

RE: DCC Draft 9 Year Plan Consultation Submission

Tēnā koe

The submission points discussed below are in relation to the state of our local performing arts sector and infrastructure. The discussion and proposed actions are presented in line with the focus of “looking after what we’ve got.” as stipulated in the Draft 9 Year Plan Consultation document (p. 6).

231 Stuart Street

It’s been several years since the former Fortune Theatre building has been identified as unsuitable for redevelopment as a performance space. The sale of this asset could be used to begin work on upgrading an existing venue.

While the Playhouse is on the smaller side of capacity requirements for a future-fit venue, we know that without urgent attention we will not only lose our children’s theatre (an important point of difference in our city), but also a venue that has been used in the past for various outside and festival productions.

Proposed action:

Invest proceeds from the sale of 231 Stuart Street into the upgrade of the Playhouse Theatre (the first of the Dunedin Theatre Network venues flagged for redevelopment). This would signal the Council’s will support the future of local performing arts and arts practitioners despite the \$17.1 million for a new venue being removed from the 9 Year Plan.

Progressing and Safeguarding Existing Theatre Networks

Significant time, consultation, planning, and \$100,000 from DCC has already been invested into the Dunedin Theatre Network proposal. It would be imprudent to condemn this work to the same fate as the Charcoal Blue consultation.

The Playhouse, Athenaeum, and Te Whare o Rukutia are three central sites utilised by a range of local and visiting performing artists. In addition, they provide work and experience opportunities for practitioners to develop and retain specialised production and technical expertise that will be essential for operating and managing any new venue(s) in the future.

Proposed action:

Continue to work with and support the Dunedin Network to progress redevelopment of the Playhouse and the Athenaeum. Alongside this, continue to support the operation of Te Whare o Rukutia.

Accessibility

Given that up to a quarter of the population live with some form of disability, the council can and should do more to ensure and support accessibility of the performing arts. This would help grow ticket sales and increase engagement and participation from disabled audiences and practitioners. Currently, this is not happening at all adequately.

The Dunedin Arts Festival has just celebrated its 25th anniversary. In its programme it states that “[t]he Festival would not be possible without the ongoing support from our core funders, **Dunedin City Council**, Otago Community Trust and Creative New Zealand, *who have ensured this treasure of the South’s rich cultural life is accessible to all.*” (p. 5; my italics). And yet, it appears that the festival included:

- NO Audio Described events or touch tours
- NO NZSL translated events
- NO relaxed or sensory relaxed performances

No fewer than 6 Festival events were held at the [Mayfair Theatre](#), a venue that declares on its website that it “does not have disabled access”. Nevertheless, performing arts organisations, companies, and practitioners still find it justifiable to produce work at the Mayfair and other similarly inaccessible venues and no-one with the means or power to do so is holding anyone to account over this. At best, this situation is embarrassing and devalues both the work being presented and audiences.

The [UNCRPD](#) recognises “the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms” (p. 4; v).

Proposed action:

Planning for new and/or redeveloped performing arts venues with involvement from the DCC to be undertaken from the outset with the local disability community and accessibility consultation. This would include regular public updates and invitations for feedback.

Finally – and most importantly – the People and their Work

It is bemusing how resistant the Dunedin City Council is to proactively platforming and investing in the work of local playwrights and theatre creators under our UNESCO City of Literature banner. Whether or not individual councillors have an interest in the artform, the loss of opportunity for the city’s profile is nothing short of absurd, especially when compared with our sister city Edinburgh.

Across the road from where council will listen to and consider submissions for the Draft 9-Year Plan is the Writers Walk. At least 4 of the 25 were playwrights, including Sir Roger Hall and Robert Lord. The latter bequest his home on Titan Street as a writing residency.

The Robert Burns Fellowship is considered New Zealand’s premier literary residency. The fellowship has been awarded to no fewer than 3 playwrights in the last 10 years. One of those playwrights who is based here in Ōtepoti Dunedin also won all three

categories of the Adam NZ Play Award in 2021, one category in 2022, and was received the Bruce Mason Award in 2020 – the first South Island playwright to do so in 26 years.

From 2019 until 2023, I along with producer H-J Kilkelly and Prospect Park Productions co-director ran the Ōtepoti Theatre Lab. Fifteen playwrights developed new works through the programme. The majority went on to some form of further development, and/or the playwrights pursued further writing opportunities including at the International Institute of Modern Letters and the Masters study in the School of Performing Arts at Otago University. Some of these new and emerging playwrights had no formal tertiary education or even previous writing experience.

In addition to opportunities for playwrights, new work development, workshops, and productions require the expertise of performing arts practitioners in various skilled roles, from dramaturgs, producers, techs, directors, designers, actors, and venue managers to name a selection.

Our stories can only be created and developed from here in Ōtepoti Dunedin. With the right supports we can take them out into the world and use them to welcome people from all over the world when they visit our city. We can make international-quality, professional work here, but we can't make it out of thin air.

Proposed action:

Increase funding availability for local performing arts and artists, including the Professional Theatre Fund to enable us to adequately invest in, support, and retain local talent.

This is how we look after what we've already got.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this submission.

Kā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emily Duncan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Emily Duncan