

Ignatius Jones My name is Ignatius Jones, I was the artistic director of Spectac Productions, and as such I was the artistic director of Sydney New Year's Eve from 1996 until 2002. Which means that one of my productions was the millennium celebrations, where we put Eternity on the Harbour Bridge.

Ignatius Jones I first came across Eternity. Like any good artistic teenager in the 1970s, through the work of Martin Sharp, who had created the most beautiful series, of prints, I think they were I think there were a few paintings as well. Based on the Eternity concept, at that stage I hadn't heard of Arthur Stace. But later on I did long before I knew anything about Sydney New Years Eve or Millennium or anything. But the whole story of Arthur Stace was so inspiring that it added yet another layer to the Eternity story and friends of mine. I think when I turned twenty one had given me a pair of matched Eternity prints framed and everything, and they followed me around for the rest of my life and I had them. I had them up in my office in in Sydney New Years Eve office, where people would comment on them. And, you know, I'd had to explain the story because by that stage, you know, a lot of the younger people had forgotten the significance of Eternity someone and made a. Documentary about Arthur Stace, which I had, you know, in my in my book as well. And then. In the in the late 90s, we started to as part of New Year's Eve.

Ignatius Jones OK. So everybody would ask the school, what is this Eternity thing mean?

Ignatius Jones What's it about? And of course, I'd I'd tell the story of Arthur Stace and and him, you know, putting Eternity all over the footpaths in perfect copperplate script, yellow chalk during the during the 60s and. And, as you do, at one stage, we had a young work experience, lad, Ian, who was absolutely fascinated about the Eternity symbol and what it meant, and I said, well, you know, if you're that interested here, have a look at this video. It tells the whole story of Arthur Stace etcetera. And he took it away and watched it at home and only became more and more excited about it.

Ignatius Jones Now that at that time we just started this would would have been nineteen ninety seven.

Ignatius Jones We just started to put things on the bridge to light them up.

Ignatius Jones During the finale of the fireworks. Designer Peter England had been sitting on the point of the Opera House, looking at the Bridge, may have been aided by certain substances and into his mind, there came this whole idea, putting stuff on the bridge, which was great. We we used to get together every Friday at about five thirty in the office and and crack a few bottles of wine and have wine o'clock. And often we'd get our best ideas during during wine o'clock and this wine o'clock we were, it was nineteen ninety eight actually and we were trying to figure out what we were going to do, what we were going to put on the bridge for '98. And this young work experience kit just went, I know you should put Eternity up there. And it was like. Hold that thought because it was just the perfect thing to do.

Ignatius Jones But it was too good to do in '98. So, you know, I put it on the shelf and kept it for ninety nine, two thousand for the millennium celebrations. And in the in the build up to those, I'd gotten a picture of the bridge and photo shopped Eternity onto it and gave it to Peter and said, mate, make this work. And not only did he make it work, but I'd, I'd asked him, can we write it on? Can we write it on? So it looks like Arthur Stace's invisible hand is writing that thing and he went. Yeah. And basically the word was in sections and we faded each section up. So the E would have had five sections and we faded them up in sequence and it did look fantastic.

Ignatius Jones And then and it was, you know, the usual. How would I say artistic friction about, you know, something so big? And it he is really, really big. If you know, if you have a look at the films they took on the night, you know, you're looking at it. And you what is that little thing? A tiny millipede down there? It's actually a train. The train's never go off. They haven't got any people in them, but they never go off when the crackers are on the bridge. Anyway, it was big and. And Pete figured out how to make it work. And then come the millennium. Well, the story was, I have to say there was a lot of friction and some whether or not it was going to be effective. And would anyone remember it? And and I was of the opinion. It made no difference. And in fact, I hoped they didn't remember it. And it had the chance to do its magic all over again. You know, for the people who had no idea what it was, I never heard of Arthur Stace. And and I have to say that Frank Sartor stood up for it. And in fact, in his way, he gave me a little call, said, mate, is it going to work? And I said, Yes, Frank. Trust me, I'm the director. But yeah, on the night. Sure enough, we get to the great moment.

Ignatius Jones And it was meant to happen right at the end of the fireworks on the bridge as the smoke cleared, Eternity would write itself ever so elegantly on the bridge. And you would hear all the bells in all the churches in the CBD would ring, you know, to ring in the new millennium, et cetera, et cetera. And I actually, you know, with my team, spent weeks going around to all the churches asking them to to to ring their bells at you know, we gave them the time and said we all synchronise our watches. So they knew when it was going to happen and on the night. I was standing with Ric Birch's partner at the time on the tip of the Opera House, watching the whole thing happen and the fireworks went off and they were particularly spectacular. And the company, the fireworks company was doing the bridge that year had just lost the job, to another company, you know there's huge. There's huge rivalry between fireworks companies. You should never work with more than one at a time. But politically, we we had to. And anyway, a company A had lost to Company B and this was company A's last year. So they decided to put everything they had on the bridge and not tell us.

