



## **Submission to the Dunedin City Council**

**Draft 2025–2034 10-Year Plan**

**From: Regent Theatre Trust of Otago**

**Re: Support for Allocation of CAPEX Funding for the Stage on a Stage Project**

**Date: 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

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### **Introduction**

The Regent Theatre Trust of Otago welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Dunedin City Council's Draft 2025–2034 9-Year Plan. As the custodian of one of New Zealand's largest and most cherished heritage theatres we are committed to preserving the Regent Theatre's iconic status while ensuring its continued relevance, accessibility, and viability for current and future generations. Further, as an active collaborator in Ōtepoti's performing arts sector, we submit this response in support of a series of crucial requests that we believe will ensure the continued vibrancy, sustainability, and accessibility of the city's performing arts infrastructure and programming.

We write to request the allocation of Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) funds in the 9-Year Plan to enable the delivery of the **Stage on a Stage Project** at the Regent Theatre. This new venue will have a seating capacity of 300-350, capable of accommodating to a wide array of performance types in several different configurations.

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### **1. Allocation of CAPEX Funds for the Stage on a Stage Project (Regent Theatre)**

We strongly advocate for the allocation of Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) funding in the 9-Year Plan to enable the delivery of the Stage on a Stage Project at the Regent Theatre. This project involves the installation of modular, flexible, raked seating that will significantly expand the Regent's usability for small-to-medium productions, educational programmes, rehearsals, community events, and innovative performances. It offers an energy-efficient and cost-effective solution that honours the heritage of the venue while opening new creative and community opportunities.

We are proud to note that this project is actively supported by numerous key producers and performing arts professionals and entities both local and national (including the Playhouse Theatre, Stage South, and Zeal Land), who see this infrastructure as essential to supporting access, and creating opportunities for diverse performance needs in the immediate future. This collaboration ensures alignment with wider community needs and shared strategic objectives, fostering a unified approach towards development and growth – all of which is more articulately outlined in the support letters attached to this submission, which I urge you to read.

This project reflects our vision of a more accessible, inclusive, and adaptable Regent Theatre that continues to serve as a cornerstone of Dunedin's cultural and civic life. The Trust fully believes that this initiative will achieve a net gain in revenue and wellbeing for the city whilst the newbuild project is developed.

### **Strategic Alignment**

The Stage on a Stage Project aligns with several priorities outlined in the Council's Draft Plan, including:

- **A Creative and Vibrant City** – Supporting local arts, culture, and community participation through a diverse and adaptable performing arts venue.
  - **A Stronger Economy** – Stimulating economic activity in the city centre by hosting more frequent events and encouraging wider venue access.
  - **A Sustainable Future** – Offering a cost-effective, environmentally responsible way to expand programming without increasing the carbon footprint of large-scale productions.
  - **Community Wellbeing** – Ensuring broader community access to cultural experiences and participation in the arts, particularly for youth, schools, and emerging voices.
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### **Request for Support**

We respectfully request that the Dunedin City Council:

- **Allocate CAPEX funds in the 2025–2034 9-Year Plan** toward the development and implementation of the Stage on a Stage Project at the Regent Theatre.

This investment will serve as a cornerstone contribution that will enable us to leverage additional support from philanthropic, community, and national funding bodies to meet the OPEX costs of the initiative, ensuring delivery of a high-quality and accessible solution for our city's cultural infrastructure.

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### **Conclusion**

The Stage on a Stage Project represents a timely and forward-thinking opportunity to strengthen Dunedin's cultural offering and to future-proof one of its most significant civic assets. With Council's strategic investment in its existing infrastructure, we can realise a vision of a more flexible, inclusive, and sustainable Regent Theatre.

We thank the Council for its ongoing support and welcome the opportunity to speak to this submission in person.

