

National Cultural Policy Submission

Adelaide Repertory Theatre Inc

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

Community based theatre companies in Australia (unless Government owned) are often forgotten in Government policy and certainly in Government funding opportunities. The Adelaide Repertory Theatre Inc is a not-for-profit community based Theatre Company. The subscribers and members of our theatre company, own The Arts Theatre a 480 seat theatre. We are not funded or owned by Government. We currently fall in all the gaps whenever funding is sought. We are not an employer, we are not employees, we do not have a profit making endeavour as some private organisations have. The organisation is run mainly by volunteers with a contracted part-time Theatre Manager and Technicians. We serve other community arts groups by providing a venue, at a reasonable cost. However, the Theatre is sadly in need of upgrading to ensure equitable access to all, maintain safety and provide up-to-date facilities. The company does not have the money to do this and we are constantly told that we do not meet the requirements to receive funding from government, at a local, state or federal level.

We cannot be the only community based theatre company facing this kind of dilemma. We would like to be recognised as providing a valuable contribution to the Arts and Culture of Australia and invested in so we can continue to contribute. We humbly request that this and future cultural policy includes our story the story of community theatre among the other worthy narratives so we don't disappear altogether. And that this cultural policy is supported by appropriate funding and investment.

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

Community Theatre groups are perfectly placed to encourage and support First nation creative performance endeavours. Unfortunately, many of us are currently not equipped to do this very well and would need education, support and assistance to do so.

A Place for Every Story

Community Theatre needs a place to be so that we can all tell our stories.

Community theatres involve more participants, present more performances of more productions, and plays to more people than any other performing art in the country.

Our story.

The Adelaide Repertory theatre is the oldest continuous surviving amateur theatre company in the southern hemisphere. Established in 1908 the company continues to produce works to this day. In 1963 the then president raised funds from the public to build a 480 seat theatre in the centre of

Adelaide. The ARTS theatre is owned by the members and subscribers and managed both by volunteers and by a theatre manager and theatre technician who are contracted part time.

The ARTS theatre is used by our company to present 4 plays per annum and for the rest of the year it is hired out to other community theatre groups at a reasonable cost that enables us to make enough funds to produce 4 plays per year and to maintain the building. But not to upgrade the building (which is now nearly 60 years old) to today's standards.

Community theatres provide locals with a platform in which they can express themselves and remind us how we can work together to better our society. There are many ways in which local community theatre is important, ranging from furthering education to self-expression, introducing change, and so much more.

For our volunteers, we offer opportunities for self-improvement, communication, self-expression and self-empowerment.

By promoting unity, creating an accepting environment for debate, self-expression and interactivity, community theatre is the centrepiece to the fabric of our society; an unmatched component to the very health of our neighbourhoods, towns and cities.

Only a very small percentage of actors are able to find and maintain professional employment in the arts. This leaves a large proportion of talented performers in the community who are unable to work professionally. These are people who have a rich imagination that needs to be channelled. They are gifted in emotional expression, languages, physicality and have the desire to be creative. They need to be accepted, appreciated, and rewarded and to do what they love to do. That's why, just as there is with sport, there will always be a need in the community for community theatre where actors can practise their art in their spare time.

A friend who used to move a lot told me that every time he moved, he would find a community theatre in which to participate. He knew it was a place he would always feel welcome. It was also a comfortable atmosphere, with the diverse personalities and backgrounds; a person could always find someone with whom to relate. Volunteers act, produce and direct, sweep floors, clean toilets, run and design lights, sell tickets, serve on the board, gather props, design sets, playwright and manage. They play roles which they would not be able to in professional theatre.

Community theatre gives all of the community who are interested the chance to explore and develop their particular interests and talents. Community theatre is a classroom, where volunteers can learn by watching, listening, and doing.

Community theatre is part of the social fabric of most communities, and in small venues may be the only local live, performing arts possibility that exists. It is also the first introduction to theatre for many students (or perhaps the second if performing arts exist in the school system.) Community theatre is usually affordable even if other entertainment exists.

So let's not forget us or our contribution.

The Centrality of the Artist

Community theatre nurtures and supports the Performing Artist throughout their lives.

Many performing artists get their first involvement with theatre via Community Theatre Company youth groups performing in "youth productions". Some start performing later in life.

Many professional actors will perform in an amateur production because they have the opportunity to play certain roles which would never be available to them in professional theatre. A professional production needs to choose a well-known lead actor in order to make enough money to fund their production.

Not all performers, stage crew, directors, choreographers can find ongoing professional work. Community theatre allows them to continue to do what they love, until the next gig comes along.

Many performing artists also return to community theatre after a professional career. This allows them to continue to do what they are passionate about as well as allowing them to give back to their community by passing on their skills and knowledge, by directing or choreographing or serving on the Board.

Strong Institutions

Community Theatre Companies around Australia perform in all sorts of venues with varying facilities and capabilities. However, these venues are disappearing at an alarming rate, especially in capital cities.

In the Adelaide CBD, there are small pubs and clubs and cabaret venues and of course the Government owned and very costly Her Majesty's and Festival theatres. But there is only one Theatre that is affordable and available to community theatre groups and big enough to handle a "Musical" audience.

The Arts Theatre is a popular venue in Adelaide providing low cost entertainment to over 30,000 people a year. The theatre is self funding and self managed by a volunteer board. All theatres in Australia need to be suitably maintained and operated in order to sustain our arts and culture. However, Theatres age and new standards of safety and accessibility mean extremely costly building renovations that cannot be met by the community groups that own them.

Perhaps the Theatre Association of Sth Australia (TASA) could be funded and assisted to improve the connections between community theatre companies in Sth Australia and used as a model to form a national body.

Reaching the Audience

Community theatre reaches a large and wide variety of audience members and often provides audience members their first taste of "live" Theatre. They come along to support their friends and family involved in a production and develop a taste for it.

Because the costs of production in community theatre are comparatively low, due to the amount of volunteers involved, many people who simply couldn't afford to attend professional theatre are provided the opportunity to see often "professional standard" theatre.

Community theatre companies can also provide a variety and diversity in the types of productions they perform, try new works or lesser known works which may not be profitable for professional companies to produce.

Instead of spending 15 minutes in every news broadcast talking about sport perhaps television stations could be encouraged to give an arts briefing for their local area each night.