

Theatre is a great place to learn

Primary and secondary students develop critical thinking and empathy through theatre performance, says WA's State theatre company which has a stellar line-up for 2018.

In the digital world it's easy to grab any learning tool or entertainment form you want – but there's nothing like going to the theatre.

Black Swan State Theatre Company, housed at the State Theatre Centre of WA in Northbridge, prides itself on extending WA schoolchildren's education through productions it promises are "adventurous, ambitious and ridiculously entertaining – as well as asking some big questions".

"We hope the experience at the theatre encourages students' empathy and hones their critical thinking, and we guarantee they'll have a great time," says artistic director Clare Watson.

Through theatre, students can explore the nature of humanity and our role in society, while engaging in the classics and new stories and encountering different voices.

Black Swan's program for season 2018 includes engaging local stories and productions that link with the curriculum. Teachers are invited



Black Swan State Theatre Company artistic director Clare Watson.

to see the productions for free when escorting student groups of 10 or more, plus receive a complimentary education resource kit which can be used to contribute to classroom activities.

School matinee performances of Black Swan's three biggest plays of the year – *Skylab*, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and *Assassins* at the Heath Ledger Theatre - will be held during school hours in terms 2, 3 and 4 and link with the curriculum, including ATAR courses such as Drama, Design, English, Modern History, Literature, Music, Politics and Law.

What's in store for in 2018

THE LIGHTHOUSE GIRL

A regional tour of the home-grown Albany story of a lighthouse keeper's daughter is in the planning stages for 2018 after a sell-out season in April last year.

Based on the novels *Light Horse Boy* and *Lighthouse Girl* by Dianne Wolfers, the play is destined to feature as the centrepiece for the company's Anzac Day centenary commemorations and is suitable for upper primary and secondary students.



SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEETH DOLL

Set in 1950s working class Melbourne, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* – one of the most significant plays in Australian theatre history – revolves around two mates' return to the city to 'live it up' during 'lay off' season. With the fly-in, fly-out culture being a normal part of life for many Australian families, the play is deemed more relevant to audiences than ever before.



SCHOOL MATINEE PERFORMANCE: Term 2: Friday, May 11, 11:30am

FREE PANEL DISCUSSION AND Q&A SESSION: "Talking FIFO and DIDO (drive-in, drive-out)", Thursday May 17, 6pm

ASSASSINS

The Tony Award-winning musical that questions some of the flaws and consequences of trying to live the American dream is suitable only for Year 12 students due to its adult themes. The play, with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim (*Sweeney Todd* and *Into the Woods*) and based on the book by John Weidman, follows nine misfits enticed to kill an American president. The New York Times says *Assassins* "begins with an invitation to 'C'mon and shoot a president' and then goes considerably further".



SCHOOL MATINEE PERFORMANCE: Term 2: Wednesday, June 27, 11:30am

FREE PANEL DISCUSSION AND Q&A SESSION: "Music as medicine", June 28, 6pm

SKYLAB

It's an event etched in our history. In the early hours of July 12, 1979, the US space station *Skylab* - launched by NASA in 1973 - crashed on WA's south east coast, scattering debris across the Nullarbor and the eastern Goldfields and causing a worldwide sensation.



The historical event forms the basis for the world premiere production presented by Black Swan in collaboration with Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company.

Skylab follows the characters Nev, Jem and their kids who have no idea that their world is about to change when reality shifts, conspiracy theories abound and a pink horse appears out of nowhere. The town's white fellas start behaving strangely too, with apologies for taking black fellas' land and handing over all money owed.

Written by Melodie Reynolds-Diarra and directed by Kyle J Morrison, it is suitable for ages 12+ (some mild language and adult themes) and will run from August 18 to September 2.

SCHOOL MATINEE PERFORMANCE: Term 3: Thursday, August 23 at 11:30am

FREE PANEL DISCUSSION AND Q&A SESSION: Hear first-hand accounts of *Skylab* ground zero and check out a pop-up *Skylab* museum, Thursday, August 30, 6pm

Dramatic role reversal puts pupils in charge

Black Swan State Theatre Company is turning the tables and putting pupils in charge of adults in its new "FITTER. FASTER. BETTER." incursion, which is part live theatre, part game, part disco and part workout.

