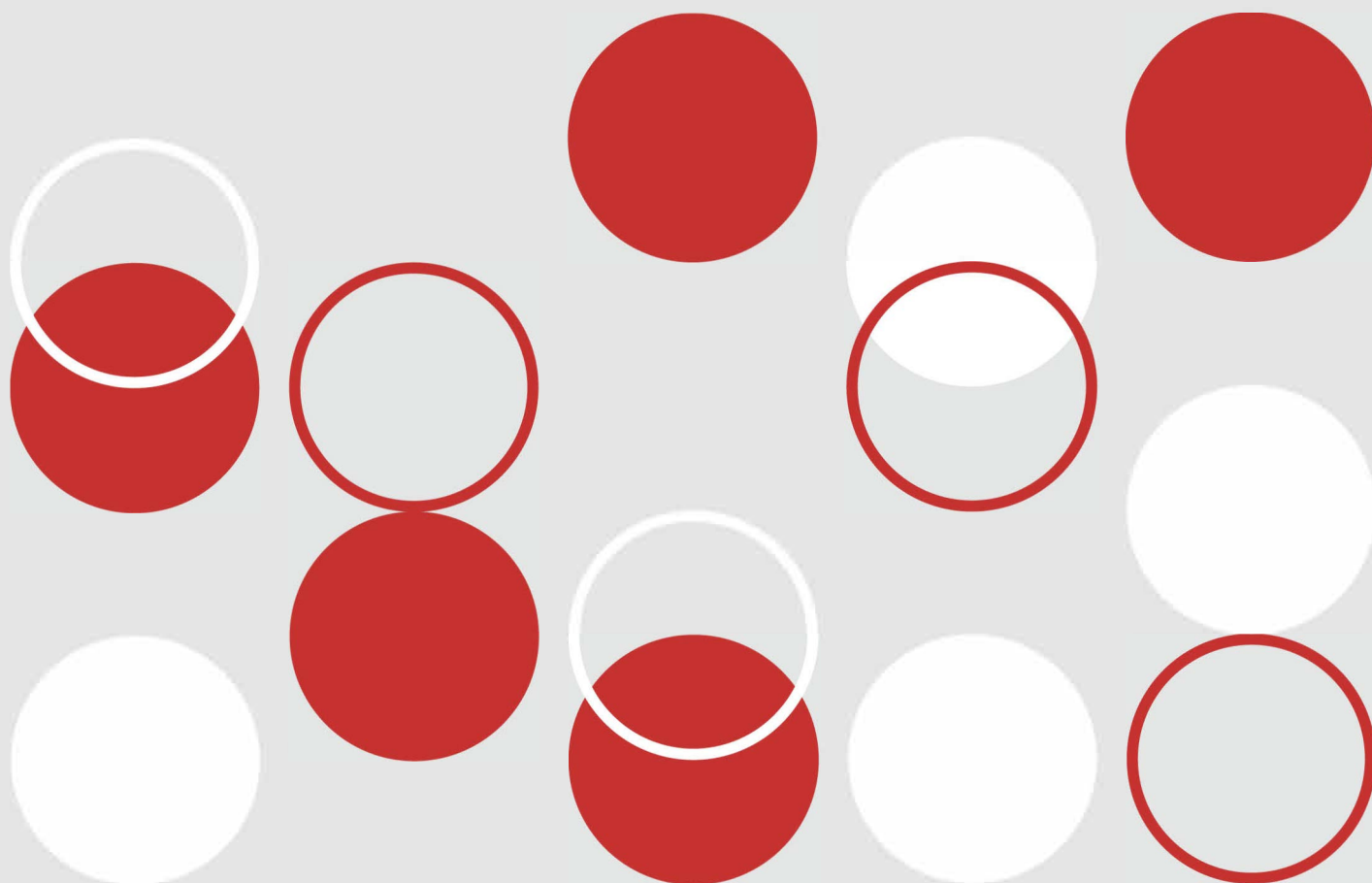


Creativity & Cultural Production in the Hunter

An applied ethnographic study of
new entrepreneurial systems in the
creative industries.



Final Report:
Hunter Creative Industries

Performing Arts

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12. PERFORMING ARTS

12.1 A Brief History of Performing Arts in Australia

The performing arts sector in Australia is diverse, covering all of those aspects of artistic expression which involve people using their bodies and/or voices, or extensions of those, to communicate with an audience. The performing arts include theatre, musical theatre, dance, music, opera, comedy, circus, mime and much more. The sector has a long history in Australia.

While performance in indigenous culture is intrinsic to the practice of their values, beliefs and way of life, British colonists brought with them a number of Western art forms including music, dance and theatre. 'The Recruiting Officer', written in 1706 by Irish playwright George Farquar, was the first play to be performed in the colony of New South Wales staged largely by convicts in 1789, one year after the First Fleet arrived in Sydney. However, the regimental bands of the British military who oversaw these convicts, formed the basis of the first musical ensembles. The military band members were made available to play for 'theatre orchestras, public promenade concerts, official and private function – soirees, dinners, balls' (Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell 2003, p. 482).

Early colonial drama consisted mostly of English-style musical theatre, comedies and pantomimes that took on local themes. The disordered fun of the theatre at this time did not match the idea of Australia as a penal colony, a place of punishment for convicts. Some authorities believed theatre to be a bad influence, others felt it was useful entertainment and these views affected the way theatre developed here. The authorities struggled with issues such as badly-behaved theatre audiences, theatre licences and crime. Meanwhile, a few people set up theatres and presented performances, with varying, and then growing, success (AG 2018, online).

The first full concerts were written up in the first newspaper in 1803. Theatre orchestras quickly became the mainstay of employment for most civilian working musicians where they played 'overtures, incidental music for the drama, music for specialist dancers, fillers between the acts and more' (ibid). As the population grew the number of working theatres expanded. Australia's oldest continuously operating theatre is the Theatre Royal which opened in Hobart in 1837. Professional theatre orchestras not only accompanied drama and musical theatre but increasingly worked for opera companies.

Ballet was staged at this time 'but generally as an afterpiece to an opera' (Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell 2003, p. 79). The first ballet proper was performed in Sydney at the Theatre Royal in 1835.

Other professional dancers arrived in the 1840s and their stage performances included national and novelty dances and other excerpts from ballet. Many newly arrived professional dancers also began to teach dancing or to choreograph and present ballets, including comic ballet. Theatrical dancers in the 19th century were commonly actors or singers as well (Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell 2003, p. 79).

While it is generally agreed that the first opera - *The Poor Soldier* - was performed in 1783, the first performance from the standard European canon was staged in 1838 at the Royal Victoria Theatre. In the 1850s the Gold Rushes saw a huge growth in population. The increased trade brought wealth from the goldfields and to the colonies where 'there was a growing demand for theatre entertainment, and Shakespeare and opera performances increased. Touring companies

such as the New York Serenaders (1851) and the Backus Minstrels (1855) brought minstrel shows to Australia from California' (AG 2018, online).

Opera was originally either staged by a few ad hoc companies or was part of a broader theatre offering, but in 1861, Irish entrepreneur William Lyster arrived in Australia with his Royal English and Italian Opera Company and opera soon became a significant element of the performing arts in Australia. Following the success of the Lysters, some theatres came to stage opera programs exclusively. William's brother Fred Lyster, a baritone, had started this venture as a small opera troupe in the USA but William built up the company so that it employed many singers and musicians in runs around the country. It was said that so began 'a new epoch of the Australian stage. No previous colonial entrepreneur had presented such enormous musical and dramatic forces' (Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell 2003, p. 470). Many touring companies operated after 1870 including the Royal Italian Opera Company and these were often backed by local businessmen. It wasn't until the 1900s that the first operas were presented in English. In 1908 John Wren established the National Opera Company and imported stars were eclipsed by home-grown performers such as Nellie Melba. After success internationally, Melba returned to Australia and staged a series of concerts in 1911 in conjunction with the promoter J.C. Williamson. In 1916, entrepreneur Benjamin Fuller brought an impressive company from Europe - the Imperial Grand Opera Company - and added Australian singers and performers for a successful national tour. Fuller is best known, however, for his vaudeville shows featuring Australian cultural icons Stiffy and Mo.

Many Italian opera and ballet companies toured the country and some performers were obliged to remain here after Italy joined the war against the Allies in 1918. In Paris in 1909 Sergei Diaghilev and his Ballet Russes had swept away the old formal and ornate style of ballet and established a new mode. While he did not personally make it to Australia, many of his dancers did including Anna Pavlova and her partner Laurent Novikoff in the 1920s. Pavlova was so popular she inspired the establishment of Australian branches of prominent British dance training institutions, the Cecchetti Society and the Royal Academy of Dancing. As the Second World War was starting many of the dancers who had worked with Diaghilev or had moved on to other noted Russian companies found themselves in Australia. They reformed and called themselves the Original Ballet Russe (Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell 2003, p. 73). They were to become highly influential. The descendant of one of these dancers, Dr John Barnes, is a prominent Newcastle artist and arts writer.

Under the guidance of Harry Rickards in the late nineteenth century, the Tivoli in Sydney had become the preeminent popular theatre in Australia. It drew on both American minstrel shows and the British music hall tradition, giving them a peculiarly Australian character. At the same time jugglers, lion-tamers, bearded ladies and freak shows continued to tour the country in travelling circuses. 'Australia's tradition of circuses stretches back to the early 19th century' (Landragin 2011, online) with 2018 marking 182 years of the circus in Australia.

In the 19th century, when Australia was one of the most enticing destinations for Europeans in the world, many European troupes would tour the colonies. 'So enamoured of Australia were some visiting circus artists', writes St Leon, 'that many remained behind and joined local companies'. Thus, it can be said that they left their own circuses to run away and join the circus (ibid).

While the circus increasingly became a relic of a bygone era it was the Tivoli that 'introduced the gramophone, the movies and the miracle of flight' (Van Straten 2003, p. 2) to many Australians. At the Tivoli they 'celebrated Federation and sheltered from the shadow of the Great War. At the Tivoli we heard the roaring of the Twenties, the tango and the devil's music – jazz' (ibid).

The Tivoli circuit 'was created in the last decade of the nineteenth century and entertained Australians for more than seventy eventful years. It was an earthy, integral and much-loved part of Australian show business' (Van Straten 2003, p. 2). In the early days there were playhouses, some opulent, and:

Theatres in every provincial centre, and adventurous travelling shows that performed in humble halls and under canvas. Entrepreneurs such as J.C. Williamson and George Musgrove presented carbon copies of the latest overseas successes. Rich or poor, we went to see opera, Shakespeare, melodrama, burlesque and pantomimes, just as we would have 'at home' in Britain (ibid).

The Great Depression forced many live venues to shut their doors. But the Tivoli carried on, providing 'relief and refuge and Roy Rene – Mo' (ibid, p. 3). At the same time the Golden Age of Radio had begun. In 1920 Dame Nellie Melba broadcast from one of the inventor Marconi's transmitters in Essex, England to listeners in many parts of the world (Holloway 1975, p. 9). Following this, radio began to broadcast plays, musical comedy, dance music, grand opera, band concerts, orchestral concerts, vaudeville, symphony concerts, community singing and revues, effectively promoting these art forms and keeping many professional performers in work.

People tuned in nightly to hear their favourite serial and the most enduring drama program was that written by Gwen Meredith. It was initially called *The Lawsons* when it started in 1944 but changed its name to *Blue Hills* in 1949 and ran continuously until 1976 (Lane 1992, p. 234). Apart from the success of the commercial radio stations, ABC Radio in particular became the home of a number of symphony orchestras and opera was broadcast often. It was all live and 'repeat broadcasts meant repeat performances' (Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell 2003, p. 475). After WWII, in 1948, the National Theatre company was set up in the belief that:

Sydney needed an equivalent to Melbourne's National Theatre Opera Company... Renamed the National Opera of Australia, the Sydney company began its 1953 activities in Newcastle (NSW). Then it gave a season in Brisbane – claimed to be the first opera season to make money there ... the main season, in the Tivoli in Sydney, included two Australian works (Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell 2003, p. 476).

This period saw the beginnings of a national dramatic identity with the first Festival of Perth held in 1953 as well as the establishment of The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in 1954. Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was first staged in 1955, and the National Institute for the Dramatic Arts (NIDA) was founded in 1958. The 1960s counterculture brought many changes and saw theatres such as La Mama open in Melbourne. In 1968, The Australian Council for the Arts, soon to become The Australia Council, was set up. This organisation established 'major state theatre companies and provided arts funding' (AG 2018, online). In the sense that they had political concerns, certain community arts initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s recalled the workers' theatre movement of the 1930s. Others borrowed older forms for entertainment purposes:

As with the parallel community arts movements that occurred in the UK, the US, Canada and Ireland from the late 1960s, Australian live performance became a forum for reimagining, and at times re-inventing performance forms that had enjoyed popularity with earlier generations. Re-imagined paradigms of circus and variety appeared in Australian community arts performances during the 1970s, seeding the establishment of long-lived companies that have endured to today, such as *Circus Oz* and the *Flying Fruit Fly Circus* for young people (Arrighi 2013, p. 2).

The 1970s saw a further flourishing of theatrical expression boosted by the second wave of the Australian film industry. Playwrights like David Williamson came to the fore and the Australian Performing Group and Nimrod Theatre (now Belvoir) were established. Other plays, among many at this time, included *The Front Room Boys* by Alexander Buzo, 'White with Wire Wheels' by Jack Hibberd and 'Chicago, Chicago' by John Romeril. As one later reviewer commented:

Though Australian plays of the late '60s and '70s are infrequently revived, they tend to reveal a ferocious desire for change; politically aware bids to remove the shackles of conservatism through expressive, brazen and irreverent vaudeville-like structures and forms. Some of the plays may be rough around the edges, indulgent or consigned to the bin of noble failures, but they were rarely half-hearted and revelled in the might and mastery of words. McNeil, Buzo, Hibberd, Romeril, Williamson, Hewett and company were far too passionate about the stage, and its promise, for them to have been anything less (SMH 2002, online).