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## **2. Reinstatement of the \$17.1M Capital Expenditure Budget for Performing Arts**

We join with our partners across the city in strongly urging Council to reinstate the \$17.1 million capital expenditure budget for performing arts venues that was previously included in long-term planning but is now omitted in the current draft. The removal of this funding severely undermines the sector's ability to deliver safe, functional, and future-ready performance spaces that support the creative sector, community users, and economic growth through cultural tourism and event hosting. Investment in arts infrastructure is not discretionary—it is foundational to a thriving, creative, and connected city.

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### 3. Support for the Playhouse Theatre

We advocate for ongoing and increased support to ensure that the Playhouse Theatre can continue delivering its invaluable work with preschoolers, children, and rakatahi. The Playhouse is the only venue in Ōtepoti dedicated to children's theatre and creative development for young people, with programmes that foster early engagement in the arts and build lifelong cultural participation. Ensuring the sustainability of the Playhouse Theatre aligns directly with Council's commitments to community wellbeing, educational equity, and access to cultural experiences for all.

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### 4. Creation and Adoption of an Ōtepoti Theatre Action Plan

We strongly support the recommendation of the city's Performing Arts Group – comprised of the Regent Theatre, Stage South, the Playhouse Theatre, and the Athenaeum, that Council partner with the sector to create and adopt an Ōtepoti Theatre Action Plan.

Such a plan would:

- Provide a clear, collaborative roadmap for the future of theatre in Dunedin.
- Address venue access, sector development, engagement, infrastructure needs, and cultural equity.
- Ensure long-term coordination between Council and the creative community.

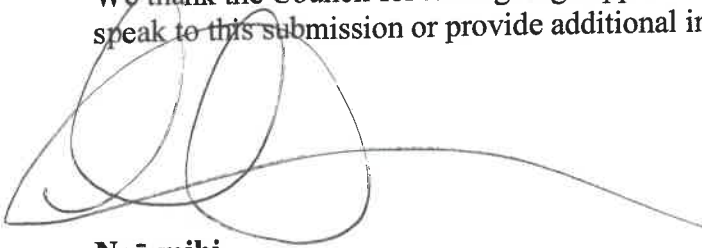
An Ōtepoti Theatre Action Plan would demonstrate leadership, vision, and partnership – positioning Dunedin as a forward-thinking cultural city that values and nurtures its artistic community.

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### Conclusion

We urge Council to seize this opportunity to invest meaningfully in the future of the performing arts in Dunedin. These requests—from targeted infrastructure funding to sector strategy—represent more than budget lines; they are commitments to creativity, inclusion, economic resilience, and cultural identity.

We thank the Council for its ongoing support of the arts and welcome the opportunity to speak to this submission or provide additional information if needed.



**Ngā mihi,**  
**Sarah Anderson**  
DIRECTOR  
The Regent Theatre

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## **Budget Breakdown – Stage on a Stage – Regent Theatre**

**Overall Budget: \$1,600,000**

### **1. Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) - \$1,300,000**

- **Renovation and Expansion: \$200,000**
  - Modify existing spaces in the parking building behind the Regent for theatre seating, stage enhancements, and technical equipment storage.
- **Technical Upgrades: \$50,000**
  - Additional lighting systems, and acoustics to ensure high-quality productions and audience experience.
- **Accessibility Improvements: \$50,000**
  - Installation of wheelchair ramps, and accessible seating to comply with modern standards and ensure inclusivity.
- **Staging Equipment \$1,100,000**
  - Purchase and installation of risers, truss additions, drapes and other necessary fixtures to enhance theatre functionality and aesthetics.

### **2. Operational Expenditure (OPEX) - \$300,000**

- **Staffing Costs: \$50,000**
  - Technicians, operational crew and administrative staff to manage productions and theatre operations.
- **Programming and Events: \$250,000**
  - Cost associated with curating and delivering a diverse program of performances and events that align with strategic objectives and community interests.

### **Total Budget: \$1,600,000**

This draft budget breakdown outlines the allocation of funds across capital and operational expenditures required for the development and successful operation of a medium-sized theatre within Dunedin's Regent Theatre. Each category is designed to support the theatre's mission of enriching cultural life and ensuring sustainable operations. Adjustments and detailed cost estimations may be refined based on further project planning and stakeholder consultations.

