

# **LA BOITE THEATRE 1925 TO 2003: BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER ITS TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY FROM AMATEUR TO PROFESSIONAL STATUS**

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

## **Introduction**

THE BRISBANE REPERTORY THEATRE SOCIETY (B.R.T.S.)<sup>1</sup> announced its arrival with a production of A. A. Milne's "The Dover Road" at the Theatre Royal in Elizabeth Street, Brisbane in 1925. The Society was co-founded by former actress and top speech and drama teacher Barbara Sisley and Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Queensland, Joseph Jeremiah Stable, both of whom were intensely involved in its development over the next 20 years. The end point for the thesis was 2003, La Boite Theatre Company's last year in its iconic theatre-in-the-round building in Hale Street and the year of its controversial relocation to a new purpose-built theatre, The Roundhouse, in Queensland University of Technology's (Q.U.T.) Creative Industries Precinct at Kelvin Grove.

The 'repertory' context proved important to the doctoral study. In its preamble, I argue that the integrity of purpose that characterised B.R.T.S.'s genesis, inspired by the professional English repertory movement and already existing amateur Australian repertory societies, had an unusually lasting effect. The non-commercial nature of its repertoire from the beginning and the striving for professional standards of acting and direction as ordained by Repertory standards, resonated generationally throughout its long transformational journey.

## **La Boite's Distinctive History**

What attracted me to this project was the distinctive nature of La Boite's achievement within the context of Australia's theatre history. Never once closing its doors since its genesis, La Boite can lay claim to being the oldest theatre company in Brisbane and the second oldest in Australia (the amateur Adelaide Repertory, which dates from 1908, is the oldest). But, most significantly, of all the repertory societies and companies that were set up as amateur theatrical groups throughout Australia from the early twentieth century onwards, this one is the only one that managed a successful transition to fully professional status and is still operating. Amateur groups such as Brisbane Repertory Theatre are

acknowledged by the renowned theatre commentator Katharine Brisbane as the parents of our professional theatre, but most were unable or unwilling to make the transition from amateur to professional and, quoting Brisbane, “by the end of the 70s most of the old-fashioned theatre groups were gone” (Brisbane in Healy, 2000, 5). La Boite was an exception. By the mid-1970s it was a funded ‘pro-am’ company (professionally staffed for amateur participation) and by 1993 was operating as a fully professional organisation. Today it is recognised nationally as a major Brisbane theatre company.

It was this distinctive achievement which led me to ask the question:

Over its long history to 2003, how did La Boite Theatre negotiate its successful transformation from an amateur group to a flourishing professional company and, despite set-backs and crises, survive, change and develop in an unbroken line of theatrical activity?

### **Surveying the Literature, Collecting the Data**

The literature review presented something of a challenge because scholarly work in the field of Australian theatre has concentrated much more on playwrights, plays and theatrical movements than on individual theatre companies. Only fairly recently has this gap begun to be addressed in publications such as Julian Meyrick’s recent history of Nimrod (2002) and Geoffrey Milne’s major work on Australian theatre since the 1950s (2004). Milne’s text examines national, state and regional organisations and companies and, for the first time in any scholarly work, acknowledges La Boite as a significant company, and positions it in relation to state and national trends. Edited by Philip Parsons, *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (1995) was invaluable, limited only by its end date of the early 1990s. Additionally, there were several relevant theses (Radbourne, 1978; Cullen, 1982) and a small number of major and minor publications on other Brisbane theatre groups which usefully contextualised my story of La Boite within the larger Brisbane theatre scene (Batchelor, 1986; Capelin, 1995; Cook, 1992; Healy, 2000; Queensland Performing Arts Museum, 1999; Radbourne, 1987).

Fortunately for me, La Boite has always had a strong sense of its own cultural significance and over the years annual reports, minutes of meetings, planning documents, programs, photographs, media reports etc. have been deposited and catalogued at the University of Queensland’s Fryer Library. Various other documents and memorabilia are housed at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre’s Museum, in the Heritage Collection. I was lucky enough to have access to materials still housed at La Boite itself thanks to the interest and generosity of Public Relations Manager Rosemary Herbert. Other small private collections were also loaned to me by people who had been involved at different periods in La Boite’s activities, plus my own collection gathered through my personal association over many years as amateur actor, professional actor with La Boite’s Early Childhood Drama Project, Board member, and dedicated subscriber. The short-lived monthly editions of *Theatre Australia* and *New Theatre: Australia* published between the late 1970s and 1980s, plus the Australian & New Zealand Theatre Record which lasted until the mid-1990s, were all important sources for understanding critical responses to La Boite’s artistic work during these periods.