The 1980s and 1990s saw a diversity in performance styles, companies and venues:

A number of experimental women's theatre groups emerged in the 1980s, such as Melbourne's Home Cooking Theatre Company (1981) and Adelaide's Vital Statistix (1984) ... In 1990, the dynamic musical *Bran Nue Dae* by Jimmy Chi and the band Kuckles premiered to impressed audiences at the Festival of Perth, before touring the nation ... John Bell established The Bell Shakespeare Company in Sydney in 1990. In 1993 Sydney held its first Asian Theatre Festival. Australian musical theatre experienced a revival during the 1990s with shows such as *Bran Nue Dae*, *Hot Shoe Shuffle* (1993) and *The Boy from Oz* (1998-99). By the year 2000, Australian theatre-goers could almost take for granted the array of dynamic performance styles, theatre companies and venues available to entertain, delight and challenge them (AG 2018, online).

These diverse sets of performing arts have continued well into the twenty first century. Some of the shows that have had international success include musicals like *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *The Boy From Oz*, *Tap Dogs*, STC's *Hedda Gabler* on Broadway. Australian talent continues to impress on the world stage and these include, among many others, opera director Barrie Kosky and theatre director Simon Stone. Bangarra Dance Theatre, 'an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and one of Australia's leading performing arts companies, widely acclaimed nationally and around the world' (BDC 2018, online), is currently located in Walsh Bay in Sydney. They have been in existence for nearly three decades and their ongoing 'annual program includes a national tour of a world premiere work, performed in Australia's most iconic venues; a regional tour allowing audiences outside of capital cities the opportunity to experience Bangarra, and an international tour to maintain our global reputation for excellence' (ibid). They continue to engage in 'education programs, workshops and special performances and projects, planting the seeds for the next generation of performers and storytellers; (ibid).

12.2 Structure of Performing Arts Industry

The performing arts sector comprises performers of all kinds, agents, venues, festivals, training institutions, companies, critics and enablers such as investors and various funding bodies.

At the local level there are myriad independent companies that perform on a DIY basis forming the foundation for all of the other major institutions and organisations. This sector is currently dominated by a number of large professional organisations including Sydney Theatre

Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, the Australian Ballet, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Opera Australia. Nationally important performing arts institutions include the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA), Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts (WAAPA), Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS), Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) and the Australian Ballet School. Selective creative and performing arts secondary schools include Newtown High School of the Performing Arts and The McDonald College, both in Sydney, and Hunter School of the Performing Arts in Newcastle.

Performing arts festivals include the Perth International Arts Festival, Australia's first, which was established in 1953, as well as the Adelaide Festival which started in 1973 and includes the Adelaide Fringe, the Darwin Festival and the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. Most capital cities and some regional centres host arts festivals which prove a boon to tourism and economic development.

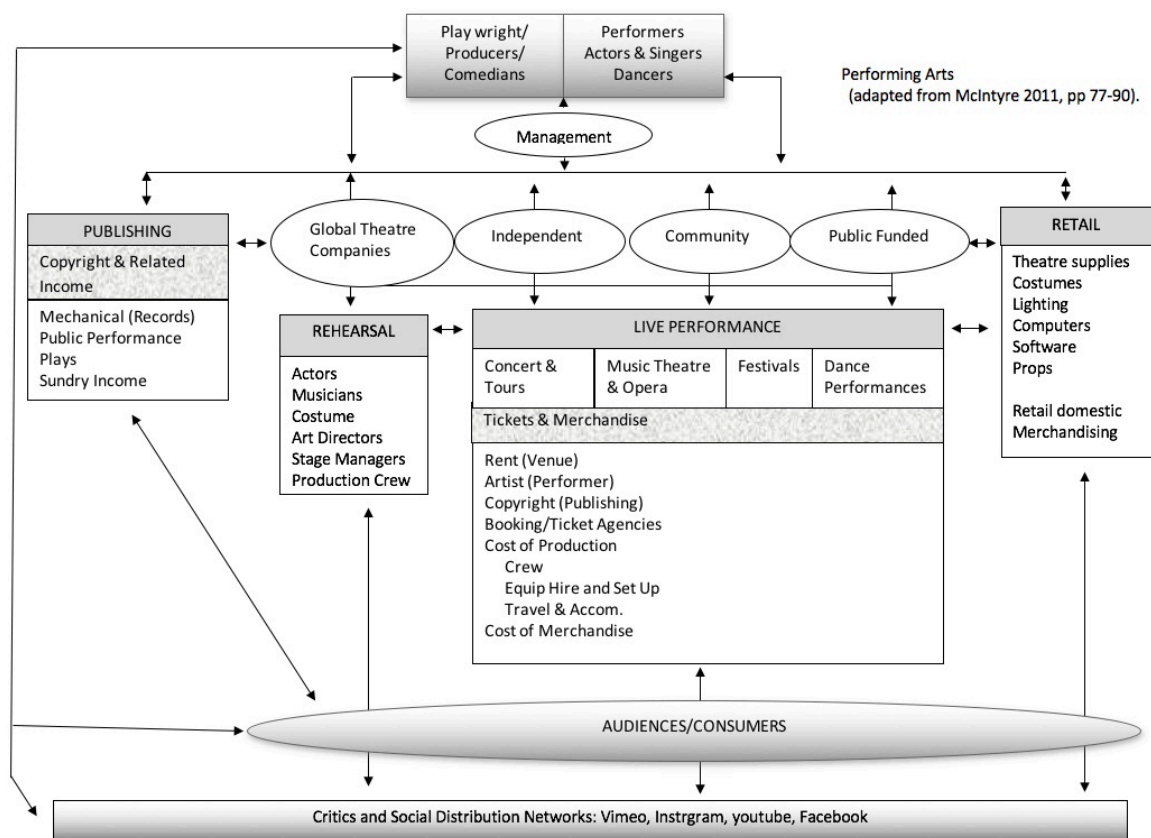
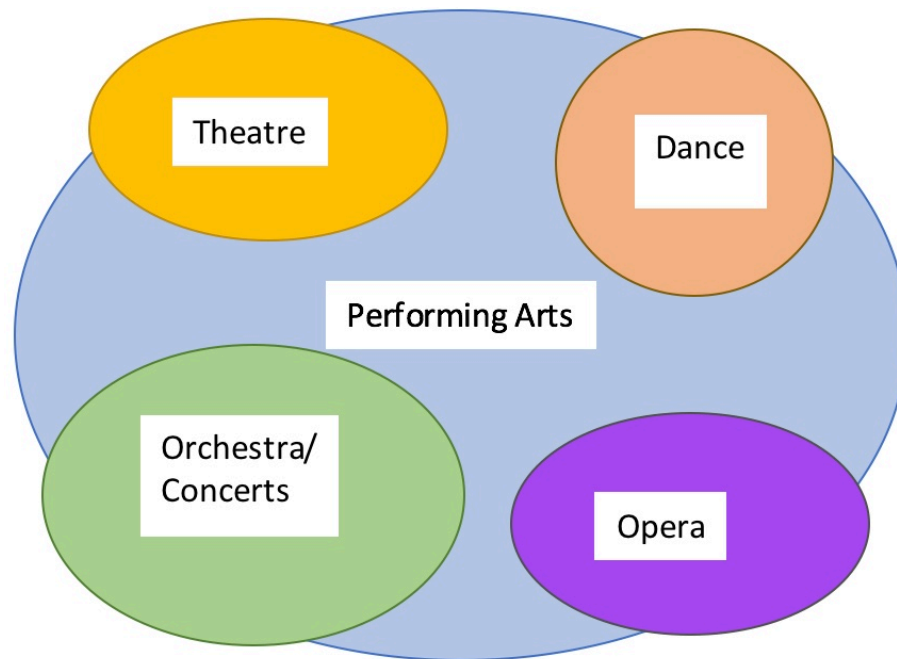


Figure 23 Performing Arts Industry Generalised Structure

The Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG) is the umbrella group for Australia's 28 major performing arts companies which aims to give its members 'a national voice and presence' (AMPAG 2017, online). The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) is the union and industry advocate for performing artists, and was formed in 1992 from the merger of Actors Equity of Australia, the Australian Theatrical & Amusement Employees Association and the Australian Journalists Association, with the later addition of the Symphony Orchestra Musicians Association to the MEAA.



*Figure 24 Performing Arts Industry Company Clusters
(Original from Annukka Jyrama, School of Business, Aalto University)*

12.3 Business Models

The sale of a ticket to attend a performance remains the primary income stream. Performing arts practitioners create a product, the performance, and sell attendance to that performance. They realise a profit if attendances exceed the cost of staging the performance. In this case income is usually dependent on box-office receipts from ticket sales. Subscription to a program of performances provides an auxiliary income stream to box office receipts. Subscriptions make money by offering an ongoing benefit, regular attendance at the performance, which allows the provider, the theatre company for example, to charge an often recurring fee. This subscription service ensures a profit ahead of the performances and can be used to cover some ongoing costs instead of recouping them on the night with box office sales. Theatre owners create a durable asset, the theatre, which can be accessed by a number of performers or companies and then they proceed to charge for its use. Agents market and sell an asset or service they don't own, the performance, on behalf of a third-party, the performer or performers, usually collecting a percentage of the transaction price as a fee. Some companies have a cooperative ethos and pay stipends to performing artists on a profit share of takings. Payments of residuals may also be provided for re-use of produced or recorded work outside of the original contract, for example for television commercials, but this depends on the success of the performance and the contracts that the performers negotiated prior. While some performers are represented by agents, others self-manage their careers, especially those whose work is marginal or sporadic. In terms of

income, performers usually provide artistic services on a freelance/contract basis, as profit-share, or as part of the gift economy where no payment is received. Continuing work – on a long-running drama production or television series or music tour – is rare. Most work is short-term, sometimes ‘one-off’, for example ‘extras’ on a film set, television commercials and voiceovers (including for online games and websites). Some full-time, paid employment is available, for example to teachers of performing arts, venue managers, and local government staff working in the cultural areas.

Limited funding is available from government organisations such as Create NSW (formerly Arts NSW) and The Australia Council for the Arts, while support from local government may take the form of venue hire subsidies or other ‘in kind’ support. Private funding is rare as arts philanthropy in Australia is not strong, despite the efforts of Creative Partnerships Australia, (Australia Business Arts Foundation Ltd), a national organisation which promotes private sector support for the arts through partnering, volunteering and giving. Investors will sometimes take a chance on what is a high-risk investment, especially in the case of large-scale musicals, and place funds with particular producers who have a proven commercial track record. This investment allows the producer to mount shows but the profits are generally split 40/60 with the investors taking the larger share of the profits. Alternatively, crowdfunding has been used to support some performing arts projects, especially smaller scale projects.

Online screening through various forms of social media, webcasting and distribution of pre-recorded product is increasingly being used by performers to promote their services, to showcase their work and garner what at this point has proven to be minimal income.

12.4 Operational Methods

Performing artists often develop their skills through a program of study, for example at a drama or music college. Leading institutions are NIDA, WAAPA, VCA and the state conservatoria while universities and TAFE colleges also offer courses. Many performers, however, are self-taught or learn on the job, often when working in an unpaid capacity as part of the gift economy. The trade-off is exposure to the industry and the development of the necessary craft skills.

Once they feel competent, performers will often seek work through auditions, and casting calls and may also seek a listing with an agent to assist them in finding ongoing work. Agents usually take a commission based on the work they obtain for the performer. Performers may also create their own work, perhaps establishing their own company and/or working collaboratively with others, thus becoming entrepreneurs themselves.

As a general rule, performers usually need to self-manage their careers, which are often ‘portfolio’ careers, with a diversity of types of employment unless, having had some success, they hire a manager who will undertake to secure work for them and ensure their career is viable. Managers do so for a fee or by taking a percentage of the performer’s income. Festivals are often useful for performers mostly in terms of promotion as many are lucky to cover costs. They are like trade shows which allow the performer to show off their wares and establish a presence in the marketplace.

Once the performer or performing company is known they may also tour their product. Touring is an entrepreneurial activity which requires outlays for venue hire, accommodation for performers and crew, insurances, travel costs, van and truck hire, regular weekly payments for technical crew as well as all production costs. Income is derived primarily through ticket sales and possible merchandising which itself requires t-shirt, poster and program booklet design, printing and other costs such as DVD manufacture of recordings of prior successful shows. The difference between outlays and income determines whether the next production can be staged.

If the tour is successful, a season may be booked at one of the major venues. The same outlays and income are applicable except travelling costs are, of course, minimised but rents and rates may increase. Costs such as the rental of the theatre and rehearsal space, payments for performers, the cost of a stage manager, as well as lighting and sound designers, will still apply while the venue will supply house management, a box-office service which increasingly includes online ticketing of some type, as well as limited marketing. A PR company may be engaged to manage press, television and social media promotion, but the cost of printing posters and paying for costumes and props remains that of the company. All insurances and taxes still have to be paid no matter the size of the production.

A percentage of profits may also be split by the entrepreneur, often the producer, with prominent performers. This split is dependent on the leverage they have in the market which is often based on their popularity, 'pulling power' and reputation. Stars, whether they be directors, actors, singers or others, can usually demand hefty fees or lucrative percentages of the box office. If the deal is also for a royalty this won't accrue until the costs of production are covered. Returns from royalties will increase as the production tours or is successful in the one location. If you are a playwright those royalties, usually fixed around 6-7% after costs, will accrue as the performances become more successful and other production companies take on the show. These latter matters, of course, apply primarily to the operational methods of the higher end of the market for the performing arts.

At this end of the market digitisation is now increasingly a part of marketing and production as well as providing a forum for interactive participation (Towse 2013). Ruth Towse argues from the available evidence that box office functions and promotion in particular have been affected by digitisation. Websites are now ubiquitous as is the use of social media, giving audio-visual previews, histories of the show, stories about the cast and so on, all of which are linked to ticketing. These sites also encourage new audiences providing insights through forums for learning about the art forms with virtual back stage tours of theatres, video of rehearsals, interviews with performers, etc. In terms of production, digitally controlled scenery changes and lighting have reduced the need for a number of backstage staff while streamed live performances done in real time via satellite to HD cinemas are becoming increasingly common. Of course, this audio-visual material comes with its own production costs, extra crew and necessarily intense coordination with the theatrical event itself. There are of course multiple rights to be negotiated whether the audio-visual material is embedded in social media or unsold on DVD at the event site (Towse 2013, pp. 311-21). Smaller companies and individuals, however, are increasingly using low-cost methods for promotion – mobile phone footage posted to social media platforms, for example.

12.5 Important Personnel

Actors, dancers, singers, comedians, jugglers and so on are the core onstage presence in the performing arts. Their work in the industry may be supported by a vast army of creative, technical and administrative support staff – or, as in the case of micro-theatre, they might do it all themselves. Choreographers, like playwrights, will develop a show to the point where it can be staged, while dramaturgs ensure the viability of theatrical scripts prior to the production going ahead.

