

A champion for expression

A Brisbane choreographer is realising her dream and contributing to the future of Australian dance writes Chris Herden

Natalie Weir is giving back. "I had so many opportunities as a young woman and I just feel that this is something I need to do," says the choreographer who has thrilled audiences worldwide.

With presentations that boldly explore every facet of modern dance, she has won national and international acclaim for her highly physical dance works that demonstrate her classical ballet sensibility and deep understanding of the expressive capabilities of the human body. The performances are organic, unrestrained and always reveal a touching insight into human nature.

"I feel I really need to be a champion for the art of contemporary dance and I take that very seriously," she says.

"That's why I do programs like *SOLO Festival of Dance* which this year gave a glimpse of the dance happening here in Brisbane and in Queensland."

Weir has created more than 150 works for Australian and overseas dance companies (including the American Ballet Theatre) and under her leadership the Expressions Dance Company has achieved significant recognition through national awards.

Showcasing the work of Australia's most exciting emerging choreographers is something close to Weir's heart. She devised a series of training platforms aimed at

seeking out and nurturing Australia's finest dance-makers.

"We're open and generous and we see the bigger picture - there's no room for rivalry with other companies. Producing good dance is good for the whole art form," Weir says.

"When I see my dancers performing someone's work and audiences loving it, then it's very satisfying to think I'm playing a role in giving someone a platform for their work to be seen."

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Since 2009 Weir has been artistic director of Expressions Dance Company, the same dance collective which gave Weir her first choreographic commission when she was a newly arrived 18-year-old ballet-lover from Townsville.

"Choreography was part of the course I was doing at Kelvin Grove College [QUT] and it completely ignited a different flame in me. I was hooked and have pursued it with tunnel vision ever since."

In 2010 Weir's first signature work as artistic director, *Where the Heart Is*, won



Natalie Weir with Expressions Dance Company members



Best Choreography and Best Ballet or Dance Work at the 2011 Helpmann Awards.

"That was a real test of the company's new direction and if it was to have a viable future. It was beautifully danced and well received and that was the moment I realised that yeah, this is going to work, I can do these works here and they can be successful."

Next up for the company is Weir's interpretation of Hans Christian Andersen's gothic tale of delusion *The Red Shoes*, in which a young woman's obsession with dance leads to her ultimate demise.

"Set in the 1940s, it's an edgy, psychological piece with lush music. I can relate to the crazy woman at the end - as I try to juggle work and my private life. I can be a bit nutty by the end of the day too."



Photography by Fiona Cullen



Natalie Weir's next production



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