Ignatius Jones So music finishes, bells start ringing. I've got the walkie talkie and I say, shoot Eternity. Now. And the fireworks kept on going. There's a whole new sequence happened on the bridge and it consisted of what we call a sequential when you go to de de de de de de de de de deux across the arc, there was two of those. And then another another wall of comets. And there was a

waterfall, a Niagara. And Niagara's make so much smoke. Anyway. Eternity is writing itself. And I can't see it because there's so much smoke. So let's grab the walkie talkie. And I said, turn it off. Turn it off. And the poor guy in the control room went turn it off?

Ignatius Jones Yes, turn it off. So he did. And we just waited until the smoke and had blown away in the wind and went, now go. And sure enough, it went on again and wrote itself on like it was meant to. So we really got one and a half eternities that night and. And it did what it was meant to do, with the bells ringing and number of people who told me, you know.

Ignatius Jones Yeah, it was. It was one of those wonderful moments in major events which could have gone both ways. But fortunately, it did as it was meant to.

Ignatius Jones I used the way I saw I saw it was. Sure enough. Yes, it was. The millennium celebrations and we were celebrating, you know, a thousand years of what, you know, humanity's short span on Earth as a civilisation here on this city, on a far off shore of a tiny planet, in a infinitesimal galaxy. You know, in the middle of. Billions and billions of years of existence. And I think that's one of the things that Arthur Stace wanted you to think of is, you know, who are we? We tiny little ants, you know, on crawling on the planets face. I just love the idea of taking something that had been scribbled on a sidewalk and putting it. On the Harbour Bridge, creating the largest light sculpture, really that's ever been attempted.

Ignatius Jones Getting it to work one and a half times. But we even got the colour. We matched it to the yellow chalk that Arthur Stace used, and it really it must have spoken to so many people because there are so many people have spoken to me about it since who have got no idea about Arthur Stace and about, you know, why Eternity was there and it got them thinking, you know. Which is exactly what it was was all about. Just one moment in. In all this mad partying when they would stop and think, even if they didn't happen to do that until the next day or the next week, it would be something that that remained in their memory.

Ignatius Jones And it did.

Ignatius Jones Frank was worried that people wouldn't know what it was about or that they that the word itself would not resonate.

Ignatius Jones I don't think I never thought that was going to be a problem. The fact that there was the Arthur Stace story behind it was just a bonus. It would have been fabulous whether or not Arthur had, you know, had made it part of the Sydney legend. But he did. And that was it. It was part of the Sydney legend.

Ignatius Jones And I remember seeing two days later in Time magazine, even though the front cover was the ball dropping in. In New York.

Ignatius Jones For whatever reason they do that. But when you opened the magazine to the actual story was a full double page, full bleed of the Harbour Bridge with Eternity on it. And, you know, suddenly it was almost like Sydney had arrived in many ways and and we got two shots at it, do you know that and the Olympics and interestingly enough, they used it in the opening ceremony of the Olympics. It had become in gosh in three months. It had become an iconic moment for Sydney.

Ignatius Jones So it really must have, have spoken to a lot of people and no one questioned it when we used it at the Olympics. You know, everyone said, oh, yeah, Eternity fine, you know. And it was the finale, again, of the opening ceremony's Cultural segment. And yeah, they no one questions that they and they they all took it for granted that this was, you know, that this said Sydney.

Ignatius Jones It was it was it was a wonderful moment. Obviously, I knew it was going to happen. And. It's. The opening ceremony had nine directors, you know, and we all worked together. It's one of the very few times that's ever happened in Australia and we all worked together on this and and the. The other directors knew very well do who'd worked to get Eternity up on the bridge. So as part of that community and I was quite young, you know, that was twenty years ago, and it was a great there was a really great moment to be recognised in that way.

Ignatius Jones And to know that I'd actually either as a new Australian, as a immigrant to the country, had managed to touch on. On such a such a nerve. You know, the especially since the other segment of the opening ceremony that I worked on was the lone horseman and, you know, making the Olympic rings out of horses, you know which was a great thing to give the young immigrant, Banjo Paterson.

Ignatius Jones And, you know, the Australian National Poem. So, you know, in many ways, it justified my feeling that, you know, Australia was not so much a melting pot. But but but a tossed salad in which we could all be ourselves and yet be part of the warp and wolf of the country held together by the salad dressing of tolerance and have a go, mate. And yeah, I was having a go.

