

Prospect Park Productions NZ Feedback Submission for DCC 10 Year Plan Consultation



**PROSPECT
PARK**
PRODUCTIONS



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Introduction

In principle, Prospect Park Productions supports the development of a purpose-built performing arts venue in Dunedin, with a view to (further) establishing a visible, vibrant, and accessible central city arts hub. However, we also recognise - and share - concerns regarding the proposed developments in that 'Dunedin householders anticipating a rates rise of almost 10% in the coming year may be understandably lukewarm' (ODT editorial 1/2/21) given that the proposed theatre development options were announced alongside said rates increases. Furthermore, we believe that the two mid-sized theatre options do not accurately reflect or address discussions amongst the performing arts community at the Charcoal Blue consultation workshops in 2018 and 2019.

It is our position that any new venue development should not come at the cost of ensuring immediate and short-term support for the sector. This includes consideration of how it is integrated with other city activities, strategies, and policies going forwards. Therefore, this submission takes its lead from the key issues identified in the *Future of Us* consultation document in relation to performing arts, and references the Dunedin City Council's Strategic Framework, with particular focus on Ara Toi, Arts and Culture strategy, the Economic Development strategy, and the Social Wellbeing strategy.

About Prospect Park Productions

Prospect Park Productions was founded in 2016 by producer H-J Kilkelly, and writer, director, and dramaturg Emily Duncan, who bring together decades of theatre experience locally, nationally, and internationally.

Prospect Park delivers award-winning professionally developed and presented theatre and podcasts and facilitates the development platforms Ōtepoti Theatre Lab and Ōtepoti Writers Lab.

In 2020 Prospect Park established an accessible physical base in the historic Carnegie Centre.

www.prospectpark.co.nz

Looking After What We Have

This year's Dunedin Fringe Festival was remarkable in that it had the highest ticket sales of its 21 years to date and our city was one of the very few places in the world where groups could gather for live performances without wearing facemasks or observing social distancing. Furthermore, the performing arts community demonstrated its adaptability and resilience by picking up from where they had been forced to pause the previous year.

Prospect Park was proud to present a season of *Thief!* at Emerson's Festival Club. This work was developed through the Ōtepoti Theatre Lab's inaugural Playwrights' Programme in 2019, and scheduled for a full production in the 2020 Fringe. Writer and performer Kelly Hocking received an Outstanding Performance nomination and Prospect Park is now investigating options for further seasons and touring.

In order to deliver projects of the calibre of *Thief!* we must safeguard our community's knowledge, skills, and wellbeing. Currently, our performing arts skill base and experience in Ōtepoti is wanting for sufficient and sustainable support and professional acknowledgement, save select individuals.



Prospect Park comprises two practitioners who bring a wealth of experience and professional recognition in the industry. Despite this, Prospect Park - like other local theatre companies - is funded currently on a project by project basis. Under these conditions, burnout is an inevitability and specialised roles are stretched, as we - like many of our colleagues - work in the face of under-resourced uncertainty.

Emily Duncan holds a PhD in theatre, which she focused on dramaturgy as currently there are no formal training programmes in New Zealand-Aotearoa. She is one of only five playwrights in the country to have held the Burns Fellowship and been awarded the Bruce Mason award, and was the first South Island-based playwright to be awarded the latter in 26 years. In February, Emily won three categories of the Adam NZ New Play Award, including the overall award for Best Play.

H-J Kilkelly is an Ōtepoti-raised producer, whose extensive experience crosses independent shows, festivals, practitioner development platforms, and workshops for companies including Tawata Productions, Kia Mau Festival, Barbarian Productions, BATS Theatre, Dunedin Arts Festival and NZ Young Writers Festival. H-J is also involved in projects centred around addressing infrastructure, strategy, advocacy, and professional development for the sector, including Ringatoi Pōneke: Artists Initiative, and the local collaborative project alongside Dunedin Arts Festival and Dunedin Fringe Arts Trust.

Proposed Actions

- Provide ongoing assurances and support for the temporary venue and shared resources project, of which Prospect Park is a partner along with Dunedin Fringe Arts Trust and Dunedin Arts Festival, in turn renewing existing assets and potentially reducing the projected debt levels (*Future of Us*, p. 7). Local practitioners

cannot afford to be priced out of larger, more expensive venues that are more suited for touring productions. This was a significant challenge before Covid, and it will continue to be so if not addressed.