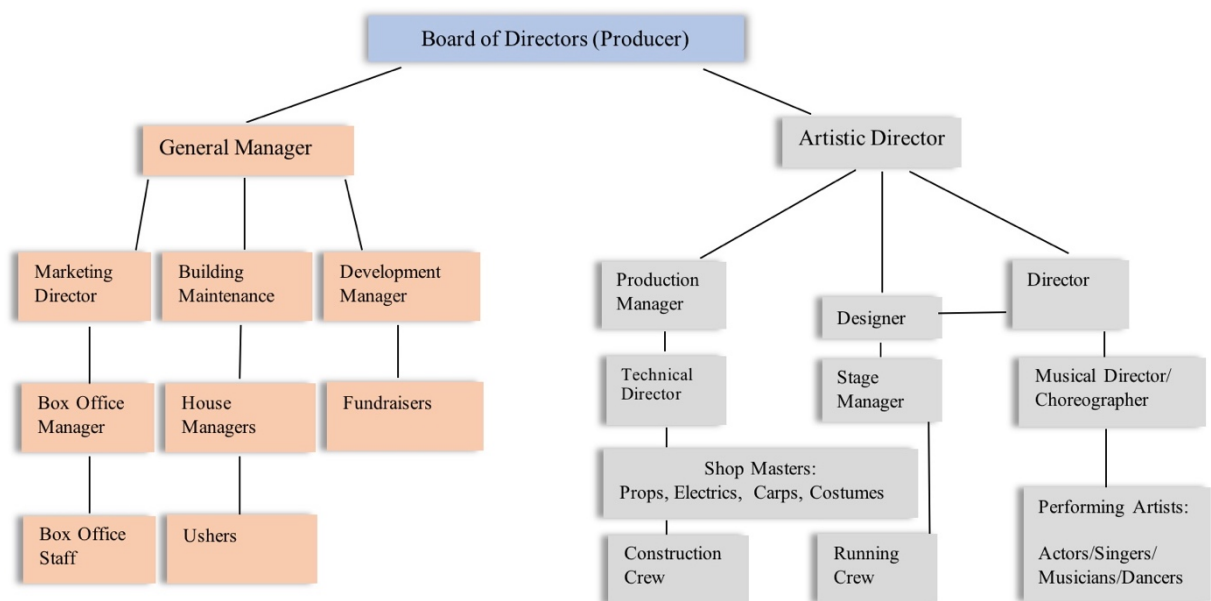


Figure 25 Performing Arts Industry Personnel

Musical theatre depends on those who compose the book, score and lyrics, all of which becomes the blueprint directors use to mount the performance. While musical directors are responsible for the musical elements, directors themselves control the artistic elements of the performance while producers ensure that all other tasks such as financing, legals and administration are taken care of so the director, cast and technical crew can do what they do best. Producers may access patrons, benefactors, funding bodies or investors in order to ensure the production costs are covered. Agents may be used to find a cast to fit the theatrical event while other agents book the necessary musicians to support the performance. Venue managers will ensure the performance is right for the venue and will supply often limited in-house lighting and sound facilities as well as most staging requirements and some marketing. The facilities are often dependent on the position of the venue in the marketplace. For large-scale productions, entertainment lawyers and accountants are crucial to ensure all legals and taxes are taken care of and then there is, of course, the audience, one of the most important groups of people in the field of the performing arts. Without them very little profit can be made. Critics act as knowledgeable intermediaries between the audience and the performances.

12.6 The Hunter Region Performing Arts Sector

12.6.1 Background

The Hunter Region has a long history of performing arts activity and continues to be noted for the quality of performers and associated creatives who go on to have significant careers nationally and internationally. These include writer and actor Jonathan Biggins, comedian Rhys Nicholson, music theatre performers Jye Frasca and David Harris, as well as actors such as Abbie Cornish, Sarah Wynter, Susie Porter, Stephen Peacocke and Ben Mingay. John Bell, of the Bell Shakespeare Company grew up in Maitland and the Hunter has been home to award winning playwright Nick Enright and musical director John Foreman. The Tap Dogs dance troupe has toured internationally for many years while international ballet companies including the Moulin Rouge often include dancers from the Hunter.

The 1980s was a particularly vibrant period in the region which saw two professional, funded theatre companies in operation (Hunter Valley Theatre Company and Freewheels); an opera company funded by donors, businesses and corporations (Hunter Opera which became Opera

Hunter); The Workers Cultural Action Committee of Trades Hall which supported a range of activities including commissioning *Aftershocks*, a play about the Newcastle Earthquake; and the emergence of a number of performance groups including Zeal Theatre and The Castanet Club.

After the closure of BHP Steelworks in 1999, some emphasis was put on the potential of the arts and culture to provide new jobs in the region as part of a diversification strategy. Government-funded TAFE courses offered retraining for retrenched workers in arts-related areas. The closure itself was marked by a major cultural festival funded by the company. This included the commissioning of new work such as John O'Donoghue's play *No More the Fur Elise, No More the Bullied Bloom* which documented work in the steel mill over three generations and travelled to Canberra for a performance at Parliament House.

There have been significant losses for the sector in the last three decades with the de-funding of performing arts companies and the closure of some venues. The level of activity is still high, however. Successful individuals are diversifying their skills, for example by developing their own content and marketing techniques and collaborating on multi-disciplinary work. Successful companies are using innovative strategies such as crowd-funding and alternative staging, for example, site-specific work. New, more intimate venues have emerged and host smaller-scale, more experimental work. The financial rewards for performers are slight, however, and most need to leave the region to find employment that covers their living expenses.

12.6.2 Individual Performers, Writers, Choreographers, Composers, etc.

Individual performers include a number of people who live in the region but work in Sydney where the major film, television and theatre companies are based. These are akin to FIFO (fly in, fly out) workers but might better be termed TITO (train in, train out)! Actors Stephanie Priest, Angie Diaz, Katy Carruthers, Anne Rzechowicz and Barry Shepherd, and educator Carl Caulfield (NIDA) are examples, as are the television and film actor Todd Lasance and operatic performer Guilherme Noronha. The precarity of their position is exacerbated by the travel required and the highly competitive selection process for acting jobs which means that individuals may need to make a number of trips to Sydney for auditions and call-backs, without any guarantee of success. Others have relocated to Sydney or Melbourne in order to be better positioned to secure work in the theatre or to pursue further training but continue to work also in Newcastle. Three individuals associated with leading Newcastle-based theatre company Stooged Theatre provide an illustration. Singleton-born director and actor Chloe Perrett has completed training in Newcastle and Sydney, works at Sydney Theatre Company in a customer service role while she pursues theatre employment in Sydney, and returns to Newcastle as required in her role as Associate Director of Stooged Theatre. Medowie-born Daniel Cottier, Literary and Development Manager of the company, was recently Assistant Director of a professional production in Sydney. Mat Lee, Artistic Director of Stooged Theatre says:

Sadly, the nature of working in the arts means one must work three jobs at times ... I am a humour therapist for people with dementia in aged care (sometimes referred to as a clown-doctor, we call ourselves 'Humour Valets') for the Arts Health Institute (AHI). Performing and engaging with people with dementia in order to bring happiness, laughter and memory back into their lives. Most of my work with AHI is intimate, in-the-room connection ... My second job is working as a concierge in serviced apartments in Barangaroo, Sydney. My third job is being the Artistic Director of Newcastle-based independent theatre company Stooged Theatre. This is deciding and overseeing our theatrical seasons, directing and

performing in work in Newcastle, and many admin tasks that arise – and there are many! (Lee i/v, April 2017).

Lee says that all of the core Stooged team work for free ‘unless they are working on a production and that production makes money ... a profit-share system’.

The individuals who work in musical theatre have a wide variety of occupational options with some few freelancing not only locally but also nationally and internationally. One of these is David Fitzgerald, a CONDA (City of Newcastle Drama Awards) winner for his work in musical theatre in Newcastle. He works as both a performer and a manager and lives with this family near Lake Macquarie. A Musical Director and Head of Audio, he works nationally and internationally, in which capacity he recruits musicians for the shows he directs and supplies tech specs for the audio parameters of the show. ‘I switch between both being an MD onstage or an MD at the audio, front of house audio position’ (Fitzgerald i/v, April 2017).

After working with big bands in Tamworth as a youngster, his big break in musical theatre came when he moved to Melbourne. ‘I went down there to study at VCA post school and within 18 months of being in Melbourne I was working on *Phantom of the Opera*’ (ibid). At the same time he studied for his Bachelor of Music at the University of Melbourne then went on to do a Grad Dip in Education at Sydney University. Fitzgerald’s time studying in Sydney coincided with the *Phantom*’s run in that town and he worked full time on that production. Awarded the Millfield Fellowship, he relocated to UK for 12 months where he was mentored by the Director of *Phantom of the Opera*, Cameron McIntosh. Even though he was by now trained as a classical concert pianist, he moved into synthesisers and the digital technology that accompanied it. He also studied business through an MBA and now operates under his own trading name of Full Fat Jazz. This is an extension of his theatre work as he has ‘some production values in terms of funding, organising, managing, directing, producing, and that again comes under that Full Fat trading name’ (ibid).

Since his *Phantom* days, Fitzgerald has worked with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra but more often than not on new productions. ‘When you look at things like *The Full Monty* in Sydney and *Sunday in the Park with George* which was a professional show in Sydney, again up here with things like *The Wild Party*, I love doing it first, I love trialling stuff. Which goes right down the line with what I’ve been doing for the last 10 years with Cirque and Illusionists’ (Fitzgerald i/v, April 2017).

His audio engineering skills have also come in handy. ‘I was MD’ing in Sydney quite heavily, music directing, for a lot of shows and Loud and Clear was the preferred supplier’ (ibid). After some time he managed to also find himself behind the Front of House desk in an effort to understand his MD’ing role from the technical perspective. He now ‘regularly mixes 12 shows a year but I push boundaries and I’m seen a little bit as a renegade but by the same token I’m also seen as a mentor for a lot of the younger engineers’ (Fitzgerald i/v, April 2017).

‘I’d call myself an engineer more than a pianist nowadays although I still do a lot of accompanying here at the Conservatorium in Newcastle and I travel as an MD primarily but the income that I derive is more from ... engineering’ (ibid). He recognises how all the parts of a theatre production need to be synched. For example, he believes there should be a deep link between the MD and the FOH operator.

There should be a strong one, I don’t know that there is a defined role. Having just come from Broadway and watching how the Americans work they are still very much defined by the unions, the red tape, and what they should and shouldn’t do. And so an audio engineer’s role over there is a bit like what we’d consider a lighting person’s role is - push go, push go, push go. They expect it to be right coming out of the orchestra. What I love is the ability, having been an MD, to give

suggestions to a musical director and say, 'How about you swing this person to this position, how about you place the amp that way, that way you get the fold back and I can control what's happening with one of ours?'. So there's a lot of those techniques that if an audio engineer, especially because a lot of it is not working in professional theatre, we're not talking about every show is mixed in the Opera House with a great D&L-Acoustics line array. So you've got to compromise, you've got to suggest, because sometimes the musical director, especially in the regional areas are semi-pro. Even at the top end I've taken shows into the Seymour Centre and into the Civic Theatre here where the music director actually has no idea what happens past their baton let alone how what they're doing in the pit affects what's happening in a reinforced perspective. And often that's because they're used to band programs or orchestral programs where reinforcement is not part of their sphere. So the short answer is yeah I do believe there should be a massive relationship and they can certainly help working hand in hand. I actually think if you look at the history of music theatre, and I'm talking going back to opera and to even the courts back in, you know the 16th century, 17th century, an MD at the piano in Mozart's day and age would have still had every note and every vocal and every syllable pass him. And even terraced dynamics was something they understood. Why we've lost that understanding or that training in the current day and age is again something of interest to me because they're the ones that actually know the underscore of when the dialogue's happening and then they can bring the orchestra back in but I think that is lost in the place of getting perfection off a score in terms of notes and rhythms (Fitzgerald i/v, April 2017).

Not only does Fitzgerald have a deep understanding and commitment to his various theatrical roles but he also, often through experience, understands the legalities involved in staging a production. He also holds an MBA where he did arts management and a number of courses on copyright. As a result he can link copyright directly to the creative decisions that are being made:

I was on Broadway, you know in November, putting on a show there. We'd ... been touring this show for two weeks and it wasn't until we got to a theatre there, we'd done one preview and I had producers coming to me asking me about the music and is it in breach of copyright, is it acceptable to use, and this was not just the show tracks, this was also then the interval half time music. I had placed complete trust in the artistic director who was actually the assistant director, the main director didn't make the US leg, and I was told it was all cleared and all of a sudden I'm getting producers saying, 'Well no, it's not'. And producers funnily enough have a raft of people around them to give them advice. I'd only had obviously in my chain an artistic director who said it was fine. But having had that training I could actually within the four hours between the preview and opening night find an answer, find a solution and put that into place. I was lucky that I had done that for this client previously, you know going back another 10 years when we first started Le Grand Cirque in Australia. I had done that and dealt with agencies on that all the way through. So it's something, again it's always in the back of my mind (Fitzgerald i/v, April 2017).

For his long-term work with *The Illusionists*, Fitzgerald:

Took a band across to Dubai which is where we re-built this show and then over 18 months we've had it back through Australia. I've done Mexico City, although that was without band so I just naturally slotted into front of house even though

I'm still controlling all the playback files and Ableton files. I just did it behind the audio desk and mixed at the same time. The only change in personnel really has been the American side. I had to train four new musicians over there because we couldn't get visas, they're very strict on Broadway, for my Australian crew. So that's the first time the Aussie crew haven't travelled with me (Fitzgerald i/v, April 2017).

