

Summary of the final report on Recharge: The Gathering 2009

9-14 April 2009, at the Newtown Community & Cultural Centre, Wellington

Introduction

The third Magdalena Aotearoa Gathering was held at Easter 2009 (9-14 April) and once again proved to be hugely successful in creating a unique opportunity for theatre artists to present work-in-progress to an audience of peers. The event attracted less full-time participants than we had hoped, but many more people attending one or two sessions, which meant that we networked across more communities than at past Gatherings.

Recharge: The Gathering 2009 received funding from the Wellington City Council and in-kind support from People's Coffee, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Diversity Action Programme of the Human Rights Commission and Actrix.

"I wanted to be 'recharged' & inspired. The Gathering exceeded my expectations!"

Aims and Outcomes

| Aim: | Outcomes: |
|---|--|
| to strengthen networks in theatre, arts and wider communities | Participants came from around the country and across art forms; networking; new web site. |
| to nurture individuals' creative processes | Six works-in-progress; 'next steps' session - concrete actions with dates. |
| to facilitate skills exchange between young and old, and emerging and experienced artists | The participants ranged in age from young students to experienced practitioners in their 50s and 60s, with opportunities for everyone to interact. |
| to foster the development of quality theatre that is relevant to our communities | Works-in-progress covered a range of topics and stages of development; performance of a finished work previously presented at the Gathering. |

Specific targets and milestones

| | |
|--|---|
| a total of 60 participants (approximately 40 attending full-time, 20 part-time) | Approx. 75 people participated: 15 attended full (3 or more full days), 10 part (1-2 full days) and approximately 50 others attended 1-2 sessions. |
| 8 works-in-progress presented | Six works-in-progress were presented; 7 were selected, however one pulled out. |
| media coverage achieved in Wellington newspapers (as well as online and elsewhere) | We did not achieve any newspaper or radio coverage, which was disappointing as media releases were sent to all newspapers and to national radio. |
| good documentation of the event – for presenting artists, and for fundraising and planning future events | All work-in-progress presentations and discussions videoed, and some other parts of the Gathering; each presenting artist given a DVD of their session; short documentary about the Gathering to be made. |
| written evaluations returned by at least half the participants | At the time of writing, 14 evaluation forms have been returned – all very positive. |
| breaking even financially | Loss of \$567.01. |

Participants

There were 15 full-time participants, 10 who attended for 1-2 full days, and approx. 50 who came to one or two sessions (half days).

The presenting artists suggested specific "responders" whose feedback they wanted to hear, and these were formally invited to attend. This brought about 50 additional people into the Gathering, many of whom did not know about Magdalena Aotearoa. All were impressed by the facilitation and feedback process. As well as affirming the value of the Gathering, these invited responders broadened our networks and the enhanced the reputation of Magdalena Aotearoa in the community.

"I thought the process of responding was outstanding. The thoughtfulness of the comments, the fact that everyone was given time to respond and the artist remained silent until the end ... All these factors contributed to a very generous and constructive feedback process."

Work-in-progress Presentations

- *The Vegetable Phoenix*, devised and performed by Madeline McNamara; she will present further works-in-progress during the year and tour NZ in 2010.
- *The Hooligan and the Lady* written by Pauleen Hayes and read by four actors; Pauleen's challenge is to find ways to continue the work from her home in Hastings, when her actors, mentors and theatre community are in Wellington.
- *Winter Overture Extracted – the spirit of the piece*, co written by Challen Wilson and Cathy Rexford, performed by four performers and a musician. Challen and Cathy will continue to work on the script and are seeking funding for production.
- *Watch Your Tongue Young Lady* – four stories told by Judith Jones, involving the audience as storytellers as well. Some responders contributed their own experiences of critical feedback sessions within the storytelling medium.
- *Shadow of a White Rose in a Silver Mirror*, devised and performed by Jade Valour; solo performance based on *Salomé*.
- *bodies without shadow*, workshop process led by Jaki Trollove; an experiment with bodies and materials including salt, milk, paper and light, a hands-on session for all participants.

"I felt privileged to share the space of gestation – forming the work ... Amazing to have a window into someone else's creative process."

At the 'next steps' session, each artist had 15 minutes in which the whole group brainstormed the key points from their presentation and discussion. These were written on a large sheet of paper for the artist to keep as a reminder of what they need to do.

Programme – other events

- morning training: Adele Chapman (walking meditation), Jade Valour (vocal work);
- Randai demonstration and workshop led by Megan Collins; popular workshop which introduced participants to a new technique;
- writing workshop: reviews and critical writing; some writing published in the newsletter and as blog posts on the new web site;
- web site launch: the new web site for Magdalena Aotearoa includes blogs and forums and an online membership database;
- Magdalena Aotearoa AGM: held on the Monday afternoon and well-attended;
- Closing Night Party: a highlight for many participants, this is an opportunity for everyone to have their moment in the spotlight.

Feedback

Participants filled out written feedback forms, and feedback was also gathered verbally and by email. Overall the feedback was very positive, with participants finding the event a valuable and enriching experience.

"I expected a creative, open and supportive atmosphere and the Gathering went way beyond my expectations."

Key points:

- it would be good to always start on time;
- the morning physical training was really appreciated;
- a whiteboard with day's programme and changes each morning would be helpful;
- people liked doing takeaways at the venue for dinners, instead of cafes;
- include general information about Magdalena Aotearoa in the info packs;
- request for a hands-on tech workshop;
- pre-Gathering facilitation training/mentoring so that others can share this role.

Financial Report

The Wellington City Council provided a grant for a coordinator's salary and administration, but every other application was declined; we applied to 5 gaming trusts and to Creative New Zealand. This meant that the coordinator's limited time was focussed on funding applications when, in hindsight, it would have been better to focus on publicity. Not all of the participants were able to pay the set fees; we accepted donations from those who couldn't afford the full fee, rather than exclude anyone on financial grounds.

In-kind sponsorship was gratefully received from People's Coffee (coffee), Actrix (web hosting), the Diversity Action Programme of the Human Rights Commission (pens), and the Ministry of Women's Affairs (folders and notepads).

Thanks to people's generosity with their time, Moira Aberdeen's excellent management of the catering budget, and the removal of every possible cost, the final budget (attached) has made a loss of only \$567.01. This loss will be met from donations.

Conclusion

Despite the financial situation, the Gathering has been a success: all participants found it a valuable experience that met or exceeded their expectations, and there was a real sense of the processes and traditions being developed with this regular event.

It has been proposed to hold the next Gathering at Queen's Birthday Weekend in 2010 – this is usually the first weekend of June. This would mean that people who can't come at Easter may have a better chance to come, and it is a shorter period which will make it slightly cheaper to run. We could alternate in future, holding a smaller Gathering in June one year, and a bigger event at Easter the next year. Rose Beauchamp has offered to host the 2011 Gathering at her land at Nikau Cove in the Marlborough Sounds.