- Engage meaningfully with local professional practitioners around the current contestable funding models on which so many of us rely, and are not sustainable.
- Support experienced practitioners in furthering and re-establishing real pathways to careers in the performing arts locally. The council can take a lead in this by professionally engaging practitioners as mentors and consultants.
- Recognise what the performing arts has to offer the community in terms of wellbeing and fostering connections, and leverage and address this accordingly. A 2020 WHO study 'identified a major role for the arts in the prevention of ill health, promotion of health, and management and treatment of illness across the lifespan' (Fancourt, D., *Summary of findings – HEN 67. What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being?* (2019). If our artists are not well, how can they continue to aid others' wellbeing with their work?

Strategy Alignment

Ara Toi: Identity Pride, Inspired Connections, & Creative Economy;
Social Wellbeing: Manaakitanga Pathway, Vibrant and Cohesive Communities Healthy, & Reasonable Standard of Living for All;
Economic Development: Business Vitality, Alliances for Innovation, a Hub for Skills and Talent, Linkages Beyond our Borders, & a Compelling Destination.

Working With Mana Whenua

In November 2020 the biennial National Māori Theatre Hui was held for the first time in Ōtepoti at Puketeraki Marae. As the year turned from the challenges of Covid, it is more than fitting that the hui was based around the kaupapa of 'activating space' and a programme anchored in Hauora.

Prospect Park acknowledges the need to ensure mana whenua's voice and participation going forwards in consultation around any new performing arts venue. Significantly, for theatre practitioners this is an opportunity to rethink western theatre models that do not serve the community at large; physically, financially, and emotionally. This would be in accordance with the council's underpinning principle of respect for the Treaty of Waitangi.

Proposed Actions

- An emphasis on prioritising mana whenua contact and engagement in project communication and strategic plans, and accordingly, guidance and accountability for local non-Māori theatre in working with mana whenua and the Treaty. Are there existing models and relationships of which non-Māori practitioners should be aware?

- Assurances and frameworks for ensuring that Māori leaders and academics are not being called on as unpaid cultural guides, as was highlighted in an interview with AUT Professor Jarrod Haar on RNZ's Morning Report (16/4/21).

Strategy Alignment

Council Key Principle: Treaty of Waitangi;

Social Wellbeing: Connected People & Vibrant and Cohesive Communities;

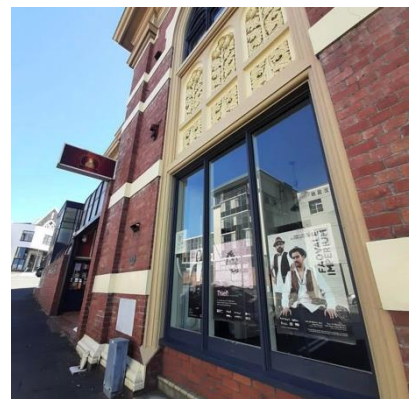
Ara Toi: Inspired Connections & Access and Inclusion.

Responding to Climate Change and Reducing our Waste

In 2020 Prospect Park took on the lease of a ground-floor space in the historic Carnegie Centre. This was to establish an accessible, visible, physical base in the central city that could be used by multiple groups at minimal cost.

To date, we have hosted local companies and practitioners, including Arcade Theatre Company, Summer Shakespeare cooperative, Ruth Ratcliffe's Forum Theatre workshops, and an increasing number of independent show rehearsals, as well as national companies including Java Dance, White_Mess, and the Someday Leaders workshops for youth.

Additionally, we have provided physical space for storage of sets, lent out equipment, showcased artworks, and offered window space for posters advertising events for the sector.



Workshop for White_Mess' OTHER [chinese] during Dunedin Arts Festival 2021. Photo Credit: Alice Canton.

By having sites at which to combine and pool our resources – whilst maintaining independent companies – local theatre companies and groups can reduce their waste, recycle and reuse resources. By focusing on local practitioners' skills employment and development (limiting the need to import talent) we are helping to reduce carbon outputs.

Proposed Actions

- Guidance and pathways support for local theatre companies to meet ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) standards. Although we are (generally) small organisations, we strive to improve how we operate as a steward of nature, how we manage relationships with employees, suppliers, customers, our communities, and how our leadership functions in this regard.