He moved from Sydney to Newcastle and it appears to have worked out for him and his family:

I was living in Sydney, I was working as an MD in Sydney and just as I was starting to work as an audio engineer for Loud and Clear, we sort of flipped a coin. I met Wendy, my wife, who's a Novocastrian, and we flipped a coin. Where would we live? And it made sense to go to Newcastle for a lot of different reasons. Has it hindered me? No, except to say that there's a few jobs I've said no to just because of proximity. Has it allowed me to be creative and continue? Yes because I'm not, because I can say no to jobs. If I was in Sydney I'd be full time stuck in that Loud and Clear mentality or back office system and I wouldn't have the opportunities that I've had by being a freelance artist. So I think in hindsight yes it's allowed me a lot of great experiences. How that changes now I've got a young daughter, I'm not so sure. Funnily enough, the last 18 months I've been on the road pretty much continuously and even that's actually been enjoyable even with a young daughter at home because I know I'm doing something to support the family unit. Often there is a frustrating time when you're waiting and 'when is the next job and what is the next job?' I mean my pianist work is great but it's cyclical and regular, you know when university exams are, you know when AMEB exams are, you know when the HSC is, two weeks here, two weeks there, and that's regular as clockwork. And, you know, with people like Philip Sketchley locally taking a backseat I'm picking up more and more accompanying work which is nice. I think that's part of the reason why we do like Newcastle. In terms of the current gigs I'm doing it's not different, it's an extra two hours to travel to one airport than it is to go to the local airport. Just to catch an international flight (Fitzgerald i/v, April 2017).

In the case of dance, performers without exception need to leave the region to find employment but they do so with exceptionally strong skills. Timothy Gordon is an international dancer, choreographer, coach and teacher who was a choreographer for the Australian Ballet and now teaches dance at The National College of Dance. Gordon agrees that Newcastle punches above its weight in terms of dancers succeeding at the highest level and says this is 'because there's nothing else to do here, except go to the beach!' (Gordon i/v Aug 2016). More seriously, he speaks of the difference in culture, especially youth culture, in Newcastle:

These kids in Sydney, you can tell from the way they look, the way they walk, how snooty they are. And how their parents mollycoddle them, driving from this thing to that, never working, never having to lift a finger, living in their pink palace of privilege! Whereas these kids come from the country, way out in NSW, Coffs Harbour, Mudgee, Orange, the outback, all of that western country area. They would rather come to us than go to Sydney. And their parents would rather them be here than in Sydney. By far. And one of the good things about Newcastle - and there aren't many good things, ha! - is that one feels safe. The kids feel safe here. They can wander around and do all sorts of things outdoors. They don't always have to be around shops and having to compete with each other's clothes and shoes and handbags, all that junk. They don't have those distractions here. They look after each other. They have an amazing camaraderie. They hug each

other, they get into groups before they perform, they encircle each other, hold each other, they are amazingly good ... Of course they are going to succeed, because people want to work with them. Because they are so likeable, so unselfish about their talent and their abilities, and fun to be around (Gordon i/v, Aug 2016).

Gordon agrees with a comment he says was made to him by Dame Peggy van Praagh, the founder of the Australian Ballet. She said that 'the future of dance in Australia would not be in the main centres; the future of dance in Australia would be in the regional centres' (Gordon i/v, Aug 2016). He explains:

Things are not yet set, you don't have politics driving everything, it's the true and hard-working creatives that will drive everything, not the bureaucrats ... [and] isolation can be tremendously positive because you can focus and not be distracted by all the ridiculous nonsense that goes on in the huge big centres of economic privilege (Gordon i/v, Aug 2016).

Tamara Gazzard is a co-founder of Paper Cut: Contemporary Performance Collective which creates, produces and stages original theatre and movement work. She says:

One thing I think that characterises working in the creative industries is unpredictability. The work doesn't happen nine to five, five days a week, and you don't get paid a regular wage. While it's unpredictable, it also involves a lot of planning. We had to get used to planning 18 to 24 months into the future to make things happen. That was a really big shift as well. I guess for me it's the unpredictability and the haphazard nature of it all sometimes ... there are those periods of like amazing energetic creation of things and then there's nothing for a while so you have to ride those waves. And when a production finishes, that's when you feel it the most because all of a sudden there's this void until you've got something else to do (Gazzard i/v, Amy 2016).

While local employment options are limited, there are examples of successful, full-time professionals working in the region. Some, like Paper Cut and Stray Dogs, create their own work. Chris and Debbie Kelly have for many years run Ship O'Fools which provides entertainment, especially for children. Others found employment with the Arts Health Institute before it folded in 2017 (as discussed below). Many have portfolio careers, combining a number of types of performance-related work, some artistic, some commercial, perhaps supplemented by teaching.

Daniel Stoddart is an example of a performer with a portfolio career. A Drama graduate of The University of Newcastle, he declined the offer of a place at NIDA and worked for two years as Assistant Program Director at Livesites, a place activation strategy run by Newcastle City Council. He later developed the concept for *The Ultra-Swing Lounge*, a 1950s-style jazz music show produced by Phil Collins which was staged at Civic Theatre Newcastle and toured for nine years. Daniel is an award-winning actor and singer, he hosts and comperes events and he was Co-Artistic Director of the Popular Theatre Company with the late Victor Emeljanow (their last production was *Charley's Aunt* at Civic Playhouse in 2015.) He performs in an unpaid capacity with local companies including Metropolitan Players. His full-time, paid job is as Artistic Director of Hunter Drama which was established in April 2007.

Performer Lucy Shepherd points to the issue of the gift economy in the performing arts:

A lot of people do it for free, they do it as a passion and they do it for the high they get from it but when does that line cross over to professionalism? ... When do you start getting paid? ... I guess supply and demand is out of whack (Shepherd i/v, May 2016).

Her creative collaborator Sarah Coffee says that more thought needs to be put into creating professional opportunities for people in Newcastle ‘instead of just talking about the lack of them’ (Coffee i/v, May 2016). For example, she would like others to be as committed as Paper Cut to paying performers for their work. She argues that ‘there’s that expectation associated with the creative industries that you should be doing it for free. That’s not sustainable. You can’t do that. No wonder people are leaving’ (Coffee i/v, May 2016).

One anonymous industry identity also comments on the lack of professionalism in the performing arts sector, asserting that ‘there’s a lot of highly respected training institutions and dance schools but there’s not a place for professional artists to work’ (Anon i/v, 2016). This identity also regrets the lack of status of dancers in the city:

But it’s about the artist feeling valued in their own community by getting paid and having somewhere to take that ... [Newcastle] needs to start paying its artists at a higher rate. I’ve always paid my artists MEAA rates ... Artists will come here and get \$1500 a week to work ... That changes the playing field. Artists think, ‘I’m here to work. It’s not a hobby, it’s work’ but there’s still passion about it. Then the funding bodies take you seriously if you do everything in a way that’s transparent, and the wages are good, you’ve got grants, then you are taken seriously (Anon i/v, 2016).

Another interviewee who also prefers to be anonymous goes so far as to say:

We talk about the industry a lot but in actual fact it’s not an industry, because people who work in industry get paid, and they get paid properly, and they get paid fairly, I assume, so I don’t really think of it as accurate, I guess (Anon i/v, 2016).

Daniel Stoddart is of the view, however, that there is a lack of commitment to professionalism within the sector:

There seems to be a lot of back-patting ... there are lots of self-appointed professionals but in terms of wanting to further their own skills and in terms of pushing their own boundaries and professional development, well I suppose in terms of theatre, there doesn’t seem to be any kind of measuring stick for that sort of thing in Newcastle. There seems to be a mentality that effort equals quality but that’s not always the case. You can put in all the effort in the world but it doesn’t always equal quality or a good show at the end of the day (Stoddart i/v, Oct 2015).

One anonymous employer of performers expressed the view that while artists demonstrate entrepreneurial skills such as resourcefulness and risk-taking in their creative work, they often lack entrepreneurial skills and spirit in a business sense and this has some bearing on their poor employment status, as has the strong volunteering ethos common in the arts. Artists need to ‘claim their value’:

In terms of being able to earn a reasonable income, I am not really sure about that. I think that’s still a problem ... knowing a lot of artists, they’re just grateful for any money, and I think that’s sort of hard, and it’s also lovely too, but it’s more than that ... I think it’s important that artists can claim their value, and the value is reflected in the type of work they do and the remuneration they get (Anon i/v, 2016).

The alumni of the now defunct Hunter Valley Theatre Company are also still an interesting set of individual performers with links to the Hunter. Many of them have ‘claimed their value’ and are still involved in the performing arts in the region as well as nationally and internationally. As Scott Bevan wrote for the Newcastle Herald ‘careers were also created and nurtured [at the

HVTC]. Among the young actors who inhabited the stage were Celia Ireland, David Wenham and Susie Porter. Others sitting in the audience saw their future' (Bevan 2017, online). For example, Vanessa Hutchins, the former Civic Theatre Manager in Newcastle, got her start as a young woman working as a stage manager and lighting operator with HVTC (ibid). She has gone on to a significant national career as a music and arts touring manager and event manager. Jonathan Biggins was also an early convert to theatre, dropping out of University to perform professionally in a number of plays with the HVTC before becoming a nationally recognised comedic personality working on stage, in television and at corporate events. Barry Shepherd, still working as a professional actor based in Newcastle, is another example. Shepherd was:

A schoolteacher living at Dungog when he began travelling to Newcastle in the 1980s to appear in amateur productions. A Sydney talent agent saw him in 1987 in a Newcastle Repertory production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and put him on his books. He began working professionally with Hunter Valley Theatre Company in 1988 and won a CONDA for his role as canecutter Barney in *The Summer of the 17th Doll* that year – one of four he has won (Longworth 2014, online).

Shepherd's expertise is still in strong demand, most often travelling interstate to act in a variety of commercials. He is also an assistant director for film productions and edited a television series. He has acted in movies such as *McLean's Money* (2013) and in the *Rake* television series in 2010 (IMDB 2018, online). He had a major role in Jamie Lewis' award-winning film *Mikey's Extreme Romance* which was shot in Newcastle and released in 2011. He has regularly appeared in popular television series such as *McLeod's Daughters*, *Home and Away*, *All Saints*, *Wildside* and *A Country Practice* (ibid).

Perhaps one of the best-known performers from the HVTC is John Doyle. A former school teacher, Doyle studied Drama at the University of Newcastle. The playwright John O'Donoghue recognised that Doyle had the gravitas for the parts he went on to play in O'Donoghue's ground-breaking play *Essington Lewis, I am Work* for the HVTC. Vic Rooney played the lead role and Jonathan Biggins played multiple characters in the play as did Doyle.

The first production opened to mixed reviews. The houses for the first week at the Playhouse were reasonable, it seemed as if it was going to do average box office. Enter David Williamson. In Newcastle to promote the film *Gallipoli*, he was interviewed by the Newcastle Morning Herald and towards the end of the interview he mentioned that he had seen the play the previous evening, how good it was and that Newcastle audiences should be horse whipped for not supporting it. Next day the phones ran hot. Performances were sold out, audiences were wildly enthusiastic and an extension to the season was arranged (McFadden 2018, online).

After this success, Doyle worked steadily for a number of years at HVTC, eventually leaving his teaching position. This very solid grounding in the daily grind of professional theatrical life, rehearsing by day performing at night, proved very useful to Doyle's future career. While his credits include the 1985 film *Bliss* and *Babe* in 1995, he has inhabited the now iconic comedic character of 'Rampaging' Roy Slaven, firstly for ABC's Triple J, and then moving the show to Triple M for the Southern Cross Austereo radio network and much more since then:

Roy and his cohort HG Nelson have appeared continuously on *This Sporting Life* on radio since 1986, as well as creating television programs including *Club Buggery*, *The Channel Nine Show*, *Win Roy and HG's Money*, *The Dream*, *The Monday Dump*, *The Ice Dream*, *The Cream* and *The Memphis Trousers Half Hour* for ABC TV. Doyle himself hosted the weekly mid-afternoon shift on 702 ABC Sydney in the late 1980s and early 90s, earning a loyal following with his broad

knowledge, versatility and superb interviewing skills, often probing and poking fun at the prevailing views and perceived wisdom of the day ... Over the last decade Doyle has developed a very successful parallel career as a writer of serious television drama. His first major effort as a TV dramatist was the highly acclaimed ABC-TV miniseries *Changi*, an adventurous exploration of the experiences of a group of young Australian soldiers interned in Changi POW camp during World War II. The series was partly inspired by *Hogan's Heroes* and was originally conceived as a situation comedy; using the dramatic technique of magic realism, Doyle developed the script into a deeply moving yet often humorous examination of the experiences of young men at war and the effects it has on their later lives. His drama series *Marking Time*, examined contemporary racial and cultural tensions in Australian society, seen through the prism of an Australian country town ... In 2006, Doyle appeared in *Two Men In A Tinnie*, a documentary of his own making involving a trip down the Murray-Darling river system of Australia with his long-time friend, biologist Dr Tim Flannery. The program focused on the degradation of the once mighty rivers and gave many different insights as to the causes. John and Tim reprised their collaboration in 2008 with *Two in the Top End* as they explore northern Australia [*Two Men in China* came later]. In 2008, John Doyle's play *Pig Iron People* was produced by Sydney Theatre Company at the Sydney Opera House Drama Theatre. Doyle's outstanding contribution to Australia's cultural scene through radio, television and the theatre has been recognised by the granting of an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Newcastle, eight Australian Writers Guild (AWGIE) awards for comedy, one for Best Original Mini-Series for *Changi*, one for *Marking Time*, numerous Logies for his television work and a 2004 AFI Award for Best Television Screenplay, again for *Marking Time*. John Doyle is the Patron of Spectrum Australia (ASPECT) (Celebrity Speakers 2018, online).

Like Philip Adams (see Section 8.7.1), whom he most closely resembles as a public intellectual, Doyle has also published quite a number of books. He was presented with an OAM in 2010 for his services to the media and he now lives with his wife, the exhibiting artist Deanna Doyle, in Balmain. They met in a theatre production in Newcastle and they are still personally connected to the city. Aarne Neeme, now himself a teacher and successful theatre director in Sydney and Singapore, directed quite a number of the plays Doyle and many others appeared in for the Hunter Valley Theatre Company. Neeme suggests that ‘the “great sadness” with the demise of not just the HVTC but a string of regional theatre companies was the removal of “the opportunities that gave young theatre people a start”’ (Bevan 2017, online).

Some of those young people in the performing arts have taken matters into their own hands. For example, Ethan Andrews, a nascent comedian, is a recent Business and Commerce graduate from the University of Newcastle who started life in Singleton. He realises that if he is to get anywhere with his performing life he has to do it himself. To that end he began running comedy shows in 2015 in order to learn his craft. These shows ‘also gave locals new opportunities to perform’ (Morris 2017, online). Andrews:

Organises and hosts a Five Dollar Comedy Night at the Croatian Wickham Sports Club and produces *Carrington Comedy* at the Carrington Bowling Club. He also hosted and organised *Tonight's the Night* at The Press Book House. Lately, he's been running comedy writing sessions and workshops (ibid).

