

SAMARA CUNNINGHAM

When dancer and community artist Samara Cunningham was in her late teens, she discovered a world of dance 'outside the lines' of performance theatres and ballet shoes.

Born and raised in Tasmania, Samara recalls a teacher converting an old woolshed in Launceston's industrial estate into a repurposed "cutting edge" performance space.

"I thought: dance can be this!" the 44-year-old says from her home in Fish Creek.

In her early 20s, Samara received a BA in Performing Arts from the Western Australian Academy of Arts in contemporary dance. But she didn't forget the potentiality of dance first sensed as a teenager in the old woolshed in her hometown of Launceston.

With this, Samara has gone on to create an extraordinarily rich and inclusive performing arts scene in South Gippsland over the last 9 years or so.

"From what I've observed in the nine years of living in South Gippsland, [there is] an openness to get involved and do things," the artist says. "But you've got to put out the offer and make it clear that this is for everyone. Everyone can participate in dance, and everyone has a story to share."

Samara is currently artistic director of (it's no) drama, a Leongatha-based theatre company with founder Emily Ardley. Since 2015, this inclusive physical theatre ensemble has provided an environment for people with disability to develop professional experiences and industry recognition in the arts.

But it's not just working with performers with a disability. Samara creates opportunities for her local community to experience and learn from professional dance and theatre performance. During COVID-19 she choreographed a participant-inspired performance with community members who had never performed before, to express how they filled the void during repeated state-wide lockdowns.

This month, Samara has invited the community to engage again in a similar project at Fish Creek's famous 'Tea Cosy' festival from the 14th to the 22nd of May.

The ACTION STATION free workshop series has challenged the community to come together in dance, sound and film workshops over ten sessions in the Fish Creek Hall supper room to develop a series of two performances for the Tea Cosy Festival on 21 May 2022.

Whatever the format or modality of a performing arts event, Samara is a conduit, injecting the world of performance into the region's everyday reality.

Celebrate Her!

Photography: Karli Duckett. Design: Anne Miller

STORIES OF SOUTH GIPPSLAND WOMEN



WHO DO YOU CELEBRATE?

"Celebrate Her!" is a project inspired by the global celebration of International Women's Day and aimed at bringing it right back home to South Gippsland to celebrate the women who live and work amongst us in 2022.

Over the next 12 months, Celebrate Her! will collect nominations of women you would like to see acknowledged and we will work with them respectfully to record their voices and their stories. The end result is to be a published collection that our whole community can be proud of.

To be launched on International Women's Day 2023.

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