Case Study
Djuki Mala – The Chooky Dancers

What: Each year, the Empire Theatres hosts a vast number of events and shows to entertain, inform and provide unique experiences to the community of the wider Toowoomba Region. On occasion, there is an opportunity to engage the community beyond the stage as was the case with the recent touring show Djuki Mala also known as The Chooky Dancers.

Toowoomba rarely hosts such high quality indigenous performance art that is also so accessible in form and format. The decision to present this show was part of a strategy to engage indigenous audiences and promote diversity in content and attendance at the Theatre. To help to achieve this, the Empire Theatre presented an afternoon of free pre-show events involving and celebrating the talent and culture of the local community.

On the Empire Church Lawn, from 4.30pm audiences were entertained by William Haupt and the Kooma-Didgeri Aboriginal Dancers from Oakey, the Kiuya Dance Troupe from Toowoomba and local music act Judy and Gerard Hobson. South Toowoomba Apex Club hosted a BBQ to raise money for the Empire Theatres Foundation. As the sun set, adults and children alike enjoyed the entertainment before the main event.

In the auditorium on stage prior to the show, local elder Darby McCarthy delivered the welcome to country with the assistance of William Haupt and Kooma-Didgeri.

The result was an event that both attracted and connected with the community for which it was programmed.

When: Sunday 16 March 2014
Where: Empire Theatre Church Lawn and Empire Theatre Auditorium, Toowoomba

Partners, Contributors and Sponsors:

South Toowoomba Apex Club

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Links:

www.empiretheatre.com.au
www.thechookydancers.com
Outcomes:
The project successfully attracted approximately 200 people to the preshow events on the lawn. The atmosphere and response to the afternoon was great with many families and children coming along to enjoy the entertainment. The BBQ raised $150 for the Empire Theatres Foundation which goes directly to supporting the artistic development of regional young people.

This enthusiasm carried over to the show with audience numbers exceeding expectations with over 827 people in attendance. 202 of these were under 25 years old and groups from Centacare (25) and Toowoomba Youth Service (50) were given the opportunity to attend through the Toowoomba Regional Council’s Community Access Fund.

Three local groups were given the opportunity to showcase their talent and share their culture with the community and Kooma-Didgeri was given the opportunity to meet with the Chooky Dancers backstage.

Overall this project successfully engaged approximately 1000 people in cultural celebration.

Learnings and reflections:
There is an audience in this region for indigenous culture events and product however engagement of the community needs to happen on a deeper level then the traditional audience/patron dynamic.

Involving local, accessible and affordable ways of enhancing the main stage events will be the key to further engagement of this sector along with ongoing consultation with key members of the community.

The Empire Theatre will continue to seek out events that appeal to a wide cross section of the community thereby fulfilling its goals to provide equitable community access that maximises the use of venues and provides culturally diverse activities that reflect the needs and wants of the community.

This project directly correlates with three objectives in the Empire Theatres Projects Company Business Plan.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim One</th>
<th>To be accessible and engaging to broad sectors of the community.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Objective 1.1</td>
<td>Create and facilitate programs and projects that are mindful of the diversity and richness of all regional Australians inclusive of all ethnic and cultural origins and demographic and socio-economic circumstances.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Aim Three</th>
<th>To empower and enrich the cultural capacity of south central Queensland arts practitioners.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Objective 3.1</td>
<td>Increasing engagement in creative projects throughout our community.</td>
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<td>Objective 3.3</td>
<td>To develop and nurture a community of artists and arts workers in and around the Toowoomba region.</td>
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This project also correlates with Community outcomes 1.1, 1.2 and 1.5 in the TRC 2009-2014 Corporate Plan.