- Support companies in looking after and adapting existing work spaces. This includes assurances around the on-going feasibility of spaces such as that of Prospect Park in the Carnegie and the means to further fit it out so that it is truly fit for purpose will allow us to work in ecologically sound 'spaces to skite about' (Ara Toi Strategy) that benefit not only us but the wider community.
- Support the creation and generation of work that is not reliant on overseas multinational companies and prevents us being reduced to a service hub.
- Support for design and technical workshop space that can be used by multiple companies and groups and where they can share and trade resources.

Strategy Alignment

*Council Key Principle: Sustainability, Te Ao Tūroa;
Ara Toi: Inspired Connections & Creative Economy;
Economic Development: Alliances for Innovation.*

Moving Around Our City

A significant barrier to maintaining and growing the Fortune Theatre's audience was due to the venue's inaccessibility, which was not merely a matter of obstacles faced by people with disabilities, but an inhospitable environment for all, whether they be visiting or employed on site.

As our population grows, ages, and diversifies, accessibility and inclusion must be central to any consultation around performing arts going forwards. As an independent theatre company, we recognise the value of accessibility and take this into consideration for all our projects, resources permitting.

Proposed Actions

- In the development of any site or significant initiative going forwards, consult with a range of members of the disabled community, including organisations such as Arts Access Aotearoa - Putanga Toi ki Aotearoa.
- Prioritise the development of sites and spaces that those with accessibility needs have identified as being – or potentially being – user-friendly.
- Ensure that sites and spaces can be readily accessed via public transport, cycle ways, and mobility parking, and are in proximity to key services and businesses.
- Support local performing arts companies and groups in delivering initiatives that improve access, such as signed and low-stimulation performances.

Strategy Alignment

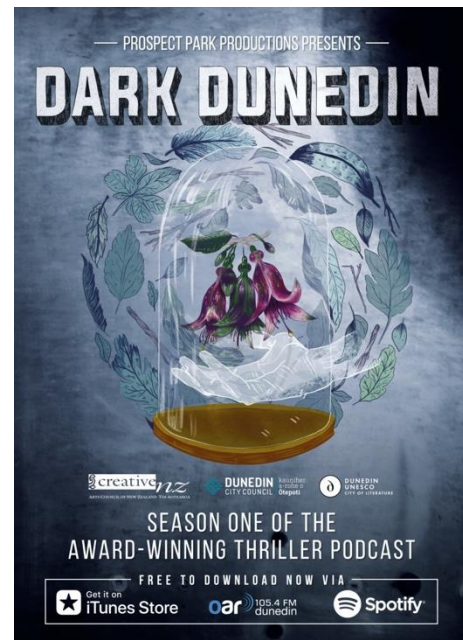
*Ara Toi: Access and Inclusion;
Economic Development: Alliances for Innovation;
Spatial Plan & Parks and Recreation.*

Growth

In late 2017, Prospect Park met with Otago Access Radio to propose a podcast entitled *Dark Dunedin*. The project was new territory for both parties. Season One was launched as a special event incorporating the Town Belt and Olveston during the 2018 Dunedin Fringe Festival, which was chronicled by Associate Professor Hilary Halba for the international online journal, *The Theatre Times*:

Dark Dunedin: Heaven Looks On interlaces geography, history, stories, hearsay, and fiction through multiple narratives ... and has at its physical and emotional epicenter [sic] Dunedin's Town Belt...the venture is a true community event, mobilizing audiences and theatre-makers through a fusion of the numinous with every day in Duncan's sometimes elegiac, sometimes funny and earthy writing, and in her creation of a Dunedin mythos. (14/4/18)

Season one won multiple awards and Prospect Park has since recorded seasons two and three of *Dark Dunedin* with the support of Dunedin City Council and Creative New Zealand Arts Grants, which went towards the writing, research, and workshopping of the scripts, paying for 16+ hours of studio time, employing 14 local actors, and commissioning original artworks for each of the nine episodes from local artist Jess Newton. Limited editions of these works are available to purchase as well as view online since the launch of season two April 1st, 2021. Seasons one and two are available on a range of platforms including Apple and Google podcasts, Spotify, You Tube, and the Otago Access Radio website. In short, the *Dark Dunedin* project is emblematic of an entrepreneurial and creative local mixture of growth and networking that has reached a global audience.