### **Funding Request**

The Regent Theatre Trust of Otago has committed \$50,000 from its fundraising proceeds towards seed funding for an underwriting/presentation budget to support the OPEX expenses involved in delivering work with the reduced seating capacity associated with this initiative. Jennifer Ward-Lealand is the Trust's Patron and together we will be launching a national fundraising campaign to build towards a Pūtea Tautoko fund that will ensure the project's ongoing sustainability within the theatre's operations.

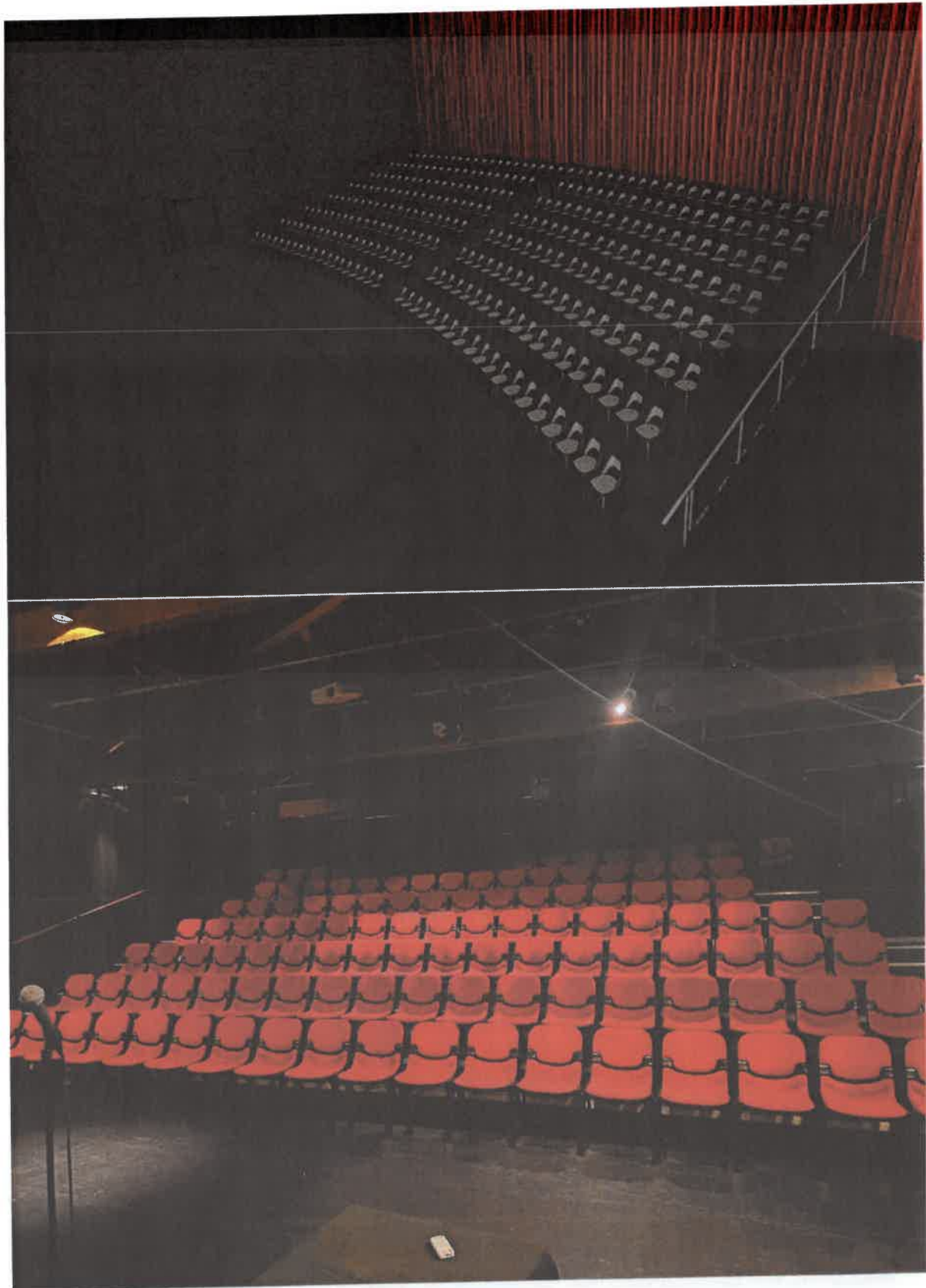
With this as our intent, we request funding support from the Dunedin City Council to meet the \$1.3 million CAPEX expenses noted above. This funding will be a strategic investment in an existing asset to address the immediate need in the city for a suitably equipped mid-sized theatre, capable of supporting the sector while long-term projects are worked towards.

