The royal New Wave: Aubrey Mellor and Queensland Theatre Company, 1988–1993

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Abstract

When Aubrey Mellor returned to Brisbane in 1988 to become the second artistic director of Queensland Theatre Company (QTC), the company had been under the direction of a British-born and trained director since its formation in 1969. QTC was part of the national state theatre company network established as a result of postwar cultural planning. The network was charged with promoting national drama and producing theatre to a high artistic standard, but this objective imposed very specific constraints around the companies' programming. This was particularly observable at QTC: the company had been culturally and geographically distant from the New Wave movement that emerged in Sydney and Melbourne between 1968 and 1981. Mellor brought his experience of working in key institutions during this movement to QTC where he pursued a personal mission to develop Australian playwriting. During his five-year leadership he transitioned the artistic identity of the company to a more contemporary artistic framework.

When Aubrey Mellor returned to Brisbane in 1988 after an absence of twenty years to commence as the Artistic Director of Royal Queensland Theatre Company (RQTC), he found the remains of postwar cultural infrastructure. Originally called Queensland Theatre Company (QTC), the company had been founded in 1969 as the state's hub in a national theatre network created by the newly formed Australia Council. This network was intended to fulfil the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust's earlier plan for a 'national theatre'. This grand artistic vision was intended to replace bleak postwar offerings and symbolically dissect Australia's cultural identity from that of the empire. Plans for a single national company or venue were frequently discussed; however, a decentralised network comprising a subsidised professional theatre company based in each capital city, and overseen by its own artistic director, was seen as a more equitable method of achieving the goals of a flourishing art form and supporting local talent (Meyrick 2014a: 143; Milne 2003: 50; Milne 2004: 165; Fotheringham 1998: 26). The formation

of QTC completed the mainland network, joining Melbourne Theatre Company (formalised by the Trust in 1954), Perth's National Theatre Company (professional from around 1960), South Australian Theatre Company (founded in 1965) and Old Tote, New South Wales' proxy state theatre company (1962–78) (Milne 2004: 104, 108; Parsons and Chance 1997: 197).

The model for the network was unique. Where the original idea had sought to emulate the role of European theatre companies such as the National Theatre of Ireland (Abbey Theatre) and England's Old Vic in promoting national drama, the decentralised model better suited the regionalised Australian topography (Milne 2004: 10). Despite the vastly different artistic and cultural characteristics of each city, the state companies were essentially charged with upholding the Trust's original aim to subsidise them to promote national drama of the 'highest artistic standards' (Coombs 1954: 283). Such was the significance of the cultural and financial investment in this small number of elite companies that the UNESCO Seminar on the Performing Arts in 1969 noted the Australia Council 'chose to concentrate funds on a limited number of companies which it hoped would ... perform at high levels of competence by international standards' (cited in Johanson 2000: 104). This strategy was as divisive as it was idealistic.

The early emphasis on artistic excellence and cultural nationalism imposed very specific constraints on the state companies' artistic programming. New Australian plays, brief glimpses of artistic innovation and Australian interpretations were set among seasons of mainly classic and contemporary European and American work. Notwithstanding this content, and despite the state theatre company network's remit to advance a national drama, the understanding of both 'excellence' and theatre were irrefutably British (Johanson and Rentschler 2002: 172; Rowse 2001: 120–22). The first generation of artistic directors at the state companies were, without exception, British trained. All but John Tasker at the South Australian Theatre Company (now called the State Theatre Company of South Australia) were British born. Meyrick (2005: 27) refers to this era of theatre leadership as the 'Anglo generation'. Accounts of this time present their traditional artistic values as dominating both the programming and the position of the companies in the wider theatre sector (Sharman 2008; Milne 2004: 1–19; Wherrett 2000). By maintaining such an approach, the state theatre companies were largely partitioned from a nationalistic theatre movement emerging in the independent sector.