Central to the data collection were twenty-three interviews with Artistic Directors, Presidents of Council, Chairs of Boards, General Managers, actors and Board members. These oral accounts richly contributed to the texture of the study providing historical detail, subjectivity and human presence, and through triangulation with other primary and secondary sources, provided an important means of validating my interpretation.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

This qualitative historical research was informed by historiography. The important task of the historiographer is “to reconstruct the reason for past actions” by “identifying evidence of past human thinking” from “valid and meaningful data” which are then interpreted “with regard to how and why decisions and actions have occurred” (Berg 2001, 219). So, through an historiographical approach to all my data I was able to identify that it was the human actions of key individuals involved in artistic and organisational leadership roles that, more than other factors, determined the successful progression or otherwise of La Boite’s eventful journey to professional status. The design of the study, therefore, was based on the historiographer’s task of applying ‘valid and meaningful data’ to the process of investigating this key characteristic, and interpreting this data in relation to the research question.

My original determination to design this study around the interpretative paradigm of postmodern historiography was abandoned on academic advice, proffered early in my doctoral journey. I was advised that this paradigm was too complex for a study that embraced a long and complicated theatrical history and that it would distract from the transformational journey at the centre of this study which required a chronological approach. Therefore, I have pursued a more traditional historiographical paradigm which allowed for my investigation to be chronological and less complicated in its structure.

However, some elements of postmodern historiography remained attractive and were blended into the traditional historiographical approach—namely the valuing and legitimation of small scale histories such as this one and the effect feminist theory has had upon traditional historiography. For centuries, Western history has been a series of narratives of “great” men and a recording of “great” events (Elam in Jenkins 1997, 66-67). Under the influence of postmodern feminist thought, historians are now finding ways to write the histories of women “. . . the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organisation of most societies”(Scott in Jenkins 1997, 69).

Overall, this research was an interpretative enterprise. I applied my historical imagination to the data and an interpretive ‘truth’ emerged in relation to the key question. Following the poststructuralist notion that all ‘texts’ have the potential to convey many meanings, and that there is no one true and objective reading of these texts that will reveal the ultimate ‘truth’ of this history, then what this study delivered was an interpretative truth, not the truth of the matter (Tuchman in Denzin 1994, 316).

**Presenting the Data**

In the initial data gathering process, my ‘text’ was the whole history of La Boite which I felt I needed to understand before I could begin to grasp the meaning and significance of the parts of this history, and vice versa. In this process, those parts which emerged as seemingly more important than others were related to artistic and organisational leadership. Thus, a second major text emerged which became the basis for the interpretive exercise of addressing the key question of this thesis—grouped into a ‘whole’, this new text constituted all those artistic and organisational leaders who seemed to have most influenced, both positively and negatively, La Boite’s development. Now, the research enterprise was to both survey and analyse these leadership contributions in an endeavour to find what kinds of ‘manifestations’ of leadership might emerge to provide a meaningful response to the thesis question. Thus I had a chapter structure for controlling the unwieldy amount of data that my initial research endeavours had unearthed, for example: The Sisley and Stable Era 1925-1945; The Babette Stephens Era 1946-1968; The Blocksidges and Billinghurst Era 1969-197, and so on.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Effective Leadership**

The key recurring characteristic that this study identified as central to the company's successful transitional journey was effective artistic and organisational leadership. In the process, this study examined the contributions of all the artistic leaders—Barbara Sisley, Babette Stephens, Jennifer Blocksidge, Rick Billingham, Malcolm Blaylock, Andrew Ross, Mike Bridges and Mary Hickson, Jim Vilé, Patrick Mitchell, David Bell, Sue Rider and Sean Mee. It found however that it was only those with passion for and commitment to this organisation (which, in some cases, was extraordinary) and a positive disposition towards its history, blended with either a strong artistic vision and/or powerful organisational abilities and/or ability to support La Boite through serious crisis, who were key to its theatrical evolution and its managed transformation into a flourishing professional company.