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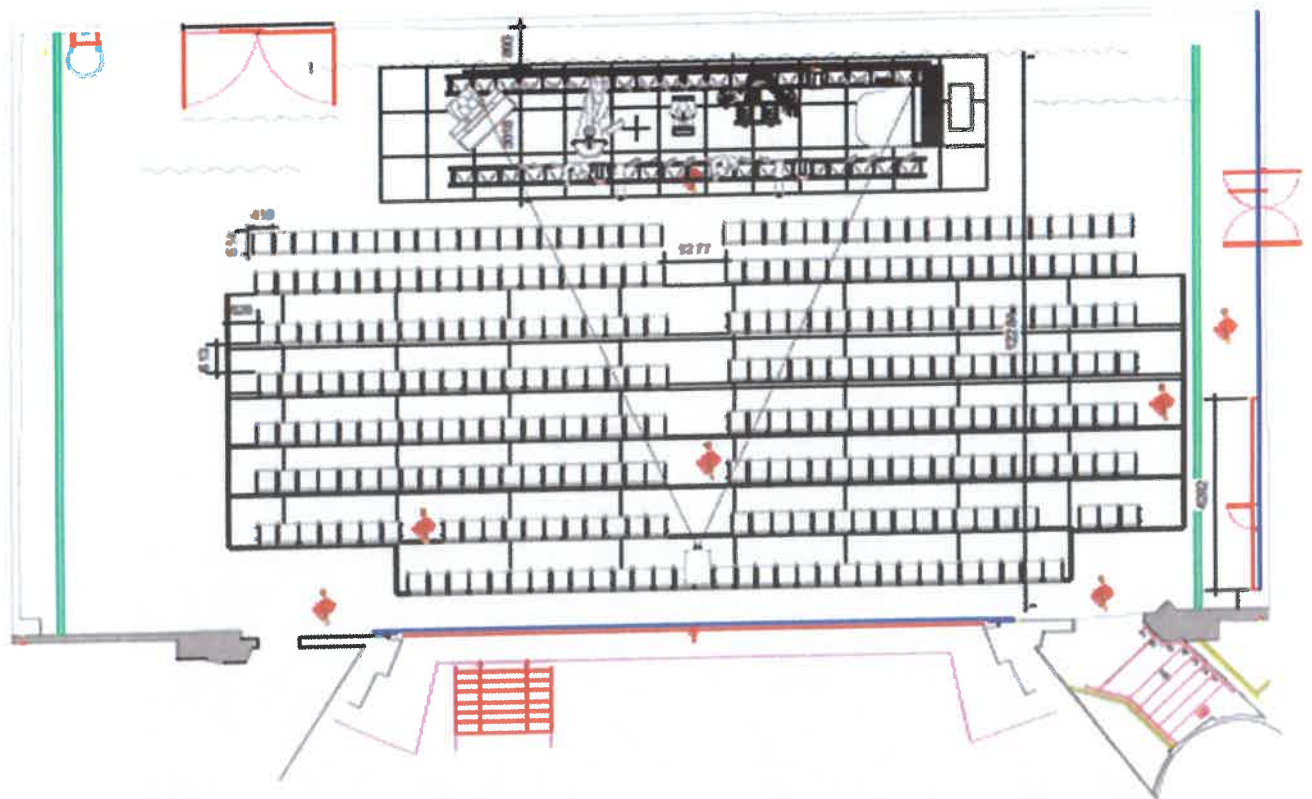
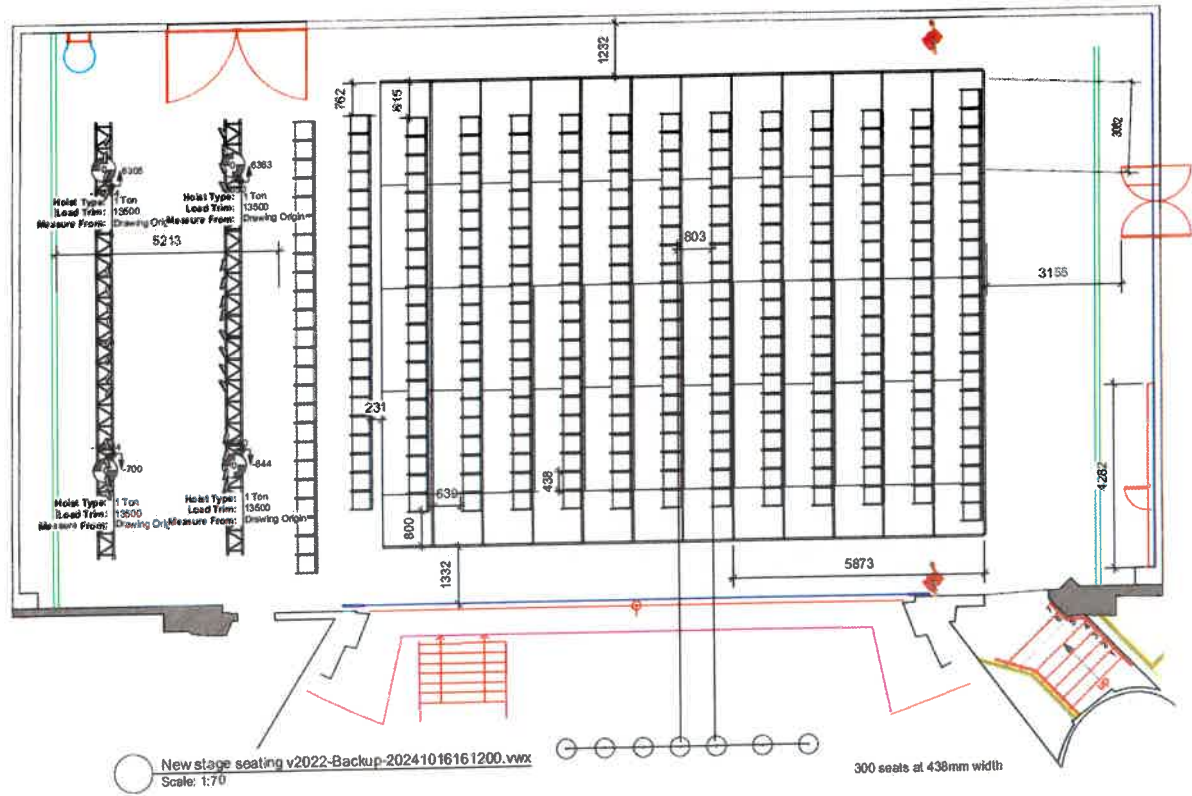