While much of the focus of postwar arts policy and funding was directed towards 'state' institutions, from around the time of the formation of the Australia Council and through the early 1970s, an aesthetic transformation was occurring in the independent field of Australian theatre (Sharman 2008; Milne 2004: 123–49; Wherrett 2000). The 'New Wave' (1968–81) is defined by a radical shift in artistic and theatrical values from those originally promoted by the Trust and upheld by the 'Anglo' approach of the state theatre companies' first artistic leaders. It was ultimately a writer- and director-led revolution towards a nationalistic, locally relevant drama and aesthetic (Comans 2006: 7). A new sense of ownership over these plays also promoted a shift in the way independent Australian theatre was administered and produced, asserting a clear separation from the state theatre company model. Evolving the conventional leadership style from one artistic director's individual artistic vision, the companies that began during this movement were typically led by a small, democratic collective providing a balanced, artistically sympathetic

environment for the plays to be presented. The Australian Performing Group (APG), Nimrod and Playbox Theatre Company exemplified this new model, with the individual strengths of their leaders combining to provide dynamic direction for the new companies.

The artistic counterpoint formed by these new energies against the programming of the state theatre companies was significant. Milne describes this era as ‘Australianising Australian theatre’ (2002: 73). The work provided an ‘artistic space on Australian stages for Australian voices in the face of long-term pressures to conform to British and US standards’ (Brisbane, cited in Casey and Gallagher 2009). It was a vital movement, fulfilling the vision for an ‘Australian theatre’ that the Trust and the Australia Council had so keenly anticipated. Yet it was achieved by opposing the very structures that these organisations had planned and put in place.

Mellor’s career: From variety to ‘New Wave’

It was against these tensions playing out in the national theatrical landscape that Mellor’s career took form. He had grown up in Queensland, performing in chorus with his siblings to his mother’s piano accompaniment on family tours throughout the state. As the oldest child, his special duties included caring for their travelling menagerie and providing the ‘tricks’ in his father’s magic show. Theatre was in Mellor’s blood. But as a young adult in the 1960s, he craved something more than variety concerts in country towns. With hindsight, he believes that at this point he sought an independent career path because he needed to understand the craft, assert his own artistry away from the family act and seek his own understanding of the importance of performing and the value of theatre. He followed this calling, participating in summer schools and workshops in the Theatre Department of the University of Queensland. There he was encouraged to audition for the recently formed National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA, established in 1960), which he did half-heartedly as he knew a rejection would not alter the course of his career. He believed he was destined for directing theatre or film; the only question was which one (Mellor 2011). The successful audition made this choice for him.

Mellor commenced study in NIDA’s Production Management program in 1968. It was a multidisciplinary course that encompassed stagecraft and stage direction, running parallel to its well-known acting program. He started working professionally from the first day of his studies. At night he worked for Old Tote as an assistant director and during the day he attended classes and assisted in teaching undergraduate acting at NIDA (Mellor 2011). These activities took place under the direction of Robert Quentin, the director of the Old Tote. Quentin had been collegial with ‘theatrical royalty’ J.C. Williamson and the Oliviers, lending his presence at the school a celebrity quality (Mellor 2011). Mellor and his peers had considered themselves fortunate to study under the tutelage of a director of Quentin’s calibre; however, this appreciation and its implicit compliance with Quentin’s British aesthetic perceptibly changed during Mellor’s time at NIDA. As newly Australian educated theatre-makers, the students wanted to create and present Australian stories exploring contemporary, relevant issues on stage (Mellor 2011; Milne 2003: 97–99, 106). Despite plentiful opportunities at NIDA, the freedom to experiment with such adventurous direction was not forthcoming. Mellor recalls the school

being ‘very old fashioned and rather dull’ at the time (2011). There were, however, exciting artistic moments happening outside of its confines.

