



It's all about the 'goose bumps'

TANIA DE JONG

FOUNDER OF POT-POURRI, MUSIC THEATRE AUSTRALIA AND THE SONG ROOM

“... because someone believed in me, I could believe in myself.”

A PERSONAL JOURNEY: FROM REALISING MY OWN POTENTIAL TO HELPING UNLEASH POTENTIAL IN OTHERS.

I had an interesting time at school. Attending Korowa AGS I was academically bright, but a shy, timid girl. I was born in Holland and always felt left out. My mum came from Vienna and dad from Holland. My grandfather was the famous sculptor Karl Duldig and my grandmother, Slawa Duldig, was a painter, inventor of the first folding umbrella and a much-loved art teacher at St Catherine's in Melbourne. My parents and grandparents were lucky to escape the Holocaust alive. Most of our relatives were killed.

I always knew I wanted to sing. A girlfriend convinced me I shouldn't bother. At the same time, I was being bullied daily for at least a couple of years, finding refuge with friends experiencing similar treatment. Then in Year 11 I was offered the lead role in Oklahoma, never having had a singing lesson. The potential I instinctively knew was there, just needed someone in the right position to encourage and validate. Without this kind of involvement much potential lies frustrated and dormant.

GOOSE BUMPS 1: BECAUSE SOMEONE BELIEVED IN ME, I COULD BELIEVE IN MYSELF.

Walking out on stage on opening night was one of the defining moments of my life. I felt the goose bumps! If there's a physical sensation for one's potential being unleashed, then that's it for me.

But there have been many detractors along the way. I remember one famous singing teacher telling me at the age of twenty-two that I would never make it past the chorus and I should pursue my law degree instead. I also had to tackle the all too common “tall poppy syndrome”. Despite such soul destroying moments, I held on to what I already knew and found a deeper sense of self. I was resolved to show the disbelievers what I was truly capable of. The support of family, friends, teachers and mentors is particularly important in helping overcome the obstacles to one's self belief and potential, at least until you are ready to take full control yourself. At a time when I was studying in the mornings, coaching tennis in the afternoons and having singing lessons at night I realised I had done just that. Taking control of my own potential meant I was ready to inspire others, in what felt like a very natural process of emerging leadership.

GOOSE BUMPS 2: BECAUSE I BELIEVED IN MYSELF I WAS FREE TO LEAD, INSPIRE AND CREATE.

Pot-Pourri and Music Theatre Australia

In 1987 I founded Pot-Pourri, (www.pot-pourri.com.au). It was here, that much of my real



leadership potential was tested and developed. We began at a small night club in Melbourne and I never dreamt that twenty years later we would have completed forty overseas tours and six CDs. Once I started to visualise the possibilities, what we could achieve became obvious.

These are some of the key things I learnt about leadership early on:

- Resilience and determination. Leaders do not give up on their potential or their dreams even when things are not going well.
- Leaders want to make a difference and they are positive they can do so.
- Leaders are interested in personal development and develop self awareness of strengths and weaknesses. They always want to know more.
- Leaders are flexible and adaptable so that they are ready to seize opportunities and are prepared for change.
- Leaders need to communicate clearly and understand and take on board different perspectives.
- Leaders inspire others with their passion, energy, courage and optimism.
- Leaders cannot do it alone and need support. It is OK to ask for help.

Today Pot-Pourri is one of Australia's leading performance groups presenting public performances and customised entertainment at corporate and special events throughout Australia and internationally. I am inspired most when audiences stand and cheer at the end of a performance and complete strangers come and hug us and tell us they felt 'goose bumps'.

I believe the keys to our success have obvious implications for all leaders and working teams:

- Inspiring the performers in the group to be part of the team and contribute ideas including repertoire and how best to connect with the audience and make our performances relevant and unique. We have a lot of fun together too. This has meant very little employee turnover.
- Getting passionate with our clients about the magic of our performances and the way in which they affect the audience. We have many repeat clients plus lots of referrals from clients who were delivered even more than they expected.
- Creating an enormous network of supporters, colleagues and general fans, who help to spread the word.