Ignatius Jones Oh, usually very complimentary. Because they don't usually realise that it was me who did it. You know, it'll be a conversation like you're on. I really loved it when they put Eternity on the bridge, you know. I did that. You did that said they. There it is. It is still when you consider it. Gosh, it wasn't even L.E.D.s It was it was incandescent bulbs.

Ignatius Jones You know, that we'd put into a giant tray to, incandescent bulbs inside rope light. We put into a giant tray, which unfortunately got trashed afterwards and a lot of people wanted it to stay.

Ignatius Jones And a lot of people, you know, called Frank and and wrote him letters and said, you know, you've got to leave it up there. It's just wonderful. And in many ways, you know, I kind of agree with them because it seemed to put a full stop on the bridge. You know, it seems I mean, you look at it after, you know about Eternity, you seem you think something's missing. But, of course, it's only been designed to be there for a couple of weeks. There was no way that it could stay there.

Ignatius Jones And the bridge, of course, is not the kind of splice to two giant pieces of metal.

Ignatius Jones You know, it would have rusted and been blown to bits in no time flat. But I still think there's a place in Australia somewhere that needs a giant Eternity site.

Ignatius Jones I think it would have, I think the story of Arthur Stace was just so resonant that eventually the same way, Martin picks up on it. We would have picked up on it. The difference being was that Martin was. You know, several decades older than me, and he was artistically alive when I first did the original Eternity, I think he probably would have been in his late teens, you know, when when that happened, which is when I discovered it in my late teens 20 years later. So I think it would someone else would have found it and and brought it to bring it to the fore. But, you know, Martin was absolutely extraordinary in the things that he picked up on. You know, like any great artist. It's about observation. It's about, you know, Barry Humphries often calls it finding those little bits of wool that stuck to a civilisation. The little burrs.

Ignatius Jones And, you know, I. I like to think that that's what I have done. It's found that little burr sticking to the civilisation and pulled it out. And, you know, expanded it again. And I wouldn't be surprised if someone else doesn't take Eternity and run with it. It's too wonderful a thing, you know, to to to lose.

Ignatius Jones I didn't have to it already was really. It was already an iconic moment. I think that's something that that. Well. That Arthur states himself had had realised. I mean, it changed his life. But. You know, I knew that it was picked up again by Martin Sharp. And through that, you know, it changed other people's lives, I think was was a very, very mean, meaningful thing. And I just think it's going to continue to do that as as a you know, people see the postcards, you know, of the night and see the various commemorative stuff on us.

Ignatius Jones It's now part of Sydney's history. It always was. But it's something fantastic to take a bit of history and run with it and then have, you know, that gesture rewarded by having people recognise it as what it was.

Ignatius Jones So just know that the church bells that you hear on the track are real church bells and they're being picked up by the cameras, the microphones on the cameras and. I suppose. Gosh, it's it it harks back to my experience as a kid with Fiesta's in the Philippines and in Spain.

Ignatius Jones They ring the bells, you know. On the day. And every time I hear the bells ringing on a Sunday, which they do at all sorts of different hours, depending on on your particular your particular part of the Christian faith. The whole idea of having all the bells in the city ring, you know is sort of an 1812 moment. So we actually went and. Talked to all the various churches and interestingly enough, the. When I got to St. Mary's, the person who was in charge of the bell ringing, I forget what the title is, but I'd met him before. He'd buried my father and Ignatius Jones remark about it.

Ignatius Jones They're all called Father Kelly. And he took me up to the to the belfry and introduced me to the bell ringers. And they played me a few of the top hits, you know.

Ignatius Jones And there were eight twelve of them hanging on to these robes. And they literally as the bell went up so did they, they would leave the ground and go up three feet and come back down.

Ignatius Jones And, you know, getting all the different denominations to ring their bells at the same time was a fabulous moment, because no matter where you were in the CBD. You heard them and got the bells of St Mary's. That sounds like a nursery rhyme. They are very loud. Yeah. So, you know, the eastern side of the harbour certainly rang, well, you know, it's got ringing in the year. And that's exactly what we did. It's something I wish they would do every year.

Ignatius Jones I don't know. And you mentioned that it's (Tower bell at the GPO) got a one of them has got Eternity written in it. I wouldn't be surprised. I would not be surprised if it did. We were trying to involve everyone in the city, with the celebrations, you know, which is. Something that's so exciting. I mean, when when we told bell ringers that we wanted them to ring the bells after the fireworks and finish them, they were so thrilled.