**APPENDIX ONE: SUPPORTING IMAGES**

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Sarah Anderson  
DIRECTOR  
[saraha@regenttheatre.co.nz](mailto:saraha@regenttheatre.co.nz)

## **STAGE ON A STAGE – SUPPORT LETTERS**

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502/393 Great North Rd  
Grey Lynn  
Auckland 1021

28<sup>th</sup> April 2025

### **The Regent Theatre's Stage on a Stage Project**

Tēnā rā koutou,

I am writing in support of the Regent Theatre's Stage on a Stage project and am very pleased to be acting as Patron for this enterprise as I believe it offers an outstanding solution to a long-standing gap in Dunedin's performing arts infrastructure. Throughout my 40+ years as a performer and director, I have championed the building of new theatre spaces, from The Watershed in the early 90s through to the Auckland Waterfront Theatre and Q Theatre. These venues all proved to be well utilised, providing theatre space for various different sized shows and their respective audiences. However, they were all new builds and thus took significant time to complete.

Recently I toured to Ōtepōti Dunedin to perform as part the recent Arts Festival. Our venue was the Mayfair Theatre which I had not performed in since 1989 and which, frankly, hasn't improved much since then. Backstage is dire with inadequate dressing rooms, lighting and facilities. If the Stage on a Stage venue had been available, I feel confident our producer would have chosen this instead. As it stands there is limited availability of mid-sized spaces in Dunedin so you take what you can get, however dilapidated.

The Stage on a Stage initiative is a creative and practical approach to this issue. By transforming the Regent Theatre's existing stage into a flexible mid-sized venue, the project will be able to use existing resources—staging, facilities, and infrastructure. The capital required to install seating, drapes, and technical components is relatively modest compared to constructing a new venue from scratch. Having been involved in new venue creation, I well know how these costs can blow out. This investment would go a long way in supporting the sector's sustainability while longer-term solutions are developed.

A purpose-built, accessible mid-sized venue would significantly benefit the performing arts community and audiences alike. I feel keenly for the local theatre makers looking for opportunities to present their work, as well as touring productions who want to contribute to Dunedin's cultural and artistic landscape, as currently the pickings are very slim.



It's also encouraging to see the Regent Theatre Trust of Otago pledge a substantial portion of proceeds from its 24-hour Book Sale to help cover operational costs.

I strongly support this initiative and the Regent Theatre's submission to the Dunedin City Council for CAPEX funding to realise the vision of this project.

Nāku me ngā mihi o te wā



Jennifer Ward-Lealand CNZM  
Te Atamira  
T: 021 994 057

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Roger Hall** <[rogerhallnz@gmail.com](mailto:rogerhallnz@gmail.com)>  
Date: Mon, 28 Apr 2025 at 16:22  
Subject: Re: Support Letter  
To: Pip Hall <[misspiphall@gmail.com](mailto:misspiphall@gmail.com)>

*4D 173 Hurstmere Road, Takapuna Auckland 0622*

Regent Theatre's Stage on a Stage Project

I write to support this project:

It is practical

It can be operating very quickly

It is cost-effective compared to most alternatives.

It retains the advantage of the Regent's central city location.

It retains the historical links to Dunedin theatre that the Regent has had for well over a hundred years.

(Sir) Roger Hall KNZM

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4 November 2024

Kia ora,

I write to let you know that the Dunedin Arts Festival fully supports The Regent Theatre's initiative to build a mid-sized venue within their existing larger venue.

We are supporting The Regent's request for funding to enable this, not just as it will benefit the Dunedin Arts Festival as a future venue, but as it will also benefit the Dunedin and Otago community, and better connect the region with the wider touring arts community in Aotearoa.

The Dunedin Arts Festival often collaborates with other Festivals and arts organisations within the motu, around show sharing, knowledge sharing and general support and advice. This collaborative approach along with the work the group of festivals were actively doing prior to covid, means the Regent's initiative of making an accessible and sustainable venue that can be used by multiple companies of varying sizes, aligns closely with what we have been trying to do on a national scale, and we wholeheartedly support this.

The Dunedin Arts Festival presents a biennial pan-arts form festival across the bottom of the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, presenting works not only from local and domestic artists, but from all over the world. An accessible, mid-sized venue would be of benefit to not only us, but to other presenters around the country, and therefore we strongly support this initiative and look forward to presenting shows there in the future.

