

Archive No. 120

Performing Older Women's Circus

Beginnings:

In December 1994 Jean Taylor called a meeting of women over forty years of age to discuss whether these womyn would be interested in a six-week summer project of learning circus skills, followed by two weeks of rehearsal and two shows. Around thirty enthusiastic women turned up and each woman had her own favourite skill she wanted to learn. Some were keen to be clowns or stilt walkers, others wanted to learn fire or balances, some wanted to learn trapeze. POW began workshops in late January and by International Women's Day (8 March) had a performance ready.

For several years POW was based at the Footscray Community Arts Centre, who also auspiced all their funding applications.

Aims of the Performing Older Women's Circus:

To challenge ageism and ageist assumptions.

To promote well-being and fitness for women over forty regardless of ethnicity, class, previous experience or physical abilities.

To provide a supportive environment for older women to learn new skills.

To uphold feminist principles.

To foster lesbian visibility.

To have fun and work safely.

Performance History: POW Circus Annual Shows:

Act Your Age performed at FCAC, Melbourne, 8 – 9 March 1995, directed by Jean Taylor.

Several gigs based on this show were performed by POW members at various events over the ensuing months, including at the Expo for Seniors at the Melbourne Town Hall in March and for Breast Cancer Day at the Royal Women's Hospital in October.

Still Revolting!!! at FCAC, 29 February, 1 – 2 and 6 – 7 March 1996, directed by Jean Taylor. Several gigs followed this show including on the steps of parliament house for the IWD rally on 8 March and for a booklaunch at Deakin Uni in April.

Every Witch Way at FCAC, 28 – 30 November, 1996, directed by Jean Taylor. POW was also hired to do a gig for the Midwives Conference at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in April 1997.

Unstopped Mouths at FCAC, 30 – 31 October and 1 November, 1997, directed by Jean Taylor

Over the Top With Tarot, at FCAC, 24 – 26 September 1998, directed by Nancy Armendarez, this show was dedicated to a founding member of POW, Maureen O'Connor, who died on opening night.

The Art of Falling is Never Landing at FCAC, 27 July – 5 August 2000, directed by Kim Baston, this show toured to community centres in Melbourne's western suburbs in August 2000 and opened Carers Week at the Melbourne Town Hall on 5 September 2000.

Power Moves at the PIT Theatre, 27 September – 7 October 2001, directed by Kim Baston.

The Maiden Aunt's Story at the North Melbourne Town Hall 25 July – 3 August, 2002, and again at the Cromwell Road Theatre, South Yarra, 9 – 12 October, 2002; this show toured to Sydney for the Gay Games at the Paddington Town Hall, NSW, 6 – 7 November, 2002; directed by Kim Baston.

Something Old Something New at the North Melbourne Town Hall, 11 – 20 September 2003 directed by Kim Baston.

This Skin at the North Melbourne Town Hall, 30 March - 8 April, 2006 directed by Vanessa Chapple.

From its inception, many dozens of women joined POW, participated in workshops and devised, wrote and performed in various gigs as well as POW's annual shows. POW Circus members held weekly physical training and music workshops throughout the year with qualified and skilled trainers in order to improve their skills and devise their shows. POW performed in a number of gigs as requested by different organisations to raise money and their profile in the community as well as toured smaller shows to country Victoria and one large show to Sydney for the Gay Games in 2002. POW various activities were funded by its membership who paid workshop fees as well as by several successful submissions for grants from government departments and benevolent institutions.