Case Study
Project Puccini

What:
Opera Queensland, in partnership with eight regional Queensland venues, embarked on an ambitious journey to involve hundreds of community members in their latest touring production of La Bohème. Project Puccini gave 48 people from each community it visited the opportunity to learn a section of La Bohème and perform, in full operatic voice, on stage with the professionals. Each region employed a local Chorus Master to rehearse the local choir of men, women and children who were fully supported by the Opera Queensland creative and producing team. Over 9 weeks the chorus learnt to sing, in Italian, and rehearsed the blocking required to appear on stage alongside the professional opera ensemble in August 2014.

In Toowoomba, acclaimed conductor Harley Mead and pianist Tonia Paroz were engaged to take the reigns locally. These positions were funded by the Regional Arts Development Fund, A Queensland Government and Toowoomba Regional Council partnership to support local arts and culture. The position included professional development opportunities for Harley Mead through workshop training for the project through Opera Queensland’s Open Stage.

When: Friday 15 August 2014
Where: Empire Theatre Toowoomba

Partners, Contributors and Sponsors:

Supported by the Regional Arts Development Fund.

Contact further information:
Empire Theatre Projects
Ph: 4698 9925
Email: jeanette@empiretheatre.com.au

Links:
www.empiretheatre.com.au
Outcomes:

As a result of the process, 48 local men, women and children performed on the Empire Theatre stage alongside professional opera singers in a professional production. Each chorus member gained significant experience and knowledge of operatic performance and what it is like to perform in a different language.

The local community were able to witness first-hand the skill and potential of the local performers and be proud of the wealth of talent present in the region. It gave young singers hoping to pursue a career in the performing arts invaluable experience to assist them on their path and allowed a major performing arts company the opportunity to make a tangible connection to the communities they visited.

Learnings and reflections:

As an audience development strategy this project did not significantly increase audience engagement. La Bohème sold on par with the highest selling opera the Empire Theatre has ever presented. This was however a very successful community development project as it gave many members of the community an experience they would not have been able to get otherwise.

It was a very worthwhile project and an excellent way to demonstrate the value of real regional engagement by the major performing arts companies in the regions.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim One</th>
<th>To be accessible and engaging to broad sectors of the community.</th>
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<tbody>
<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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<td>Aim Two</td>
<td>To be vital to the cultural and social health of the wider Toowoomba and south central Queensland region.</td>
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<td>Objective 2.2</td>
<td>To provide arts services locally including training and education resources delivery</td>
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<td>Objective 2.3</td>
<td>To address the issues of remoteness and accessibility to the arts in regional Australia</td>
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<td>Aim Three</td>
<td>To empower and enrich the cultural capacity of south central Queensland arts practitioners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objective 3.1</td>
<td>Increasing engagement in creative projects throughout our community</td>
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<tr>
<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.