Ignatius Jones You just go, oh, God, I got that one right. It's it's interesting. Yeah, I've been very lucky in my life that I've had a few of those a few of those moments. You know, when the lone horseman got galloped out at. At the Sydney Olympics. When we raised the giant Timorese flag at the. Independent ceremonies of East Timor. You know, there's been a number of those lighting a few Olympic cauldrons. You're so. You're so frightened that something's not going to I'm not going to happen as it's meant to. And then. It's interesting, you know, you get lifted up by by the winds of fate and they fix it, you know. And and the number of times that this has happened. But, you know, you it's one of those things that you get lucky to be put in that that situation. And. it's, it's a really great thing because you're sharing it with a lot of people, you know, more so than if you're doing a play or. Or even a movie, you know, because you can feel those those people there with you. And. You don't in major events. There is no second night. You've

got to get it right on the opening and. If it does go wrong, you're going to save it, you know. But. I think out of all of those things that I've worked on, Eternity was one where. You could feel that magic around around the harbour. Yeah. And fortunately, I was surrounded with people to at the at the Opera House there. And. A lot of people knew that it was there because. We did have to test it. So even though we tested it every morning at three a.m. or four a.m., people still knew it was there. But I don't think they had any idea how effective it was going to be or how we were going to do it. And that was that's half of it is, you know, the theatrical build up for it. And the bells, you know, wouldn't have been the same without the bells. And as you say, you know, it really did deeply affect affect a lot of people. Which it was meant to do.

Ignatius Jones And and that's such a wonderful thing for a theatrical practitioner when something that they do deeply affects the audience. You know, you say, you know, you know, you're on the right track.

Ignatius Jones Yeah, the the. There was a journalist in the Herald. Who writing on the front page of the Herald and he said, you know, Eternity is now the word of the millennium. Which was a pretty fabulous thing. And Leo Schofield. Called me Mr. Eternity Jones, which was a lovely thing on his part. So, yeah, we it certainly. It certainly struck a lot of chords.

Ignatius Jones You know, we as I say with everyone, those who remembered it from its humble beginnings and those who had just seen it that night for the first time.

Ignatius Jones Hell of a lot, you know. I was the one who gone first, seen it when I was 17. And had actually seen it at at Martin's place. And been obsessed with it. For. For years. until I got those two posters, framed them, and, you know, they they sort of followed me around. The fact that we managed to get it onto the onto the bridge. Good on you, Frank, for believing in it. You know, we had to we have to raise the dollars to get it up there. And it wasn't cheap. But it certainly taught Australia a lesson, I think, I mean very commercial now. But there was an article in the Financial Review, The Australian Financial Review the next year or that year by a senior executive in what was then Singleton Ogleby Mader, a major, major advertising agency. We said he'd been in New York and turned the television on at six AM.

Ignatius Jones And, you know, at the end of the news, as they always do, the newsreader said, No, Happy New Year to you, and we'll leave you with some people who are already partying in Sydney, Australia.

Ignatius Jones And boom, they showed a 30 second clip of some of the Sydney fireworks and Eternity. And this fellow wrote that he kept the television on every day for the rest of the day. And at the end of every news segment, they showed Sydney and Eternity and and he said that If I'd. I had no idea the power of. The visuals of major events and what they could achieve and if I as a senior

advertising executive, it had to cost that, I would have said that, you know, and it was editorial. It wasn't advertising. It just said that, you know, it would have come up to five hundred thousand dollars, you know, half a billion.

Ignatius Jones That's all right. Five hundred million dollars. Half a billion dollars worth of of advertising that, you know, we got relatively for free because we created something that was just so iconic. And, you know, remained iconic since then.

Ignatius Jones You know, people have used have used it so many different ways. But they will always be Eternity. And and I think, you know, in a nation that has so few iconic symbols, it is one of our great ones. And I love the fact that, you know, it comes from. It comes from the streets and it comes from a city. It doesn't come from the great wide land, you know, drenching floods. And, you know, it is. An Australian urban icon and specifically a Sydney icon. That's a that's a wonderful thing. We need more.

Ignatius Jones We used to have a saying in the Olympic family. You're only as good as your last cauldron. It had its opportunity, really was Frank kept hassling me to do it. So what do you do? What do you do to top eternity? I said I resign. It's hard. It's a really difficult one to top because. You know. Where do you find an icon like that that's been prepared for you so carefully by people like Arthur Stace and that fabulous backstory? And then Martin Sharp, you know, it's it's easy is a hard one. I'm sure we could do something that that would. That would have resonance for that. The other thing, too, that we had with Eternity was its sheer size. It's still the biggest. Bridge effect we've ever done.

