The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4882

Woodrow, Carol Joan

(1943 -)

Born	19430820, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Occupation	Actor, Director, Teacher, Writer

Summary

Carol Woodrow has pursued a wide-ranging career in theatre in Canberra for many years. In the 1970s through her work with Canberra Youth Theatre, she provided opportunities for young people to learn about drama through improvisation. At the Jigsaw Theatre Company, she worked with professional actors to develop and present work for schools. In the 1980s and 1990s she worked as a freelance director of avant-garde and community theatre with several ensemble companies, developing new scripts and nurturing new playwrights, and also directed plays for professional theatre companies.

Details

Born on 20 August 1943, Carol grew up in Melbourne in a family with great enthusiasm for the theatre. Her parents, Bill and Sarah Armstrong, founded the Children's Theatre Guild of Victoria (which became the Youth and Children's branch of the Melbourne Theatre Company). While still at school, Woodrow started acting professionally at age 13 on stage, radio and television, performing with, among others, Barry Humphries. She studied acting with Irene Mitchell at St Martin's Theatre for five years.

After moving to Canberra with her young family in 1962, she acted in plays with the Canberra Repertory Society and later, ran drama workshops for young people. Then in 1972, influenced by the ideas of British educator Dorothy Heathcote, she established the Canberra Youth Theatre to provide opportunities for young people to learn about drama through improvisation. She was also the founding director of the Jigsaw Company Theatre-in-Education in 1974 where she worked with professional actors to develop and present work for schools. She was artistic co-ordinator of the Youth Program for the National Festival *Australia '75* .

She founded the Fool's Gallery Theatre in 1979 to explore ensemble devised theatre with strong visual imagery, heightened theatrical poetic and ritual qualities, and challenging content. The company staged and toured some powerful feminist theatre such as *It Bleeds, It Sleeps* and *Standard Operating Procedure*, and ran for five years.

In 1984 Woodrow returned to text-based works as artistic director of Interact Theatre. The company staged some memorable productions in the ANU Arts Centre, including Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*. She also worked as director and dramaturg with Playworks (1986-88) and the Playwrights Conference (1985, 1993-96), developing new scripts and nurturing new playwrights. She ran courses in the ACT for the Australian National Playwrights' Centre, and was on the Board of the Centre for several years.

In 1989, Interact Theatre combined forces with Eureka! Theatre to form the Canberra Theatre Company, with Woodrow as director. This attempt to establish a mainstream, full-time professional theatre company in Canberra was assisted by funding from the ACT Arts Development Board, and a number of productions were staged including Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but following the withdrawal of corporate sponsorship, it wound up in 1991.

Woodrow was also a freelance director for many other companies. John Bell, who had admired her work for many years, invited her to direct *The Merchant of Venice*, the inaugural production by Bell Shakespeare, which was staged in a circus tent near the Canberra Aquarium in 1991. She also directed for the Nimrod Theatre, the Sydney Theatre Company, the Belvoir Street Theatre, the Griffin Theatre, and the Troupe Theatre.

In Canberra in the 1990s she directed a series of classics for Canberra Repertory, including Ibsen's *The Doll's House* and Rattigan's *The Winslow Boy*, as well as staging new Australian works, with her company Wildwood, at the Street Theatre. She continues to direct, as part of the 'Season at the Street', developing new repertoire in a similar way to her earlier work with playwrights.

On Australia Day 2012 Carol Woodrow was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for service to the performing arts, to youth theatre as an artistic director, and to the development of women playwrights in Australia. At the time, she said that working with an ensemble of actors is 'the most creative way to achieve the best work because the team members become so nuanced with each other' and that 'experiential drama, through play for children, is the best tool to teach anything by getting them involved imaginatively'.

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Resource Section
Member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia,
http://www.gg.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/honours/ad/ad2012/Media%20Notes%20AM%20(M-Z)%20(final).pdf

Newspaper Article
A lifetime career in theatre, O'Brien, Philip, 2012,
http://www.canberratimes.com.au/entertainment/a-lifetime-in-theatre-20120303-1u932.html

Site Exhibition
From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

Archival resources

National Library of Australia
[Biographical cuttings on Carol Woodrow, theatre producer, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Author Details
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