

## COMMENTS ON THE DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL'S DRAFT 9 YEAR PLAN – PERFORMING ARTS

### Money and People

The Dunedin City Council proposed support for events, festivals, music and heritage – \$24.1 million over 9 years.

This includes, 'to keep our city vibrant':

- An additional budget of \$4.4 million for major and community events over the next 5 years
- An increase in funding of \$2 million per year to support event attraction at the Forsyth Barr Stadium and Dunedin Centre Town Hall
- \$137,000 annually to support live music

The draft 2025 Dunedin Festivals and Events Plan envisions Ōtepoti Dunedin as a vibrant city enriched by memorable, inclusive events. It aims to make the city a vibrant place to live, celebrating inclusivity and fostering a strong city identity.

It seems to me that the vibrancy and strong city identity being strived for is an intermittent and fleeting thing. The emphasis is on relatively sparse 'major events' – like the yearly celebration of Matariki and the Mid-Winter Carnival, the biennial Arts Festival, or the rare total solar eclipse in 2028 (after all, the last one glimpsed in NZ was in 1965).

The plan's emphasis on securing major events is to 'increase visitor numbers, drive tourism, and stimulate economic growth'.

My point? What about Dunedin's *every day* vibrancy? What about the *locals* who live and work here and contribute their earnings to Dunedin's economic growth on a daily basis?

What about the people who don't want to wait for a major event to feel the vibrancy of their city?

What about the people who didn't have to wait? The people able to feel the buzz, the magic, the utter joy, and yes - the *vibrancy* of being able to attend a new event every few weeks?

Because for 44 years until May 2018 that's literally what thousands of people did yearly in this city. They attended comedies and farces, tragedies and classics – quality productions with fully realised sets, props, lighting and sound – in their own live theatre venue, presented by their own local and visiting professionals.

Over the last 7 years though, these loyal audiences have had fewer and fewer productions to attend. With a few exceptions, those plays able to be presented have, through lack of venues and funding, been much smaller productions with compact casts, minimal sets and lesser production values. The vibrancy is hard to come by these days.

'The Ōtepoti Live Music Action Plan was adopted to foster long-term development of artists, audiences, live music infrastructure and the live music eco-system ... Budding musicians need support as they develop sustainable creative and professional practices. Music organisations and events such as the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra, Otago Polyfest, Music Heals, and the Amped programme provide pathways for this development and DCC funding can help them continue.'

Just as long-term development of musicians and their audiences requires fostering, so do theatre artists and audiences.

Just as there is a need to foster live music infrastructure and the live music eco-system, so there is that same need to foster the live theatre infrastructure and eco-system.

Just as budding musicians need support as they develop sustainable creative and professional practices, so do budding theatre practitioners.

Theatre organisations like the Playhouse, the Athenaeum and Stage South provide pathways for this development – and DCC FUNDING CAN HELP THEM CONTINUE.

The longer the Dunedin City Council takes to ‘work with the community on how best to support the development of performing arts for our city’:

- the harder it will be to build audiences again
- the more expensive any new infrastructure will be
- the more budding – and established – theatre practitioners will leave the city
- most theatre organisations providing pathways for development will cease to exist

Stage South's vision for a performing arts centre is not just for professionals as the Fortune was, but for the entire community; a purpose built, accessible, functional, 21st century centre for all; a welcoming space for local performing artists of all disciplines and abilities, and for national and international artists.

We see the performing arts centre as the hub of performing arts in our city, an addition full of **vibrancy!**

I urge the City Council to reinstate funding and progress the building of a new performing arts centre in Dunedin.

Kā mihi nui

Karen Elliot  
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