



Research First



WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

# MID-SIZED PERFORMING VENUES REVIEW

**Absolutely Positively  
Wellington City Council**

Me Heke Ki Pōneke

November 2016

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## Mid-sized Performing Venues Review

## Disclaimer

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# 1

## Executive Summary

This report summarises the current situation facing Wellington's performing arts sector in general and mid-sized performing arts venues in particular. It is not intended to inform any specific upcoming decision, but rather to provide context for future decisions as they arise. It is based on interviews with and surveys of people connected with venues and performing arts organisations.

Wellington has historically been positioned as a good place for performing artists and performing arts organisations, but that position is perceived to be under threat from a number of forces including:

- High venue hire prices.
- Closure of the Town Hall.
- Closure of Downstage.
- Absence of a mid-sized performing arts venue (in the 400 – 800 seat range).
- Loss of performers and other performing arts professionals to Auckland.
- Yellow sticker status of the Opera House and St. James Theatre.
- Greater difficulty in obtaining funding from sponsors as well as funders such as Creative New Zealand.

While Wellington still has a large number of performing arts venues even after the closures noted above, the remaining portfolio of performing arts venues in the city is rated by hirers as being between poor and fair, on average.

Venues that are used by the greatest proportion of hirers (who responded to the survey described in this report) are:

- St. Andrews on the Terrace (used by 36% of respondents in the past two years).
- The Hannah Playhouse (29%).
- The Michael Fowler Centre and Adam Concert Room (both 25%).
- The Opera House and the larger two venues at Bats (all 21%).

Recommendations for improving the composition of performing arts venues in Wellington and the general health of the performing arts community include:

- Review pricing for Council owned venues to confirm the perception that Wellington venues are significantly more expensive than comparable venues in other New Zealand cities, to quantify the magnitude of the difference, and to determine whether the difference is greater for some types of bookings than for others.
- Find ways to support individuals and organisations outside the major national performing arts organisations (so they can afford to hire venues, continue their work, and stay in Wellington), such as:
  - Offering community rates for Council owned venues or venue subsidies for smaller local organisations.
  - Providing smaller local performing arts organisations access to services such as marketing using staff at existing Council organisations who already perform those functions for Council run events and Council owned venues.
  - Advocating for the Wellington performing arts community with central government and larger public funders and corporate sponsors.
  - Creating a shared sponsorship model that would allow local businesses and individuals to support performing arts in Wellington generally (as opposed to a specific organisation) with the funds generated spread across organisations and / or used to reduce the cost of venue hire.
  - Facilitate the creation of shared season bundles that would allow people to buy a package of tickets to performances involving multiple organisations (thereby building the overall performing arts audience in Wellington).
  - Create a performing arts hub that would provide a central point of connection for those involved in performing arts to access mentoring, information, and resources as well as potentially underwriting some of its activities through a café / bar that could also act as a gathering point for members of the public who are interested in performing arts.
- Accelerate the renovation and reopening of the Town Hall, but ensure it is accessible to a wide range of users.
- Consider creation of a mid-sized venue, but with a focus on accessibility, affordability, and flexibility.
- Create or adopt best practice guidelines for making venues accessible to families, people with disabilities, and people from all cultures and socio-economic groups, and help venues implement them.

# 2

## Background and Methodology

This report was commissioned by the Wellington City Council to ensure it has a good understanding of:

- The existing stock of mid-sized performing arts venues in Wellington.
- The extent to which those venues are meeting the needs of performing artists and organisations.
- Unmet needs related to mid-sized performing arts venues in the city.
- The broader performing arts ecosystem in Wellington.

The review was not intended to support any specific decision, but rather to provide a backdrop from which future plans and decisions can be made.

To produce the well-rounded view desired, the review included multiple steps:

- Depth interviews with venue operators and hirers as well as other key stakeholders who have a broader view of the sector.
- A survey of venue hirers and operators to quantify venue attributes and requirements as well as some of the attitudes and perceptions that emerged in the depth interviews.
- A literature review to contextualise the findings from the depth interviews and survey by placing them within the broader context of what is known about performing arts in New Zealand more broadly.
- Additional desk research to collect information about mid-sized Wellington venues that did not participate in the survey or interviews.

A total of 34 people representing venue hiring organisations and 10 people representing venues participated in the depth interviews or the survey.

Organisations that participated are listed in the appendix.

Representatives of an additional four key stakeholder groups also participated. The majority of hirers (82% of survey respondents and most interviewees) are based in Wellington. Because there are many overlaps among the topics covered in the different stages and some people and organisations participated in multiple stages, results are presented by topic with the source of information identified.

Hirer survey results were tested for differences between organisations focusing on different genres and based in different locations (Wellington versus elsewhere). Significant differences are noted in the report.

# 3

## Local and National Context for Performing Arts

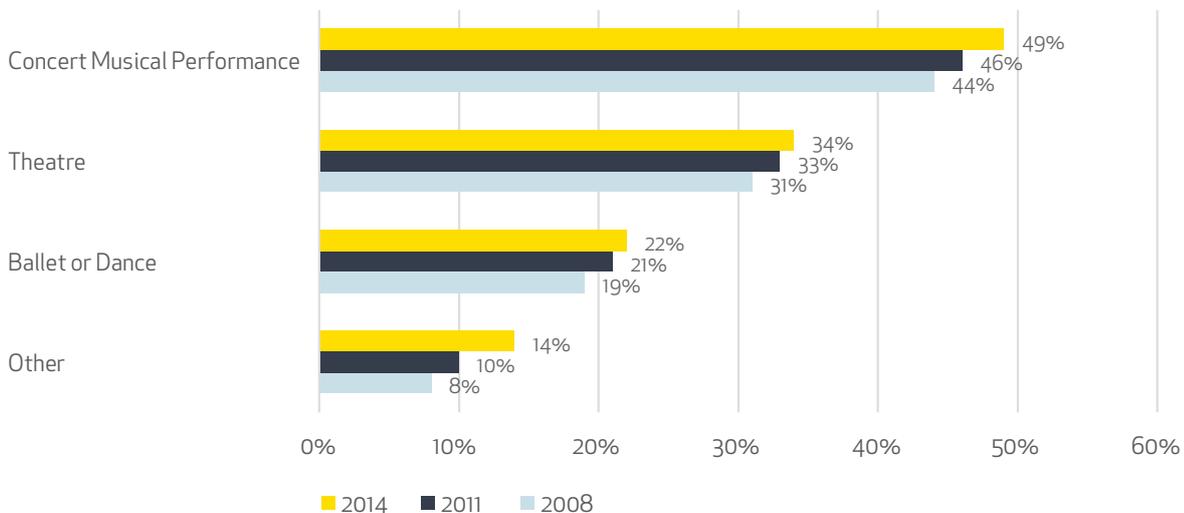
### 3.1 Performing Arts Audiences

According to a Creative New Zealand report<sup>1</sup>, nearly two-thirds (65%) of New Zealand adults watched performing arts in 2014. That was greater participation than for any other art form. It was also an increase over the prior decade (61% in 2005, 60% in 2008, 59% in 2011).

Children between the ages of 10 and 14 attended performing arts events at approximately the same rate (67% in 2014 versus 64% in 2011 and 60% in 2008), with most of their attendance taking place outside of school<sup>2</sup>.

As shown below<sup>3</sup>, a greater percentage of adults attended musical performances than other types of performing arts events, and audience attendance in all genres is growing.

*Proportion of population who attended at least one performance or event of each type in the previous 12 months*



1 Creative New Zealand, New Zealanders and the Arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation in 2014.

2 Creative New Zealand, New Zealanders and the Arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation in 2014.

3 Creative New Zealand, New Zealanders and the Arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation in 2014.

Performing arts audiences are disproportionately female and affluent compared to the overall population. Those whose household income is less than \$30,000 are disproportionately *unlikely* to have attended performing arts events in the prior year<sup>4</sup>.

Overall, New Zealand households spend an average of \$19.10 per week on cultural services (including performing arts but also things such as seeing a film at a cinema or visiting a paid exhibition at a museum) or about \$993 per year<sup>5</sup>.

Several interview participants expressed the opinion that Wellingtonians are particularly supportive of the arts; however research completed by Creative New Zealand showed no statistically significant differences between Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington relative to their population sizes<sup>6</sup>.

4 Creative New Zealand, *New Zealanders and the Arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation in 2014*.

5 Statistics New Zealand, *Household Economic Survey, Household expenditure for group, subgroup and class*, Retrieved 15 October 2016.

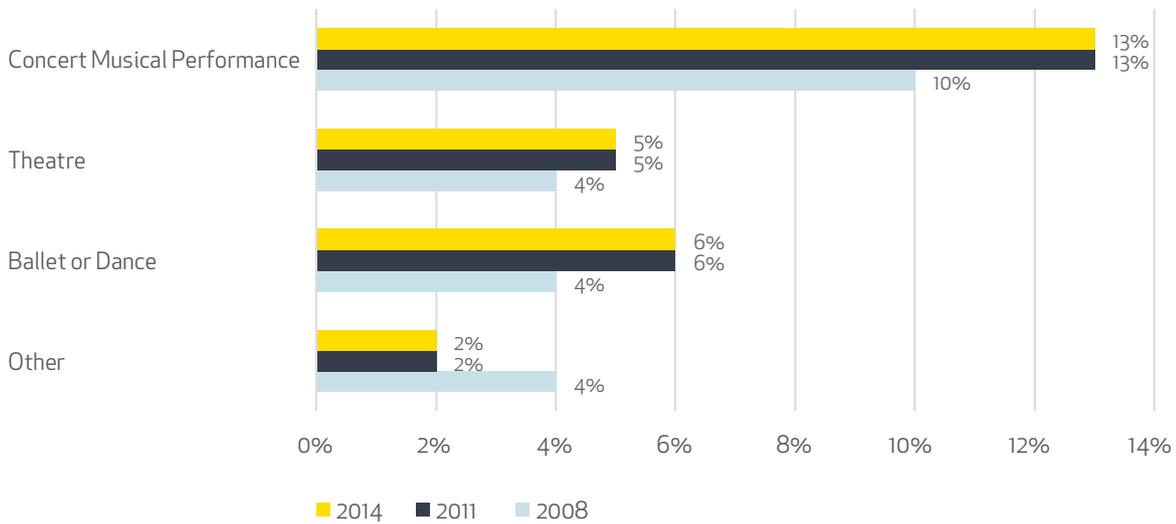
6 Creative New Zealand, *New Zealanders and the Arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation in 2014*.