Andrews also organised a single day comedy festival which he entitled *This is not This is Not Art*. While organising these events and freelancing as a comedian keeps him busy, in terms of income he classes himself as underemployed. In an effort to change those fortunes he applied

for and won The NSW Young Regional Artist Scholarship, worth \$10,000. These State Government scholarships, 25 of which are on offer annually, are designed to enhance the professional development of young regional artists. As Alex Morris wrote in *The Herald*, ‘the scholarship will allow him to develop his audience and reputation, including allowing him to perform at the Melbourne Comedy Festival’ (Bevan 2017, online). The grant ‘pays for my venue hire, my accommodation, promotion and registration fees to be a part of the festival’ (ibid). As well as developing his act, Andrews has also been organising comedy writing sessions and workshops:

Basically I got sick of hearing other comedians that I like performing the same jokes. I was like ‘well people will perform at a gig, what if they come out to write’. I was talking to (local comedian) David Gairdner about it. He was really struggling to withhold schoolgirl squeals at our recent writers’ workshop, but I want it to be like a library; I want silence. American improv teacher Del Close used to tell his students on the first day of their classes that there’s nothing f---ing funny about comedy, and I agree. A group of eight comedians can go off the rails, and that’s why I’m trying to reign everyone in (quoted in Morris 2017, online).

Andrews notes that the Newcastle comedy scene is evolving and other opportunities have begun to surface. For example, the Clarendon Hotel offers an open mic night in association with *Comedy under Construction*. The Clarendon was the home of the former comedic groups The Musical Flags and Castanet Club where Mikey Robbins, Steve Abbott (The Sandman on Triple J), Angela Moore, Glen Butcher, Maynard, Warren Coleman (co-writer of Oscar-winning *Happy Feet*), all got their start. *Clown & Anchor Comedy*, hosted by David Gairdner and Chris Butler, is claimed to be ‘the biggest new, fortnightly, Thursday night, free open mic stand-up comedy event in Newcastle!’ (Facebook 2018, online). It is staged upstairs at the Crown & Anchor Hotel in downtown Newcastle. Ethan Andrews surmises that the type of comedy coming from regional centres like Newcastle is different to its more urbanised variants. He also realises that he is now part of an expanding comedic community in Newcastle:

There’s so many opportunities in regional NSW. I wouldn’t be so special if I were in Sydney, but here it’s like there’s this thing that’s happening and not many people know about it and a lot of good work is coming out of it, I think it takes people by surprise (quoted in Morris 2017, online).

12.6.3 Agents

Agencies which operate in the Hunter Region for performing artists include Gina Stoj Management which began in 2002. Gina Stojanovski saw an opportunity in the local market to represent talented actors from Newcastle. Within a year she found that actors from Sydney and beyond were asking to join the agency (GSM 2018, online). While she operates her Australian agency from Lambton, her US management company has offices on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles and Lexington Avenue in New York. She is a member of The Talent Managers Association and is an accredited agent with AACTA (The Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts). Since beginning her business she has placed actors in a wide variety of television, film and commercial work. Her actors have worked in numerous television series including *Rake*, *Janet King*, *Black Comedy*, *Underbelly*, *Crownies*, *Here Come The Habibs*, *Home & Away*, *Neighbours* and *Redfern Now*, as well as films such as *Hacksaw Ridge*, *Unbroken*, *Fury Road*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Grandmothers*, *This Christmas*, *Badness*, *A Few Best Men*, *Blood Brothers* and *Happy Feet Two*. The commercials her actors have worked in are numerous and listed on her webpage (GSM 2018, online). When interviewed for a *Huffington Post* article, Stojanovski stated that:

You always get a feel for an actor from their initial email or phone enquiry. Are their materials all in order, do they know their type, and also do they have acting chops? Is there a gap in my agency for a particular skill or quality they may have? I am known for giving new actors a start, nurturing them (Beattie 2016, online).

Her experience has been hard-won:

I started out as a 'stage mum' in Australia and saw a need for a middle tier agency. The only options that were available were either top of-the-line agencies or ones that only took extras. So I decided to start an agency that filled the gap. From there I began with one actor, who happened to be my son! Within weeks, word had spread in the industry and I started filling my books with actors looking for representation. I was a 'person that actors could trust' was the word on the street. I [had]] always been an employee of someone else. I was a secretary to four psychiatrists before I became an agent, (so) everything was trial and error. [But] whenever I had questions, peers in the industry were always on hand to give advice. There were many hurdles, sometimes the simplest things were a challenge. Getting a phone number that is portable to both countries that doesn't get discontinued when you are out of the country for a certain time is one example. And time zones! (Beattie 2016, online).

As well as expanding her agency Stojanovski started a non-profit theatre company - Theatre 48 - in partnership with one of her acting clients and they staged the play *Finding the Burnett Heart* on Theatre Row in Hollywood. It was reviewed positively by the theatrical press there, becoming a Critic's Pick. With that experience behind her she went on to produce a short film, learning as she went. She believes it is important:

To have your ear to the ground and hearing of new projects in development. Networking plays a big part of developing new relationships within the industry. Work hard and don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it. Give your best to the people who believe in you and trust you with their career. Be loyal to yourself and trust the journey! (Beattie 2016, online).

Haylee Knight is the Agency Director for Models and Actors, a Newcastle-based talent management agency located in Greenway Street in Wickham, inner Newcastle. This talent agency has over 30 years industry experience (M+A 2018, online) and is connected to the film, fashion and advertising industries (ibid). They 'represent a broad range of talent to their local clients, models for fashion editorial and runway nationally, actors and extras to FOX Studios, ABC and the Seven Network, and to advertising and production companies further afield' (ibid). The other major talent agency in the region is CHAAYS Model and Talent Management which has been established for 25 years. This agency supplies 'models, actors and extras of all ages to the Advertising, Fashion, TV and Film industry throughout Newcastle & The Hunter, Central Coast and Sydney' (CHAAYS 2018, online).

Many local performers are signed with Sydney agents.

12.6.4 Venues

The major performing arts venues in the region for large-scale entertainment and events are Newcastle Entertainment Centre which has a capacity of 6,500, the Civic Theatre (1,400) and two leagues clubs venues - Wests City in the Newcastle CBD and suburban Wests New Lambton. The Griffith Duncan Theatre at the University of Newcastle seats approximately 930 but since its refurbishment and an increase in fees the building has become unusable for most theatre companies. It has not been used for theatrical productions for a decade although some

dance schools have been using it. Lake Macquarie Council supports a modest performing arts centre at Warners Bay (300 seat capacity) while Cessnock Council's award-winning performing arts centre (capacity 466) is a showcase facility. Maitland has two main performing arts venues: Maitland Town Hall and Maitland Repertory Theatre:

Located in the heart of Heritage Maitland's Cultural Precinct, the Maitland Repertory Theatre was a Congregational Church before being purchased in 1964 from the church and being converted to its current use as a theatre by Maitland Repertory in 1965. The theatre is located opposite Maitland Town Hall and the Maitland Regional Art Gallery on the corner of James St and High St (Newcastle Live 2018, online).

Many community halls across the region are used for theatrical and music performances, for example, the Gresford School of Arts. The Cassilis Community Centre Hall has a capacity of 200 people for a performance. Other venues include Singleton Youth Venue which has a multi-purpose function to stage theatre and live bands as well as to conduct training and workshops. The Scone Old Court Theatre is a converted hall, originally built as a court house in the 1860s, which has a stage and back rooms designed for theatre, films and various group functions. In the north western part of the valley, the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music (UHCM), 'the largest cultural organisation in the Upper Hunter' (AUH 2018, online), includes a purpose-built facility which 'is the first newly designed performing arts facility in the Upper Hunter' (ibid). Its auditorium seats 154 or 240 with no seats, similar in capacity to the Civic Playhouse in Newcastle. Smaller rooms are available for hire, one of which is suitable for performances and has a capacity of 58 with theatre-style seating.

At the other end of the valley, Newcastle City Council owns and manages the heritage Civic Theatre, with a seating capacity of 1,400, as well as the Civic Playhouse which seats a little under 200. The Concert Hall and other venues at City Hall and Wheeler Place are also the Council's responsibility. Civic Park in the city centre has also been used for performances, most recently in the Spiegeltent which presents national and international level cabaret, comedy, music and dance, as well as in 2018 the 'headline show, the saucy circus-cabaret, *Blanc de Blanc*. From the creative minds behind LIMBO and Madonna's recent Rebel Heart Tour' (StrutnFret 2018, online). Council hires out all of these venues and buys in product, that is, the touring theatre, dance and music shows that populate the programs for each of them.

As well as providing venues, local government authorities generally take on responsibility for cultural development. For example, in 2016 Newcastle City Council endorsed a Cultural Strategy which focuses on partnership, collaboration and engagement. Former Cultural Director Liz Burcham insisted that making Council venues more accessible was an important part of this focus within clear budget constraints:

Council has a responsibility as the major presenter and producer in this town; we have a responsibility to our local artists, our local makers and producers. So we have got to work with them, to open up our facilities to those parties, but we can't do that at a cost to those institutions operating at the level they need to (Burcham i/v April 2016).

Performer Daniel Stoddart, is Australia's only recipient of the Freddy Gershon Fellowship presented by Music Theatre International, New York, for his work with young people in theatre. He is not alone in identifying a lack of suitable venues as a problem for performing arts in Newcastle:

It's the age-old problem that always pops up – the need for a medium size theatre. We've got the Civic Theatre which is lovely and is really nice and fun to use but it suits 1,400 people and it's pretty expensive to use and then on the other end of

the scale there's The Civic Playhouse which holds less than 200, a very cheap space to use. I love using The Playhouse but something in the middle is needed as a stepping stone to get on to that bigger venue, to the next level business for local producers in terms of growing our economy, that would be so useful but we don't have that (Stoddart i/v Oct 2015).

While Stoddart praised the Playhouse as a venue, since the 2017 hire increase and a commensurate take of 11% of net box office sales associated with it, the venue remains largely unoccupied and is not used as it used to be before the price increases. This situation underscores the idea that staging productions is expensive and risky, not least because royalty payments of approximately 16.5% on a show's gross also apply. In 2014, Hunter Drama staged Disney's *The Little Mermaid Jr* at the Civic Theatre and it failed to cover costs. Stoddart comments, with some frustration, that 'it lost a lot of money. When we do another show next year at the Civic Theatre ... it needs to be more commercial than a Disney show would be and, let's face it, what is more commercial than Disney? How do you top something like that?' (Stoddart i/v Oct 2015). One option is the use of alternative venues for performance and these are becoming increasingly popular. Daniel Stoddart surmises that:

What seems to be happening at the moment, which is really exciting, is that people are realizing, particularly in theatre, that you don't need a venue, you can just go to a café and stick somebody in the corner and as long as you have got somebody doing something and if you have at least one person there to watch, you have a theatrical event. I think that people are really starting to enjoy freedom of that and I think that younger audiences and younger creative people coming straight out of school like Hunter School of the Performing Arts and the people I work with at Hunter Drama are currently taking ownership of that and really enjoying the opportunity to take risks and to enjoy having no budget to spend and seeing what they can do. Like the Crack Theatre Festival and the Micro Theatre Festival which had theatre in a gallery, café and bookshop (Stoddart i/v Oct 2015).

Tantrum Youth Arts is gaining a reputation for its site-specific work – *Diving off the Edge off the World* at Newcastle Ocean Baths (2015), *Manning the Fort* at Fort Scratchley (2016) and *Mapping the Lake* on the shore of Lake Macquarie (2017). But their reason for eschewing traditional theatre spaces is not cost but rather finding a unique style of work in a crowded marketplace. Former Artistic Director Amy Hardingham comments that 'venue costs are enormous but site-specific work isn't necessarily free' (i/v Nov 2015). In the lead-up to *Manning the Fort*, she was aware of the problems:

There are so many hidden costs, I'm now sort of thinking, 'Can we even do this?' There are so many hurdles - security, OHS, ticketing, and all the things that if we could run ourselves it would be affordable, but it needs to be done by other organisations and that's a little bit prohibitive. So yeah, it's not necessarily because of the cost of the work that we do it (Hardingham i/v Nov 2015).

Professional-standard theatres are located at two Newcastle schools – Hunter School of Performing Arts and St Phillips Christian School, both in suburban Newcastle. Newcastle Theatre Company in suburban Lambton has a small, well-equipped theatre with a capacity of 140, but like the school theatres, it is rarely available to outside users. Catapult Dance has performance space at its Hunter Street studios for the use of its students and visiting dancers.

Small, alternative performance venues include The Royal Exchange, The Gallipoli Legion Club and The Unorthodox Church of Groove (now renamed the Black Malabar), all in Newcastle. Local clubs and dinner theatre has a niche role at a church hall in suburban Adamstown (Theatre on Brunker), close to another church facility, The Dungeon at Adamstown Uniting Church. As

mentioned above, the Micro Theatre Festival use cafes, bookshops and art galleries as performance spaces.

Newcastle has lost some significant venues in recent years, notably the Drama Theatre at the University of Newcastle (demolished), The Commons in suburban Hamilton and The Black Box at Newcastle Community Arts Centre in Parry St (Council sold the building). The historic Victoria Theatre in the CBD is currently being refurbished and is expected to provide opportunities for local performers, as well as touring shows.

12.6.5 Festivals

A number of performing arts festivals are staged in the Hunter Region. For example, Crack Theatre Festival which began as an initiative of the National Young Writers' Festival in 2007 (Crack 2017, online) is now part of the acclaimed annual TINA (This is not Art) Festival in Newcastle which is run by Octapod. The festival bills itself as a place 'where experimental performance artists come from all over Australia to unleash their wildest ideas' (ibid) and has the aim of championing 'the creation of safe, non-confrontational performance spaces, invading the shopfronts, streets and unused buildings of the Newcastle CBD to create non-traditional theatre spaces where experimental and contemporary art can exist' (ibid). While it provides venue, marketing and technical support as well as networking events, but as of 2017 it 'no longer provides monetary, travel or accommodation support' (ibid).

Micro Theatre was established in 2015 by Kate Dun and Mardi Ryan as 'an independent festival of short plays performed in intimate spaces such as cafes and small art galleries where the venue is the stage' (Micro Theatre 2018, online). Festival to provide live theatre opportunities for a variety of performing artists where 'prizes are offered for best actor as well as prizes for writing, direction and production' (ibid). The festival has the support of a number of local businesses who act as sponsors and promoters, and the non-traditional venues in which it has been held include Curve Gallery, The Press Bookhouse, Vinyl Café, all in Newcastle, and Studio 21 Artspace in Hamilton. 'Micro Theatre Pty Ltd was formed to be an independent social enterprise company. We are committed to growing the Micro Theatre Festival as a self-sustaining festival, where all net profits are invested back into the festival' (ibid).