A NEW educational concept coming to WA schools in 2018 challenges the contemporary world of fitness by teaching children to run boot camps for adults.

Using song, dance, craft, drama and physical education skills, students instruct adults to be FITTER. FASTER. BETTER. The concept orchestrated by Black Swan State Theatre Company empowers children and let adults experience what it feels like to be a kid again.

The school incursion, available in regional and metropolitan primary schools, is part live theatre, part disco and part workout, run over five days.

The first component is four half-day workshops run by two Black Swan teaching artists who instruct up to 30 students from Years 3 or 4 to create craft activities, drama and dance choreography and use outdoor school spaces in new ways. The second component is two 45-minute boot camps led by the students for adults who have registered. Each pupil is matched one-on-one with a volunteer parent or adult they don't know, so the pair can establish a bond and make a new friend.

Originally devised by Black Swan's artistic director Clare Watson for St Martins Youth Arts Centre in Melbourne, FITTER. FASTER. BETTER. is where ideas about the body in motion are refocused through the eyes of a child. The pupils are given positions of leadership and encouraged to collaborate and contribute to the process of learning while the adults just need to bring runners, a water bottle, clothes to move and groove in and plenty of enthusiasm.

"For the kids who love drama we sneak in sport and for the kids who love sport we sneak in the arts, so everyone's happy," Ms Watson explains.

"It's about shifting the hierarchy, making a new friend and it reminds parents that by participating with the children they can gain fitness. There are other ways of doing things rather than sitting at the park with your iPhone. Kids are encouraged to



Westminster Primary School student Kiah Marie Vinyette and undergraduate teacher Alisha Bates race each other in the school playground as part of Black Swan Theatre Company's FITTER. FASTER. BETTER incursion. Picture: Rebecca Mansell.

invent things and in turn encourage adults to use their imagination."

Highlights of the boot camp include adults following choreographed dance routines to old-school hits (Nutbush City Limits) and current chart-toppers (Uptown Funk) before youngsters lead them to the playground to grapple with swings and climbing frames.

"Adults no longer 'walk around a puddle while the kid jumps in'. They jump into it together," Ms Watson says.

For more information and bookings, visit www.bsstc.com.au/education/fitter-faster-better/

Professional learning workshops and tips for students

VOICE COACHING

Artists from Black Swan work with teachers to increase knowledge, strength and durability of their most important tool - their voice. The company's Voice Care and Control workshops, held during staff development days for up to 25 participants, focus on breath control, resonance and vocal projection to enable teachers to sustain their voice and manage vocal health. Bookings and pricing: bsstc.com.au/education/workshops

EXAM WORKSHOPS

Teaching artists also work with student groups to unpack curriculum elements in a fun way that helps prepare them for exams. Workshops can be held at school or at the State Theatre Centre of WA, with a choice of performance, design or writing elements of the arts.



A school group on set at the Heath Ledger Theatre.

BACKSTAGE TOURS

Students and teachers can access all areas and tour the State Theatre Centre of WA to see the performance spaces, rehearsal rooms and backstage areas for free, with a minimum four weeks' notice.

FIND OUT MORE

Register your interest and stay up to date with season offerings by emailing Alena Tompkins, education and community access manager, at alena@bsstc.com.au. Further information about group subscriptions, pre-and-post show talks and theatre etiquette can be found at www.bsstc.com.au/education



Black Swan teaching artist Libby Klysz with Geraldton Senior College students.

"Black Swan creates theatre that promises to be adventurous, ambitious and entertaining. Through theatre we explore the nature of humanity and our role in society. We promote agency through art, building knowledge and empowering the imagination. Let us help you spark a conversation with your students in your classroom and at the theatre."

- Clare Watson, Artistic Director



Luke Hewitt, Caitlin Beresford-Ord, Geoff Kelson in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (2016). Image by Philip Gostelow

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