Ignatius Jones And the other thing about it was that it was big.

Ignatius Jones It's still the biggest light sculpture ever built. And if you want to measure it? Look at the hangers on the bridge, the things that that hold the roadway on to the arc and count them, Eternity takes up six segments.

Ignatius Jones No bridge effect has ever been that big since, you know, they've just gradually got smaller and smaller. I think they're down to two segments. So it really did make. It did make an impact. And it was up for a couple of weeks after that. So everyone got a really good chance to see it. Very proud making, you know, to know that you'd gotten that up there. But it wasn't, you know, just the work of one person. It really did take a major team to get it up there.

Ignatius Jones I would have gone, mate? How about that? I wouldn't have offered him a drink. But I would have shook his hand
He was a

Ignatius Jones I think he must have been quite a special, special gentleman, you know, to to have gone what he'd gone through, what he had gone through. And then, you know, towards the end of his life, suddenly have a. A massive epiphany that turned into a

mission to to write that word all over the sidewalks, and that's interesting is that he wrote him on the sidewalks, not on the walls buildings, but on the sidewalks.

Ignatius Jones This is just something that um. It speaks to his his humility and faith, and I'm not that I'm a religious person at all.

Ignatius Jones But what's important there is the faith and the wonder that he had himself. And that's in many ways, what we are trying to achieve was that sense of wonder. And obviously, it did strike some people like that, which, again, is a very. Rare thing in the Theatre, you know, to to have something like that happen. And it was Theatre. That's exactly what it was.

Ignatius Jones Remo's Eternity was very much Martin's. It was a reproduction of Martin's Eternity. But, you know. Anyone who has partaken of it has become part of that timeline. We know the Eternity we put on the bridge. Peter and I, Peter England and I were very careful that it matched Arthur's.

Ignatius Jones We weren't matching Martin's. Martin's was single line thick. It was thicker on the canvas but it was the whole thing was the same thickness, which is not copperplate, copperplate is calligraphy.

Ignatius Jones So the line changes in thickness as you write it. And we said before we copied his colour. So it was that sort of pale yellow. And we copied his his Eternity very, very closely. And I think we got we got, you know, pretty close to it.

Ignatius Jones Despite the fact that we were using rope light in a tin mold to achieve it. I mean, nowadays we would be sewing L.E.D.s And it would be brighter. You know, we could make it. In fact, the very, very year after, which was federation, we put the Rainbow Serpent above the federation star on the bridge. That's still when we were pretty big. And we we ended up calling it the Las Vegas Disco Snake because we could run colours through it. And, you know, we'd managed to discover the glory of L.E.D.s. But Eternity was very, very, very simple and almost stark. And that was part of its magic.

Ignatius Jones You know, you ask people, do you remember the Las Vegas disco snake? Nup. But they remember Eternity, you know? So it obviously had something that nothing else has had before or since.

Ignatius Jones It was magic. That's that's when we started to get the letters saying let it stay there. And it really did work. It did work well there. You know, you don't there's not a lot of public art in Australia, you know.

Ignatius Jones And you look around the world. See things like the Statue of Liberty. You know, it is a major work of public art and it kind of stands for New York. I think Eternity on the bridge could be one of those major pieces of public art that could stand for

Sydney. I mean, admittedly we've got the Opera House, which is a major piece of public art. But. You've got to go to the Opera House and you've got to go in it. And a lot of people are intimidated by it. You know, when we did the first few Vivids and brought contemporary music to the Opera House, 60 percent of the people who attended had never seen anything in the Opera House before.

Ignatius Jones So there is a feeling of of eliteism about that building, but not about the bridge. You know, that's why whenever the people are given the opportunity to walk across it on the roadway, it just goes off. Which it had just before we put Eternity up there for the the the the reconciliation walk across it. There's something that the. People of Sydney, really. Do. They feel the bridge is theirs, you know. They go across it every day. And and, you know, to hear that that Arthur had started scrolling Eternity the year, the bridge seems to make it that more appropriate. I bet you he scrawled Eternity on the bridge a couple of times, too.

Ignatius Jones I would have loved. I think that there is a film of him writing it. I think we we even referred to that when we when we wrote it up there, I don't know if there's footage of it writing itself on, but that was the idea. Still, it worked. And it it, as you say, hung there for the next at least three or four weeks. Could be a couple of months.

Ignatius Jones Hi, I'm Ignatius Jones, the artistic director of the Sydney Millennium Celebrations, which, of course included the fireworks and the unveiling of the Eternity symbol on the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Ignatius Jones Hi, I'm Ignatius Jones. I was the artistic director of the Sydney Millennium Celebrations in 2000.