

Interim Community Report

arts
Performing Arts Strategy



**Creative
Waikato
Toi Waikato**

Introduction

The Waikato performing arts sector and the arts and culture ecosystem as a whole is on the verge of change.

With the construction of the new Waikato Regional Theatre in our midst, there is an opportunity to build upon the strengths of local performing arts activity, which can in turn elevate the sector and help to bring about wider societal, social and economic change.

The performing arts sector has been deeply affected by the covid pandemic, with the cancellation of shows and venues being closed for long periods, the mental toll of rescheduling and the continued need to be reactive to pandemic restrictions has been demanding. However, the sector has shown its resilience in its ability to adapt and rethink in order to continue to serve their communities, and to explore what this sector might look like moving forward.

The Performing Arts Strategy is being developed through broad consultation with the performing arts sector and beyond, and has been supported by Momentum Waikato Community Foundation to also support the development of The Waikato Regional Theatre.



Because this body of work is connected with arts, culture and creativity in the Waikato region, it is important that it is also aligned with the Waikato Arts Navigator (the Waikato's Regional Arts Strategy) in providing a framework for how the sector can contribute to the overall vision that:

The Vision

The Waikato
prosper with
diverse and
transformative
creative¹
activity



¹ creativewaikato.co.nz/advocacy/waikato-arts-navigator

There is an opportunity to build on the cross fertilisation of the various arts groups, artists, venues and facilities that sit within the wider performing arts ecosystem of the Waikato Region.



This strategic vision builds upon the strength, diversity and history of the performing arts community of Hamilton and the wider Waikato Region.

As we look to the future and continued development, it is timely to reimagine a sector that is emboldened with the uniqueness that the Waikato performing arts has to offer, and embracing of the diverse, dynamic and agile communities which it serves.

Fostering an environment which enables communities to see themselves in all forms of performing arts activity, into the future – one of prosperity, hope and inclusiveness.



development process

An
update
on the

A strategic working group consisting of representation from the theatre venues, education, Māori and disability sectors has been serving to oversee high-level engagement around the process, research and scope.



The Creative Waikato team have worked through a broad process of desktop research which led into targeted community consultation specific to this region.



To understand the performing arts sector ecosystem, interviews and focus groups were undertaken, which included 70 people who are involved in the performing arts sector i.e., artists, arts organisations, educators and technicians, but also sought to capture voices of those in the wider community including ethnic groups, community houses, LGBTQI, Māori, Pasifika, people working with youth and those who have access issues.

The questions asked of people were focused on understanding thoughts and ideas on what a thriving performing arts sector looks like, what the challenges and opportunities are for the performing arts sector, the communities' experience of using current venues² and what opportunities there were to complement and support the Waikato Regional Theatre as a new part of the local ecosystem.

² Includes theatres, rehearsal spaces, community halls and school spaces

The background consists of several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in various shades of green and teal. A large, dark green circle is prominent on the left side. Other shapes in lighter shades of green and teal overlap it and each other, creating a layered, abstract effect. The overall color palette is cool and naturalistic.

A few

questions

To guide performing arts development in the Waikato region, with a view to providing a platform to strengthen the ecosystem of performing arts and its infrastructure.



Who is it for?

The Performing Arts Strategy should be relevant for the performing arts sector (organisations and venues), but can also be utilised by funders, community organisations, government and businesses as well as other key regional enablers and stakeholders.

Why does it matter?

Having a strategy that considers the bigger picture of the sector and provides a shared vision or focus for future development is an important way to move forward in a positive direction. It can help us to collectively have a clarity of focus, but to also share responsibility towards enabling the change we want to see. We can each make small contributions to have larger scale change.

Are there big picture trends that inform this work?

There has been an evolving of performing arts sectors internationally over the past 50-60 years. With the presence of global pandemics, divisive politics and growing social movements, it is now more important than ever that the performing arts sector continues to evolve and connect with communities. Arts researcher Steven A Wolff describes the key development as relevant, authentic celebrations of cultural diversity, leading the way in ensuring that the performing arts have a place in the cultural identity and expression of citizens and communities worldwide. These arts centres (our venues, spaces and places) are seen as having a strong alignment with community building and benefits; a shift from simply being a home for the performing arts to being a place of innovation and learning – core contributions to the value, richness and cultural wellbeing of our communities.