### 3.2 Performing Arts Participation

According to Creative New Zealand<sup>7</sup>, one in five (20%) New Zealanders participated in performing arts in 2014, and participation has held fairly steady over the prior decade (21% in 2005, 16% in 2008, 19% in 2011).

As shown below<sup>8</sup>, a greater percentage of people participated in musical performances than other types of performing arts events.

*Proportion of the population that participated in at least one performance or event of each type in the previous 12 months*



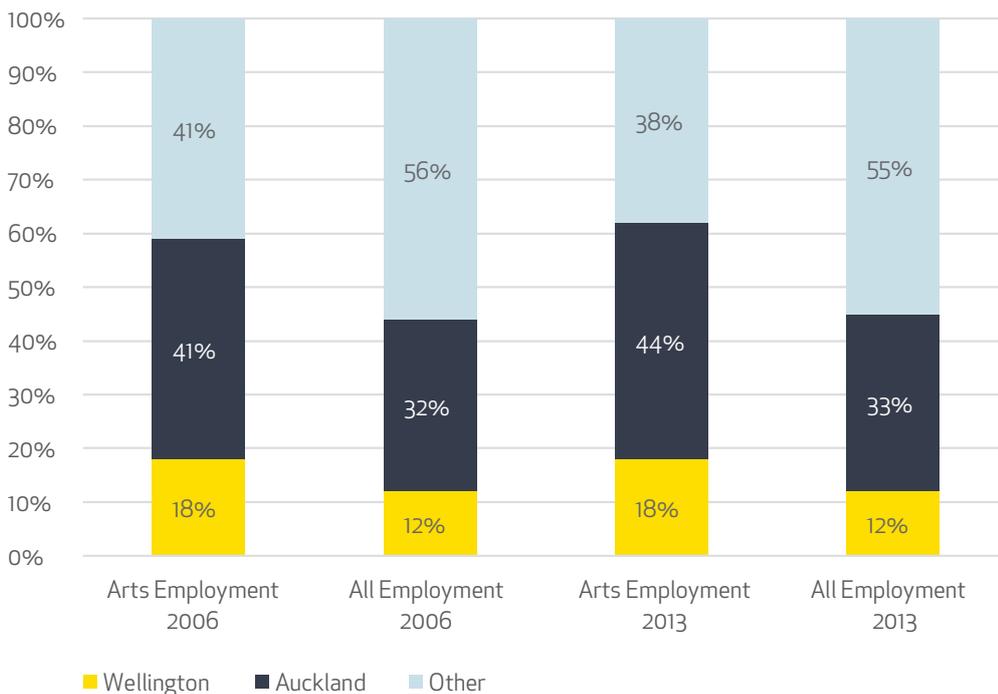
<sup>7</sup> Creative New Zealand, New Zealanders and the Arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation in 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Creative New Zealand, New Zealanders and the Arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation in 2014.

As of the 2013 census, 17,685 New Zealanders were employed as 'Arts and Media Professionals,' a category that includes other types of artists and media people and not just performing artists. Nonetheless it provides an upper limit on arts-related employment, which had not changed much from 2006 when it was 17,526<sup>9</sup>.

A disproportionate share of those in arts-related employment live in the Wellington region. Wellingtonians made up 18% of people employed in arts-related occupations compared to 12% of those employed in all occupations (those percentages were identical for the 2006 and 2013 census). Auckland is also home to a disproportionate share of people working in arts-related occupations. It has about a third of the country's employees (32% in 2006 and 33% in 2013), but was home to 41% of people working in the arts in 2006 and 44% in 2013.

*Percentage of arts and all employment in Wellington and Auckland*



<sup>9</sup> Statistics New Zealand. Occupation (ANZSCO sub-major group) by age group and sex, for the employed census usually resident population count aged 15 years and over, 2006 and 2013 Censuses (RC, TA)

### 3.3 Wellington-Based Performing Arts Organisations

One reason Wellington is home to a disproportionate number of people employed in the arts is that it is also home to a large number of performing arts organisations. As can be seen from the list below, these include everything from community-based organisations to many of New Zealand's premier performing arts organisations in their genres. Music and theatre organisations dominate by volume.

#### *Wellington-based performing arts organisations*

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Description*</b>	<b>Primary Genre(s)</b>
Aroha String Quartet	Chamber music ensemble.	Music
Bach Choir of Wellington	Choir with a particular emphasis on the music of J.S. Bach and his contemporaries.	Music
Chamber Music NZ	Presents chamber music throughout the country.	Music
Festival Singers of Wellington	Wellington-based community choir with a 38 year history and practice of seeking to work alongside the Christian church.	Music
National Youth Orchestra	Run by NZSO to nurture young performers. Puts on a programme in July of each year.	Music
New Zealand Youth Choir	Sustains and promotes two complementary but distinct choirs. An internationally renowned professional choir - Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir, and a youth choir that inspires and develops New Zealand's extraordinary young talent.	Music
Note Bene Choir	Wellington's most versatile chamber choir.	Music
NZ String Quartet	The New Zealand String Quartet is renowned for its versatility and has enjoyed collaborating with musicians from all over the globe, in a range of classical, jazz and world music genres.	Music
NZ Symphony Orchestra	New Zealand's national orchestra.	Music
Orchestra Wellington	Wellington's city orchestra.	Music
Orpheus Choir	New Zealand's leading symphonic choir.	Music
Strike Percussion	New Zealand's premier Percussion Ensemble.	Music
Stroma Ensemble	New Zealand's largest and most flexible chamber ensemble.	Music
Wellington Chamber Music Trust	Has been presenting chamber music, including Sunday concerts, since 1945.	Music
Wellington Chamber Orchestra	Amateur chamber orchestra.	Music
Wellington Community Choir	Community choir.	Music
Wellington Gilbert & Sullivan Society	Promotes light opera including the works of Gilbert and Sullivan.	Music
Wellington Youth Orchestra	Caters for players less than 25 years of age in the greater Wellington region who have reached Grade VIII.	Music

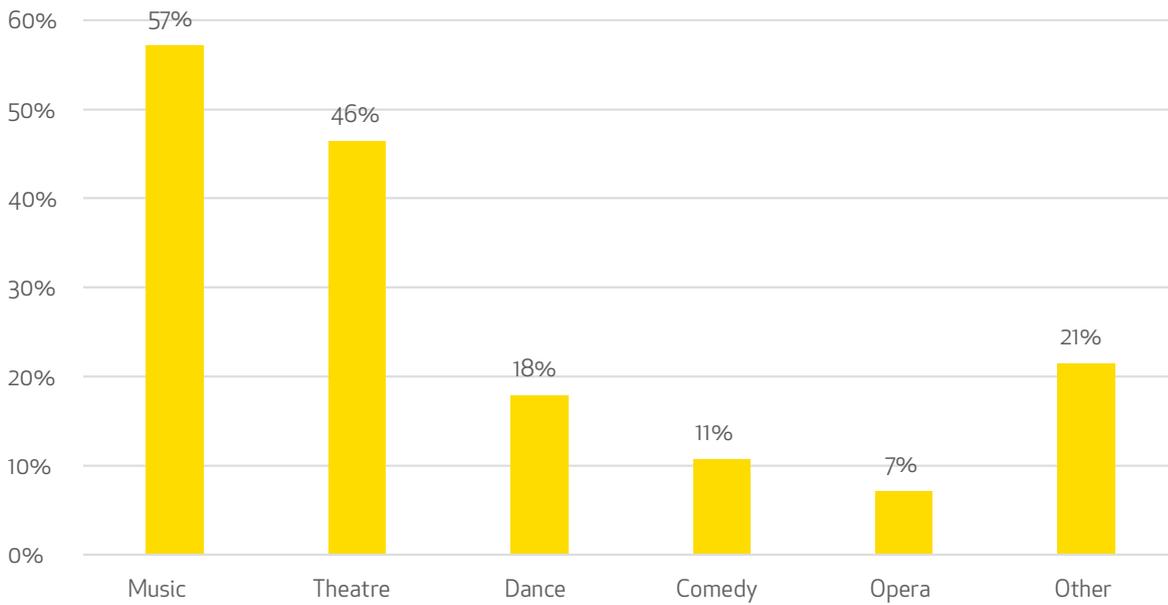
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Description*</b>	<b>Primary Genre(s)</b>
Baggage Co-op	Committed to creating and promoting performance pieces and art works that incorporate a variety of mediums, cultures and languages and that encourage people to risk new experiences.	Theatre
Barbarian Productions	Theatre infused with comedy and lecture. Uses a wide range of venues and actors.	Theatre
Binge Culture	A group of artists working to renew theatre and performance for the digital age.	Theatre
Capital E	Focused on performances for young people and their families. Has a festival and national theatre for children.	Theatre
Conch	Focuses on NZ-Pacific productions and tours nationally and internationally.	Theatre
Little Dog Barking	Focused on children.	Theatre
Long Cloud Youth Theatre	Training and production company for young people aged 16-21.	Theatre
My Accomplice	Theatre collective.	Theatre
Pat-A-Cake Productions	Theatre collective committed to devising original movement-based performance to open relevant dialogues with our community.	Theatre
Stagecraft Theatre	Non-profit theatre society.	Theatre
Taki Rua	Produce, commission and develop theatre with a distinctively Māori voice.	Theatre
Tawata Productions	Māori and Cook Islands theatre and film company.	Theatre
Trick of the Light	Makes productions for adults and children that are unified by their attention to narrative, integrated visual design, and belief that theatre should resonate with the wider world.	Theatre
FUSE	Fuse circus is New Zealand's premiere circus and physical theatre company.	Theatre
Footnote NZ Dance	Contemporary dance company that has been going for 30 years and performs nationally and internationally.	Dance
Java Dance Company	Contemporary dance.	Dance
Royal New Zealand Ballet	New Zealand's national ballet company.	Dance
Festival of the Stars	Matariki festival with song and dance and food from Filipino, Scottish, Indonesian, Maori, Samoan, English and other Wellington communities.	Multiple
NZ Festival / Jazz Festival	Bi-Annual international arts festival + annual jazz festival	Multiple
Show Pony	Promote and produce original pieces with origins in New Zealand.	Multiple
Wellington Musical Theatre	Non-profit that promotes an interest and appreciation of Musical Theatre, Dance and Drama among the people of Wellington.	Multiple

\* Many of these descriptions were taken from organisations' web sites.

