

In her father's footsteps

With her own theatre company, Emma Buzo is keeping her father's legacy alive.



EMMA'S STORY: WORDS BY SUSANNAH HARDY LEAH'S STORY: WORDS BY HEATHER GRANT PHOTOGRAPHY: SCOTT DANKINE HAIR: TRAVIS FOR PETER LINCOLN MAKEUP: JESSICA

Emma Buzo, 35, actress, producer and mother of three, found strength after the loss of her Australian playwright father, Alex Buzo, by establishing a theatre company to honour his work.

"People often ask me what it was like growing up with a father who was a famous playwright. I didn't know any different, but I did see a lot of theatre, and absolutely adored it. My father encouraged us to read widely and think critically. He exposed us to a lot of different art forms, particularly theatre and film, and I always wanted to be involved in that world.

"As I was growing up we had a fairly tempestuous relationship. Like any teenage girl, I felt he didn't understand anything; I now marvel at how beautifully my father could write about people, particularly women. Even though I pretended not to be interested in his work, I felt extremely connected to both my father and his writing. He definitely inspired me to become an actress.

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"When Dad died of cancer I was grief-stricken. His passing was very public. It was a loss to many people, particularly in the theatre industry. But for me it was much more personal – I was dealing with the loss of my father, whom I had loved and respected so much.

"A few months later, Currency Press, a performing arts publishing house, was planning to present a public reading of his work as a tribute. They approached me and asked if I would organise a section on his prose and gather actors to present it. I had no idea how I was going to do that. However, something just clicked. I realised I could separate this from my personal grief and do what I really love, which is organising and producing some of my favourite work.

"Through this, a lot of my grief found its natural place and was no longer in the forefront of my mind. I realised how much I loved my father's work; how much I identified with it and respected his craft. I was one of the actors who performed for the tribute and that was wonderful.

"Not long afterwards I decided to officially launch a company that would produce, promote and perpetuate his work. I organised a massive opening event, featuring a reading of one of his early plays, *The Roy Murphy Show*. I then produced another play, *Norm and Ahmed*, which is currently a touring educational production in high schools around Sydney.

"The next play to be presented is *The Marginal Farm*, a story set in 1950s colonial Fiji, that's always had special meaning for me. I went on two trips to Fiji when I was eight and nine, while my father researched this play. Even as a 10-year-old, I found the story engaging. The central character is one I've always admired and, as an actor, wanted to play. I am finally the right age and have the chance to perform that role.

"I feel the company is positive for the nation. We have great Australian writers and we need to ensure their work is supported and enjoyed. I chose to do this because I admire my father and the commitment he had to his work."



Alex Buzo

Live theatre

The Marginal Farm will be staged during August and September 2008. Visit www.alexbuzo.com.au for details.

Giving back

Leah Israel, 46, a former chef and mother of three teenagers, became a voice for the voiceless in developing countries, working with Opportunity International Australia.

"I've always cared about others, but never thought I was the evangelical type. Up until three years ago I was quite happy doing my bit: looking after my family, running my catering business, and once a week I'd make tea for refugees at the Romero Centre, a Brisbane-based community group that supports refugees on temporary protection visas. But I had a growing sense of disquiet inside.

"That's when I went along to an information evening about Opportunity International Australia, a not-for-profit organisation established 37 years ago by an Australian entrepreneur, David Bussau. It works on the premise that the key to ending extreme poverty lies in enabling the poor to get a foot on the ladder of development. It invests in the world's greatest, mostly untapped resource – human potential. They provide small, collateral-free loans to entrepreneurial poor to help them set up their own business. There are more than one million clients in 27 countries.

"I'd reached a point in my life where I was thinking, 'I've got all this. Now what can I give back?' Opportunity International sounded great, but the sceptic in me thought it too good to be true, so I paid to travel to Bali and West Timor to see how it worked. It was an eye-opener! I've since self-funded trips to India, Africa and the Philippines. I've seen how, in many villages, children are missing after being claimed by money lenders for slave labour or prostitution when parents can't repay their loans. I've also seen how the organisation makes a difference. I saw that a small amount of capital – just a few hundred dollars – and training could help people work their way out of poverty.

"After travelling to Bali and West Timor, I gave up my catering business and committed to being an ambassador for Opportunity International. I now spend my days knocking on boardroom doors and speaking at functions, seeking to win hearts – and sponsorship.