

Opera House debut

By Lauren Edwards

THE work of an author and illustrator from Mitchell's Island is the inspiration behind a children's theatre production soon to be staged at the Sydney Opera House.

Emily Loves to Bounce is based on the first four books by Stephen Michael King and has been developed by Adelaide's Patch Theatre, a company aiming to create imaginative and engaging theatre for children aged four to eight years.

It was first staged in Adelaide last year and after Sydney will go onto Melbourne and Toronto.

Stephen managed to catch a couple of performances last year and absolutely loved it.

"It is based on my books 'Emily Loves to Bounce', 'The Man Who Loved Boxes', 'Patricia' and 'Henry and Amy'.

"The story is told in a theatre language more than a picture book language.

"Illusionists are used and there is a lot of movement and music. They have interconnected a lot of my books and string together the creativity and wonder of being."

Stephen said he was approached by Patch Theatre about developing the books into a theatre production.

The theatre director, who works off the Reggio Amelia teaching philosophy of letting kids be kids, felt his books fitted that kind of theme.

He thinks it is great someone has taken his idea and gone forward with it.

"I guess what I love about all that sort of stuff is getting your idea out and then (someone moves) beyond that. You lose ownership in a way but it grows into something else."

He likes seeing his work take on a new dimension and a new life.

"I loved the theatre production.

Some people said it didn't tell the story like the book, but I liked that. It is a whole new language all about ideas. They did capture everything I ever tried to capture in (the books). It's fabulous, bizarre and wonderful," he said.

One of the ways it is different is the character of Emily.

"I drew Emily as a person but in the production Emily is a ball that bounces – it is abstract," he explained.

Throughout the show illuminated balls float in the sky and there are many different ideas expressed.

They use shadow puppet theatre and at the end of the show a thousand coloured balls drop from the ceiling.

Music is a big part of it, with violin and piano accordion playing a role.

"It's great, I just loved it," he said.

Another children's theatre company – Monkey Baa Theatre from Sydney – is currently working on an adaptation of another of Stephen's books, Milli, Jack and the Dancing Cat.

This story is about a girl named Milli who learns to dance and as a result her creativity is awakened.

It is hoped this production, to be staged next year, will come to Taree.

Stephen is unsure what it is that attracts theatre companies to develop his books.

"I think I have a lot of movement (in my books); my characters are floating and moving. Maybe that is what works in the theatre world."

Stephen is currently writing a new book, which he said is mostly wordless.

Emily Loves to Bounce is on at the Sydney Opera House Playhouse from Tuesday, April 17 to Saturday, April 21 at 10am and 12.30pm, as well as Wednesday,

Stephen's delighted with production



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What the director said...

DAVE Brown from Patch Theatre Company wrote to Stephen Michael King in 2004 about why he chose to create a new work inspired by his book Emily Loves to Bounce.

"Stephen Michael King's stories endorse what it is to be a child... indeed, what it is to be human! They celebrate play, imagination and creativity. They burst with music, sound, art and dance. They place eccentricity, invention and self-expression.

"They challenge conformity and banality. They demonstrate how undervalued and mistrusted imagination and creativity are in the left-brain orientated, adult world.

"Our creative process will begin with an exploration of 'bounce' inspired by the book Emily Loves to Bounce.

"Child initiated investigations, insights and outcomes will be our starting point.

"We will develop an array of performance languages – some led by visuals, some by music, some by text, some by other conventions (for example fashion parade, games structures) – in order to render the meaning contained within this story and two others (Henry and Amy, and Patricia) in a variety of ways."

April 25 and Saturday, April 28 at 10am and 12.30pm.

All tickets \$24 and groups/fami-

ly of four or more \$21 and can be booked through the Sydney Opera House Box Office on 9250 7777.