

Intro IRIS

It's rare to see children as experts creating high quality artistic experiences. That rarity makes these works unique and potentially confronting. But why is it so rare, and what about it is confronting?

I'm Iris and I'm one of the cross age ensembles members of the House.

Our ensemble provides the opportunity for girls to refine their skills and think critically about the art they create.

We are cultural citizens.

We are also young people.

These two labels are not mutually exclusive, and in fact the overlap is the catalyst for interesting, provocative work.

(over to Sylvie)

SYLVIE:

I started to think about what I wanted to say about to you today - about how of course we are cultural citizen and how that is important. I can use fancy words and make it sound smart, but I have been given one minute, so lets keep it simple. We are cultural citizens, just by existing. We are active cultural citizens by participating, BUT we can be advocates of change and power in this culture by creating.

I used to compare myself to the other girls in our ensemble and think my voice wasn't good enough, or my songs were not as clever or worthy of time. But over time I learnt the power in just showing up and sharing. This meant I got better. The first song I wrote was not brilliant, neither was the second or the 10th. But lately I have been writing songs other girls want to sing, and audiences that I don't know, sit still to listen my music. My skills have grown, grown so much I can now share my skills with anyone of any age.

I am a young person, but I am not a 'child' of the arts of culture. The dictionary defines a child 'as a person who has little or no experience in a particular area' and that is not me. I have been given platforms and sort my own to participate in. I have had the experience of feeling completely out of my depth, but still showed up. I have sung with everything I had, even when it terrified me. I am standing here today aware that you all already converts and do not challenge my right to a voice based on age. But this isn't the norm, I wonder what could really happen if across all levels of our society we were to value the energy and passion of young people, not as potential adults but as valued cultural creators now.

GRACE:

I contribute as a cultural citizen. Two weeks ago, I was able to go to Broken Hill as an artist with the House.

I have learnt how to write my own songs through projects like Toy Choir and Tender Young Creatures and I have mastered these skills. Mastered them enough anyway to now be able to share them.

When I was in Broken Hill, I helped to lead the AKIN workshop, which sees girls my age come together to songwriter. This means that I get to meet and spend the day with girls aged 10-18. I get to teach song structure and basic chord progression. Then together we share stories and ideas and turn these ideas into songs.

As young artists we always want to know WHATS NEXT. We are constantly curious and want to create. So whilst we were in Broken Hill we interviewed girls and lots of women to find out what it was like living their lives. Within minutes of meeting these people, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in their world and learn about the land on which they lived.

These cross-generational experiences provide me a unique cultural learning window as a person. As an artist I see it is my job to share and extend this to others.

As a cultural citizen these are amazing experiences. They give me a chance to see outside my little bubble and meet people with a different approaches to life through real people and stories. I can now talk about what it means to be a young person in Australia today. Access and Opportunity to experiences outside our own worlds are rare for those of us defined as a child, but they are integral to the development of all people as cultural citizens.

IRIS

As I said, I'm a cultural citizen right now. Youth theatre should not be training us for thought and action in the future, it should be training us for now.

Part of that training is the ability to think critically and reflectively about your own work and your place in the conversation.

The process at the House, in particular the process of Tender Young Creatures, is challenging and rewarding.

To sit in a room filled with girls, and to have each idea judged on its merits, rather than where it came from, is an unusual experience. Sitting in that room with these girls, surrounded by drive and a passion for creating is a process that may only be achievable in the youth theatre.

Every girl in that room cared about the work as much as me. The ensemble was never an after school activity, although I believe they have a valuable place in youth arts. It was a collaborative process that pushed me to think critically about my role as an artist and what I wanted to say. We had to articulate ideas- why am I saying this? Why in this way? Why now?

This process is an empowering and challenging one, and one young people must be allowed to undertake. They must be allowed to articulate their ideas, and be pushed to think critically on the implications of those ideas. To shy away from this would be to take the purpose out of art, and totally nullify young people's role in the public sphere.

EMILY

Over the last few years that I've worked with the house I've been given so many opportunities, but unlike many other things in life they weren't handed to me. That is something I believe is a big part of being a cultural citizen as a child. Through these opportunities I've expanded my knowledge and abilities as a performer and citizen. This has made me be able to hold a conversation with peers and adults and having their respect.

If I do a performance, I get real feedback from respected performers and it won't be sugar coated, this makes us want to push towards excellence and get the best result of a performance we can. As well as feedback and critiquing, the training we went through strengthened us as performers by giving us a chance to have power wherever we go and whatever we do. I just turned 13 and I feel as though I can contribute to the social sphere as a child. I was 10 when I first started to create my own work, and at 12 I ran a room with 20 girls in Berrigan showing them how to do it to. My artistic practice has given me this ability and I think that the arts has the ability to do this to any child, making us all participating social citizens.

THANK YOU.