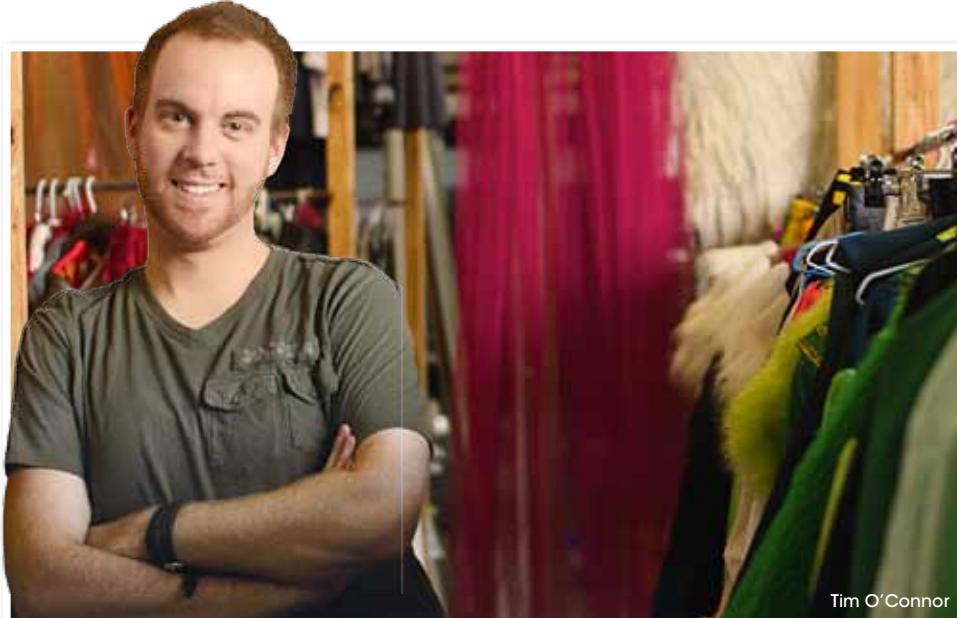


a flying dragon, elaborate costumes and a unique music score performed on stage by a string quartet.

While it is a far cry from the small drama group that started in New Farm in 1985 as an arm of the local church, the company's success is no surprise to O'Connor's younger sister Beth Ballard, 29, who has vivid memories of her brother's early productions. "From such an early age he was always putting on shows which he forced me to be in. We're not sure where he got his dramatic flair from because mum was a scientist and dad was a policeman and even though they were both supportive, they weren't really creative," says Ballard.

She says it was a trip to QPAC that eventually sealed her brother's fate. "Mum took us to see *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Pirates of Penzance* when we were young and after that, especially Pirates, Tim was just completely focused on his creative pursuits. And from then until now I have never seen him waver in his commitment to it. Not once."



Tim O'Connor

O'Connor passes on some of that passion through an internship program initiated two years ago and run from Harvest Rain's Alderley warehouse. "It's the course I wanted to do when I was starving," explains O'Connor. Hundreds audition for the year-long program which is open to students who have completed Year 12 and is limited to 50 places. "It's a year of singing, dancing and acting with the best teachers and you're a part of a working theatre," he says and, even

at a course cost of \$8500, aspiring performers are banging down the door to get in.

The company's Youth Theatre program for kids aged 8 to 18 is also fully subscribed. Unlike the internship program, which requires an audition, entry to the Youth Theatre is by enrolment and caters to 150 students every week.

O'Connor still takes part in weekly classes with interns, overseeing auditions, facilitating industry panel discussions and rehearsals. He

also directs interns' productions.

According to long-time friend and collaborator Maitlohn Drew, O'Connor is a natural teacher. "Tim's been my boss since he was 16 and even though I was the teacher, he had the creative ideas," explains Drew, who taught O'Connor at Northside Christian College. "Even at school Tim had the ability to inspire others, lead a team and give people a creative ownership of what they were working on," he says.

Drew, 37, has been involved with Harvest Rain for 11 years and the company's musical director since 2008. "Tim has single-handedly turned [Harvest Rain] around and that's a massive achievement. He's a director, producer and a counsellor! He wears 10 different hats every day," says Drew.

O'Connor says his work has only just gotten started. "I know this might sound corny but I really love Brisbane and I want to add something to the city and feel I am beginning to achieve that in some way through Harvest Rain."

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