Survey responses largely mirrored this same pattern with people from music and theatre organisations making up the majority of respondents.

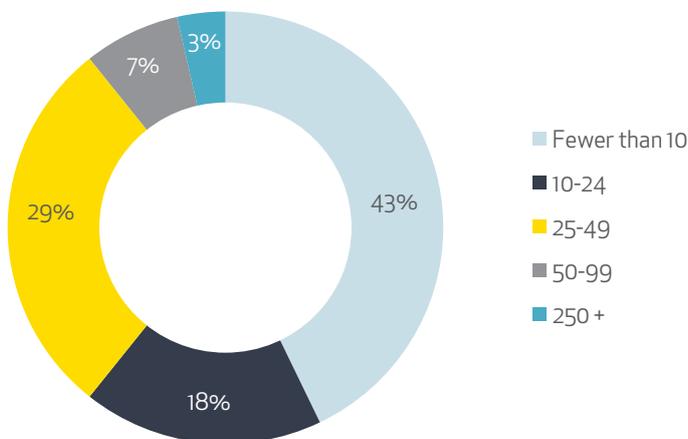
### Hirer Survey Respondent Genres

(Multiple responses were allowed, so the total exceeds 100%)



The vast majority (90%) of organisations represented by hirer survey respondents perform fewer than 50 times a year in Wellington, with 43% of responding organisations performing fewer than ten times per year in Wellington<sup>10</sup>. Organisations based outside of Wellington were disproportionately likely to be among those performing fewer than ten times per year in Wellington.

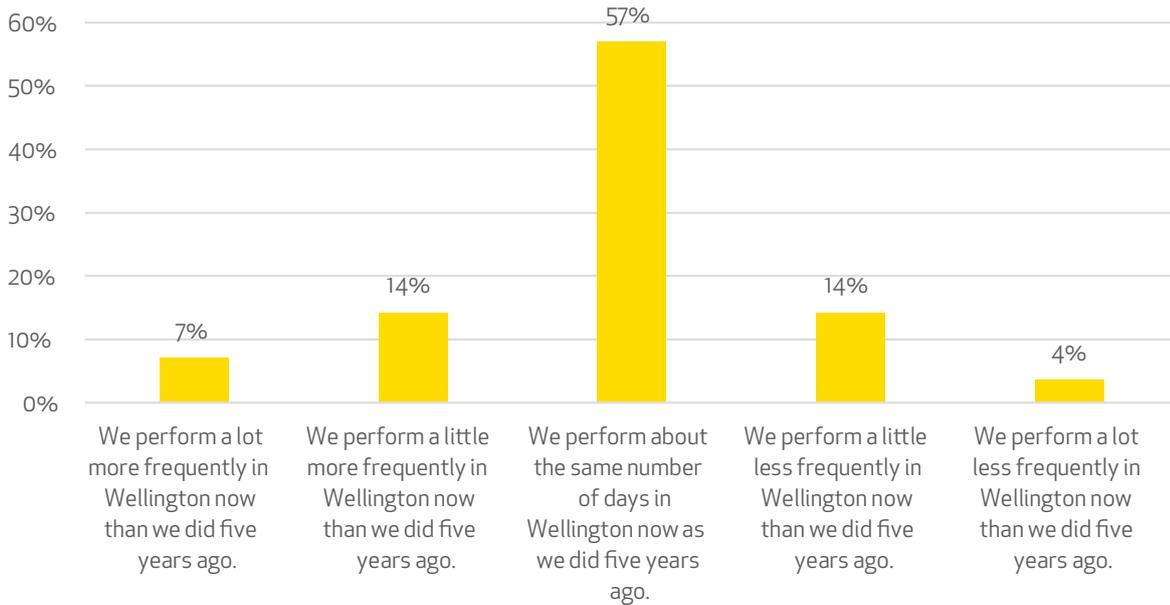
### Number of Wellington performances per year



<sup>10</sup> Based on hirer survey responses.

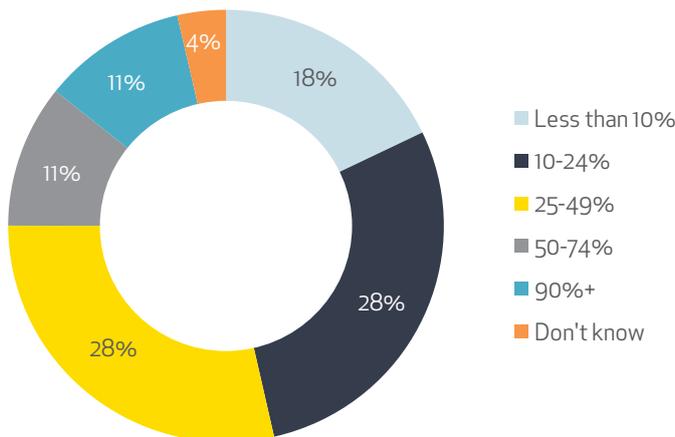
As shown below, performance frequency has remained relatively constant over the past five years<sup>11</sup>.

*Relative frequency of Wellington performances*



The majority (74%) of organisations represented by survey respondents generate less than half of their revenue through ticket sales, with the remainder coming from grants, sponsorships, etc.<sup>12</sup>.

*Proportion of revenue from ticket sales*



<sup>11</sup> Based on hirer survey responses.

<sup>12</sup> Based on hirer survey responses.

### 3.4 Wellington-Based Performing Arts Educational Institutions

Five tertiary institutions in Wellington offer performing arts education, including the New Zealand School of Music and Toi Whakaari (NZ Drama School).

*Wellington-based performing arts educational institutions*

Organisation	Description*
Massey University College of Creative Arts	Offers degrees in commercial music and theatre studies.
NZ School of Dance	Offers courses in ballet and contemporary dance.
Toi Whakaari / New Zealand Drama School	New Zealand's largest dedicated training provider for professionals in the screen and performing arts.
Victoria University	Home to: New Zealand School of Music (New Zealand's pre-eminent provider of tertiary-level music education, research, composition and performance); Department of Theatre and Film (offers degrees in theatre and film).
Whitireia	Offers bachelors degrees and diplomas in performing arts.

\* Derived from web sites.

### 3.5 Visiting Performing Artists and Performing Arts Organisations

Wellington's local performing arts community is supplemented by frequent visits from performers from around New Zealand and around the world. The most prominent example of this comes during the New Zealand Festival, but there are also many one-off performances and performances in which visiting artists collaborate with local performers. Many interviewees mentioned that overseas artists are impressed with the performing arts scene in Wellington – particularly in relation to the city's size, though some are less than impressed with some of the city's venues.

 *"It's a problem when you're bringing in international artists ... top calibre artists .., and you're putting them in a venue that's completely inappropriate [because of its size] like the Michael Fowler Centre. It's embarrassing."*

## 3.6 Funding for Performing Arts Organisations

One point that came through repeatedly in interviews was a perception that performers, other professionals, and performing arts energy and resources are being drawn to Auckland and away from Wellington. As indicated previously, as of the 2013 Census, when it comes to people working in the arts (overall, not just performing), Wellington was holding approximately steady while Auckland was growing.

Since funding for performing arts organisations comes from different sources, the picture is somewhat more complicated, but overall it shows that historically Wellington has received a disproportionately great share of arts funding relative to its population. While that's still the case for Crown funding, Wellington's share of Creative New Zealand funding has diminished and performing arts organisations in Wellington receive significantly less than those in Auckland from their local Regional Amenities funds even on a per capita basis.

### 3.6.1 Direct Crown Funding

The majority of the twenty million dollars the Crown spends directly on performing arts goes to Wellington-based national organisations -- the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Royal New Zealand Ballet<sup>13</sup>. The Government has signaled that the NZSO should generate a greater proportion of its revenue from sources other than the Government -- targeting the Government contribution to drop from 75% to 70%<sup>14</sup>.

### 3.6.2 Creative NZ

Traditionally, Wellington has received a disproportionately great share of Creative New Zealand funding across all art forms relative to its population<sup>15</sup>. This continued in 2014/2015 when 15.7% of Creative New Zealand funding went to Wellington compared to the 28.8% that went to Auckland. That meant that funding was greater per capita in Wellington (about \$12.49 per capita for the Wellington region versus \$7.25 for Auckland). In spite of that, the proportion of creative New Zealand funding going to Wellington in 2014 / 2015 dropped significantly compared to the previous three years when it was closer to 20%.

It's possible -- perhaps even likely -- that the funding coming to Wellington from Creative New Zealand will drop further in the future. Creative New Zealand gets the majority of its revenue from the Lottery Grants Board, and the amount of money the Lottery Grants Board had to distribute dropped significantly between 2014 and 2015. The result was a reduction of about 17% in the funding Creative New Zealand received from the Lottery Grants Board<sup>16</sup>. Creative New Zealand was able to absorb much of that through reserves; however that can't continue indefinitely. If Lottery Grants don't increase it seems likely that Creative New Zealand will need to make funding cuts and since Wellington receives a disproportionate share of Creative New Zealand resources it seems a likely target.

13 Vote Arts, Culture And Heritage. The Estimates Of Appropriations 2015/16 - Māori, Other Populations And Cultural Sector B.5 Vol.8

14 Ministry for Culture and Heritage, New Zealand Professional Orchestra Sector Review, February 2013.

15 Creative New Zealand Annual Report 2014/15

16 Creative New Zealand Annual Report 2014/15

The drop is already being felt by Wellington-based performing arts organisations. One survey respondent commented that:

“Central Government under-funding of the performing arts (whether direct funded or via Creative NZ) over almost a decade has had a significant impact on the level of activity of many of the city’s performing arts organisations in terms of mainstream performances and education/outreach work.”