In addition to Artistic Directors, a number of Council Presidents and General Managers emerged as pivotal to La Boite's prosperity as an amateur theatre and to its successful transition into a pro-am company and eventual transformation into a flourishing professional company. Examined in this study as pivotal influences were Council Presidents Professor J. J. Stable, Babette Stephens, Bruce Blocksidge, Jennifer Blocksidge, Helen Routh, Philip Pike, Peter Lawson and Athol Young and General Manager's Deborah Murphy and Craig Whitehead, all of whom took strong leadership roles and encouraged tough decisions when, in some instances, more generally favoured ones would have seen the organisation slide backwards. Less effective leadership was the breeding ground for stalled development and crises, yet in each example of such difficulties, the emergence of either an effective Artistic Director or Council President, or both, was the major factor in re-energising the company and, in some instances, preventing the Theatre doors from closing.

**Leadership of Four Powerful Women**

The generative contribution of four charismatic women—Barbara Sisley, Babette Stephens, Jennifer Blocksidge, and Sue Rider—was found to be unusually influential because of the sustained and passionate commitment of each over long periods of time, for the high standards that each aspired to for the Theatre and personally delivered, and their crucial roles in shaping its development to professional status. The only man who rivalled the duration and standing of these women's contribution was Professor Jeremiah Joseph Stable. My doctoral study identified his important work in the Society's genesis, his role in moving it forward organisationally, the positive benefits of his high cultural status in Brisbane, and the stability his twenty year formal association as its inaugural President gave to the Theatre.

Both Sisley (whose involvement as Senior Producer, actor and Council member spanned twenty years) and Stephens (who was Theatre Director and Council President for twelve years within her forty years of overall involvement) developed Brisbane Repertory as a high profile amateur Brisbane theatre with a reputation for striving for professional standards. It was Stephens' leadership role in the acquiring of a four-property portfolio between 1958 and 1965 and the creation of the first La Boite in one of the cottages which gave the theatre a potent financial base and exciting, experimental artistic presence from which to confidently pursue its future.

Jennifer Blocksidge, whose involvement first as an actress and director then as Theatre Director (1969 to 1975) and Council President (1976 to 1978; 1981) lasted twenty years, emerged as critical change agent at a crucial moment in La Boite's evolution. Significantly she won first time Australia Council and State Government funding for La Boite. She played a key role in the conception and realisation of the new theatre building which opened in 1972, guided the Theatre's transition to pro-am status

with the appointment in 1976 of its first professional Artistic Director Rick Billinghamurst, built its national identification with risky, contemporary, Australian theatre, and seeded the idea that La Boite's eventual destiny was as a professional company.

Sue Rider, who served eight years as La Boite's first (and, to this point, only) professional female Artistic Director, made a major contribution by leading its transformation, after a period of acute financial crisis, into a flourishing professional organisation within a year of her appointment. Manifest in her leadership was a deep respect for La Boite's history coupled with, for most of her term, a purposeful, strategic and dynamic approach to change. Although amateur participation had ended she was able to nurture the Theatre's constituency and develop in audiences a sense of loyalty to La Boite and connectedness with its performance space. Like Sisley, Stephens and Blocksidge before her, Rider is English by birth, but, like Blocksidge, she was culturally focussed not on the English canon but on Australian works. She progressively committed La Boite's programming to Australian plays and increasingly commissioned and premiered more and more Queensland works in in-house and touring productions, thus creating for La Boite a distinctive profile which served it well in its bid for national recognition. Although the drama in 2000 of Rider's departure under duress from her artistic directorship was traumatic at the time for all involved, her great legacy was the historic professionalisation of the Company and the extraordinary period of growth and development that followed as she worked to consolidate and further develop La Boite as Brisbane's second largest professional company.

These four women, all powerful personalities and talented professional artists, made an out of the ordinary contribution to La Boite's evolution and eventual transformation into a fully professional company. The integrity of purpose with which each approached her role and their shared capacity to enthuse their constituencies to support their individual visions for the Theatre resulted in decades-worth of artistic credibility for the company and decades-worth of forward-thinking organisational and structural guidance. How La Boite was able to develop, change and transform itself is at least partly answered through understanding the full impact of their combined fifty-seven years of artistic and organisational leadership.