‘Modern arts centres are
a major, positive force
in the arts and cultural
ecosystem and
the economic
vitality of many
communities’³

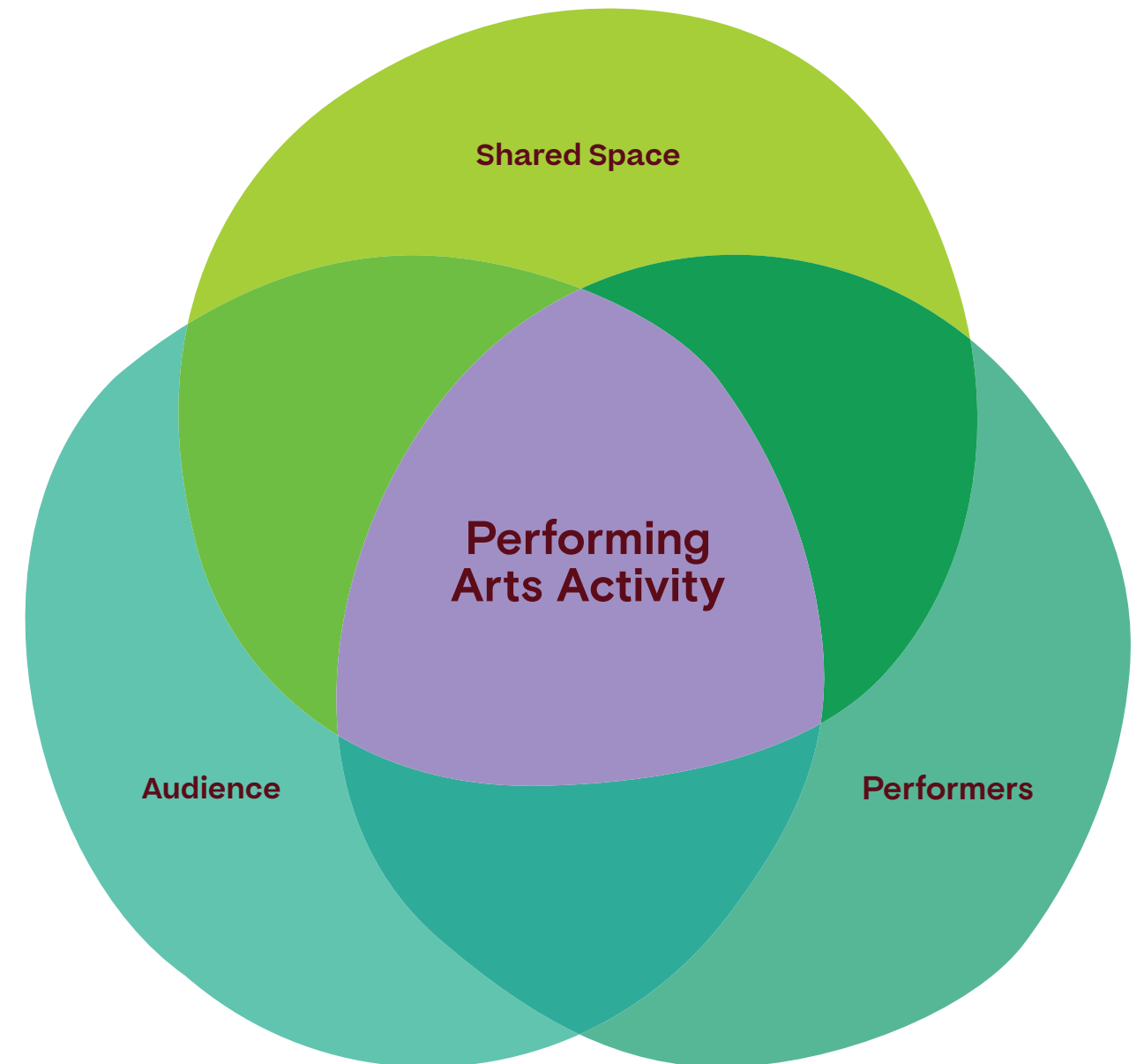
³ Wolff, Steven A. 'The Evolved Performing Arts Centre' <https://www.ams-online.com/the-evolved-performing-arts-centre>

How did we approach this work?