### 3.6.3 Regional Amenities Funds

Obviously Auckland has a much greater population than Wellington; however as shown in the tables that follow, funding for performing arts provided through Regional Amenities funding is significantly greater in Auckland than in Wellington, even after accounting for population differences.

Funding for Performing Arts from Auckland Regional Amenities Fund<sup>17</sup>

Auckland Regional Amenities	2013-2014	2014-2015	Per capita 2013-2014 <sup>18</sup>	Per capita 2014-2015 <sup>19</sup>
Auckland Festival Trust	\$2,230,000	\$2,305,000	\$1.46	\$1.47
Auckland Philharmonia	\$2,817,000	\$2,942,000	\$1.84	\$1.87
Auckland Theatre Company	\$1,330,000	\$1,415,000	\$.87	\$.90
New Zealand Opera	\$800,000	\$800,000	\$.52	\$.51
Total Performing Arts	\$7,177,000	\$7,462,000	\$4.70	\$4.75

17 Auckland Regional Amenities Funding Board – Annual Report 2014-2015.

18 Statistics New Zealand population estimate for the Auckland region = 1,526,900; <http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLECODE7501> retrieved 14 October 2016.

19 Statistics New Zealand population estimate for the Auckland region = 1,569,900; <http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLECODE7501> retrieved 14 October 2016.

Funding for performing arts from Wellington regional amenities fund<sup>20</sup>

<b>Wellington Regional Amenities</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Per capita 2014<sup>21</sup></b>	<b>Per capita 2015<sup>22</sup></b>
Circa Theatre	\$150,000	\$195,000	\$0.31	\$0.39
Creative Capital Arts Trust (Fringe Festival)	\$34,000		\$0.07	\$0.00
NZ Symphony Orchestra	\$30,000		\$0.06	\$0.00
The Wairarapa Arts Festival Trust (LUMA event as part of the Kokomai Creative Festival)	\$47,000		\$0.10	\$0.00
Wellington Lux Festival Trust	\$100,000	\$95,000	\$0.20	\$0.19
Wellington Regional Orchestra Foundation Inc.	\$100,000	\$75,000	\$0.20	\$0.15
Festival of the Elements		\$15,000		\$0.03
Matariki Festival		\$95,000		\$0.19
NZ Festival		\$345,000		\$0.69
<b>Total Performing Arts</b>	<b>\$461,000</b>	<b>\$820,000</b>	<b>\$0.94</b>	<b>\$1.65</b>

20 <http://wellington.govt.nz/~media/services/community-and-culture/funding/files/wellington-regional-amenities-fund.pdf?la=en> Retrieved 14 October 2016.

21 Statistics New Zealand population estimate for the Wellington region = 491,400; <http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLECODE7501> retrieved 14 October 2016.

22 Statistics New Zealand population estimate for the Wellington region = 496,900; <http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLECODE7501> retrieved 14 October 2016.

# 4

## Attitudes and Perceptions about the General Health of Performing Arts in Wellington

### 4.1 Wellington has been a good place for performing arts

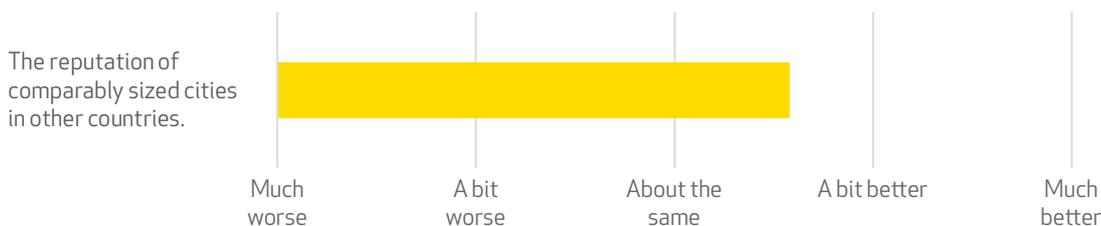
Overall, both survey respondents and interviewees felt that historically Wellington has been a good place for the performing arts.

🗣️ *"The arts scene is good here."*

🗣️ *"What's available for audiences is relatively good here."*

As shown below, on average, venue hirer survey respondents rated Wellington as having a better reputation for performing arts than comparably-sized cities internationally and the performing arts as receiving good support from Wellingtonians<sup>23</sup>.

*Average venue hirer perception of Wellington now compared to...*



*Average venue hirer rating*



<sup>23</sup> Based on hirer survey responses.

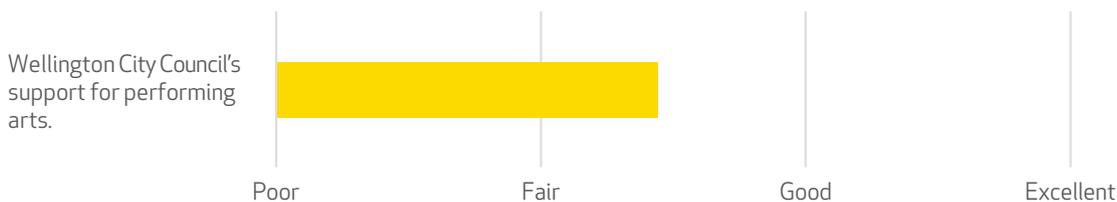
Perhaps not surprisingly, perceptions of the Council’s support for performing arts varies based on whether or not a survey respondent or interviewees’ organisation receives direct Council support. Those that have perceived Council support for performing arts as being very good, as the following quotes show:

“From my position in the Performing Arts Ecology of Wellington, the council are fantastic support with a great team of people actively offering advice and support.”

“Wellington City Council does a really great job ... in supporting performing arts ... they’re one of my favourite funders. They’re so great to work with and really supportive. Obviously everyone wants more money, but I think they do a good job.”

Yet once those whose organisations that don’t receive funding are included, the overall rating from survey respondents who hire venues was only between fair and good<sup>24</sup>.

Average venue hirer rating



## 4.2 But many in the sector believe that the performing arts sector now faces significant challenges

Many comments in interviews and in the survey reflect the view that the situation for performing artists and performing arts organisations in Wellington has worsened significantly in recent years. For example, one interviewee who moved down from Auckland because of Wellington’s reputation for edgy theatre said:

“As someone coming to Wellington I started hunting around for the ... amazing performing arts city that I heard a lot about ... it was sort of a dream that never got properly fulfilled after I moved down here”

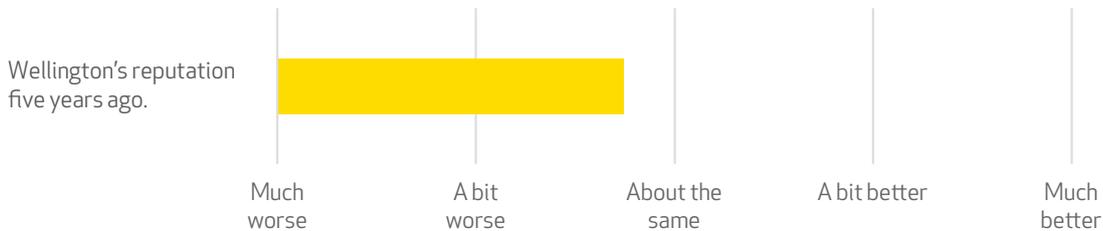
24 Based on hirer survey responses.

Someone who lived in Wellington most of her life agreed that things have changed:

“What I feel has changed ... is there aren't spaces available for practitioners to just get stuff up and going, so that whole seed of creativity isn't as vibrant as it once was ... Wellington used to be the place where you could go and see a lot of work being tested, trialed, made... It doesn't feel that there's as much of that going on anymore compared to a decade ago.”

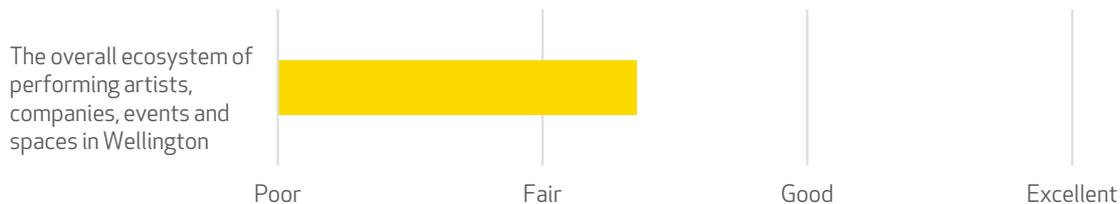
The average rating from venue hirers also reflects the view that the situation for performing arts in Wellington has worsened in recent years<sup>25</sup>.

Average venue hirer perception of Wellington now compared to...



In light of that, the average overall rating of the ecosystem by venue hirers was only between fair and good.