The Newcastle Fringe Festival was established in 2015 and in 2017 offered 'over 100 unique shows and performers' across a range of city venues including hotels. Each venue was selected to be 'within walking distance of the Newcastle CBD. Each venue will have at least 3 shows a day' (NFF 2018, online). It features theatre, comedy, dance, music, cabaret and circus, nearly all newly-developed work. The Fringe is committed to bringing as much variety in entertainment options as possible to cater for all interests and it 'showcases the best up and coming acts from around the world ... 25% of all acts will come from students, graduates and amateur companies' (ibid). The festival is sponsored by a number of businesses including Goldberg's Restaurant, Noahs on the Beach, the Port of Newcastle, Port Waratah Coal Services, WHO Printing, the City of Newcastle and Hungerford Hill winery.

Hissyfest is a short play competition run annually by Tantrum Youth Arts. Its producer is paid as an Emerging Artist. The festival features 'new writing from ten emerging writers' (Tantrum 2018a, online). It not only showcases new writing but also provides an 'opportunity to emerging and established directors and actors to produce quality new work' (ibid). It is staged at the Civic Playhouse in Newcastle and also features the Hissyfest Writers Lab where 'five emerging writers will be given the opportunity to learn from one of Australia's most renowned contemporary playwrights, Lachlan Philpott' (ibid) who guides aspirants, 16 years or older, 'through the process of writing a short, new play' (ibid).

The Hunter Valley Arts Centre was instrumental in producing Theatrefest Hunter which is a festival of one-act plays performed by the region's theatre groups and is held in 'a state-of-the-art entertainment centre, the \$8 million Cessnock Performing Arts Centre' (Stage Whispers 2018, online). Some of the short plays are unpublished and/or written by students. The adjudication by special guest judges is followed by an awards ceremony supported by Cessnock City Council and the Cessnock Performing Arts Centre.

12.6.6 Training institutions

The University of Newcastle offers degree and post-graduate qualifications in Drama. The Drama Theatre on the Callaghan campus, a much-loved venue, was recently demolished. In addition, Hunter TAFE offers courses up to Advanced Diploma level through its Music Department and Regional Institute of Performing Arts (RIPA). The limited nature of theatre training available in the region has been identified as an issue, however. Mat Lee from Stooaged Theatre talks of the strong talent base and high degree of theatre-related activity in the city but he points to the loss of training opportunities on offer with reduced offerings at both TAFE and The University of Newcastle:

... within the theatre world – Newcastle is both thriving and at a loss. We currently have more companies producing contemporary work and theatre in general, than I think we ever had before (especially in the case of dramatic theatre), we have a great assortment of up-and-coming talent graduating high school and producing or performing in excellent work – though, with recent funding cuts, we have seen [a threat to] RIPA [to] close its doors after many years of successful operation. In terms of dramatic actors, there isn't really another viable avenue to study theatre in Newcastle (this is not including musical theatre with many options available). The University doesn't really offer real acting training like it once did, and young actors – if they wish to pursue a career in this field – have to study in Sydney (Lee i/v April 2017).

Drama schools offer programs mostly for children and young people and they include Tantrum Youth Arts, Hunter Drama, Young People's Theatre and Pantseat Performing Arts as well as the Hunter Valley Actors Centre (HVAC). Young People's Theatre (YPT) is of particular note as they are one of the few companies to return substantial profits according to the audit reports available publicly from acnc.gov.au. This company:

Is the premier theatrical training institution for youth in the Hunter and has nurtured the careers of many young people with aspirations to continue in the industry. It has provided training and performance opportunities for young people between the ages of 8 and 18 for over 70 years ... 400 students attend weekly classes at YPT. As well as staging 6 productions a year, YPT provides technical training and mentors youth directors (YPT 2018, online).

HVAC, located in the Polish Hall in Maitland, has provided acting and theatre courses since 2010. As their website attests, 'in 2014 HVAC celebrated Shakespeare's 450th birthday by including his works within Courses' (AA 2018, online). HVAC instructs in the fundamentals of acting including voice, movement and improvisation. The tutors who deliver the courses have over 20 years of experience in the performing arts, while the courses they teach include 'hands on experience, theoretical understanding, narrative interpretation and direction, spatial awareness & production techniques' (ibid). Students stage a one act play as a performance showcase.

Tantrum Youth Arts also offers a range of programs for young people aged 3 to 26 and describes itself as ‘the leading professional youth arts company in the Hunter Region. We develop new, innovative and inclusive contemporary performing arts projects characterised by collaborative processes and participation. Our work is inspired by our local communities and generated through community partnerships’ (Tantrum 2017, online).

Pantseat Productions was formed in 2007 to assist young people develop their performance skills with a specific music theatre focus. Their classes and performances were directed by ‘tertiary qualified and experienced drama performers and drama teachers. Daniel Kavanagh and Lia Pati, company founders, have over 20 years’ experience in the Performing Arts and are both currently qualified to teach in NSW schools’ (Pantseat 2018, online). They operated out of St. Stephens Hall in Adamstown, the home of Theatre on Brunker, staging five major productions each year, showcasing the talents of their students and performers from the wider community (ibid). Pantseat ceased operations in 2018 and WEA Hunter took on most of their students and at the same time purchased the old DAPA Theatre on Beaumont Street.

Daniel Stoddart is the owner and formerly full-time Artistic Director of Hunter Drama, an out-of-school hours academy for young people aged from three years to 21, which teaches acting for theatre, screen and musical theatre from studios in suburban Broadmeadow (and, since 2018, Singleton). It employs a part-time Assistant Program Director and twelve tutors. Stoddart says ‘we are promoting a new wave of creative people’ (Stoddart i/v Oct 2015).

UpStage Youth Theatre in Maitland holds a number of its productions outdoors and in unique locations including such settings such as Maddies of Bolwarra and Tocal Homestead. Once a year UpStage also presents a One Act Play Festival showcasing the work of students prepared in class (Upstage 2018, online). At Upstage ‘students are given the opportunity to learn about the dramatic arts through a practical, hands-on approach to performance’ (ibid). Their classes and productions are taught and directed by ‘qualified and experienced drama teachers and industry professionals’. The classes cover a wide variety of skills pertinent to the performing arts including ‘improvisation, audition preparation, playbuilding, physical theatre, mask, voice work and speech, mime, technical productions, circus skills, performance, script work, stage craft, social development, individual tuition, musical theatre and acting for the camera’ (ibid).

Drama Karma has been operating in Morisset since 2008 and offers courses in acting, public speaking, mime, script writing, performance and theatre sports (AA 2018a, online). The Australian Dance and Talent Centre in Cardiff claims to be ‘Newcastle and Lake Macquarie's premier performing arts facility’ catering to all age groups and holds ‘classes and private tuition in all styles of dance, singing, drama, musical theatre, guitar and piano’ (ibid). They offer performance opportunities for all students [and] a purpose-built facility with experienced staff’ (ibid).

The Pasvolsky Actors Studio was established by Claire Pasvolsky in 2014. It offers voice, movement and acting classes for adults as well as corporate workshops from premises in Cooks Hill, Newcastle.

Barnes Music in Broadmeadow is a family-run business that has been operating since 1980 and employs a number of teachers to conduct music classes. Rod Barnes, who studied at University and became an architect, began playing clarinet 50 years ago and says that many of his students ‘have gone on to play professionally, whether it be classical or jazz, and others who have also gone on to become teachers themselves’ (Barnes Music 2018, online). He established the legendary Dungeon Jazz Club in Adamstown while his partner Jenny Barnes, who also teaches at Barnes Music, has sung with and directed ‘jazz bands and orchestras, performed in oratorios, operas, a capella groups, choirs and recital programs. In 2009, Jenny attained a PhD for research

into the operatic soprano voice, an investigation that has had profound implications on her own teaching' (Barnes Music 2018, online). Jenny Barnes has an impressive background:

Former principal soprano with Opera Australia, Opera Queensland, State Opera of South Australia, Sound Construction Company, Sydney Metropolitan Opera and soloist with Sydney Philharmonia, Perth Philharmonia Choir, Newcastle University Choir, Newcastle City Choir, Gosford City Choir and member of a capella groups The Hunter Consort of Voices, Bash and Waxing Lyrical. Roles include Cio-Cio San (*Madama Butterfly*), Grimgerde (*Die Walküre*), Micaela & Frasquita (*Carmen*), Antonia (*Tales of Hoffmann*), Ellen Orford (*Peter Grimes*), The Governess (*The Turn of the Screw*), The Alms Sister (*Suor Angelica*), Hirsinde (*Abelard and Heloise*), Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*), Mother (*Amahl and the Night Visitors*), Mother (*The Shining Isle*), Trilby (*Trilby*) (Theatre Newcastle 2018, online).

In the Upper Hunter, the Platinum Dance Centre is located in the main street of Muswellbrook and its principal teacher and owner Emily Manning is an experienced teacher who was a dancer for 14 years. She has completed her major ballet exams with BBO, has a Certificate IV in Dance Teaching and Management, and is 'a registered member of both A.T.O.D and B.B.O. Dance Syllabuses' (Platinum 2018, online). Her assistant 'started dancing at the age of two and has completed all major exams in Classical Ballet and Tap. She has performed in selected groups for Starstruck, competed at eisteddfods in groups and solos for various dance schools and also Cheer Comps all over the state' (ibid). Together they teach classical ballet, tap and performance group classes as well as selected modern and jazz classes.

The Hunter Dance Academy also operates out of Singleton while the Newcastle Premier Dance Co at Caves Beach provides dance tuition in a 'variety of dance forms to all age groups, levels and abilities ... Classes include: ATOD Ballet, Jazz, Lyrical/Contemporary, Tap, Pre-School Programs and Stretch & Conditioning' (AA 2018a, online).

At the coastal end of the valley, Newcastle is renowned for its talent in dance with many local dancers finding placements in leading companies internationally, from ballet companies to the Moulin Rouge. Dance schools include Newcastle Ballet Theatre and, for children, Tap Pups and the National College of Dance as well as Catapult which is a not-for-profit contemporary dance organisation for professional artists, emerging artists and young people (McCarthy 2018, online). This studio offers a range of training programs including The Flipside Project (youth dance and multi-arts), master classes with nationally acclaimed choreographers, community open classes for all ages, and a community and schools outreach program. It also conducts Propel, a professional artist in residence program. The studio has received funding from Create NSW, the City of Newcastle, the NSW Department of Education & Training, and Ausdance NSW (ibid). Catapult was founded by Cadi McCarthy in 2014. She is a professional dancer and choreographer with twenty years' experience in the sector:

Between 2009 and 2013, Cadi was the Artistic Director of Buzz Dance Theatre, WA. With the company she created 9 full-length works for a variety of age groups including Look the Other Way which received a 2014 Australian Dance Award for Outstanding Achievement in Youth and Community Dance, Restless, Fragile, Goodbye Jamie Boyd (collaboration with Monkey Baa Theatre Company) and Stop! don't Blink. The community programs she established with the company include: the largest Artist in Residence Grant (AIR) in Australia, collaboration with Southern Edge Arts: Albany, the Big Stretch program that was awarded the 2010 Outstanding Achievement in Community/ Regional Dance at the WA Dance Award and the 2010 Arts and Aboriginal Health Award, the community partnership program with the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre and

Aranmore College, and collaborations with the Michael Leslie Foundation (Pilbara). She has also been the education consultant for the Queensland Ballet and the Western Australian Ballet. Previous to this position, Cadi danced with Paige Gordon and Performance Group (1996–1998) and with Buzz Dance Theatre (1998–2002). She created the independent company Cadi McCarthy & Company in the ACT in 2002, where she created 6 full length works including *Awkward*, *Shambles* and *Grappling for the Edge*. With the company she was the Recipient of a 2004 & 2006 Canberra Critics Circle Awards. As the recipient of a 2007 Churchill Fellowship, Cadi spent time working with dance companies in Denmark, UK, Germany, USA, and Canada. In the same year she was awarded a residency at Chez Bushwick in New York. In 2009 Cadi travelled to Taiwan as the Australian Delegate of the World Dance Alliance, International Youth Choreographic Project (ibid).

The National College of Dance (NCD) in Lambton, Newcastle was formerly the renowned Marie Walton Mahon dance school. Marie Walton Mahon completed her advanced exams in ballet at the Royal Academy of Dance in London where she was awarded the Solo Seal Award in 1970. She then went on to a professional career touring Europe as a ballerina with Les Ballet de Marseilles in France before returning to Newcastle. She set up her own Academy and ‘entered students for all levels of examinations for 36 years’ (RAD 2018, online) while continuing her affiliations with professional dance and ballet in Europe. As she explained ‘many visits abroad to the Genée International awards have always given my students exceptional inspiration over the years. One highlighted experience would have to be training my own daughter Veronica Mahon for the Genée and her being awarded the Gold Medal in London’ (ibid). Her name eventually became ‘synonymous with dance in Newcastle’ (ibid). She maintains a role as a vocational examiner for the Royal Academy of Dance and is also a registered tutor with the RAD. She was awarded a Life Membership of this prestigious institution in 2011. Her Academy was bought in 2012 by Brett Morgan, formerly of the Australian Ballet Company and Associate Director of Sydney Dance Company. His wife Vicki is CEO. NCD teaches classical and contemporary dance and jazz from Certificate to Diploma (semi-professional) level. Students in the accredited one-year Diploma course work long hours, from 8.15 am until 5 pm or later. They often do night classes as well and at the weekends they may be performing or engaged in competitions. Students are drawn from the Hunter Region but also Coffs Harbour, Mudgee, Orange and western NSW. Graduates gain places in professional dance schools or move into a junior company such as the Sydney Dance Co or Queensland Ballet and some audition for big theatre shows ranging from Disneyland to Moulin Rouge. Teacher Tim Gordon says that 98% of them are placed.

12.6.7 Companies

Circus Avalon is a community circus company based in Newcastle which has been active in the performing arts for the last 25 years. It is ‘one of Australia’s largest non-government funded community circus organizations’ (Circus Avalon, 2018 online) and delivers ‘high-end circus acts to clients of all types. Whether it be large scale big top shows, corporate functions, local events, or even birthday parties’ (ibid). This company of performing artists has over 100 members as well as highly skilled trainers. In 2018 they expanded their repertoire ‘to include not only family friendly circus and physical theatre performances, but elegant dinner shows at local nightlife hotspots’ (ibid). They also run a Circus Academy, training people in circus performance and delivering workshops for schools and corporate clients. They subsidise their costs by hiring their equipment, including the green and yellow big top tent.