The script-based New Wave movement represented just one component of the full spectrum of changes occurring in the ‘golden’ age of Australian arts and cultural development in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Craik 2007: 11). Buoyed by the progressive agendas of the Australia Council, the proliferation of new work and new companies continued to expand the field of Australian theatre and the performing arts. Supporting this productivity, new venues were constructed, providing stages, seating for eager audiences and tangible landmark buildings that symbolically asserted theatre’s position at the centre of contemporary cultural life. As a student, Mellor’s NIDA cohort was transported to a watery hole in the ground at the construction site of the Sydney Opera House. Here, the students were told that the new home of Old Tote — ‘their’ state theatre — would soon exist (Mellor 2011). The company’s residency at the Sydney Opera House confirmed its flagship role among the state’s subsidised theatre institutions: graduating students of the elite drama school would soon have an equally significant venue in which to perform.

Notwithstanding these developments, Mellor’s cohort graduated into a sector still largely led by the ‘Anglo’ directors. They were a young, professionally trained generation of artists zealous about finding their own Australian aesthetic and actively challenging the dominant aesthetic of the older generation (Mellor 2011). At Old Tote, this struggle was finely articulated, with the likes of Mellor, John Bell, Jim Sharman and Richard Wherrett seeking greater representation of the Australian ‘voice’ (as much a matter of character as of accent) in the company’s productions. This moment transpired in 1971. Mellor remembers the *frisson* on reading a draft of *Don’s Party* by a then-unknown playwright named David Williamson. The Old Tote’s production in 1972 first brought Williamson’s work to Sydney. Mellor worked as an assistant director on the production, and recalls ‘putting the Australian accent on stage, I witnessed it!’ This production confirmed the maturation of Australian theatre (Mellor 2011; Varney 2011: 94–95; Pensalfini and Fotheringham 2007: 50–52; Blundell 1997; Rowse 1985: 69). The play was a revelation, but Mellor noted how quickly Williamson’s success established the expectations of what an Australian play should be: ‘the okka [sic] accents and people swilling beer on stage, it became the *Don’s Party* syndrome’ (Mellor 2011). After Williamson’s style became standard repertoire, his quick transition to the mainstream undermined his alternative credibility, leaving the New Wave movement without one of its star writers (Varney 2011: 19).

However, the popularity of Williamson’s work, and its rapid uptake by the state theatre companies, did not immediately pose a threat to the New Wave artists, who were still intent on challenging the conventional aesthetics of the mainstream. For Mellor, Williamson’s work represented a ground-breaking moment in the quest for the Australian ‘voice’, but it was still far from embodying the Australian play the New Wave idealised. Mellor was dogged in his pursuit of this voice, but still struggled with challenging the form to evolve. He recalled, ‘I wanted to look for an aesthetic that most Australian playwrights didn’t want, them seeking the yobbo [instead]’ (2011). Until alternative scripts were written, Williamson’s plays continued to represent the benchmark, regularly featuring in the programming and teaching repertoire of the country’s significant institutions. The popularity of Williamson’s

work was a triumph for the movement, but his prolific output (around one new script per year) meant his plays were frequently programmed as the representative Australian play in the state theatre companies' seasons. This was a conundrum that Mellor continued to address throughout his career by fostering a new generation of playwrights.

The energy of the New Wave was successful in loosening the 'Anglo' generation's stranglehold on the state theatre companies. After weathering internal conflict at Old Tote, Richard Wherrett and John Bell were among the instigators of an artistic leadership coup against Quentin and his co-director Robin Lovejoy. While not successful, it provided the impetus for Wherrett, Bell and Ken Horler to establish Nimrod in 1970, successfully challenging and providing an alternative to Old Tote's staid programming. Although Old Tote moved to the illustrious Sydney Opera House on its opening in 1973, Quentin and Lovejoy's commitment to the British artistic sensibilities and decidedly old-fashioned theatre continued to decline in popularity with contemporary Australian audiences, a demise that was more striking in contrast to Nimrod's innovative productions (Sharman 2008: 153, 156). The outmoded model contributed to a deterioration of Old Tote's morale, public dissatisfaction and poor box office returns despite the promise of the new venue. The Australia Council and the NSW Premier's Department withdrew funding in 1978 and the company was wound down (Sharman 2008: 153; Parsons and Chance 1997: 277; Wherrett 2000). Old Tote was an important institution in fulfilling the agendas of the Trust: it pioneered the professional, subsidised company model and, by providing training and professional opportunities for future artists of Australian theatre, it opened a pathway for the realisation of the national theatre culture. Its collapse represented a significant moment in Australian theatrical history (www.nida.edu.au; Sharman 2008: 153; Parsons and Chance 1997; Milne 2004: 22, 115, 179; Wherrett 2000: 50, 152).