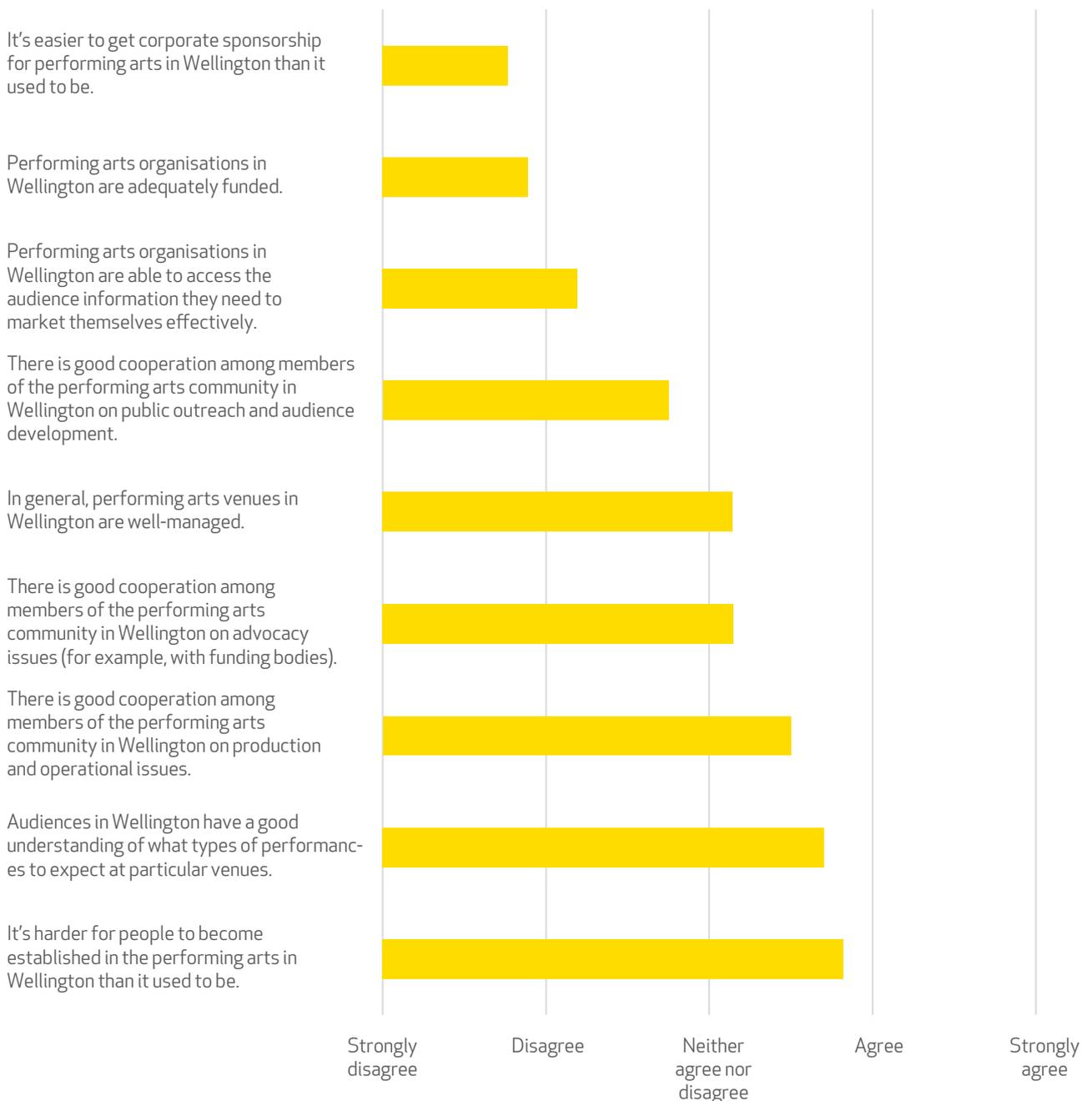
Average venue hirer rating



25 Based on hirer survey responses.

Comments made in interviews about specific aspects of the ecosystem were used to create a list of statements that were evaluated by survey respondents. Both the interviews and responses to that series of statements (with averages shown below) suggest a general consensus that it's harder for individuals to become established in the performing arts in Wellington than it used to be and it's also harder to organisations to obtain funding, whether through sponsorship or other means.

*Average agreement with statements about performing arts in Wellington...*



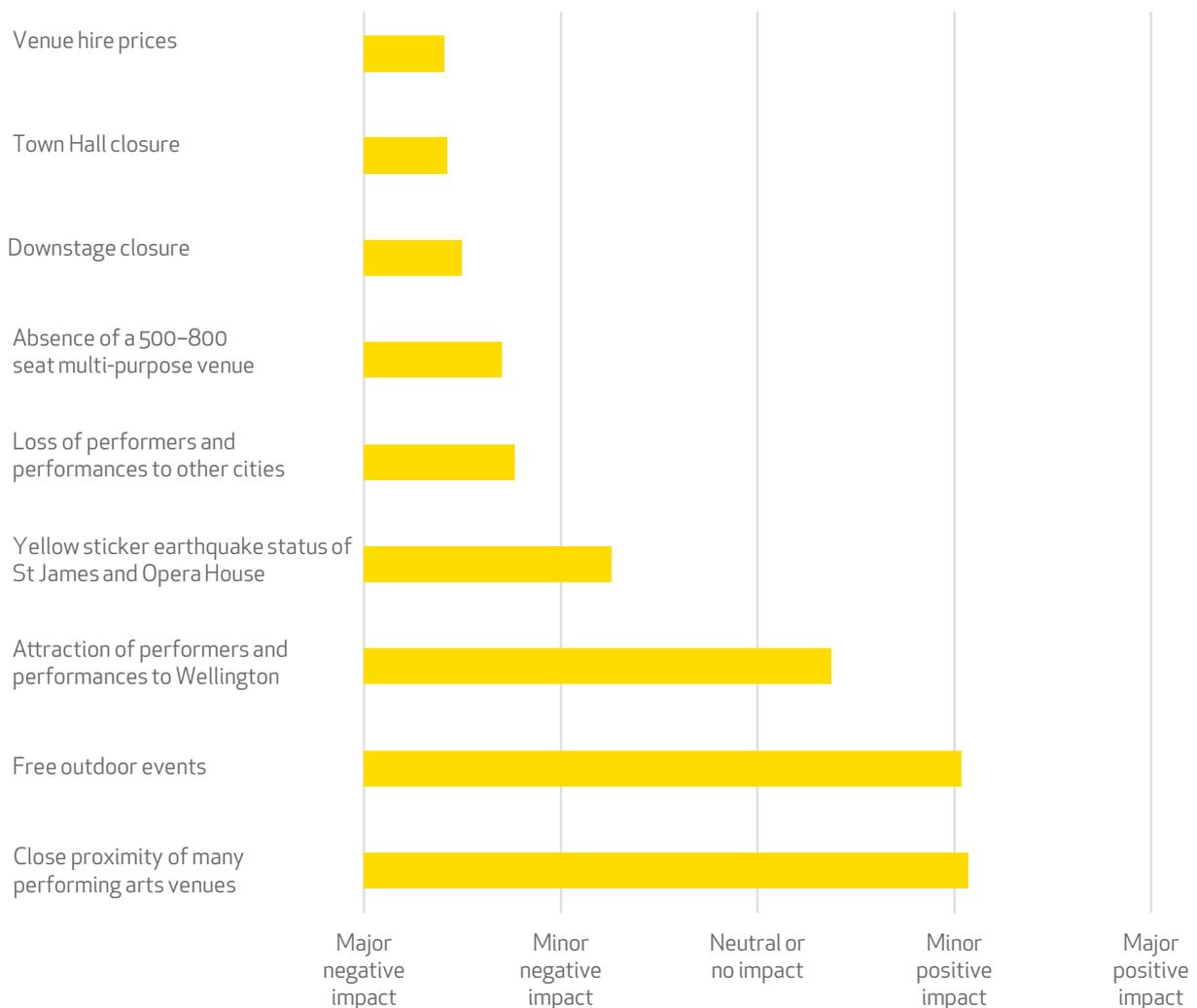
### 4.3 Influences on the Wellington performing arts sector

As shown in the hirer survey results below, the factors perceived to have the most negative impact on the performing arts sector in Wellington are high venue hire prices and the closure of the Town Hall and Downstage<sup>26</sup>.

The absence of a 500-800 seat venue, loss of performers to other cities, and yellow sticker status of the Opera House and St. James theatre were also perceived to have negative impacts. On average, those involved with music organisations rated the absence of a 500-800 seat venue as having a greater negative impact than those working in other genres.

The primary positive influences on the performing arts sector were the proximity of venues and free outdoor events in Wellington.

*Influences on Wellington's performing arts sector in the past few years...*



<sup>26</sup> Based on hirer survey results.

Comments made in interviews followed a similar pattern, except with more emphasis on the negative effect of the loss of performers to Auckland in particular and less on the closure of Downstage. Comments about some of these areas made in the interviews and in response to open-ended survey questions are discussed in greater detail below.

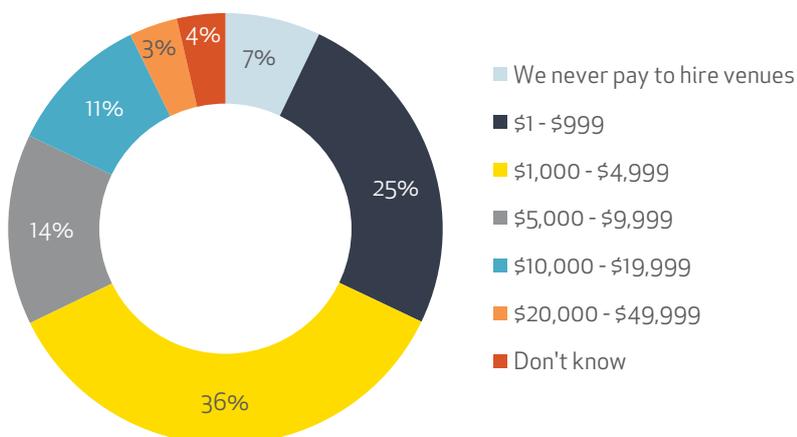
#### 4.3.1 Venue prices

Many venue hirers said in survey responses and interviews that WREDA hire prices are the highest in New Zealand, and that the cost of hiring venues in Wellington is prohibitive for many organisations and limiting for others. Here are some examples:

- 🗨️ *"MFC hire charges are considerably greater than those for any other comparable venue in New Zealand. Wellington City Council and the Regional Amenities Fund do not offer the kind of support needed to sustain a lively professional arts scene in Wellington."*
- 🗨️ *"Wellington's venues are the most expensive in the country."*
- 🗨️ *"WREDA do not support local artists to present their work. Their venues are completely inaccessible - WAY too costly. They operate on a for-profit business model that is NOT conducive to supporting the performing arts in Wellington."*
- 🗨️ *"For the proscenium arch theatres, I have personally presented 5-6 shows in these facilities, but have dropped back significantly the hireage days due to the high rise in costs. I think the cost increase was way too high, and as a freelance artist, we dropped back our hireage days of the opera house / St James to 2-3 days, which I have to peg back to 1-2 days now due to costs. A huge portion of the community will never use or see work there due to this hireage cost and the ticket price one has to charge, and that is a shame."*
- 🗨️ *"We get very good support from WCC funding, which helps enable us to hold our events in the Town Hall (sob) or MFC. But the cost of hiring these venues is very high - higher than equivalent costs in other cities - and other funding agencies seem to be playing a lot more hardball these days. So we are definitely struggling to cover our costs. Can the venue rental & tech costs be lowered?"*
- 🗨️ *"Wellington has a lot of choirs who need both rehearsal and a good acoustic performance space. A lot of these choirs are community choirs and provide a supportive and socially interactive opportunity. They need access to low cost suitable venues."*

The survey included a question about the maximum price ever paid per day for a venue, and the responses to that also suggest that the rates WREDA venues charges are beyond the reach of many organisations. As shown below, more than two-thirds (68%) of organisations represented in the hirer survey have never spent \$5000 or more per day on hiring a venue.