We are rightly proud of our gaming and film industry in Dunedin, which have received substantial support in recent times. As Enterprise Dunedin CEO John Christie points out in his *Star* column, film is:

more than just our locations, it is the wide-reaching benefits across our broader creative, service and tourism sectors, our crew and local talent...training and career pathways for our people to enter this globally significant industry and it's the capacity to tell our unique southern stories for international audiences that underpin our commitment to a flourishing film sector in Dunedin. (8/4/21)

Theatre occupies both a separate and complimentary space within the local arts and culture ecology, also contributing to the city's economic and wellbeing strategies. And yet,

this value and its leverage potential appears to have been often overlooked. On page 27 of the *Future of Us* document, theatre is not included under Ara Toi. At the public library, above the self-checkout kiosks there is a board celebrating our UNESCO status. Under the theatre heading, the Fortune Theatre is written about as if still in operation, three years after it was closed abruptly and without warning.

It is not an either-or argument to invest in the arts locally, and the council has a crucial role to play in how this is presented and delivered. Furthermore, no one would rightly question closing the art gallery, Toitū, Lan Yuan Chinese Garden, Olveston, or our libraries. Dunedin's bid for UNESCO City of literature status, highlighted:

the quality of the city's considerable literary heritage, its diverse combination of literary events, businesses, institutions and organisations, plus its thriving community of writers, *playwrights* [our italics] and lyricists. (<https://mch.govt.nz/dunedin-thrilled-be-unesco-city-literature>)

Among the criteria set by UNESCO, the characteristics shared by cities of literature include 'drama ... playing an important role in the city', the 'existence of public or private cultural centres, which preserve, promote, and disseminate domestic and foreign literature', and an 'active involvement of traditional and new media in promoting literature and strengthening the market for literary products'. (see <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/>)

Proposed Actions

- Show increased courage in our UNESCO status, including writing for theatre, by further investing in, leveraging, and integrating into other areas. We have an opportunity to move away from the perception of theatre as a niche activity and support initiatives in a similar vein to Playwrights' Studio Scotland in Edinburgh, whose vision sees Scotland as 'a place where playwrights thrive and excel and where they are valued as central and essential to a strong and healthy culture.' (see www.playwrightsstudio.co.uk; NB: Prospect Park worked with Playwrights' Studio Scotland to programme Edinburgh playwright Tim Barrow's *Book Club* for the 2020 Dunedin Fringe).
- Development of a range of third-place spaces that can - amongst other activities - be used for live performance. This would be in addition to conventional theatre models.
- As with the need for healthy and affordable homes, prioritise upgrading and investing in existing venues and performing arts spaces to be healthy and affordable for practitioners and audiences alike, allowing all to grow and thrive.
- In addition to our excellent festivals, there should never not be live theatre options for locals and tourists alike. Therefore, support for smaller companies' programme development that will contribute to ensuring increased continuity and more sustainable employment models alongside retaining and growing audiences. Currently, most companies exist on a project-by-project basis, which is detrimental in the long term.

Strategy Alignment

Council Key Principle: Sustainability; Te Ao Tūroa;

*Ara Toi: Access and Inclusion, Inspired Connections & Creative Economy;
Economic Development: Business vitality, Alliances for Innovation. Linkages beyond our
borders, & A compelling destination;
Spatial Plan & Parks and Recreation.*

Conclusion

By ensuring its integration with the 10-Year-Plan, Arts and culture, and specifically theatre and the performing arts, have an important role to play in realising the Dunedin City Council's strategies. As stated on page 8 of the Economic Development strategy:

The arts and culture sector plays an important part in Dunedin's economy. It contributes to the development of the economy in its own right through its practitioners, businesses and employees, but the sector also reinforces other sectors (for example tourism, engineering and ICT). Significantly, it provides a point of difference, vibrancy and place and identity shaping elements to the city.

We have an opportunity now to set a precedent around the delivery and support of the performing arts of which our amazing city could be truly proud. To do otherwise, is to truncate possibilities for current and future practitioners, projects, and initiatives that would benefit the community at large.



Dark Dunedin Season 1 commissioned artwork by Jess Newton.