

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

**From: Whakaari Aotearoa – Drama New Zealand, Otago Southland Branch**

**Re: Advocacy for a Fit-for-Purpose, Accessible Theatre Space in Dunedin**

**Date: 22/4/25**

To the Mayor and Councillors of Dunedin City,

As the Otago Southland branch of Whakaari Aotearoa – Drama New Zealand, the national subject association for drama in education, we write to you with a shared vision and an urgent plea: that Dunedin City Council pursues robust, sustainable, and inclusive pathways toward the establishment of a **fit-for-purpose, accessible theatre space** that meets the needs of our vibrant and growing creative community.

### **Why This Matters**

Dunedin has long been a hub for creativity, expression, and cultural innovation. Our city is home to a broad range of theatre-makers, educators, students, and audiences, all of whom contribute to a rich and thriving artistic ecosystem. Educators saw meaningful engagement with the Fortune Theatre's education program making professional pathways explicit by collaborating with Otago University students both on stage and in the diverse, skilled areas behind the scenes. However, we are currently constrained by a lack of Theatre space that is accessible, adaptable, and suitable for the diverse needs of contemporary theatre practice.

A purpose-built or properly adapted venue would not only provide a home for the performing arts but would also act as a catalyst for community engagement, youth development, education, and economic regeneration. It would be a cornerstone of our civic identity—a space that champions inclusion, expression, and creativity.

### **The Needs Are Clear**

The creative community in Ōtepoti urgently needs:

- **Accessibility:** Spaces that are physically and economically accessible to all artists and audience members, regardless of ability or background.
- **Flexibility:** Venues that support a variety of performance styles, rehearsal processes, and technical requirements.
- **Affordability:** Reasonable hire rates that do not exclude emerging or community-based practitioners.
- **Visibility:** A central venue that acknowledges and celebrates the role of the arts in the life of the city.

- **Support for Education:** Spaces that welcome schools, kura kaupapa Māori, and tertiary institutions to learn, explore, and perform.

## A Call for Action

We urge Council to:

1. **Prioritise the creation of a central, accessible, fit-for-purpose theatre space** in upcoming urban development and cultural strategy planning.
2. **Engage meaningfully with the creative community** to understand the specific needs of theatre practitioners and educators across all sectors.
3. **Explore partnerships** with arts organisations, mana whenua, educational institutions, and local businesses to ensure a collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable vision.
4. **Champion equitable access** to the arts for all residents of Dunedin—recognising that a city which invests in the arts is investing in its social, cultural, and economic wellbeing.

## Conclusion

A fit-for-purpose theatre space is not a luxury. It is a necessity. It is a place where stories are told, where young people find their voice, and where communities come together. We, the Otago Southland branch of Drama New Zealand, stand ready to support this vision and to work with Council in shaping a future that honours our creative legacy and builds towards a more inclusive, expressive, and connected city.

Nāku noa, nā,

Otago Southland Branch - Whakaari Aotearoa – Drama New Zealand

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