For Creative Waikato, it was important that this engagement and development was led by the Performing Arts Sector.

It has been drawn from conversations with the sector. It speaks to observations of both strengths and gaps seen by the people most active in enabling the types of activity that will embody this strategic framework.

As with all the work we do, we consider this mahi with a cross-regional viewpoint.



It is vital to understand collective impact requires collective vision and scope. But with that in mind, performing arts activity is also directly connected to place. It expresses what it means to be here and now, and how our

stories relate to the spaces where we live, play and create. We acknowledge that performing arts activity is very much about shared space, audiences and performers intertwined in space and time for shared positive impact.



So what
did we

hear?

The importance of youth/
rangatahi as a focus

Focusing on children and youth is essential in embedding an awareness and passion for performing arts, that not only helps foster a love of performing arts but also helps to build future sustainable careers.

This not only means that children are involved in the performing arts for the specific purpose of putting on a show, but for the joy of being involved. Kapa haka provides opportunities for tamariki to be involved in performing from a young age. The wider whanau network is one of support, pride and encouragement.



More diversity of representation
and inclusion

The performing arts sector should truly reflect our community, that means inclusive of our ethnic, Māori, LGBTQI, people with access issues.

How we include these communities is essential to not only their participation but also in how we connect with these audiences. This could include having passionate, educated front of house staff, diverse narratives and languages and more characters in shows that reflect our communities.

- ‘Think about the richness of what people with disabilities can bring’
- ‘Imagine if roles were won on skills and talent as opposed to biology’
- ‘We need more bare-boned shows, for the joy, not just the high-end stuff’



Communities of practice to support and develop one another

A community of practice is a group of people who share a common interest who come together to fulfil both individual and group goals.

This can occur at individual and organisational levels, and often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance activity in that area of focus. Regular and proactive interaction is a key drive of this.

‘If we can’t align, grow and change, we’ll end up without audiences’



The importance of Accessible Experiences

Accessibility is a vital part of a thriving performing arts ecosystem. People need to be able to access these opportunities.

They need to see their stories on stage, to have the potential to take part in creative activities, and to have a sector that proactively works to remove any potential barriers for engagement with communities. This is true of flax roots activity, through to professional work.

The pandemic experience has increased the need for performing arts experiences that serve wellbeing, but at the same time it has negatively impacted equity gaps across society. In order for the ecosystem to thrive, we need to provide space for everyone to have full and fair access to opportunities for these experiences. Opportunities to be a part of the ecosystem and explore how performing arts activities can contribute to the betterment of their life, their family and their future.

‘Let’s get people in [theatre venues] to see the craft working, people who can’t afford tickets or want to be exposed to how theatre is made’



A desire for collaboration with sharing of resource and activity

Collective activation makes better use of resources, funding and capability.

Supporting the interconnection of our spaces, groups, activities, and planning can only have a positive impact on the wealth of performing arts activities in our communities.

Building on the cross-pollination of different groups and genres, the importance of working together means that a thriving performing arts sector can become healthy, self-sustaining and resilient. The relative ease with how we can do things is an advantage, and therefore, there is strength in having a joined-up approach to how venues promote each other's shows, and collaborate around mutually beneficial goals and outcomes.

‘Whakatauki: Ēhara tāku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini: Success is not the work of an individual, but the work of many’

‘We can do what we want here, create the work we want. We have less peer pressure and can just get on and do things — more so than other places’



Increased Education and Development

There is a vast industry that supports the actual production of a show.

From costume designers, prop makers, technicians, front of house, directors, choreographers — the opportunities for education and development for both youth/rangatahi and beyond are numerous.

It is vital that we are providing pathways that have the potential to be a springboard into creative careers. We have a strong tertiary sector which supports the performing arts. It is essential that we foster talent and help elevate artists' work to the next level, so that they can share this work nationally and internationally. These opportunities need to be in both formal and informal pathways for education and experience.