Since the demise of the Hunter Valley Theatre Company and Freewheels, there are no fully professional theatre companies in Newcastle. One anonymous interviewee commented:

There's a lot of people interested in the theatre in Newcastle but my perception is that they are doing stuff here until they can go somewhere else. So there is either kind of more amateur stuff or they are emerging/preparing to leave, I don't know. It's very tempting to say that I want the Hunter Valley Theatre Company back and that we need a professional theatre company here in Newcastle. Why don't I just say that? Yes, I think that would be good, if there was a professional theatre company here in Newcastle (Anon i/v 2016).

Some companies, however, aspire to a professional standard of work and are committed to paying performers, on a profit-share basis. These include Two Tall, Knock and Run, Stray Dogs and Stooged Theatre Company.

Stooged Theatre began in 2003 under the leadership of Carl Young who remains on the Committee as a Treasurer. Ten years later, it became an incorporated, not-for-profit company that operates on a profit-share basis. The company was established with an initial government grant but funding now comes from earnings from productions and fundraising. Personnel include an Artistic Director, Associate Director, Literary & Development Manager, Treasurers, Head of Ensemble, Production Manager, Technical Manager and an ensemble of actors and other creatives. Since 2011, Stooged has staged three or four shows a year, generally at the Civic Playhouse. They have been the recipient of numerous CONDAs (City of Newcastle Drama Awards) including Best Production in 2011, 2012 and 2014. Their most recent production was *Neighbourhood Watch* by Lally Katz directed by Daniel Cottier. Stooged is known for its innovative marketing which includes video trailers distributed via social media. Artistic Director Mat Lee explains:

Our product is bringing contemporary international and Australian plays to Newcastle that other companies have not yet staged, or classical/modern work that has a social message. We aim to produce a high-quality standard of theatre and aim to work with the brilliant actors Newcastle has on offer (Lee i/v April 2017).

Stray Dogs Theatre Company is a co-op headed by playwright, director, actor, dramaturg and educator Carl Caulfield. He founded Stray Dogs with his partner, director Felicity Biggins. A grant from the NSW Ministry of the Arts funded its establishment. The company stages new plays written by Caulfield, including *Where Late the Songbird* which was part of the Civic Theatre's Subscription Series in 2015. Performing Arts Newcastle (PAN) provides insurance coverage for the company. Caulfield's main income comes from teaching drama and creative writing. He currently teaches screenwriting at the University of Newcastle and screen studies at NIDA. He has also worked as a dramaturg (script consultant). He has written, staged and performed in a significant number of works across his career:

His works include *Seems Like Old Times*, *Dante's Dream*, *Human Resources*, *Shakespeare's Fools*, *The Anatomy of Buzz*, *Where Late the Songbird* and *Hecuba Reimagined*. *Being Sellers*, Carl's award-winning, one-man play about British Goon Peter Sellers, was first produced in 1998 at the Playhouse in Newcastle, before transferring to the Edinburgh Festival and then to London at the Man in the Moon Theatre, Kings Road. *Being Sellers* was recently reprised at the Waterloo East Theatre in London with David Boyle as Sellers and then went on to the 59E59 Theatre in New York. His most recent play, *Mark of Cain*, explores the impact of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) on a group of returning

soldiers. Carl has just written, directed and co-produced his first short film, *Chloe Comes Through* (NWF 2017a, online).

Caulfield is experienced enough to realise that a playwright's work is constrained by the limited budgets theatre companies have to work with currently. He comments that:

Theatre companies won't look at your work if you're writing for more than seven actors anyway ... nobody is putting on these large-scale plays unless you're the National Theatre ... I mean it's great to have the chamber pieces, but we also want to see the large-scale work that deals with big social issues, you know, or the movements of history (Caulfield i/v May 2015).

Sydney Theatre Company's 2017 production of the large-scale show *Chimerica* overcame this problem to an extent through a partnership with NIDA which involved the participation of a whole class of drama students. These opportunities are rare.

Other performing arts companies such as Opera Hunter have operated successfully, mounting large productions for a number of years:

Opera Hunter was formed in 1986 and has presented more than 60 productions and events in its years. It has won many City of Newcastle Drama Awards and presented operas in many parts of the region. Among its repertoire are *The Magic Flute*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Rigoletto*, *La Belle Helene*, *Julius Caesar*, *Sweeney Todd*, *The Music Man*, *Die Fledermaus*, *The Merry Widow*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Telephone*, *Amahl & the Night Visitors*, *West Side Story*, *Oliver!*, *Les Miserables*, *Miss Saigon* and *Cats* (Sticky Tickets 2018, online).

Its founding figures included Mercia Buck as President, Tom Naisby, (the then Newcastle Herald music critic) and Colleen Potts as well as Susan Hart, Karen Hawkins (now Walmsley), Philip Sketchley, Barry Walmsley and Rob Langley (Opera Hunter 2018, online). After much fundraising and planning, workshops began at Newcastle High School in 1987. Since then the company has gone from strength to strength, adapting to its regional audiences and gaining necessary sponsorship along the way.

While Opera Hunter often works closely with the Lake Macquarie Philharmonic Orchestra and The Hunter Orchestra, the company is dedicated equally to opera and musical theatre and this combination has worked to its advantage. Since 2000 Opera Hunter has used 'popular musicals to support financially the mounting of opera productions' (Opera Hunter 2018, online). As a result, audiences for the company developed into 'two distinct categories: opera and music theatre. The company continued to be truly Hunter in its ability to move to many different venues' (ibid). The main venues it uses are the Lake Macquarie Performing Arts Centre, Civic Theatre in Newcastle and they used to use the Griffith Duncan Theatre at the University of Newcastle's Callaghan Campus. They have used other venues such as Lake Macquarie's Awaba House, The Highfields Azzuri Sports Club, Speers Point Park, the historic St. John's Church in Cooks Hill and the Newcastle Conservatorium of Music's Harold Lobb Theatre, dependent on what type of production they are staging. By the turn of the new century the company had 'an increasing commitment to larger budgets supported by increased funding from donors, businesses and corporations' (Opera Hunter 2018, online). Sponsors for the 2018 season and the staging of *Don Giovanni* are Centennial Coal, Crest Financial Services, Eclipse Communications and the Newcastle Herald.

Perhaps the most ambitious company in the region is Metropolitan Players, a musical theatre company that has been operating for 40 years. Julie Black is Artistic Director of the company while Graeme Black is often Set Designer and Stage Manager for productions as well as being President of the Player's committee. *Les Miserables*, in August 2017, was the ninth show they

have staged at Civic Theatre in Newcastle. The company has been the recipient of numerous CONDAs (City of Newcastle Drama Awards) over the years.

The Company was first formed in 1977 and has been producing quality musicals ever since. We produce one major musical each year, although in the past there were sometimes 2 each year ... For many years we have used the 924-seat Griffiths Duncan Theatre at Newcastle University. Our most recent productions have been at Newcastle's premier theatre, the 1400-seat Civic Theatre. The Company is run by a Committee that is elected each year at the Annual General Meeting in February. We used to rehearse at Broadmeadow Uniting Church Hall in Broadmeadow, but after 33 years have now moved to Glendale High School. Set construction is at our warehouse in Cardiff. Over the years our productions have received many City of Newcastle Drama Awards (the CONDAs). The most successful was *The Producers* in 2008 which won 6 Awards. However, this has now been beaten by our 2014 production of *The Phantom of the Opera* which won 7 Awards. After *Wicked* in 2016 the Company has now won the CONDA Best Musical production 5 years in a row. We make all our own costumes for each show and many of these are for hire (MP 2018, online).

Metropolitan Players currently receive neither government nor corporate support. They have had some in-kind support from Newcastle City Council in the past but were unsuccessful in 2016 in their application for event funding which offered up to \$20,000. With budgets of approximately \$400,000 per show, Graeme Black suggests:

It's a huge financial risk. It could be the last show every time ... Last year's production took nearly \$500,000 at the box office but the costs are significant. Performing rights cost 16-18% of gross which was \$80,000 last year, theatre hire was \$140,000, \$80,000 was spent on sound and lighting hire, and \$8,000 on billboards (G. Black i/v May 2017).

Metropolitan Players represents a surprising hybrid of professionalism and amateurism in that the quality of work, the budgets and the operational methods are of the highest industry standards, yet everybody involved works on a voluntary basis. Graeme Black explains that this allows them to work to a scale and level that would otherwise be impossible. As Julie says, they all do it for the love of it. Those who compete for roles with Metropolitan Players shows appear to be happy to work for nothing, attracted by the opportunity to be part of a successful, high quality show where they can develop their experience, skills and profile in a positive atmosphere. Daniel Stoddart, who has performed in several Metropolitan Players shows, says that to ask for pay would be 'pricing yourself out of the market' (Stoddart i/v Oct 2015). He asks, 'Why would Metropolitan Players pay you if there are ten other people lined up who are happy to do it for nothing?' (ibid). Indeed, roles with Metropolitan Players shows are hotly contested: in 2016, 207 people auditioned for 50 roles, only nine of which were leads.

Importantly, experience with Metropolitan Players can assist performers develop the skills and knowledge they need for professional careers. Graeme Black says the company tries to give performers 'as close to a professional experience as possible and a rare opportunity to work in a theatre such as the Civic Theatre' (G. Black i/v May 2017). Several performers who have worked with Metropolitan Players have gone on to significant professional careers. Jye Frasca came to the company as a young tap dancer and is now working in shows in the West End of London, David Harris has had professional leads in Australian musicals and now lives and works in Los Angeles, Costa Nicholas worked as a singer/dancer and now runs a casting agency in the USA, Nigel Turner Carroll directs shows nationally, and Tyran Parke and Seth Drury are both currently appearing in the musical *Big Fish* at the Hayes Theatre in Sydney.

While Metropolitan Players shows do not pay performers, the economic value they generate is significant. Daniel Stoddart estimates that the 2015 production of *Mary Poppins*, in which he was a lead, had possibly one hundred people working on the show. (In actual fact that production of *Mary Poppins* included a production crew alone of 100 plus a full cast of 56 actors, accompanied by a 17-piece orchestra):

Each of those people was going into town for up to two weeks. They were all putting money in the parking meters, they were all going into the little shop next door buying iceblocks. How much money did they spend on petrol to get their car into town? How much money was spent on buying stockings for that production from Lowes up the road, and costumes, fabric, wood from Bunnings to make sets and things? If there was some way of quantifying that in a really tangible, practical way and saying the arts contribute X amount of revenue to the local economy ... comparing that to a packed-out Newcastle Knights stadium, I think we would probably give them a red hot run for their money (Stoddart i/v Oct 2015).

Shane Bransdon is a long-time performer in acting, singing and dancing roles who lectured in the Drama Department at the University of Newcastle 'teaching teachers how to teach drama' (Bransdon i/v Oct 2014). Having resigned his position as a Vice-Principal in the NSW School system he is described as 'an actor/director and educational specialist based in Australia. His recent show credits include *Les Miserable* (2017), *Wicked* (2016), and *Mary Poppins* (2015)' (OzTheatrics 2018, online). He also runs, along with Daniel Stoddart, a company called OZTheatrics. Their objective is 'grow Australia's musical theatre industry by providing young people with quality musical theatre programs' (ibid). They are doing this by:

Engaging students in a variety of large scale events that inspire and motivate young performers; building the capacity of teachers, educators and directors to deliver successful musicals; building a national network of creative artists (students and teachers); staging exciting new works; engaging industry experts and international artists to work with our young Australian performers and teachers; and, offering international experiences for young people and professional development for educators (OzTheatrics 2018, online).

Like Stoddart Bransdon argues that:

When we are talking about the representation of performing arts as a subsector of the creative industries in Newcastle, I think dance will be the biggest chunk of the pie. If we can somehow capture the economy created just by parents taking their kids to dance class every week, creating costumes and performances! I know that every theatre is booked out entirely at this time of year because of the dance concerts ... In fact on that list of who is employed are dancers, more than anything. And musicians, they just don't work for free. In all of our theatre productions, if you have orchestras and bands they will always be paid. It might not be Equity rates but generally speaking they don't work for free in Newcastle. Actors you get scores and scores of. If an actor was to say 'I won't work unless you pay me' there would be ten lined up behind them that would be willing to do it for free (Bransdon i/v Oct 2014).

To attempt to quantify this phenomenon Bransdon (2018) conducted a study, as part of his PhD research at the University of Newcastle, which was focused specifically at theatre. He surveyed half of the theatre companies running currently in the urban part of the region. With these 21 companies putting on shows and using employed staff and volunteers, Bransdon calculated the paid roles of all full-time, part-time and casual employment and bundled this together. He then added an additional calculation which included the amount profit-share actors were paid

divided by the industry award rate. The result was 8 FTE (full-time equivalent) paid workers. Given the sample was precisely half the number of companies he then assumed that the full-time equivalent employment in the region in theatre would be 16 FTE bodies. He then went on to count the number of volunteer gigs.

When surveyed, Newcastle theatre companies indicated how many volunteers contribute to each production and the administration of their company. The data indicated that a range of between 5 and 380 volunteers were utilised for each production staged by typical companies. The research population indicated that 3589 volunteers were used. This is then doubled as the research population accounted for 50% of the industry, making the result 7178 volunteer gigs. This figure has been further increased with the inclusion of a large combined schools production, which was not included in the research catchment but contributed through interview. The school's production relied on 4000 volunteers each year for their major production. The total gift economy of the industry is therefore assessed to provide 11,000 volunteer gigs (Bransdon 2018).

This is an extraordinary figure indicative of the extent of the gift economy at work in the creative industries. It also applies to companies like Tantrum Youth Arts which is the leading professional youth arts company in the Hunter region. It was:

... established in 1976 under the name 2 Til 5 Youth Theatre Co-op as a Saturday afternoon drama workshop. The company steadily grew, providing drama skills workshops and original productions for people aged 8-18. In 1996, 2 Til 5 established Tantrum Theatre, an off-shoot company, catering to emerging actors and theatre artists aged 18-25, and the two companies later merged. In 2014, we relaunched as Tantrum Youth Arts, which better reflects the work we do: a greater integration of a range of art forms including performance, filmmaking, writing, physical theatre – all with a strong focus on developing young people's creativity, confidence and communication (Tantrum 2018, online).