Ngā mihi,

Charlie Unwin  
Festival Director  
PO Box 5710 \* DUNEDIN 9054 \* New Zealand  
ph 021 1790111  
email [director@artsfestivaldunedin.co.nz](mailto:director@artsfestivaldunedin.co.nz)  
web [www.dunedinartsfestival.co.nz](http://www.dunedinartsfestival.co.nz)



28 April 2025

To whom it may concern

**Re: Support of the proposed Stage on Stage project**

Indian Ink Theatre Company has been in existence since 1997 and has been regularly touring original New Zealand theatre to Dunedin since not long after. However, since Fortune Theatre's closure in 2018, like many of this country's leading touring companies, we have struggled to find a flexible, well-equipped venue that's suitable for the sharing of high-quality, professional theatre. Thus, it has been over seven years since an Indian Ink play could be shared with local communities.

The Regent Theatre's "Stage on a Stage" project is the perfect accessible solution to this long-standing gap in the City's current performing arts venue offerings, until the long-term goal of a new build can be achieved.

Its implementation would entice established touring companies like Indian Ink to return to Otago on a regular basis, while allowing local producers to present mid-sized works that can help rebuild and re-energise the local arts scene, ensuring Dunedin recaptures its reputation as a vibrant arts and culture capital.

The additional capital investment needed to create the on-stage seating, draping and tech is relatively minimal compared to new build costs, and will help ensure the health of the sector while the long-term goal of a new build is being worked on.

That the Regent Theatre Trust of Otago (Patron: Jennifer Ward Lealand CNZM) is prepared to commit most of its 24-hour book sale proceeds to support OPEX for this initiative shows that locals are already hugely invested in making this idea work. However, further funds are required to make this vision a reality.

Indian Ink Theatre Company therefore strongly supports the Regent Theatre's submission to the Dunedin City Council for CAPEX funding to realise this very necessary project.

With kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jude Froude".

Jude Froude  
General Manager  
Indian Ink Theatre Company  
E: [jude@indianink.co.nz](mailto:jude@indianink.co.nz)

Ph: 0274 194 861

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LARA MACGREGOR

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+64 21 234 2403

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## THE REGENT THEATRE'S STAGE ON A STAGE PROJECT

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Tēnā koutou,

I am writing in support of the Regent Theatre's Stage on a Stage project. I am a full-time professional theatre practitioner who lives in Ōtepoti but who has, since stepping down as Artistic Director at the Fortune Theatre in 2015, worked outside of Ōtepoti.

This is due, in most part, to the city's currently unaffordable, and poorly maintained mid-sized arts venue offerings.

I believe that the Regent Theatre's Stage on a Stage, in conjunction with a new mid-size venue and upgrade of Dunedin's only Children's Theatre, The Playhouse, will provide an accessible and necessary solution to a long-standing gap in the city's current performing arts venue offerings.

The current lack of an appropriately resourced and operated mid-sized theatre means that local theatre producers are extremely limited in their ability to present their work.

As a Producer and Director, my kaupapa is to provide sustainable living wages to artists. This means a season of a show (in addition to a minimum four-week rehearsal period) needs to be able to run a minimum of two weeks to provide any form of adequate income. When you look at The Mayfair for example (one of the city's most embarrassing venues), hire costs are over \$1000 per day (not including sound equipment, heating, and technician costs). For a two-week season, plus technical week, this already totals \$21K without additional costs. When the maximum fund I can apply to go toward wages/costs of ONE show per year through DCC is \$20K – you do the math.

Local, and touring, professionals are financially crippled by existing venue daily charges while trying to balance budgets on minimal funding. Touring shows cannot be presented adequately due to embarrassingly dilapidated mid-sized buildings, and the entire performing arts ecosystem is compromised to such a degree that Dunedin's vibrant arts and cultural capital has been dramatically impacted. Eg: artists leaving the city and living elsewhere, tours (in significant numbers) no longer include Dunedin on their touring circuit, and the quality of local work that is produced (outside of the Arts Festival) is seriously compromised because of lack of venue options, funds, resource and support.

