

Report on recent forum: David Diamond on 'Theatre for Living: why should communities speak?'

Presented in partnership with Borderlands and Xris Reardon's Taking Up Space Project, Friday June 17th, Horti Hall, Melbourne

Our recent forum addressed by internationally renowned theatre practitioner, David Diamond, was a sell-out success. More than 100 people including artists, community, disability and health workers, artworkers, academics and researchers, students, teachers and therapists heard David talk about his work at Headlines Theatre, Canada, to help living communities tell their stories. Headlines model of 'Theatre for Living' is based on Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed'. David described being strongly influenced by Boal's writings and then actually working with him, before realising that he needed to develop a style of theatre more appropriate for his own context in Canada.

David showed video excerpts of Headlines Theatre's 2004 Award Winning interactive theatre production 'Practicing Democracy' which pioneered the concept of Legislative Theatre in North America. Then audience members were invited to actually create some Forum Theatre- a stimulating and challenging experience.

Other speakers at the forum included social activist, Jacques Boulet, of Borderlands Co-operative in Melbourne, who set the scene for discussion with an analysis of Friere's work based on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and its links to Boal's work in Theater of the Oppressed. Freelance theatre Xris Reardon, who initiated and managed David's visit to Melbourne, also spoke of her passion for Theatre for Living and the significance of this work for communities.

Responses to the event were all favourable, with attendees overwhelmingly reporting that the event and the standard of speakers was *Excellent* or *Very Good*.

Comments included

David Diamond is fantastic; Stimulating and exhaustive (in a positive sense); It may sound strange but I was moved; Mind stretching, Very informative, Great diversity of presentations; WOW!

People commented that they learned about:

Ideas on how to change; The necessity of theatre; Valuable methods of working in /with community; Greater understanding of how Forum theatre works; Listening..... sharing..... respectdialogue; How Theatre for Living is practically working; Not to be patronising; Inspiration about possibilities; An incredible technique for learning about 'the other'; An example of using theatre as a means of creating community dialogue.

We encouraged the return of Evaluation forms with an offer of free memberships to the Cultural Development Network. These were subsequently offered to artists Jo Leishman and Emanuela Savini.

David's visit to Australia also included a five- day training workshop for theatre practitioners in Theatre for Living, and a six day workshop focussing on the social impact of body image issues sponsored by the Eating Disorder Foundation of Victoria. These workshops culminated in two well attended public performances at the Uniting Church Hall in Northcote. Performances were very lively with much audience response to David's invitation for people to intervene in the play to create better outcomes for characters.

We are pleased to have been able to present such an eminent international guest and gratefully thank Xris Reardon, David Diamond, Headlines Theatre and Jacques Boulet for their contributions to a very valuable event.

To find out more about David Diamond's work at Headlines, www.headlinestheatre.com