

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

Thursday 28, 2019
EMBARGOED TO FRIDAY MARCH 29, 12am

Queensland Theatre's Sam Strong to take a final bow in November

Search launched for Artistic Director to lead the fastest growing theatre company in the country

After four incredibly successful years at the helm, Artistic Director Sam Strong will leave Queensland Theatre in November, after achieving artistic and ticketing records and transforming the company through a new identity and a new theatre. Queensland Theatre Chair Elizabeth Jameson said that after launching his fourth and final season in August – one which marks the 50th anniversary of the company – Strong will finish up in November.

Ms Jameson said after four years Sam had decided to relocate to Melbourne with his family, but would return to direct at least one show in 2020, and would remain forever a member of the Queensland Theatre family.

“Over the past four years Sam Strong as Artistic Director has led the company to unprecedented success - a new name, a new theatre, all-time high audiences, 20-year subscriber highs, an inaugural principal partnership with RACQ and we have celebrated our highest selling new Australian play ever (*Nearer the Gods*, which Sam directed). In addition, we have taken the work of Queensland artists around Australia and the world like never before,” she said.

“Sam signed on for three years as Artistic Director and we have had the privilege of his talent for four, we could not be more proud of what he has achieved with the company. We are very sorry to see him leave.”

“We can now announce we are looking for a new Artistic Director, someone to lead the fastest growing theatre company in the country, someone with dynamic vision and brilliant sense of stage story-telling; this is truly a remarkable opportunity.”

Arts Minister Leeanne Enoch said Sam Strong would leave a tremendous legacy at Queensland Theatre.

“Sam Strong has built on the strength of the company and led it through a period of successful growth and change, including overseeing the opening last year of the new Bille Brown Theatre, which delivered Brisbane’s first corner stage,” Minister Enoch said.

“Sam’s belief in the transformative power of theatre to tell stories saw the company present new productions including *My Name is Jimi* and *Nearer the Gods*, and partner with leading Queensland companies to tour *The Longest Minute* and *The Wider Earth*, which has been nominated for a 2019 Olivier Award in the UK.

“Sam will certainly be a hard act to follow but I am so pleased that he will return to Queensland next year as a guest director for this wonderful company,” she said.

Sam Strong said leading Queensland Theatre was and would remain a career highlight.

“I’m not going on to another company. Leadership for me at this point in my life means being more available to my family. I’m committed to supporting my wife Katherine Slattery who is taking up a position with Film Victoria. Katherine has always enabled my ambitions, and I’m looking forward to a period of supporting hers.”

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

“I’ve been privileged to experience Queensland Theatre shows from the 2000 seat Lyric Theatre in Sydney to a cultural centre on Thursday Island. I’ve been lucky enough to be part of the planning, demolition, renovation and opening of a new theatre and foyer. I’ve been blessed to sit in the very first audience for the world premiere of more than 10 new Australian stories, including ones by multiple First Nations playwrights and an Asian-Australian playwright and an Islamic-Australian playwright. I’ve been able to work with people who are as talented as they are lovely, and I’ve been grateful to create theatre for the uniquely generous Queensland audience.”

He said Queensland Theatre was truly a leader among theatre companies.

“Even more than the audience reach, I’m proud that we’ve achieved our vision of leading from Queensland. As well as having the fastest subscriber and audience growth of any company in Australia, we have honoured our commitment to gender parity of writers and directors for each of the three seasons I have programmed. Those three seasons have also included six works created by First Nations writers and/or directors. Finally, Queensland Theatre has become the national home of new stories. In 2019 we will stage more world premieres than any other state theatre company. Queensland arts and culture is genuinely in the middle of a renaissance and I’m proud to have been a part of it.”

“Queensland Theatre has been and will continue to be a dream job. Amanda Jolly is a wonderful Executive Director and I will miss our partnership, as well as Chair Elizabeth Jameson’s leadership. But November 2019 is the perfect time for me to hand the reins to someone else. I will be programming the 2020 50th anniversary season, including a work that I will direct. I’ve also still got six months, the stage production of *Storm Boy* with the Dead Puppet Society to direct, and a season to launch; so for now it’s back to work.”

The announcement comes as Queensland Theatre celebrates breaking even more box-office targets, first for *Death of a Salesman* which opened in February, and secondly for the world premiere season of Sue Smith’s *Hydra* which opened on March 14.

“Under Sam’s leadership and the support of the Board and every staff member, Queensland Theatre has more than achieved its goal of leading the national conversation. We look forward to making sure Sam’s final six months are as successful as ever, and to launching our search for the new Artistic Director of this extraordinary company,” said Ms Jameson.

For further information, imagery, interviews or more, please contact Kath Rose 0416 291 493 or email kath@kathrose.com