It was inconceivable for New South Wales to be without a state theatre company, and in 1979 Premier Neville Wran commissioned the formation of Sydney Theatre Company (STC). Wherrett was appointed its inaugural director and in 1980 Mellor replaced him at Nimrod, joining Bell and Neil Armfield as a co-director. The position at Nimrod was Mellor's first venture away from the security of NIDA and Old Tote, and one that Meyrick recalls he was initially hesitant to accept (Meyrick 2002: 190). It was a time of transition for Nimrod and Sydney theatre. Wherrett's departure shifted the alchemy of the city's theatrical energies; his New Wave style was effectively transplanted into the state theatre company model. Analogous to this, and without the conservative Old Tote to pit itself against, the agenda driving Nimrod changed and it entered a new, more uncertain era. Against Wherrett's adventurous programming at STC, Nimrod was no longer the epitome of the New Wave scene. Mellor (2011) summarises the mood within Nimrod as one of glib resignation:

By the time we got to the 80s, the so-called novelty of the New Wave had worn off because the good plays were not coming. What happened throughout the 70s is that we never helped train our playwrights. It was a big disaster, none of us realised until later of course, looking back. People would go along [to Nimrod] in the hope that a new play would be exciting and thrilling but we were running out of newness ... it was hard to be alternative.

The homecoming: Returning to Queensland

Mellor's acknowledgement of the New Wave's failings became fundamental to his artistic vision at RQTC. By the time he returned to Brisbane he was regarded as a successful director, teacher and mentor. Notwithstanding his time as a co-director of Nimrod, and a period of travel provided by a Churchill Scholarship (1972), his career revolved around engagements at NIDA. After his first teaching period (1970–78), he successfully produced seasons of student and professional work at the institution's pro-am Jane Street theatre (1978–79). As a teacher, he trained a new generation of directors and actors, and singles out teaching acting students Mel Gibson and Judy Davis as highlights of this era. Following Nimrod's demise, he returned to NIDA as its deputy director between 1985 and 1987, continuing to accrue directorial and administrative experience. From this role, he became RQTC's second artistic director after the 'very British' Alan Edwards AM MBE, the founding artistic director, retired after two decades in the role (1969–88). Edwards' programming was symptomatic of the Anglo generation: on the whole, the company was conservative in the fashion of the original vision for the 'state' theatre companies; however, Milne notes 'some diversity of activity' and more frequent programming of Australian work taking place from around 1985 (Milne 2004: 246). This conventional, confined artistic environment was familiar to Mellor. After witnessing the emergence of the New Wave and its fierce assertion of a new Australian aesthetic against the ageing 'Anglo' artistic generation in southern cities, Mellor's arrival at RQTC represented a necessary break for both the company and Mellor's career. Again, Mellor found himself in the middle of an organisational transformation and a city's changing culture. This time, however, the changes to the theatre company were initiated under his own direction.

Advancing RQTC was not necessarily an easy transition to manage. On Mellor's return, the theatrical and artistic heart of Brisbane was elusive. There was a theatrical pulse running through the fringe of the city's culture, but in 1988 this was obscured by RQTC's conservative, dominant position and the transient presence of World Expo '88 taking place adjacent to the cultural precinct of the city (Milne 2004: 313; Parsons and Chance 1997: 236). On one hand, the event promoted the 'unique qualities' of a laid-back Queensland, barely matured from its provincial beginnings, while on the other, it campaigned Brisbane as a nubile new city ripe for international investment and adventure (Sanderson 2003: 65–66). Expo '88's arts programs presented nice, glossy emblems of the city's reimagined identity. Andrew McGahan's local antihero Gordon, in the novel 1988 (1995: 311), observes how alienated these activities were from the city's past:

Brisbane felt strange ... The streets were full of tourists. The papers were full of Expo events and Bicentennial news. Live acts. Free concerts. Parades ... every day seventy or eighty or a hundred thousand people packed themselves in there. The thought of it appalled me.

