh used her time out in the UK to investigate how children's and youth theatre operates in different countries.

"I did courses with the Royal Shakespeare Company and I found children's theatre was what I was passionate about," she says.

"I'd never really seen children's theatre as I saw it over in the UK."

It's where she even got the idea for the name of her company.

"Over in the UK, a lot of the major theatre companies have a young version, like the Young Vic," Leigh says.

Leigh's visa eventually ran out, which coincided with a big desire to return home, so she applied for a job as a drama teacher in St Augustine's College, taking advantage of a long distance phone call by wearing her pyjamas for the interview. She taught for three years at the boys' school in Cairns and was a youth development officer at JUTE but eventually decided to take the plunge and create



**Drama queen:** The Young Company's director, Leigh Boswell, has a passion for theatre and mentoring young actors Brett Walsh, David Soncin and Laura Pegrum (left).

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her own company. The Regional Arts Development Fund provided the money for the initial research but the rest of the costs have fallen to Leigh, who does a bit of relief teaching to make ends meet.

Leigh recently bought an airconditioner to see the troupe through the summer months from a Cazalys Community Benefit Fund donation.

Not only does Leigh run the theatre company but she visits schools to teach drama classes and mentors her younger drama facilitators, some of whom are James Cook University students.

It has taken just a few short months for the company to break new ground and make a name for itself on the state and international stage.

The Young Company this week took a three-person play, written by Cairns young playwright Victoria Careless, called *Something Like Wings*, to the Brisbane Powerhouse.

"What's the most rewarding for me is that at the moment I've got these three emerging actors and they are getting the opportunity to showcase to other cities," Leigh says.

After Brisbane, the play continues with

a Tableland tour commissioned by the Tablelands Regional Council.

At Ravenshoe, Malanda, Atherton, Mareeba and Kuranda, it will be performed in schools and be followed by evening performances and workshops.

The Young Company also teaches drama at PCYC's on the Cape York Peninsula, from Aurukun to Kowanyama and the Lockhart River.

Sarah Boule, associate artist at the company, visited Makhampom Theatre Company in Thailand on a study tour in June.

Within the next five years, Leigh hopes the The Young Company's students will travel to Thailand to visit the company and the Thai company will, in turn, visit them.

The Young Company also hosted 50 international playwrights for the World Interplay program in August.

■ *Something like Wings* will tour Ravenshoe, Malanda, Atherton, Mareeba and Kuranda from Monday to October 30. Admission is free. For more information, call Leigh Boswell on 4041 4066 or visit [www.theyoungcompany.com.au](http://www.theyoungcompany.com.au).

■ *The Grinch who stole Christmas* will be the company's Christmas performance.