

Submission on the Draft 9 Year Plan 2025–2034

From: Dr. Sheena Townsend (individual resident and active member of Dunedin's arts and education communities)

I am writing to express deep concern about the decision to remove funding for performing arts from the DCC's draft 9 Year Plan. This is not just a deferral of a "nice to have." It is the quiet dismantling of the cultural backbone that supports our creative communities and young talent in this city. The current "status quo" for theatre infrastructure in Ōtepoti is precarious at best — and in many cases, outright inadequate. Te Whare o Rukutia and the Playhouse Theatre are under threat. If they disappear, we are not maintaining the status quo; we are sliding backward.

Alongside our emerging artists, we have a strong community of established professionals — writers, directors, designers, and performers — who are eager to offer high-calibre work. Since the devastating closure of the Fortune Theatre, there has been no fit-for-purpose venue for professional theatre in Dunedin. These artists are ready to contribute meaningfully to the cultural and economic life of the city — but they need spaces in which to do that.

I strongly support the collective recommendations being put forward by Stage South, the Playhouse, the Regent, and others. Our struggling local small and mid-size venues are struggling to continue to serve our community with spaces that provide affordable, accessible opportunities for creative development, local storytelling, participation and enrichment of the lives of our audiences. A diverse ecosystem of venues provide spaces where careers begin, where audiences and performers may first fall in love with theatre, and where the arts can remain open to all.

Without adequate support across the full spectrum of venues — professional and grassroots — we risk hollowing out the performing arts in Ōtepoti.

I respectfully recommend that the DCC:

- Reinstate funding for Te Whare o Rukutia
- Maintain and ideally increase the annual Professional Theatre Fund
- Invest in Playhouse Theatre infrastructure to prevent imminent closure
- Ring-fence any proceeds from the sale of 231 Stuart Street for reinvestment into performing arts infrastructure
- Develop an Ōtepoti Theatre Action Plan, including infrastructure and operational funding pathways for community theatres like the Globe Theatre.

These actions are achievable, future-focused, and vital to the cultural life of our city. Please don't let Dunedin's creative infrastructure erode further. Our artists, our audiences, and our young people deserve better.

Ngā mihi nui,
Dr. Sheena Townsend