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Jordan Hirst

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International Broadway producer Toby Simkin, who started his career in Brisbane and managed the Beat Megacub, has died.

The award-winning theatre producer died at age 59 at his home in Shanghai, China on April 7.

Toby grew up in Brisbane and his arts career got a jumpstart when he received an Elizabeth Bequest Scholarship at age 16.

It led to work at the Queensland Theatre Company, the Twelfth Night Theatre Company and many more companies.

By night, Toby worked at Fortitude Valley's Cockatoo Club and became general manager of the newly-renamed The Beat.

At the time, homosexuality was illegal, police were

corrupt and Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen “actively used homophobia for electoral advantage,” Toby recalled.

“Anti-gay laws were intensely enforced by Queensland police throughout the 1980s,” he said.

“Police raids intensified. Some police would come to The Beat for ‘poofter hunts’ and turn a blind eye to bashings.

“Some police detectives, out of uniform, would return to The Beat later in the night to drink and have fun. It was a weird experience.”

‘A stupid game of us vs them’

Toby Simkin said Queensland trailed behind other states in decriminalising homosexuality, and Sir Joh’s MPs made their anti-gay views known.

“It became a game of ‘us’ vs ‘them’ – the police, the politicians, the poofter bashers and often, our own families,” Toby recalled.

“This stupid game helped solidify a gay Brisbane community united in just wanting acceptance.

“The more the government and police pushed us, the more brazen we would become.”

As the 1980s wore on, Toby also found work as a

model and a stripper at a burlesque theatre in a show called Pisstols.

He claimed to have escaped HIV/AIDS because “I did so much cocaine I couldn’t have sex.”

In 1987, Toby made the move to the US. He said he did so “with no visa, with my money tied up in real estate, alone, penniless, but with a dream of the theatrical pinnacle, Broadway.”

Toby Simkin ‘an arts leader in every sense of the word’

Toby Simkin achieved that dream. He would work on Tony Award-winning productions of *I Am My Own Wife*, *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*, *Death of a Salesman*, and the Tony-nominated productions of *The Crucible* and *The Price*.

Over his career, Toby was involved in the marketing and management of over 120 Broadway shows.

In the early 1990s, Toby Simkin was an early adopter of the Internet. He pushed the theatre industry online with the world’s first online ticketing systems – Ticketmaster *insisted* it wouldn’t catch on – as well as email marketing and theatre livestreaming.

In the 2000s, he moved to Shanghai, bringing

Australian productions to China and developing a national theatre network.

Toby Simkin leaves behind his longtime partner, Canadian dancer Darrell “DJ” Wizniak.

In a tribute, Creative Australia’s CEO Adrian Collette declared Toby Simkin “a leader in every sense of the word in theatre and across the arts.”

Adrian said Toby’s “incredible achievements” included the production of commercial theatre in Australia, on Broadway, in London’s West End, and globally.”

“His loss will be felt in every corner of the world. He made a mark not just with incredible talent but also with his generosity,” he said.

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