

Passion play

Tim O'Connor is the creative powerhouse behind Harvest Rain Theatre Company. Interview by Alex Bernard

Tim O'Connor was once a starving artist. Literally. "I was so broke I actually could not afford food!" he says. O'Connor, now the CEO and artistic director of Harvest Rain Theatre Company, laughs about his early days when he was a volunteer at the home-grown community group, but fast forward 10 years and it's a very different story for the passionate theatre-lover.

O'Connor, 30, has risen from work experience kid to the top of the tree at Harvest Rain. "Running a theatre is the only thing I ever wanted to do and, to be honest, I'm not good at anything else so that was a great motivator," he says.

O'Connor discovered a new world behind-the-scenes when he started work experience at Harvest Rain in Year 10 and when he finished school he volunteered full-time. "Talk about on-the-job training; I took bookings over the phone, did every job in the place and that's how I learnt to run a theatre," he says.

By 2001 O'Connor, still a volunteer, was

put in charge of day-to-day operations. A year later he got the chance to produce his first show, *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

"I think that was because the place was about to fold and they [founders David and Robbie Parkin] thought, 'we've got nothing to lose!' They let me put on *Superstar* and it was a massive hit, brought in thousands of dollars and saved the day. We were able to keep the doors open," O'Connor recalls.

Today Harvest Rain is one of the largest independent theatre companies in Australia and it has been selling out capacity in QPAC's 850-seat Playhouse theatre regularly since 2008. O'Connor's latest coup is his world premiere of the family classic *The NeverEnding Story*, which opens at QPAC this week. It will be the culmination of a 10-year odyssey which saw O'Connor lobby long and persistently for the rights from the author's estate, and one that has since earned him the envy of producers around the world.

The production will be Harvest Rain's most extravagant to date with huge puppets,

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