Tantrum aims to develop innovative contemporary performing arts projects which are collaborative and participative. The work they stage is developed out of the local community and depends, as Bransdon's study indicated, on community partnerships.

Amy Hardingham was Artistic Director and CEO of Tantrum from 2013-2016. She completed a BA at The University of Sydney majoring in performance studies and was President of Sydney University Drama Society (SUDS) for two years where she developed important skills and connections including with playwright Tommy Murphy and Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP). Her first job was at Regional Arts NSW as part-time administrative officer, next door to ATYP where she was assistant directing shows on a voluntary basis and then paid. She was mentored by leading Director Marion Potts. Hardingham then completed a Grad Dip of Arts Management at UTS and a Dip Ed in Drama from Charles Sturt University. At 25, Amy took a job running Outback Theatre, a youth theatre company based at Hay in south-west NSW where she learnt about site-specific work because there were no theatres out there. 'I don't really know what to do in a proper theatre, that's the truth'. After five years she moved back to Sydney and took a job at ATYP for two years as the Regional Manager where she ran programs mainly in Tennant Creek and Palm Island. She then had her son Leo and taught workshops at ATYP working two days a week as an associate producer with the arts company Big hArt before moving to Newcastle. She says that Tantrum is:

One of the few funded youth theatre companies in Australia that is run by professionals and in a professional way and works with young people to do a range of things – one is to help them be the best they can be - so, to improve their

confidence, communication, teamwork, all of those things ... But on the other hand, I think we also exist to give people a head start with their careers. And I think that's a responsibility that we have because we are a funded organisation ... people should be looking to us if they are interested in actually building a career. And so that's why we have things like the emerging teaching artist position, and a range of initiatives for emerging theatre makers (Hardingham i/v Nov 2015).

Finances are tight, even with government arts funding. Hardingham contends that 'at Tantrum we really just survive. You know, we work so hard on these tiny grants and it's constantly like riding a bike, we're constantly pedalling the bike to create the power to run the company, and there's never any respite' (Hardingham i/v Nov 2015). The company's main income comprises operational funding from Arts NSW of \$240,000 over three years, workshop fees of \$50,000-\$60,000 dollars per annum and ticket sales of perhaps \$25,000-\$30,000 per annum. Lucy Shepherd, the new Artistic Director, comments that a strong creative strategic goal of Tantrum over the last three years has been to create more paid professional opportunities for artists, for example, paid part-time teaching positions, as opposed to casual engagements. Tantrum partners with Newcastle City Library for the 'Stories Come Alive' program which employs one emerging artist to devise and present performances for children. As well, Tantrum has a program called 'Opening Doors' whereby emerging artists are commissioned to create work.

Other youth-oriented companies include Young People's Theatre, Upstage Youth Theatre, and Reamus Youth Theatre (based in Maitland). Community-based theatre companies include Newcastle Theatre Company, Maitland Repertory Theatre and Valley Artists based in Wollombi. Club 71 (until 2017) and Theatre on Brunker offer dinner theatre.

12.6.8 Other employers

The Arts Health Institute (AHI) was the largest employer of artists in the region, employing more than 80 performers (Connell 2016, online). While arts health is well-established internationally, especially in the UK and USA, it is an emerging area in Australia. The AHI in Newcastle was established as a social enterprise by Dr Maggie Haertsch and Jean-Paul Bell in 2011. Unfortunately, it ceased operations at the end of 2017. The AHI operated nationally including in remote regions and had an office in Sydney. The AHI recruited professional artists from a range of disciplines including music, dance, theatre and comedy and trained them to work in aged care facilities and hospitals implementing various programs which both entertain and engage people but also bring therapeutic benefits. The approach was research-based and AHI worked with a number of Australian universities. The AHI website outlined the range of programs offered in healthcare settings. These include one-on-one 'valet visits', Sing Out Loud (choirs), Music and Memory (a licensed program offering personalised playlists especially for people with dementia), We Think You Can Dance (dance classes), Access to Express (art and art appreciation), Word Power (creative writing, reading), and Theatre of Life (play readings and theatre experiences) (AHI 2017, online). The Institute AHI also curated short courses for health, arts and aged care professionals through their Arts Health Academy. They paid their artists above Equity (MEAA) rates and drew them from throughout and beyond the Hunter Region, from Wollombi, Newcastle, the Central Coast, Mid-North Coast and Northern NSW. Not only were their artists paid well, they enjoyed meaningful work that they knew was making a difference. The AHI website states:

The Arts Health Institute is a major employer of professional artists with specialist skills in residential aged care, dementia and working with elders to provide meaningful creative experiences. While immensely enjoyable, the purpose of these experiences goes way beyond the simplistic idea of 'entertainment'. Every

interaction is carefully designed to actually improve quality of life with therapeutic benefits (AHI 2017, online)

Good Eye Deer also employs local talent. It is an award-winning production company owned and managed by Olivia Olley and Gavin Banks (see Section 15.7.5). It operates nationally, producing training videos for corporates, promotional films and television commercials.

Local television stations and advertising agencies produce commercials from time to time, providing small-scale local employment and some voice-over work. In an indication of the value of diverse skills and vertical integration, one leading voiceover artist actually records her read and emails it to the client; she has become her own producer and sound recordist. The University of Newcastle, some professional organisations and some corporates employ actors from time to time as simulated patients or clients for medicine and social work programs, for example.

12.6.9 Enablers – Including Funding Bodies

Funding is available for performing arts practitioners and groups from the Australia Council and Create NSW (formerly Arts NSW). Major changes in federal funding in 2015 saw the transfer of significant funds from the Australia Council to the office of the Minister, Senator Brandis, in the form of a program called Catalyst. In early 2017, the new Minister announced the closure of Catalyst and the return of \$80.2 million over four years to the Australia Council. The total funding of the Arts Council, however, remains less than the pre-2015 level (AMPAG 2017, online). Very little funding comes to the Hunter region from these sources – Tantrum Youth Arts and Paper Cut are rare current beneficiaries.

Paper Cut: Contemporary Performance Collective is an initiative of Lucy Shepherd, Tamara Gazzard and Sarah Coffee which began in 2012. Each year since, the company has created and produced a new work. Paper Cut has received a number of grants, the first of \$15,000 from the Australia Council for their first show, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, which allowed them to pay everyone in the production and cover the venue hire. For *Spent*, a work about consumer culture performed in an abandoned retail store, they got a grant from Arts NSW (now Create NSW) for part of the creative development. *No-one Cares about Your Cat*, a work about social media, was commissioned by Tantrum Youth Arts so they were paid a commission fee. With *Hello Stranger*, a work about social isolation, Arts NSW provided the total funding of \$60,000 and they subsequently successfully applied for production funding and touring funding so ‘we weren’t out of pocket in any way, shape or form ... That’s the dream’ (Gazzard i/v May 2016). They say that grants are very important but generally only cover half of the costs of a production.

There is a shared sense that the region’s performing arts sector is not receiving its fair allocation of government funding. While Carl Caulfield from Stray Dogs comments on the vibrancy of the theatre scene in Newcastle, he contrasts the reality of poor funding with the city’s image as a creative hub:

From the inside, I think it’s exciting ... what I’ve always been amazed at is ... the kind of ferocity that people have here, the passion that people have here, and that’s for real ... there is this strong tradition here of doing good theatre. It’s been around a hell of a long time, and it’s one of the best things about this city, to me. I mean, I think it’s very easy to get projects up here ... but on another level, I have to be frank with you and say, it’s as depressing as it ever was. And the lack of support is just as it ever was, if not getting worse, in a way ... I think we’re moving into a kind of brutal, corporate kind of mindset ... But at the same time there’s all this

talk. So we're getting all the feel-good talk about how creative a place it is ... There's not enough ... people putting their money where their mouth is (Caulfield i/v May 2015).

Councils are traditional supporters of local arts. As mentioned, Newcastle City Council approved a new Cultural Strategy in 2016 which focuses on partnerships, engagement and accessibility. While Newcastle Council provides important infrastructure in the form of the Civic Theatre and Civic Playhouse, currently the only funding support comes in the form of small grants from the highly competitive Events Sponsorship, Economic Development Sponsorship and Community Assistance Program. In 2017, however, Council approved a new scheme which promises up to \$50,000 funding for three years to selected performing arts companies. The total funding allocation for the scheme is at this stage unclear. Newcastle Council also publishes an online newsletter 'Creative City' to promote arts events and opportunities.

The City of Newcastle Drama Awards (CONDAS) also enable the recognition of outstanding achievements in theatre in Newcastle in the previous year and the awards event is attended by several hundred people. The CONDAS were originally supported by Council and hosted by Civic Theatre but are now run independently. Shane Bransdon, a CONDA Judge, is also Drama Representative on the arts funding body for the New South Wales Department of Education. In addition, he is Chairperson of the Newcastle Performing Arts Taskforce which represents theatre organisations:

I started that with Theresa Conicella in 2012 and it came about because there is a state body that is called the State Creative [Industries] Taskforce. It was established by the current Government in Sydney and we had a look at it and it is very Sydney-centric (because) of all of the people on it. We got together in response to things that were happening here, lack of funding in the area from the New South Wales Arts Council, lack of venue space, and things were being taken away from us. The TAFE was being hammered, their courses heavily cut back. The University had performance spaces taken out of licence. The only theatre company that received funding were Tantrum and they were losing part of their funding. Performing Arts Newcastle which was supported by Newcastle City Council lost their building and at that particular point everything seemed to be targeted at us and we wanted to have a voice. So after consulting with our state Member for Parliament and pointing out that this so called Creative Industries Taskforce in Sydney was very metropolitan-based, it was actually Tim Owen's suggestion (who was our sitting MP at the time) that we establish our own taskforce (Bransdon i/v Dec 2014).

In his role as a CONDA judge, Bransdon sees most of the shows produced locally, more than 60, he estimates, each year. In addition, there are other productions not submitted for judging. He says 'I have really been able to appreciate just how vibrant the performing arts sector is within the creative industries' (i/v Dec 2014):

We have essentially more performances, productions happening than we have room for in terms of audiences. We don't have enough audiences for the number of shows we have. In terms of participation within that sort of ecology within performing arts would be incredibly high. The participation rate is wonderful. In the last twelve months there were 25 active theatre companies but we do have a list of about 36-40 that from time to time may do a show bi-annually. Burnout is a big issue because people are so passionate that they may do six shows in one year and then decide they need a break. But their theatre company is still live. Footlice is a wonderful example. It was dormant for a few years and just in the

last twelve months probably did six shows and are now doing a lot of things. So I think it is a very vibrant performing arts industry (Bransdon i/v Dec 2014).

Octapod contributes to that vibrancy. Described as ‘an arts organisation which seeks to enable the region’s arts and cultural sector and creative communities through capacity building and cultural development initiatives (Octapod 2017, online), it receives funding from Create NSW. Octapod runs the annual TiNA Festival (This is Not Art) for independent, emerging and experimental arts; Culture Hunter (culturehunter.org) an online arts and cultural information hub for the Lower Hunter region featuring news, events, artist profiles and sector resources; and Smart Arts, a mentoring and development program delivered in partnership with The Business Centre (Newcastle Region) (Octapod 2017, online).

There are other enablers. Performing Arts Newcastle (PAN), for example, provides insurance cover for performers and previously offered rehearsal and performance spaces at a site in Auckland Street in the Newcastle CBD, until Newcastle Council resumed the premises.

In 2016, the ‘Theatre Newcastle’ website was launched by Marty Adnum from OOTS (Out of the Square Media), a Newcastle-based Advertising and Design agency (see Section 9.7.2), and performer Rachelle Schmidt Adnum. It is designed to be a ‘one-stop theatre hub’ to provide a directory of theatre performers, companies, auditions, training, events and venues and to act as ‘a collective voice’. It states that in the Hunter Region, there are over 30 theatre venues, over 40 local companies, over 70 local productions each year and over 1,000 local actors, musicians and artists (Theatre Newcastle 2017, online).

12.7 Conclusion

The performing arts sector in the Hunter Region covers drama, musical theatre, dance, opera, circus and comedy. While the statistics compiled via the ABS for this study indicate minimal involvement at 2% of the total number of the creative industries numbers who declare work in this sector as their primary occupation, a further study by Shane Bransdon (2018) paints a slightly different picture. His study was focused specifically at theatre. Surveying half of the theatre companies in the urban part of the region he calculated that there are merely 16 full-time equivalent (FTE) employment positions in the region in theatre with approximately 11,000 volunteer gigs (Bransdon 2018). It is therefore not surprising, given the wealth of avenues for experience, if not the wealth of income, that this region continues to act as a significant ‘rookery’ for practitioners, some of whom go on to professional careers on the national and international stage. A number of these individuals later return to the region, bringing significant expertise and connections with them which ‘raises the bar’ for the sector and helps the next generation of aspirants. The gift economy, nonetheless, is dominant for the many individuals, groups and organisations engaged in the performing arts in the region. The area has a small number of agencies which place actors, singers, dancers and other performers in paid positions and one of these has expanded their activities internationally.

A large number of performing arts companies operate in the region staging drama, musical theatre, opera, circus and comedy. Some mount large-scale, professional-standard shows with budgets of up to \$400,000 but the majority operate with meagre budgets of a few hundred dollars. Performers are rarely paid (except, often, for musicians working on music theatre productions) but some companies use profit-share mechanisms. A few companies are supported by grants but all rely heavily on the gift economy, as Bransdon’s work indicates, to survive with only a few principals deriving a wage from their artistic activity. Since the demise of the Arts Health Institute, the main paid work for those in the performing arts sector in the region comes from teaching, employment with Councils, and precarious, usually ‘one-off’ engagements locally or, more often, in Sydney. Training institutions are numerous although

Drama offerings at The University of Newcastle have been reduced and funding cuts to Hunter TAFE have put pressure on their dedicated school RIPA (Regional Institute of Performing Arts). Private dance academies are well-established and well-attended right across the region with many of their students moving on to the national and often international stage. Teaching is the only employment their graduates would find in the Hunter if they stayed, however. Private drama schools are also numerous but cater almost exclusively for children. The region has a number of performance venues but several important venues have closed and there is a lack of mid-size venues (seating 400-600) in the urban centre. There are a number of performing arts festivals which are growing in popularity along with the use of non-traditional venues including for outdoor performances.