### **The evolutionary nature of La Boite's journey from amateur to professional and the role of subsidy**

Fundamental to the survival of La Boite Theatre over seventy-eight years to 2003 was its capacity, despite some moments of seeming stagnation, to artistically and organisationally evolve in status and reputation by embracing change and opportunities rather than standing still and taking safe options. However, it also found that change was successful when approached gradually, in an organic, measured, and strategic way; and dramatically unsuccessful when forced prematurely and without the full support of all vested interests, including the funding bodies, as was the case with the first two attempts at professionalisation in 1983 and 1992.

When federal government funds became available for the first time in 1969 via the newly created Australian Council for the Arts, the possibility of a transition into professional status became, in theory at least, a reality for all three of Brisbane's amateur companies—La Boite, Brisbane Arts Theatre and Twelfth Night Theatre. Only Twelfth Night took the opportunity, beginning its professional life in 1971, one year after the Queensland Theatre Company (Q.T.C.) was established as the State's flagship professional company. La Boite stayed happily amateur for the time being but, under Jennifer Blocksidge's guidance, judiciously set up the Early Childhood Drama Project (E.C.D.P.) as its first foray into professional theatre. The Queensland Education Department and Australia Council funding that E.C.D.P. attracted for its work with children indirectly provided infrastructure support for the pro-am

mainhouse productions; after the demise of E.C.D.P., La Boite management prudently maintained youth theatre activities as a policy priority which attracted Australia Council funding even though it was blatantly clear that the main preoccupation of this Theatre and most of its constituency throughout its pro-am life was its mainhouse productions.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the various manifestations of the Queensland Government's Arts Divisions held fast to its policy of tying La Boite's subsidies to its pro-am status. It was not until the government changed in the early 1990s that this policy was overturned in favour of funding for professional companies only. With the Labor Government's decision to withdraw financial support from the professional TN!, an action which precipitated its demise, La Boite seized the funding opportunity which opened up; under the artistic and organisational leadership of Rider, Murphy, Pike and Lawson, the company took the calculated gamble that the Queensland Government would not abandon yet another iconic Brisbane company, and became professional. The gamble paid off and La Boite has enjoyed solid Arts Queensland support ever since. Australia Council funding soon followed; by 1999 La Boite had joined the ranks of the triennially-funded small to medium-sized companies, a status it continues to enjoy.

### **Property accumulation and theatre ownership**

When it mattered, the organisation seemed to be always guided by good business sense—that is, by what it could afford to achieve at the time—with the result that it took one affordable step at a time. This was very evident in the Theatre's gradual realisation of its long-held dream of acquiring a home of its own. In the early decades, despite certain frustrations with hiring or leasing Brisbane theatres, the financial realities associated with a volunteer organisation dependent for its survival on the vagaries of membership and box-office, stopped any foolish risk-taking. The strategic accumulation of real estate in the form of income-generating cottages in Hale, Sheriff and Sexton Streets in inner-city Petrie Terrace, preceded the next low-risk step of the gutting of one house to become La Boite's first theatre-in-the-round, before the next Queensland Government-backed venture that saw the demolition of another cottage and the realisation of a forty-seven year dream, the purpose-built La Boite in Hale Street. Once that site became non-viable, the fortuitous outcome of the next desperate search for another 'home' was the three-way financed project with the Queensland Government, Queensland University of Technology and La Boite Theatre Inc., and a twenty-five year lease of the bigger, 400 seat Roundhouse in the Creative Industries Precinct at Kelvin Grove. On both of these major building projects, the crucial financial support provided by the Queensland Government was forthcoming because La Boite had the good fortune to own property.

The buying of real estate in the 1950s and 1960s and the building and ownership of Australia's only purpose-built theatre-in-the-round made a significant contribution to La Boite's capacity to develop and was profoundly important to its ongoing existence in the face of life-threatening crises in the early 1980s and 1990s. Without the collateral of real estate to place on the table of arts funding bodies during times of financial crisis, it is doubtful whether La Boite would have sustained its long existence as a pro-am theatre, or been able to make the transition to professional status, or managed the costly move to The Roundhouse.

### **The contemporary nature of the repertoire and its Australian content**

An important manifestation of effective leadership, that this study revealed as significant in understanding how La Boite succeeded in its transformation to a professional company, was a progressive policy towards programming mainly contemporary repertoire including a commitment to the Australian play. Whilst there is an array of inter-connected reasons for constituency devotion, it was prompted,

more often than not, by the plays. The quality of the Theatre's repertoire or programming, 'contemporary' from the very beginning, attracted and sustained generation after generation of ever-changing, loyal members keen for active participation in theatre or as audience members.