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The Stage on a Stage project, through effectively creating a mid-sized theatre in the established Regent Theatre facilities is an inventive way to support the presentation of mid-size work in various configurations through utilising the Regent's existing infrastructure, staging and facilities.

The additional capital investment needed to create the on-stage seating, draping and technical requirements is a relatively minimal investment and this unique offering in tandem with a new build, will future-proof the health of the local and national Arts sector.

An accessible mid-sized venue is of immediate importance as the city has already lost some of its best practitioners who simply cannot create work in what is purportedly the 'City of Literature'.

The Regent Theatre Trust of Otago's commitment of a large portion of its 24-hour Book Sale proceeds as seed funding to support the operational expenses involved is exciting and I look forward to seeing the OPEX funding project evolve sustainably with Jennifer Ward-Lealand CNZM as its patron.

I strongly support this initiative and the Regent Theatre's submission to the Dunedin City Council for CAPEX funding to realise the vision of this project.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with further questions.

Nāku iti noa, nā

Lara Macgregor

Director, Producer, Actor, Tutor, Script Advisor





ROYAL NEW ZEALAND BALLET

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14 November 2024

To whom it may concern

**RE: Support of the proposed Stage on Stage Project**

The Royal New Zealand wholeheartedly supports any initiative that extends the ability for the Regent Theatre to bring performing arts to Dunedin and surrounding region.

Opportunities for the RNZB to showcase our company and New Zealand talent more broadly are always appreciated. The Stage on Stage project will provide a vital resource, allowing for theatrical productions at a midscale size to tour to Dunedin, a model that is currently unavailable. This holds great potential for developing audiences, creativity and careers for the next generation.

The RNZB is very supportive of opportunities which help us extend our engagement with audiences of all ages with productions of various scales and especially so in Dunedin.

As we are currently experiencing high audience demand from the region exploring any available avenues to increase our presence is encouraged. Recognising that the Regent Theatre serves as a hub for many audiences willing to travel from surrounding regions to enjoy the cultural offer in the city.

The project aligns closely with our goals to widen access to the arts and to tour widely throughout the country. With the right programme in place, it has potential to incentivise inbound tourism and will develop the profile and identity of the region. It is an initiative we wholeheartedly support.

Yours faithfully



**Tobias Perkins**  
Executive Director

PIP HALL  
65a Stafford Street,  
Dunedin Central, 9016

29 April 2024

### **The Regent Theatre's Stage on a Stage Project**

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of the Regent Theatre's Stage on a Stage project as I believe it will provide an accessible solution to a long-standing gap in the city's current performing arts venue offerings.

While I believe a new purpose-built venue as championed by Stage South is the best long term strategy for a mid-sized theatre space, I thoroughly endorse the idea of the Stage on a Stage initiative proposed by the Regent.

Dunedin / Ōtepoti is in dire need of a mid-sized theatre space to serve both practitioners and audiences alike. Lack of opportunity is driving our creatives away to other industries and other locations. Local audiences are missing out on seeing themselves reflected onstage and to have their world view opened by national and international touring work. A vibrant arts scene is a sign of a healthy city and given the state of the world right now, a robust cultural identity and having an avenue to explore, dissect, process and share what's happening around us is vital for our community wellbeing.

I strongly believe Stage on a Stage is an ingenious solution to address this problem. From a production point of view it offers a flexible performance space, with technical support and an existing inbuilt infrastructure. It is also a project that can happen swiftly with minimal investment. It can also build on an already existing patron base for both audience and practitioners, rather than having to start from the ground up.

I strongly support this initiative and the Regent Theatre's submission to the Dunedin City Council for CAPEX funding to realise the vision of this project and wish them all the very best with this vital project.

Kind regards



Pip Hall  
Playwright / Script Writer