While the emergence of Sydney and Melbourne's counter-movement against the state theatre companies had been played out in political and cultural arenas, Brisbane's independent theatre remained relatively marginalised from the mainstream (Milne 2004: 313). By chance, Edwards' leadership at RQTC spanned a similar term to Bjelke-Petersen's term as premier of the state (1968–87). This era proved a

fertile background for gritty counter-cultural developments in Brisbane's cultural scene. While the local music industry is recognised as having undergone a prolific transformation during this time, with punk rock and a burgeoning live music and festival culture thriving, Andrew Stafford (2004) insists the movement evolved despite the political environment, not because of it. In the theatre sector, however, Christine Comans (2007: 2) observes a smaller, shorter-lived but undeniably politically driven movement, led by the Foco Club and the Popular Theatre Troupe (PTT) between 1968 and 1983. At its grassroots level, theatre is innately political, and additional companies sprang up in this environment: TN!, Grin & Tonic and Street Arts joined the extant La Boite in producing theatre that challenged the times, and at times the policy-makers. In 1978 the PTT had its state funding withdrawn, becoming the only theatre company to receive funding from the Australia Council but not its own state arts agency (O'Neill, cited in Comans 2006: 22; Milne 2004: 225). At La Boite, the Queensland Police Force Special Branch regularly lingered at performances during the late 1970s and early 1980s, keeping an eye on 'politically suspect' productions (Comans 2015; Comans 2006: 115, 162).

Evidence of Brisbane's lively alternative cultural life in the history of QTC is scant. Like Old Tote, Edwards' programming did seek, at times, to embrace the artistic revolution happening in the local and national independent sector. Undeniably, New Wave Productions like Michael Boddy's *The Legend of King O'Malley* (1971) and Hibberd's *White With Wire Wheels* (1973) were scheduled alongside contemporary and classic British-American work. The company also briefly formed QTC-Tangent Productions, an offspring company that produced six plays between 1981 and 1983 in an unused city office building (www.ausstage.edu.au). Arguably, QTC's role as a state company meant it was not required to embrace such a trajectory, but Tangent allowed it to visibly experiment with some of the emerging ideas of the time while preserving QTC's main-house role. This was, however, a quiet endeavour: its success is uncertain and little is written about this brief era in the company's history (www.ausstage.edu.au; Parsons and Chance 1997: 236). It certainly was not a bold attempt to follow the trend of the New Wave that had made its mark on the state theatre companies in the southern states. The relationship between government and the arts — and its artists — was particularly vulnerable in the 'police state' (Comans 2006: 115). Edwards and QTC were not about to rock the boat, particularly when other companies were keen to do so.

Despite these brief moments in the company's artistic evolution, Mellor sees his role at QTC (1988–93) as presenting similar struggles to his terms at Old Tote, NIDA and Nimrod. He stated (2011), 'My entire life in the theatre has been fighting that British colonial view'. This was, not surprisingly, more pronounced at QTC, where one Anglo directorship had reigned for two decades. Like its compatriot state organisations, the company was originally titled according to its state or city as 'Queensland Theatre Company'. While Queensland's alternative artistic cultures were thriving, Edwards successfully lobbied for the company to be renamed Royal Queensland Theatre Company in 1984. It is the only time the 'royal charter' was bestowed upon an Australian theatre company (Parsons and Chance 1997: 236). Indeed, it was probably the only time one was sought. Nevertheless, the new title was firmly written into state legislation. Not surprisingly, Mellor's first task was to instigate its removal, but 'no one actually knew how to [legally] remove it' (Mellor 2011). In lieu of accessing more legitimate pathways, he simply deleted the 'Royal'

from company letterhead and signage. This defiant act asserted his arrival and, by renewing the identity of the company, confirmed that the Anglo era of artistic leadership was over. Well after the movement had transformed national theatre culture, a member of the New Wave generation led the company. Of course, this was only a symbolic gesture: the company's position as a state institution to uphold values of professionalism and artistic excellence was immovable.