Following the English Repertory Theatre model, the plays produced in the early decades were constitutionally bound to be of literary and educational merit and not the kind you would see on the popular or commercial stage. Yet, within this constraint, careful programming produced a balanced repertoire of serious drama, classic works, contemporary well-made plays, comedies and Australian plays and was a key reason the theatre thrived as a successful amateur company in its first twenty years of its existence.

Stable and Sisley's policy of support for the Australian play, inconsistently applied as it was during their era, remained identified enough with the Theatre for it to re-emerge in the early 1970s, contributing at that time to La Boite's identification as Brisbane's 'alternative' theatre company, and to successful transition to professional status, La Boite built its national reputation not only on its overwhelming support for the programming of Australian plays in its seasons, but, by the late 1990s to the programming of Australian-only seasons and the commissioning and production of new Queensland works.

Although Babette Stephens' English-dominated repertoire could arguably be considered a stagnating influence, it was cannily right for sustaining Brisbane Repertory Theatre (B.R.T.) as a viable organisation through the difficult World War Two and post-war years, a period when Australia was still a victim of its own cultural cringe and still to discover the full meaning of nationalism as it applied to the Arts. Later, under Jennifer Blocksidge and Rick Billingham's influence, programming changed in response to the challenge of the New Wave of Australian playwriting, attracting to the Theatre a new breed of active members—younger, less conservative. Successive directors during its pro-am years continued to develop La Boite's strong identification with alternative, often risky theatre, and increasing identification with Australian works. It was this exciting, contemporary repertoire that attracted artists back as professional theatre workers when the company evolved into its professional stage.

It was this 'alternativeness', the aspiring to high standards, the risk-taking, the Australianness, the seriousness, the fun, of the artistic work at La Boite, that has always, it seems, allowed the Theatre to claim a community of supporters and to take its constituency with it, even when the vision for the Theatre's future was sometimes opposed by sections of that very community, as happened with the transformation to professional status, the sale of the Hale Street theatre, and the re-location to Kelvin Grove.

### **The culture of constituency strength, support, and loyalty**

This study found that constituency strength, support and loyalty was an enduring feature of effective leadership. Until the company's first foray into professionalism in 1992, its constituency of paid up members, active participants, audiences both local and regional, theatre critics, theatre supporters and the theatre industry, were a formidable body at various turning points in La Boite's history, demanding a voice in times of financial crises and proposed status changes, and loyally rising to the challenge when called upon to publicly advocate for the Theatre when outside forces threatened its existence, such as Blaylock's 'call to arms' when funding was withdrawn in 1981. By the late 1980s, a section of that constituency—now professionally trained in dedicated university courses plus those aspiring to a professional career and influenced by the general professionalisation of the theatre industry in Brisbane—exerted 'hard love' on La Boite by objecting to working for free (although many continued to do so) and demanded the professionalisation of the company be considered. This pressure by theatre workers, resisted by other parts of the constituency, was a significant factor in La Boite's determination

in the early 1990s to seriously pursue the professional agenda.

After the demise of TN! in 1991, the decision by Arts Queensland to support the professionalisation of La Boite was a crucial factor in the success of the company's transformation. Had this step not been taken at this time, the previous goodwill of those wishing to work professionally would, most probably, have dried up. Although some former members continue to regret the loss of amateur opportunities at La Boite, this theatre company, in choosing to become professional, was driven not only by market forces but by its own inherent desire to progress and develop. Post-1993, despite the dwindling of paid-up membership in response to the end of any further amateur involvement, constituency support could still be marshalled for a public campaign when required, most notably in the 2001 re-location crisis.

### **Beyond Leadership: the Allure of La Boite, the Performance Space**

La Boite's theatre in Hale Street was always more than a building. It was a performance space that had very special appeal because of the possibility its idiosyncratic architectural configuration offered of an unusually intimate relationship between actor and audience. It is this subjective appeal of the space itself that accounts for the "generations around Australia and around the world" who have "a great affection for La Boite" (Blaylock in Comans 2006, 457-461). Attractive to artists and audiences for its alternativeness and independence from the mainstream of conventional theatre, it was seen by David Bell as, "a radical building . . . an interesting building, it made the papers . . . a very glamorous place to be" (Bell in Comans 2006, 478-80).