Maximum daily rate paid for venues



### 4.3.2 Town Hall closure

Many interviewees and survey respondents mentioned the gap left by the closure of the Town Hall:

- 🗨️ *"The biggest problem has been the loss of the Town Hall."*
- 🗨️ *"It was probably the most flexible space we had."*
- 🗨️ *"The Town Hall must be renovated and kept as a large auditorium. Its acoustics are excellent and the open ground floor flexible for many styles of performing arts."*
- 🗨️ *"The Town Hall is a wonderful auditorium. It's absolutely world-class acoustics. The combination of the Town Hall and the Michael Fowler Centre means that Wellington WAS wonderfully provided for in orchestral venues."*

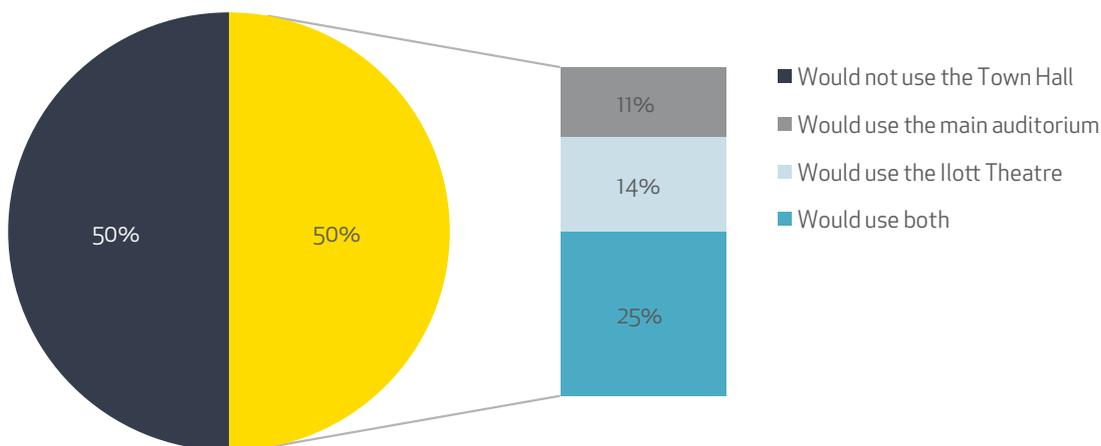
For those involved in music, the gap is problematic because the Town Hall had good acoustics for music performances smaller than those involving a full orchestra as well as having the audience amenities and venue management audiences and performers expect for performances by professional organisations (as opposed to ad hoc performances or community organisations).

While other venues offer some of these, none off all of them together, and this appears to be a particular problem for chamber music groups and some choirs.

Others who mentioned the loss of the Town Hall were more concerned about the pressure its closure put on other venues and the fact that other alternatives are not as flexible as the Town Hall was.

Many people in the interviews and survey expressed the hope that the Town Hall will re-open. The survey asked how this would affect their use of venues, and half (50%) of hirers said that they would use at least one of the Town Hall venues if / when they become available again. A quarter (25%) of hirer survey respondents said they would use both the main auditorium and Ilott Theatre and, with 14% saying they would use the Ilott Theatre only and 11% saying they would use the main auditorium only<sup>27</sup>. People representing music organisations were much more likely to say they would use the Town Hall in preference to venues they are currently using than were those representing theatre organisations.

*Proportion of hirers who would use the Town Hall if it were open*



<sup>27</sup> Based on survey responses.

### 4.3.3 Downstage closure

The average rating of the impact of the closure of Downstage was rated as between a minor and major negative impact; however, it wasn't mentioned frequently in the interviews or survey open-ends. It also wasn't described as filling a gap many perceive between Bats and Circa for those involved in theatre. While the physical space (Hannah Playhouse) is available as a venue, it doesn't offer curation, mentoring, or assistance with things like production and marketing (and its existing funding arrangements probably would not enable it to do so). Many of those involved in theatre perceive a need for that sort of support for productions that are too large for Bats, but not the right fit for Circa or not able to get in to Circa. While many people talked about that type of need, no one talked about Downstage as having filled it well in the past (with the possible exception of comments about curation). Instead, the example most people pointed to when describing this need was Q Theatre in Auckland, which apparently fills this support function extremely well.

### 4.3.4 Absence of a 500-800 seat venue

Many survey respondents and interviewees viewed absence of a venue in the 500-800 seat range as problematic. As illustrated below, their concerns included the feel of performances in venues that are too large for the work or the audience or being forced to make tradeoffs between size, acoustics and the professionalism of a venue.

-  *"We do lack the 400-800 seat venue range. Wellington could do with a 650 seater, at an affordable hireage price that doesn't stretch the budgets that hiring the Opera House or St James does."*
-  *"For music, there is no mid-sized venue. Even if the Illott Concert Chamber were available again, Wellington has never had a good professionally-managed concert venue with a capacity of 600-800 (ideal for quite a few musical genres)."*
-  *"It is very difficult for voluntary performing arts organisations to match audience numbers generated by professional groups such as the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Mid-sized venues are needed to ensure that smaller audiences do create the feeling of a 'full house' rather than having to use lighting in the Michael Fowler Centre to minimize the visual effect of a relatively large number of unoccupied seats."*
-  *"Holding chamber music concerts in the MFC is totally unsatisfactory- the acoustic ruins the music, and the space feels huge, and inappropriate. Not a happy experience, especially given the calibre of the artists performing. On the other hand St Andrews is too small to handle a popular Wellington chamber music concert, and the facilities are not adequate for larger concerts of this kind. There is huge disappointment that this issue has not been addressed in the capital city!"*

“People [associated with international theatre productions] have kicked up a huge stink because [the venues] just feel too big for the performance happening on the stage.”

#### 4.3.5 Loss of performers to other cities

Many people in both the interviews and open-ended responses to survey questions expressed the belief that while Wellington’s performing arts scene has suffered in recent years, Auckland’s has thrived. For example, many people — particularly in theatre — such as these survey respondents said they had moved to Auckland, knew people who had, or were considering doing so:

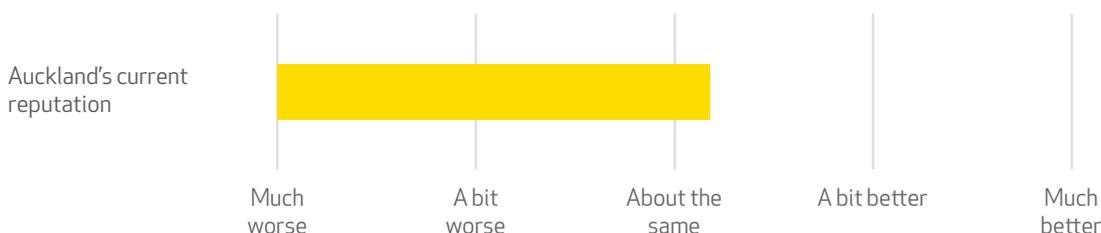
“As a Wellingtonian who works professionally in the performing arts I have been forced to relocate to Auckland in order to sustain myself financially in my career. I am very loyal to Wellington but in the face of a downturn in the ‘creative capital’ I, as well as my whole peer group, relocated up here to where there is more consistent work. Wellington on the other hand is in stasis - with BATS drumming along successfully at the emerging end, and Circa sitting on the sidelines almost irrelevant to the game. Compared to where the city was five years ago, it is in a bad way, the decline has leveled out, but it will struggle to compete with an Auckland that is on the rise. The problem unfortunately is now systemic -- the whole ecosystem is suffering and there is no singular solution. The mid career artists have mostly left, there are few state supported theatre companies remaining that have a consistent output of work, and the vast majority of graduating Toi Whakaari students have consistently moved up to Auckland upon completion of their studies. The talented people have gone, and without them it’s harder for any to stay. There just isn’t the consistency of small scale year round projects, the aspirational goal for company’s and individuals to work towards, nor the ground roots support to keep young artistic talent sustained in Wellington. The downturn in the local screen industry is also a factor in the decline of the performing arts in Wellington, as many writers, film makers, actors and so on have moved up to Auckland where there are greater opportunities in screen production and advertising.”

“In last year’s acting programme at Toi Whakaari every single acting student that graduated moved to Auckland.”

As shown below, overall survey respondents still rated Wellington's reputation for performing arts as slightly better than Auckland's, but many made comments such as this one from an interviewee:

 *"We're losing our reputation as the creative capital."*

Average venue hirer perception of Wellington now compared to...



Performing arts in Wellington is currently perceived by many to be experiencing a negative feedback loop in which funding and work opportunities are drawing people to Auckland and that in turn drives other people to Auckland, which makes it even harder to sustain performing arts organisations and careers in Wellington. One interviewee also recalled a conversation with Auckland officials who directly stated their desire to take over as New Zealand's creative capital.

Another interviewee cited the Creative New Zealand strategic decision to prioritise Auckland and Christchurch and said:

 *"That has an impact because it's kind of advertising as well for those two areas. Wellington gets spoken about less by that core facilitator."*

#### 4.3.6 Yellow sticker status of Opera House and St. James

While the Town Hall's closure elicited a lot of very direct comments in both the survey and interviews from people who really miss it, comments about the Opera House and St. James tended to be more like this one related to what they symbolise about the overall stock of Wellington venues:

 *"There is an abundance of supply of mid scale venues in various states of disuse or disrepair - The Hannah Playhouse, St James, the Opera House, the closure of the old Capital E space, and the rarely used Soundings in Te Papa sitting mostly empty year round -- one or several of these venues should be invigorated and opened up somehow, whether that is through subsidy, an activation, installing an incorporated theatre company within them, or an attempt to deliver a council run program through one of them."*

# 5

## Mid-Sized Venues in Wellington

### 5.1 Portfolio

The table that follows shows venues a performing arts organisation seeking to hire a mid-sized venue in Wellington might consider, the capacity of each venue, and what attributes each venue offers. The list includes some larger venues (up to the Michael Fowler Centre) because some organisations hire those in the absence of a 400-800 seat venue.