Out of this journey and a demand for more specialised and varied entertainment options, came the logical next step of creating and managing Music Theatre Australia (MTA), (www.musictheatreaustralia.com.au). MTA provides one stop entertainment and event production nationally and internationally.

Expanding our leadership in this field became a logical and natural progression and we now manage and book over 2,000 acts with a team of ten people in our Melbourne and Sydney offices. As for any leader in their field of expertise and passion, it is inspiring to witness one's work reach these heights of excellence and touch the lives of so many, and to be reminded with every performance why you do what you do. Great performances can be uplifting experiences as they reinforce and convey life's messages with humour and vitality. They unlock emotions, which can inspire more creative thinking in everyday lives and work.

GOOSE BUMPS 3: BECAUSE I WAS BUSY LEADING, INSPIRING AND CREATING, I FOUND MORE WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

The Song Room

My group Pot-Pourri was invited to perform as the feature act at Dame Elisabeth Murdoch's 90th birthday in 1999. After the performance a family member asked me to reflect on the greatest needs in Australia. It was then I realised the potential of our work and talents. Here was an opportunity to have a deeper and far reaching effect on the lives and learning potential of disadvantaged young Australians. I commented that there was an epidemic of disenfranchised youth who have no access to music. It was suggested I form a charity and The Song Room was born. The Song Room provides access to creative learning experiences for less advantaged children and their communities. Each program is individually created to match the cultural, intellectual and physical needs of the schools and students. The Song

“Leaders want to make a difference and they are positive they can do so.”





“When we create such rich opportunities for children to express themselves, they learn about others and discover new ways of being.”

“The Arts nourish us in ways that cannot always be measured, but can always be felt...”

“I have seen the effects of drama, singing, drumming, body percussion on children and it’s always transforming.”

Testimonials and extracts from a teacher from Our Lady’s Primary School, Sunshine, Victoria, December, 2007 on the effects of the Song Room program at her school.

Room continues to monitor and evaluate feedback about all its programs from students, teachers and teaching artists. It inspires a passion for learning through the “magic” of participation in live performing arts. Quite simply, music is already a universal language and powerful force in our society - used effectively, it can create magical transformations.

The Song Room’s vision and invitation to all educational leaders is that: All Australian children have the opportunity to participate in music and the arts to enhance their education, personal development and community involvement.

Our experience with children and communities who have been disadvantaged through economic and geographic circumstances, disability and recent immigration has shown first hand the positive effects of access to dynamic and creative music performance programs. The Song Room now has a team of some eighty teaching artists nationally working in over 200 schools for a minimum of six months and has so far given the gift of music and performing arts to over 100,000 students. We never expected there to be such a huge need for The Song Room programs. Hopefully by the end of 2008 we will have reached 150,000 students of the estimated 700,000 students in Australia who do not have access to music and specialist teachers and programs.

Amazing transformations and insightful testimonials

I have learnt that ‘feedback and follow-up’ is the food of leadership. How you produce, harvest and digest it, makes all the difference. Feedback from our teachers and communities indicates that many of the most disruptive children have become model and motivated students following the six-month workshop programs.

The Song Room has created long term workshops for DOXA Transition School in West Melbourne. Children who attend this school have been expelled from every other school they have attended. The Song Room sent in a talented drumming artist. For the first three weeks the students would not engage in any eye contact with the artist. By the tenth week the students gave a drumming performance to their parents and teachers. Everyone was in tears - they were amazed and delighted at the children’s achievement and passion in taking part. Previously most of the children’s lives had been fraught with recurring negative educational experiences. What a transformation!