Despite Edwards' royal aspirations, the company was perplexingly sidelined from much of the state government's cultural infrastructure planning. The company was not given residence in the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), which opened in 1985, although it provided the inaugural performance (*Cheapside* by British-Australian playwright David Allen) in its small Cremorne theatre (www.ausstage.edu.au). This new venue promised opportunities for QTC, but it exerted dual threats to the company's position in the local theatre scene. QPAC's larger theatres were frequently booked by commercial producers: their large-scale, popular productions whittled away much of QTC's audience. Mellor arrived to a company with a significantly reduced subscriber base (Parsons and Chance 1997: 236). Much later, Mellor moved the company from a cramped, sponsored city office into the landmark complex, but only through a space made available following the failure of one of its riverfront restaurants. It took many more years for QTC to acquire its own (albeit temporary) rehearsal venue and access to the better (but not ideal) Playhouse theatre in QPAC under Robyn Nevin's direction in 1998. In its thirty-third year as the state's flagship theatre company, it finally moved into a purpose-built office, rehearsal and performance space in 2002.

Buildings and infrastructure constituted just one of Mellor's concerns. More important was his agenda to find the local theatrical voices and build the value of the company in a cultural landscape dominated by Expo '88's free events and QPAC's commercial successes. He was determined that his experience at Nimrod would leave a useful legacy for his first independent leadership of a company. The issue of the 'Australian play' still dogged him. At Nimrod, he witnessed how little financial and dramaturgical investment in new playwrights — the next generation of theatre writers — brought the New Wave to an end. At QTC, he felt obligated to program works to appease (and retain) the typically conservative subscriber base, but was also restricted by the limited range and quantity of Australian plays available for mainstream programming. He concluded that the shortage of quality new plays was the result of the New Wave's neglect. What could be done? This predicament was crucial in informing his episode of artistic direction at QTC, leading him to believe that investing in new writing and writers was imperative for a future productive, quality Australian theatre culture.

In the state theatre company network, Williamson's work held patently different values from those it had represented in the later years of the New Wave. In the late 1980s, Williamson's plays embodied the synthesis of the New Wave and the state theatre company network in economic rationalist times: he was an Australian, and his work was new, contemporary, topical to its audiences and practically guaranteed to perform well at the box office (Varney 2011: 19–22). But in 1988, did Williamson's style still represent the Australian voice and the Australian play? For Mellor, this was largely a theoretical dilemma. Notwithstanding his long-held agenda to promote new theatrical voices, Mellor respected Williamson and saw opportunities for the company through his success. He successfully programmed

several of his plays during his five-year term at QTC, resulting in Williamson offering him two new plays to premiere, temporarily displacing STC's dominance of the state theatre company repertoire (Mellor 2011; Parsons and Chance 1997: 236).

Audiences knew Williamson's style, and they purchased tickets to his catalogue of work as well as his new, untried productions. The state theatre companies typically programmed their annual seasons along an established formula: a Williamson, a classic, a Shakespeare, a new work and a play with local resonance (Mellor 2011). This method of comfortable programming complied with audience expectations of a state theatre company, but to critics longing for companies to be more adventurous, it was seen 'as a way of meeting (not challenging) audience perspective' (Meyrick 2014b: 72). While conservative and predictable, for Mellor this programming method provided a boost to the company's bottom line, allowing it to expand and contribute to other areas of its artistic objectives. But, as he witnessed at Nimrod, this placed an extraordinary investment in one person's artistry while also, more importantly, hampering the development of new talent and the evolution of new forms of playwriting. In conjunction to harnessing Williamson's popularity, Mellor continued the process of future-proofing Australian drama.