The second column of the table shows what proportion of hirers have used each venue in the past two years. As shown there, St Andrews on the Terrace was the most used venue by hirer survey respondents. More than a third (36%) of them used St. Andrews at least once in the prior two years. That was followed by the Hannah Playhouse, which was used by 29% of respondents. The Michael Fowler Centre and Adam Concert Room were each used by 25% of respondents in the prior two years. The Opera House and the larger two venues at Bats were all used by 21% of hirer survey respondents.



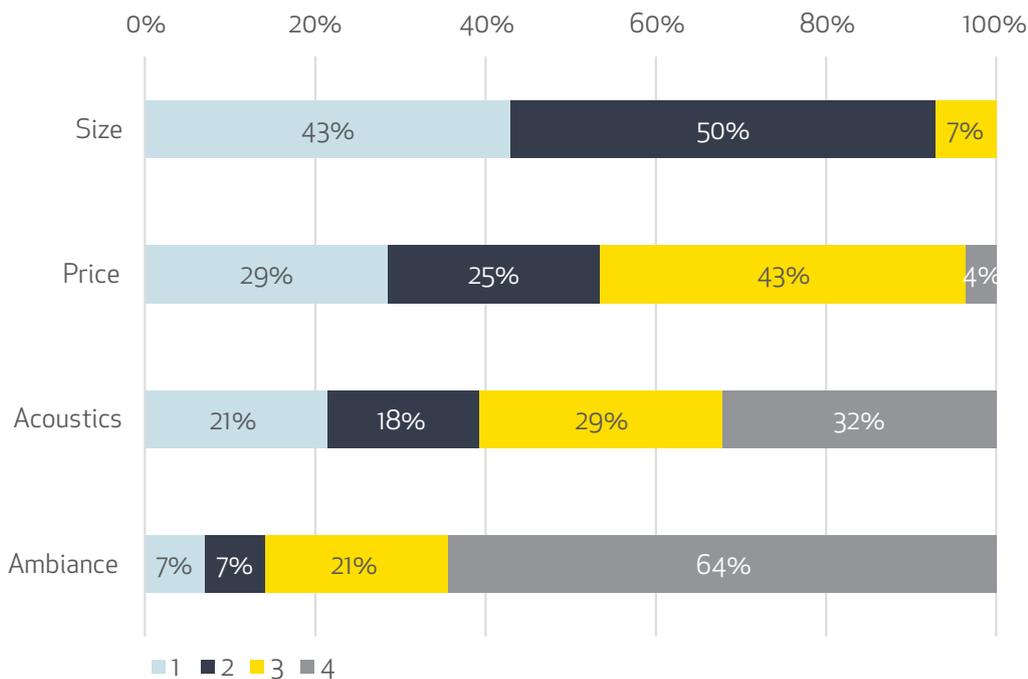
## 5.2 Priorities

The number of venues on the list might make it appear that venue hirers have a lot of options, but the reality is more complicated because some venues, such as those in churches or educational institutions, have users or uses that take priority over casual performing arts hirers and rates at some venues are too expensive for many users. Venue hirers also have different priorities, making some venues more suitable for their needs than others.

*“It is important to recognise the difference between fit-for-purpose, professionally managed concert venues and, for example, churches which may be made available for concert use. These may be acoustically fine (as St Andrew’s, Sacred Heart in Hill Street, St Mary of the Angels). But scheduling in such spaces is vulnerable to other uses (funerals etc.) and there are no support facilities (proper foyer/audience spaces, adequate backstage facilities, technical support, ticketing systems etc.)”*

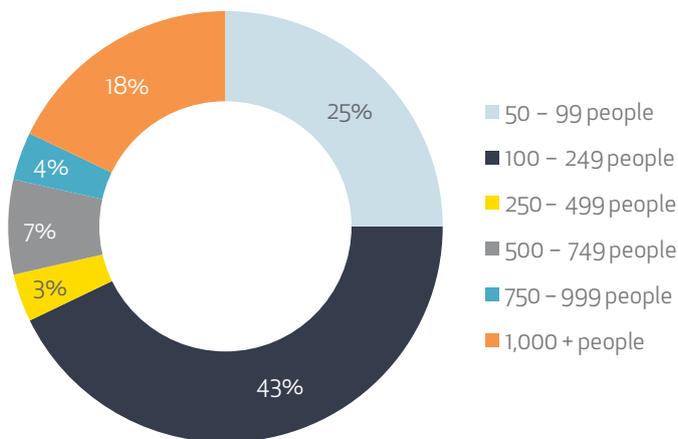
The interviews revealed that venue size, price, acoustics and ambiance played a key role in venue choice, so hirer survey respondents were asked to rank the importance of those. As shown in the chart below, size ranked first for the greatest proportion of people (43%), followed by price (29%) and acoustics (21%).

Ranked importance of venue attributes



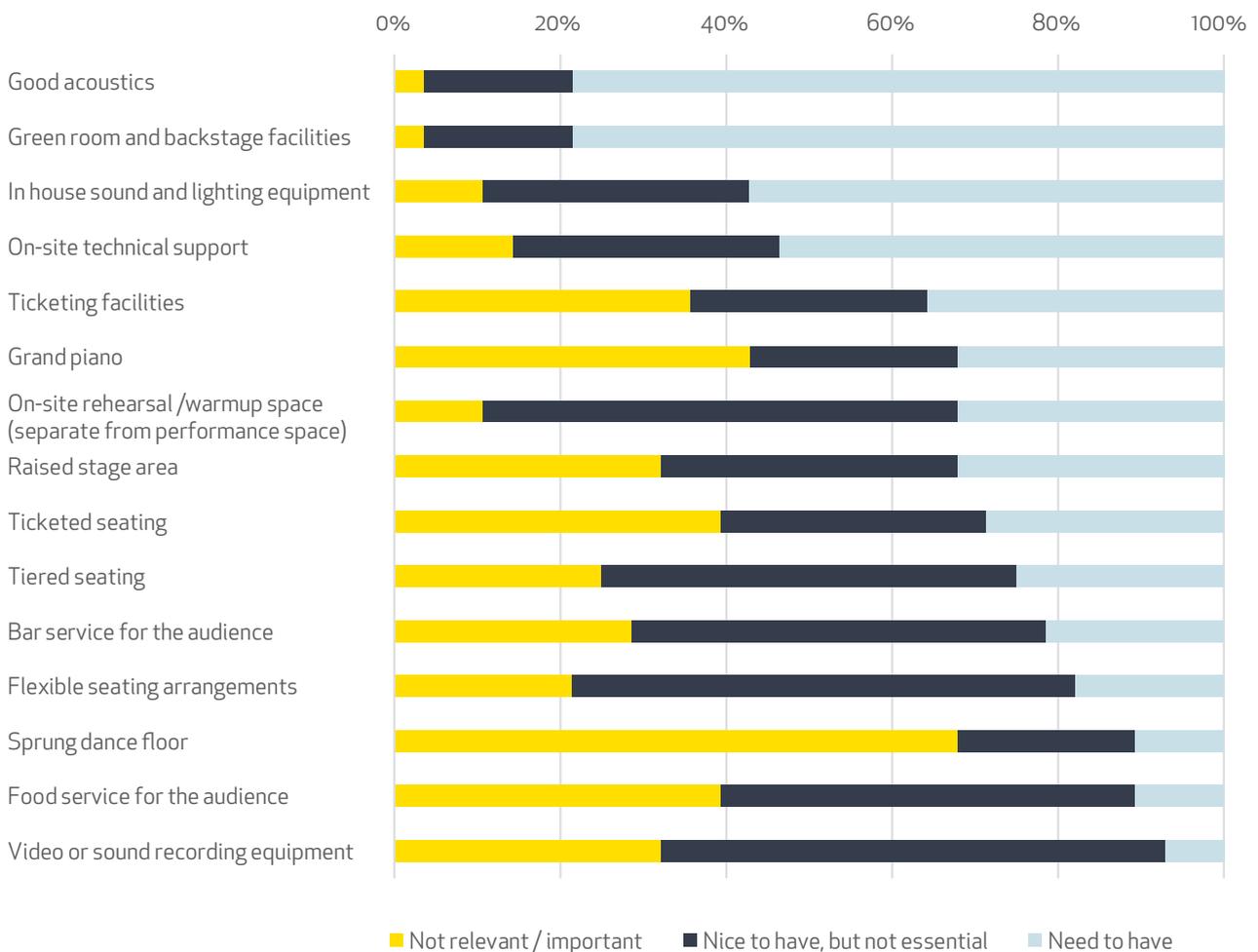
With regard to size, as shown below, more than two-thirds of hirer survey respondents said that their typical audience size is less than 250 people, but based on the interviews it seems likely that that's at least in part because many Wellington venues – especially the more affordable ones – don't accommodate audiences larger than that.

*Typical Audience Size*



Looking at more detailed venue attributes, as shown below, the attributes perceived as essential by the largest proportion of hirers are good acoustics and green room and backstage facilities<sup>28</sup>. In house sound and lighting and on-site technical support are the next most important.

### Venue Attribute Ratings



Comparing music and theatre hirers (there were not enough hirers from other genres to do comparisons), acoustics, grand pianos, and raised stage areas were more important to music hirers. Hirers based somewhere other than Wellington placed a higher priority on having on-site technical support than did Wellington-based hirers. There were no other statistically significant differences in priorities based on location or genre.

<sup>28</sup> Based on hirer survey results.

