



NSW School Spectacular 2008

Celebrating twenty-five years of epic entertainment that has launched many performing careers

A common practice in the entertainment industry is to make promises you can't possibly keep. Every new school holiday blockbuster, every eardrum-bursting concert, every pyrotechnic extravaganza, is touted as being the biggest and the best ever. So what are we to make of the School Spectacular?

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the School Spectacular has had a quarter of a decade to disappoint its audience, but so far it has done nothing but delight and surprise and has only gotten – yes, let's say it – bigger and better.

24 years of dedication

"Well, it's grown in numbers, I'll say that much," says Dianne Duff, who donned the Spectacular producer's hat for the last time in 2007, bowing out on a high note when she retired as manager of the Arts Events team at the NSW Department of Education and Training's (DET) Arts Unit.

Over her 24-year involvement Dianne witnessed, and contributed to, the Spectacular's growth from a 1600-strong student production drawing its talent exclusively from the cities, to a 3500 student behemoth backed by an 80-piece symphony orchestra, 1200-voice choir, a five-piece pro-rhythm band and students from all over metropolitan and regional NSW.

"Initially the students came from just from the city. Now the Spectacular embraces students from all the regions of NSW, including disabled and indigenous students," Dianne says.

She has worn many hats for the School Spectacular. Since first getting involved in 1984 as a Kareela Public School teacher auditioning her school choir, she has been a tunnel manager, finale choreographer, choir teacher, moving choir director and, finally, producer.

After retiring last year from the DET Arts



Unit, Dianne has been working to discover what former participants of the Spectacular have made of themselves and their spectacular experience through a "Where are you now?" project.

"Many people who were in the first Spectaculars are now in the forties and many of those now have children who are in the Spectacular themselves," Dianne says.

First outing for many stars

"One man from Orange I've been speaking to is now a muso living in London and he told me that the Spectacular was the best thing he ever did in school.

"Many former students have told me that performing in the School Spectacular gave them the confidence to go do other things in life."

Not surprising, the School Spectacular gave acts like Human Nature, Australian Idol's Paulini, Emma Pask and the McClymont Sisters the confidence to move forward and achieve success in the music industry.

It doesn't hurt either when students and the 50 or so feature artists in the Spectacular get to work with some of the top talent in Australia's entertainment and creative industries. Some of the luminaries involved include director Mary Lopez, who was named by Sydney Magazine as one of Sydney's 100 most influential people; Laurel Barannikov, whose costumes make the event so spectacular despite her suffering from MS and Australian Idol musical director, John Foreman, who first appeared in the spectacular in 1987 as a Year 7 Kotara High School student.



Like a crystal ball, the School Spectacular can be frightfully accurate in predicting Australia's future creative talent. Many of the students participating in the spectacular already possess superstar talent and have taken their first steps on their creative journeys.

Bruce Carr, a feature artist in this year's Spectacular, performed at the 2007 APEC Australia Gala Cultural Performance in front of 21 world leaders at the Sydney Opera House, which is a long way from his regional NSW home in Wellington.

Emerging talents

A little closer to the Sydney home of the School Spectacular but just as impressive, is Year 9 Campbelltown Performing Arts High School student, Angel Tupai, whose performance as a soloist in last year's Opera House Choral Concerts gave a preview of a promising singing career and the special treat in store for School Spectacular audiences this year.

While students like Bruce and Angel take centre stage, the School Spectacular is also the result of endless hours put in by dedicated teachers, who not only coordinate their individual school's act, but carry and sow the creative seed that the Spectacular imparts.

"The Spectacular not only benefits students but also the teachers who take part and take back the skills and experiences they receive back into the classroom," Dianne says.

This is why the School Spectacular is not only a boon for kids who want to reach for the stars (and perhaps become one themselves), but also for every one of the more than 250 schools who participate in the event.

According to Dianne, it is the "experience" which is the real strength of the Spectacular. It has the ability to keep on contributing to schools and students long after the curtain close.

Tickets are on sale now for performances on 28th and 29th November. Find out more at www.schoolspectacular.com.au.



Opera, music theatre, ballet, tap, jazz, solo singers, choral, classical instrument, country and western, clowns, little kids, budding rock stars and opera singers... it's all there in the School Spectacular