

Killing Kangaroos

Writers from New South Wales & South Wales have found common ground in an exciting exchange programme supported by Wales Arts International. Penny Simpson talks with Jeff Teare, the artistic director of Made In Wales, about drama down under...

The story behind the development of a new drama can take many twists and turns, even before hitting the page. In the case of Made In Wales' latest production *Killing Kangaroos*, an eclectic combination of e-mails, leading soap stars and a saxophone-playing dramatist have brought to fruition a piece of work developed across continents.

The starting point was a commission from Made in Wales for one of the country's leading young writers: Roger Williams.

"We had already staged his critically acclaimed drama *Gulp!* about twenty-somethings living in Cardiff's bedsit land," explains Jeff Teare.

"We were keen to produce a follow-up for the company and Roger suggested writing something that would explore the experiences of some of his relatives, who had emigrated to Australia in 1960. The New South Wales/South Wales Festival was in the pipeline and we felt there might be some mileage in the idea of sending Roger out to Australia to make contacts with theatre companies and to research his play."

The idea was developed with "e-pals" in Sydney, namely Jan Irvine, the drama officer for New South Wales. She put Roger in touch with the Sydney Theatre Company and the Australian National Playwrights Centre and an exchange visit was set up.

"What was particularly encouraging for Roger was the opportunity to see his new play showcased at the centre's annual conference. It was the first European play to be produced there and it went down very well indeed, " adds Jeff.

Killing Kangaroos is a quirky comedy that explodes cultural stereotypes through pitting a faded Australian soap star's dreams against the expectations of a trio of backpacking Welshmen. The company performing in the Welsh tour of the play, which followed on from the conference workshop version, included "genuine" Australian soap stars: Richard Norton (*Home and Away*) and Lucinda Cowden (*Neighbours*). A tour of New South Wales is being planned for next year.

The links don't stop there, however. The second phase of the exchange programme welcomes Australian playwright Christine Evans to the Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff. She will be writing a play during her residency in Wales, which is being hosted by Made In Wales.

"Her grandfather used to conduct a male voice choir and she is a saxophonist, so who knows where that might all lead," says Jeff.

"Whilst we were out at the conference, we also made contact with a Melbourne theatre company. The artistic director turned out to come from Pontypool, so we shall have something in common when that project gets off the ground."

Drama down under has had an enormous impact on the development of these individual writers, but its influence could also help transform the general attitude shown towards contemporary drama here in Wales, Jeff argues:

"What came through at the conference time and again was the tremendous commitment towards new Australian writing. There is no longer an interest in staging reruns of something

that was done in London five years ago, or whatever. The attitude is very much developing a cultural expression and one that extends to the country's diverse multicultural communities.

"Here in post-Assembly Wales, we hope this attitude can come to dominate here."