The performance space, that box-like, intimate interior of the Theatre, in which every look, movement and word was seen and heard as if in close-up, had an immediacy and intimacy that made audiences connect with the play and the performers in a way that was not possible in larger venues around Brisbane such as the Princess and the S.G.I.O. (Suncorp) theatre, and later the Lyric and the Playhouse. Patrick Mitchell recalled "[t]he sheer joy of working in that space" (Mitchell in Comans 2006, 319-320). For the actors, it was the kindest of spaces, allowing the shortcomings of modest talents to be camouflaged by the lesser 'craft' demands of the small space. For more able actors, the intimacy of the space allowed for powerfully focussed performances and visceral experience for audiences, showcasing the performers in ways that were more difficult to achieve in bigger, colder, more demanding venues. The quality of actors, directors and designers, attracted to La Boite for both its challenges and charms as a performance space, account for the large number of artists whose work at La Boite was consistently awarded by Matildas (a Queensland Award), but the building itself deserves some acknowledgement.

It was this subjective power of the iconic building, the inclusive nature of the performing space for both audience and artists, that seemed to engender notions of identification, gratitude, pride, a sense of belonging to something both extremely contemporary yet steeped in history, that bound people to it, that gave it a very strong cultural identification in Brisbane, and made communities care very much about La Boite and its destiny.

The performance space in The Roundhouse has been deliberately designed to be a larger version of the original Hale Street La Boite. Less forgiving of actors' shortcomings, less intimate for audience members, more demanding to direct and design for, the space presents new challenges. At the same time, the wisdom of the design is in both its connection with the past and in the symbolic statement it makes about La Boite's capacity to change and develop, about its community status as Brisbane's second major theatre company, and about its potential to grow in state and national cultural significance.

**Significance of this Study**

La Boite's slow evolution to professional status has meant that a sizeable portion of this study concerned its amateur and pro-am history. The study demonstrates the value of looking carefully at Australia's amateur theatre history in order to better understand the nature of the professional theatre operating in Australia today. Amateur theatre, Katharine Brisbane stated in her 1993 inaugural Philip Parsons Memorial Lecture 'Yesterday the World, Tomorrow Australia', is "the key to the personality of the Australian theatre today" (Brisbane 2005, 335).

I would go so far as to say that the health of the performing arts today is the legacy, not of the profession but of the amateur movement; and that throughout our history every original idea and progressive development has been advanced, directly or indirectly, not through the professional but through the amateur theatre. I believe we need to look at this history if we are to understand the structure and outlook of our subsidy systems; the changes in our commercial theatre, the dilemmas of our state state theatres and the reasons why so many regional companies have failed (ibid.)

La Boite has to date worn its amateur past proudly and the professional company that thrives in Brisbane today remains deeply conscious of that legacy. At the first 2003 Season Launch at the new venue in Kelvin Grove, Artistic Director Sean Mee publicly acknowledged that this new beginning for the company was made possible not only through the vision of the state government and Q.U.T., but by "the endeavour of generations of Queensland theatre workers":

They have borne this Company upon their shoulders for nearly 80 years; nurturing it, changing it, sometimes shaking it up but always with the same intent: to keep the Company creatively viable.

The longevity of this Company is testament not only to their tenacity and passion, but also that each generation has had the foresight and the courage, often against stiff resistance, to take that necessary step, to compel the Company to go beyond its own comfort zone and make a place for itself in the future. . . . The challenge for us now is to live up to this outstanding legacy of achievement (Mee 2003, Comans Private Collection).

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**Note**

1. Originally formed in 1925 as 'Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society', the organisation dropped 'Society' in 1945 to become 'Brisbane Repertory Theatre'. With the opening of its first theatre-in-the-round in 1967, it often referred to itself as 'Brisbane Repertory's La Boite Theatre'. In 1977 it began marketing itself as 'La Boite' although it remained, legally, Brisbane Repertory Theatre. Between 1993 and 2003 its official title was 'La Boite Theatre'. On its move to Kelvin Grove, it became 'La Boite Theatre Company'. For convenience, the organisation is referred to, where relevant, as 'B.R.T.S.', 'B.R.T.' and 'La Boite'. Although the original French spelling—La Boîte—was used for almost fifteen years, the spelling favoured by the company since the early 1980s has been consistently used within this paper.

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