The opportunity for the Waikato Regional Theatre to build connections with the current theatres and venues that exist as well as the performing arts sector and wider communities will be in alignment with a centre that is built on creativity and innovation.

‘My high school had been given tickets to a show at Founders when I was a teenager, it was the first thing I ever saw. I loved it, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. We were poor, my family didn't even go to the movies because it was too expensive...I thought the theatre was for other people, not for people like me...I can't acknowledge this experience enough’

‘You need the small ones to support the big ones. You need the play areas before you get to the serious areas, you need to go on the swing before you go on the rollercoaster’

Increased and Enhanced Civic Investment

The performing arts sector and the arts sector in general has been underinvested in over many years.

Artists, arts groups and venues receive modest amounts of investment which is disproportionate to the value and effort that is provided. The impact of the pandemic and competition for the leisure dollar makes it an increasingly difficult sector to become self-sustaining.

The need to identify funding pathways that span local/central government/philanthropic and sponsorship is essential for the sustainability of the sector long-term. There must be continued work to demonstrate the value of arts by advocacy groups and the collaborative efforts of the sector, to enable longevity in the long-term.



More Diverse and Active Audiences

It is important that our spaces and places have a diverse array of programming targets to connect with activity for diverse audiences.

This means mixing professional and participatory, commercial and community, experienced and emerging, and celebrating the value and importance of all ends of those spectra. When we look at how our spaces work, we want to see that balance activated from the smallest spaces all the way through to the new Waikato Regional Theatre. It is essential to find that balance between commercial and community outcomes to enable an engaging and flourishing space. This will be a challenge, but also an opportunity.

‘It will raise the profile of the performing arts in the city, give us something to point and aspire to’

‘To have 800 people come out onto the streets after a show, they’ll be mixing of people and it will make the town feel better’.



Pathways to Sustainable Careers

There is a real desire for there to be more professional performing arts activity in the Waikato Region.

This is true across all artforms. Both onstage and backstage. This is about the pathways for careers that enable our practitioners to tell local stories, to engage with local audiences, and to build the capacity and capability to take the creativity of the Waikato to the rest of Aotearoa and beyond. There is a real depth of amazing local talent that has been here for years, and has continued to develop and refine, and the ecosystem is fertile and has strong foundations for real meaningful opportunities to actively choose to stay here and make the Waikato a thriving base for activity.



User Engagement and Needs

Finding affordable venues and gaining access to venues can be challenging for some.

The community needs a variety of types of venues and spaces, as well as the provision for different types of needs, which is varied and complex.

Important considerations are having spaces for young people to give things a go, provision for kai at indigenous events and spaces for people who have access and neurodiverse needs. It needs to cater for different levels of activity, from workshops and classes, to rehearsals, to fringe experiments, through to professional productions. This provides opportunities for diverse audiences, diverse users, diverse communities to be part of the wider ecosystem.

There are important considerations about opportunities for inclusion and a diversity of communities at all levels of the performing arts. This even comes down to how people find out about what shows and activities are on and how they can connect with the organisation online.

‘The first obstacle can often be an inaccessible website’





What is

next?

The Creative Waikato team are working on doing the final analysis of the community consultation, developing the detailed strategy, and engaging in the design and refinement process. This will be made publicly available as soon as it is ready.

As part of this process we are also examining examples of best practice, innovative thinking and future vision for the sector that might help to provide additional strategic scope for this long-term work.

This will include areas of exploration around new models of pricing and ticketing, new models of support and activation, and any other insights into audience development, programming and the capability building that can help the ecosystem continue to build upon its areas of strength and vitality.

If you would like to know more about this process, or to talk to the team about this strategy and how it might connect with your own work and creative activity, please feel free to get in touch. Creative Waikato are always happy to support and advocate for the performing

arts sector, as well as the arts and culture sector as a whole, to demonstrate the value and benefits that these sectors can provide for everyone. If this is of interest to you, please contact us: hello@creativewaikato.co.nz



**To learn more about
our work go to:
creativewaikato.co.nz**