Here are some of the testimonials about the performance program:

“It was the best day of my life!” Molly

“Your voices made me feel very warm inside.” Matthew

“Now I want to be an opera singer.” Yachim

“You helped me understand the real meaning of music.” Lachlan

The Arts in Education - making a difference

Worldwide research has indicated that children benefit greatly from having music and arts as part of their learning experience. Wide-ranging positive educational and personal outcomes can be achieved. Long-lasting outcomes include improved self-esteem; participation in teamwork; academic results and communication skills resulting in increased opportunities and more productive contributions. Participation in music and the arts can level the playing field for disadvantaged students and prevent some young people from going down the precipice of drugs, crime, depression and unemployment. Educational leaders need to be aware of the power of music and the arts for unleashing potential across many areas of a student’s life; look at what they did for me.

Research from *Champions of Change, The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (USA Report, 1999) provides compelling evidence that the arts can and do serve as champions of change in learning and create a profound long-term effect on communities. Recent Australian research in the Stevens Report (2003) showed that as few as 23% of government school students have access to music at school. In the UK the Creative Partnerships program (2004) managed by the Arts Council England and funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Children, Schools and Families, has worked with over 2,400 schools in areas of deprivation across England. They support thousands of innovative long-term partnerships,



between schools and creative professionals.

Such partnerships have proven that:

- Schools that work with Creative Partnerships improve their academic results faster.
- Seven out of ten secondary head teachers say Creative Partnerships improves pupil behaviour in their school.
- Creative Partnerships increases parental engagement in children's learning.

The most frequent overall influences on students were reported in relation to personal and social development. In music there were effects relating to awareness of others, social skills and wellbeing.

These effects are particularly noticeable in low-ability and disaffected students. Similarly, children of low economic status who receive individual piano lessons have exhibited greater increases in self-esteem compared with controls (Deasy, 2002).

The Rt. Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Secretary of State Culture, Media and Sport, UK commented: "The Creative Partnerships is a pioneering program. It demonstrates how creativity in education can help engage and motivate young people. For the last four years it has brought together teachers, parents, children and creative professionals in lasting partnerships, which can transform schools and lives."

There is clearly a role for music and creativity in any approach to promoting emotional health, lifelong learning and wellbeing in children and young people. Music and the arts unlock the human mind and the potential of the person as a whole.

Emotional Connection

Music and the arts inspire children to communicate, learn and become creative. In an age where we are constantly bombarded by popular culture, the "reality" of movies, the instant excitement of computer games and the internet, there is an urgent need for the emotional connection that live performing arts can offer. Many programs around the world reflect the importance of participation in live performances (Scottsdale Performing Arts, USA, 1999).

The "real" experience of music and theatre is unique because the audience and the performers share their emotions at the same time and in the same space. A cathartic effect and connection is created that transcends the ordinary and can make spontaneous involvement in the performing arts truly memorable and life-changing.

Against the odds and despite the difficulties of creating and presenting engaging art, we need to find every opportunity to connect with one another to sustain our cultural heritage and humanity.

Inspiration, Leadership and Creativity

The arts invite new thought. They bear witness to fresh perspective. They challenge society to evolve. Creativity is not a skill bound within the arts, but a wider ability to question, make connections, and take an innovative and imaginative approach to problem solving. These are skills that are demanded by today's employers.

One of the most powerful ways to engage students, parents and staff is to bring them together to share emotional experiences that unleash their creative potential. This can be achieved through creating an interactive event or program featuring music and the arts that can also transmit specific messages. Live performance is a stunning way to unlock emotions, create mood, atmosphere and an event to remember.

There are thousands of creative ways you can give your school community 'goose bumps' through a shared experience. People want to feel connected. With effective and creative leadership we can all create magical moments that are remembered for a long time.

My Passion is my power supply

I think that my passion and commitment to the cause of bringing music and arts to all children has helped attract a wonderful team of artists, staff, volunteers, boards, ambassadors and patrons to The Song Room. Together we are positively transforming the educational landscape by using music and the arts to inspire creativity, connection and a passion for lifelong learning.

"The arts reach students in ways that they are not otherwise being reached."

"The arts connect students to themselves and each other."