Mellor implemented a long-term strategy to renew the identity of the 'Australian play'. He anticipated that this plan would also generate new work for the company. In his first years, he commissioned younger emerging writers, including Elaine Acworth and novelist Andrew McGahan, to write full-length plays and introduced a major playwriting award. This award was for Queensland-based emerging playwrights, initially supported by QTC and named in recognition of George Landen Dann. Dann was a Brisbane playwright who had been prolific between the 1920s and 1970s, very popular with local amateur theatrical societies. He was a radical, writing of Indigenous characters and inter-racial relationships long before they were socially and politically accepted (Parsons and Chance 1997: 80). More than providing a sentimental link to the state's literary past, naming this award in his honour lay down a challenge for writers of the state to expand their boundaries. Following this agenda, winners of the award were typically young, their plays pushing the frontier of Australian playwriting. Mellor's vision was realised fairly quickly: several winning plays were programmed for main-stage seasons at QTC, while two were considered too risky for the state theatre company and were programmed later by the edgier La Boite. Recipients of the award were celebrated. The first winner, nineteen-year-old Daynan Brazil, was subsequently short-listed for *Cleo* magazine's 'Bachelor of the Year', while Ackworth was commissioned by STC: *Solitary Animals* premiered there in 1996. Moreover, these writers launched from their success at QTC to collaborate with other local theatre artists, forming independent theatre companies that further contributed new work and new talent to the sector. McGahan continued to produce novels, film scripts and plays, writing *Bait* for the independent Renegade Theatre in 1995. He later won the Miles Franklin award in 2004 for *The White Earth*; its stage adaptation was written and directed by his Renegade collaborator, Shaun Charles, at La Boite in 2009. It was a small cluster of work but it represented a significant push towards a local writer-led movement. The Landen Dann award continued for fifteen years, varying slightly every few years before being modified and renamed as the somewhat less inspirational Queensland Premier's Drama Award,

reflecting the state government's sponsorship of and quest for locally themed work.

Through these programs, Mellor's contribution to local and national playwriting was significant. He considered the role of state theatre company director as one that was in service to the art form, saying 'I think it is very dangerous if you just try to go in and do your thing. You have to look at your community. You have to look at the artistic policy and history of the company' (Mellor 2011). He considers his other successes also in terms of building opportunities for future generations of theatre artists. He established Brolgas, a producing youth theatre company (1989–92), and provided more opportunities for local artists across the spectrum of roles required to produce theatre. Some of these initiatives resulted in Mellor mentoring several directors, naming Wesley Enoch and David Berthold as significant talents from this time. This legacy continues in leadership roles within the sector: Enoch commences as the Director of Sydney Festival in late 2015 after five years as the first Indigenous artistic director of a state theatre company, leading QTC between 2010 and 2015; Berthold is currently the artistic director of the Brisbane Festival, and was previously artistic director of La Boite between 2008 and 2014, where he was popularly credited with reinvigorating the alternative energy of the company. These milestones, however, were set against the predictability of programming and running a state theatre company.

For Mellor, eager to expand his artistic contribution, artistic leadership at QTC was somewhat marred by compromise (2011). The responsibility of meeting box office targets had to be prioritised. While he had successes in this area, the outcomes were pleasing but not inspiring. Although not inherently a risk-taker, after five years the limitations of the role confined his personal, but undoubtedly New Wave, artistic agenda. On his resignation, QTC was in good financial condition and artistic shape (Milne 2004: 247). Mellor's five-year term was effective in transitioning the company from a dated Anglo aesthetic and position, and fostering a new generation of theatre-makers and audiences. However, his stay was perhaps too short to ensure that more of his initiatives became embedded into the local theatrical landscape. He left QTC to accept the position of Artistic Director at Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne where, for eleven years, he continued in his quest to advance the Australian play.

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