

14 April 2025

Tēnā koutou.

The performing arts in Ōtepoti / Dunedin is in dire straits. I have owned and operated Theatreworks Ltd, a production company in the city since 1992 – working full time in the industry I love, and I can tell you that in all that time I have never felt as fearful for our future as I do now.

We are bleeding the life blood of creative professionals now to the extent that those of us who have committed to stay in the city are struggling to find experienced creatives for the work we do have. And it's only getting worse.

But most importantly - we do not have *somewhere* to present the craft. To tell our uniquely southern stories. To share in what it is that makes us a community. The performing arts are an accessible way of celebrating our community. In these troubled times of division and world on fire anxiety – art – telling stories is what keeps a society connected.

“Life beats down and crushes the soul and art reminds you that you have one.” Stella Adler

In the wake of the loss of the Fortune as a hub for the performing arts – the DCC funded Te Whare o Rukutia. While not an optimal/permanent solution – it did allow the community to hire and place at least a 100 people at a time in the liminal magic space for telling stories. I have hired it many times for both professional theatre work, and also my acting class performances – with over 150 local students crossing those boards per term – many for the first time. It is an important stop-gap. Without any other solutions on the table for the next few years - the DCC needs to reverse its decision to end funding for Te Whare o Rukutia, and must commit to create and adopt an Ōtepoti Theatre Action Plan – and support a new build, community performing arts centre that will future proof the arts in our community.

I am fortunate to have received funding from the DCC Professional Theatre Fund over the last few years which has enabled me to create award winning site-specific work like “Resilience- a lockdown theatre response” and the acclaimed play “Wahine Mātātoa: The (Mostly) True Story Of Erihāpeti Pātahi”. Without out it these two important local stories would still be silent. So I urge the DCC to with this fund, at least at its current level, preferably more.

I have been fortunate to work in the industry for 33 years. I am Kāi Tahu, the bones of my ancestors lie in *these* hills. My company and colleagues, cannot continue to share our hard earned craft without the support of the DCC. Please do not make me join the exodus. Please do not silence the telling of our stories.

Kā mihi nui

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