"The arts transform the environment for learning."





“... bringing music and arts to all children ... is positively transforming the educational landscape.”

Back by popular demand, Pot-Pourri will perform at the 2008 ACEL Conference in Melbourne and has a brand new CD entitled 'Nella Fantasia' available at www.pot-pourri.com.au.

Contact Tania on 0396829689 or email: Tania@MusicTheatreAustralia.com.au or visit: www.MusicTheatreAustralia.com.au.

The Song Room: www.songroom.org.au

If there is a magic ingredient, for me it would have to be the passion and belief I have for the magic of music to 'transform' and 'inspire'. Sometimes I feel as if there is a spark running through the audience and making a direct and physical connection with me - perhaps this is what I mean by 'goose bumps'. Some people describe me as passionate, creative, courageous, driven and inspiring; I just work from the inside out and when it all comes back again, that is the energy that sustains me.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The next part of my journey continues to deal with issues for children. I have been invited onto the Board of Child Abuse Research Australia (CARA). Realising the high incidence of child abuse in our community, I am committed to working with parents and schools to ensure that young children speak up about their abuse before it is too late. CARA is committed to research projects that will help lower the incidence of child abuse and lead to greater prevention. As school leaders we need to make sure that our students feel safe enough to speak up about their home environments and ask for help when required.

I started by talking about my journey, from being a student struggling to realise my potential to an adult actualising my passions through my leadership. I have ended this article where this journey was always taking me: to the promotion of the unique and powerful ability of music and the arts, to unleash potential and inspire leaders who will create opportunities and make choices that make a difference. From Rabbi Hillel, my favourite quote on leadership: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself what am I? And if not now, when?"

REFERENCES

1. *Champions of Change, The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (USA Report, 1999).
2. *Trends in School Music Provision in Australia* (The Stevens Report, 2003).
3. <http://www.creative-partnerships.com/> (2004).
4. *Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Edited by Richard J. Deasy, 2002 Arts Education Partnership).
5. http://www.scottsdaleperformingarts.org/education_outreach.php

TANIA DE JONG - FOUNDER MTA, POT-POURRI AND THE SONG ROOM

Tania de Jong is the inspiration, co-founder and artistic director of the internationally renowned singing group Pot-Pourri and Music Theatre Australia (MTA). MTA is a one stop entertainment consultancy and event production company, which specialises in corporate entertainment and productions in Australia and internationally. A graduate of the University of Melbourne (LL.B. Hons.), and the Victorian College of the Arts (Opera, Music Theatre and Voice), Tania is considered one of Australia's most talented sopranos and has performed as a soloist with various opera companies and orchestras.

In 2006 Tania received the Ernst and Young Australian Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award for her work with The Song Room. The Song Room, a charity founded by Tania, has brought music and performing arts programs to over 100,000 disadvantaged children and communities throughout Australia. Tania's other awards include the "Outstanding Individual Contribution to Australian Culture" (1998) and the Accessibility Award in The Melbourne Awards (2005). She was a finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Awards (2001) and studied overseas on a Churchill Fellowship (1996). She has recently been inducted into the AGSE Entrepreneurs Hall of Fame. Tania is also on the Board of The National Research Centre for the Prevention of Child Abuse.

Music Theatre Australia

One Stop Entertainment

Music Theatre Australia provides One Stop Entertainment to create world class events. From opera, classical, jazz, world, pop or rock to theatre, comedy, magic, circus, dance and almost anything else you can think of, MTA has it all. MTA specialises in providing entertainment for corporate and special events, conferences, public festivals and venues, weddings and private engagements internationally. www.MusicTheatreAustralia.com.au

For a standing ovation at your next conference or special event book world class feature act Pot-Pourri. www.Pot-Pourri.com.au

Music Theatre Australia
Ph: +61 (0) 3 9682 9689
enquiries@MusicTheatreAustralia.com.au
www.MusicTheatreAustralia.com.au
www.Pot-Pourri.com.au