### 5.3 Satisfaction with Venues

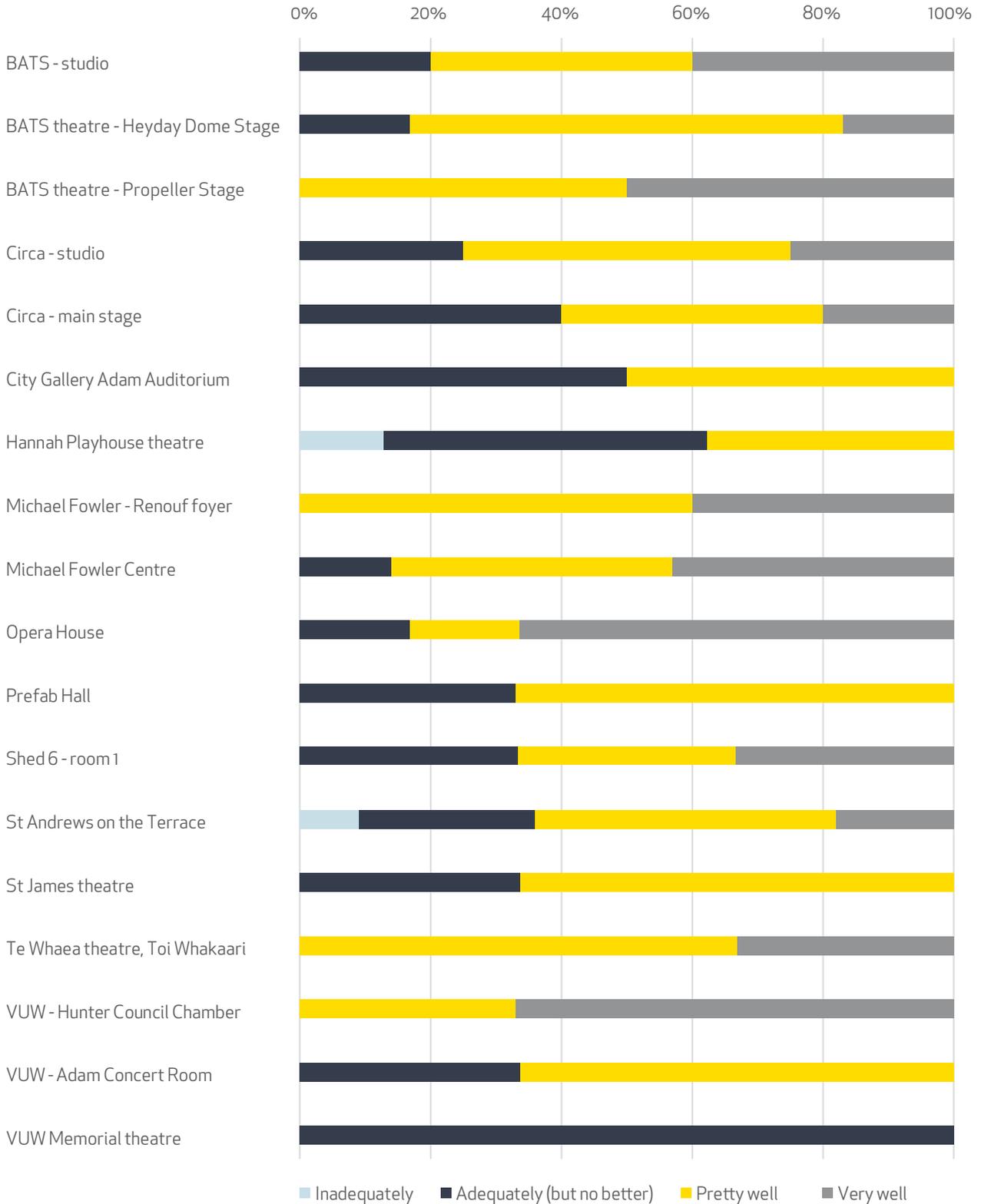
Overall, venue hirers are not very satisfied with the mix of performing arts venues available in Wellington, with the average rating given by hirers being between poor and fair.

Average venue hirer rating



As shown in the next chart, the extent to which particular venues met the needs of organisations that used them varied.

Extent to which venues met hirer needs (venues that 10% or more of respondents have used)



Among the more frequently used venues, the Hannah Playhouse had the greatest proportion of ratings of inadequate or adequate, but no better, with more than 60% of users giving it one of those ratings. That's also consistent with comments made in interviews and open-ended survey responses, as illustrated by the comment below:

*“There is no audience development going on. There are no databases and audiences don't have a relationship of trust with the venue. This makes it much more difficult for hirer to find audiences. The physical infrastructure needs major investment to ensure it better meets the expectation of modern audiences and the production needs of theatre companies (Q is a benchmark). The size is also challenging. The stage is a bit small and the seating capacity a bit low to make it viable to bring work that is touring to stages in Auckland and regional cities around New Zealand. The management are delivering the very minimum of services - from the technical team to ticketing, marketing and care of audiences. It is nowhere near best practice.”*

There were also comments about the cost of hiring the Hannah Playhouse – particularly in light of the level of service provided.

## 5.4 Future Needs

Given venue hirers are not particularly satisfied with the current portfolio of venues, it's not surprising that in the hirer survey they also rated the ability of current venues to meet future demand as poor to fair, as shown below.

Average venue hirer rating



The reasons for this are largely similar to those described for dissatisfaction with the existing portfolio of venues; however two additional themes that came through in both open-ended survey responses and interviews were the need for flexibility and accessibility.

With regard to flexibility, several people involved with theatre and dance in particular made comments such as these:

- 🗨️ *“Given that Wellington is known artistically for innovation it [the existing portfolio of venues] doesn’t meet the effective needs in Wellington ... live art forms have to evolve really quickly because the world is changing really quickly and the world has changed in terms of technology and the options for live entertainment are really broad so live theatre really needs to offer something distinctly different from a 3D movie or whatever the other millions of options are ... so the spaces in Wellington aren’t enabling really interesting, interactive, immersive experiences. Usually because you can’t shift the seats, and that sort of limitation or that it costs a fortune to shift the seats.”*
- 🗨️ *“There should be more flexible space because I think the whole notion of theatre is changing.”*
- 🗨️ *“There’s no breakout space ... where people can really push and test stuff.”*

Accessibility was discussed in financial terms, as noted previously, but also in terms of making venues accessible for audiences, including people with physical disabilities, children, and those from social and cultural groups that are not very familiar with performing arts.

While most venues have at least some accommodation for people with physical disabilities, such as providing wheel chair access, interviewees such as this one describe it as being limited and incomplete. For example, in some venues, people in wheel chairs can only sit in certain places and in others they need to arrive very early. Some venues don’t offer loops for the hearing impaired, and few offer sign language or audio interpreters.

- 🗨️ *“There’s a place in the Michael Fowler Centre ... a roped off area for people in wheel chairs and there’s this feeling of the rope making them feel like an animal ... this woman I was talking to was quite put off of going to a show at the Michael Fowler Centre because of that feeling.”*
- 🗨️ *“More audio described performances, sign interpreted performances, relaxed performances...” [are needed]*

With the closure of Capital E's theatre space, there is no longer a Wellington venue purpose-built for children and families, and according to those who create performances for those groups, they have particular needs that are not well met by other venues:

*“The old space [Capital E] was custom built for children, so there would be nappy changing and there would be breast feeding chairs and there would be little toilets ... a space where families can come and feel comfortable to just sit and have a very cheap mug of coffee or tea and know that it doesn't matter if their kid is eating their lunch and it's going everywhere ... often when we're hiring venues we fall into problems with that because there isn't that understanding of our audience's needs.”*

Other survey respondents and interviewees commented on the need to make venues feel welcoming – especially to people who may be less familiar with performing arts due to their socio-economic or cultural backgrounds. They suggested that this goes beyond making performances financially affordable, but also extends to comfort with the venue:

*“A lot of the venues are still venues that are mainly attended by wealthy New Zealand European post 40 audiences and the tickets are quite expensive ... There's quite a lot of the population that wouldn't feel comfortable going into the Wellington venues because they're quite formal theatres a lot of them ... maybe they have a café as well and it's easy for someone who might go to a café to roll into the theatre, and it's easy to have other styles of interactive programmes that entice people into the theatre and make it feel like their space and they're comfortable there and it's for them. That's something I would like to change.”*

*“Modern audiences expect a high standard of service and quality experience in a venue. It should be warm, welcoming, engaging. The experience begins from the first engagement with marketing and continues right through to post show. Wellington venues now lag best practice by a long way.”*

# 6

## Recommendations

### 6.1 Review pricing for Council owned venues

Comments made in the interviews and survey conducted for this review reflect a widespread perception that WREDA venues are expensive relative to comparable venues in other parts of the country and that the Hannah Playhouse (which receives Council funding) is too.

It would be helpful to conduct a pricing review to confirm this perception and quantify the magnitude of the difference for comparable bookings, taking into account what services (e.g., technical support, marketing assistance, etc.) are included in the fee. As part of this, it would be useful to do analysis to determine whether price differences are more extreme for some types of venues and performances than for others.

Such a review could help inform future decisions about hire rates for the venues, and also to prioritise needs for the types of support described in the next section.

### 6.2 Find ways to support individuals and organisations outside the major national performing arts organisations

Evidence from all phases of this review point to a challenging environment for Wellington's performing arts community. That's particularly true for individuals and organisations outside of the major national performing arts organisations based in Wellington. Those larger organisations also face challenges, but their size and stature makes them relatively better able to withstand them.

Smaller organisations are an important part of Wellington's identity and performing arts culture, and could benefit from any assistance the Council is able to give them either directly or through advocacy and facilitation.

🗣️ *"Concentrate more on the 'smaller' groups and take a greater interest in 'community' groups, which are very strong in the city, but get very little support from the council."*

🗣️ *"There is a major gap for supporting emerged companies/groups to grow and professionally develop. Compared to the huge investment in IT and business start-ups, there is almost nothing available that is tailored to arts companies. I'm talking about groups like Trick of the Light, Muscle Mouth, Tikapa Productions, Barbarian Productions, Java Dance, Pattacake Productions, Performance Arcade plus a few others. Companies who are clearly making important work but struggle to develop good organisational structures."*

### 6.2.1 Community Rates / Venue subsidies

As discussed throughout this report, performing arts organisations in Wellington are feeling squeezed by a difficult funding environment combined with relatively high venue hire prices. As things stand, many local organisations are being priced out of Council owned venues because they can't afford the rates. That, in turn, is putting pressure on other less expensive venues. In light of this situation, any and all options for providing community rates or venue subsidies for local organisations should be explored.

These survey respondents comments captured the perspective of many in saying:

- 🗨️ *"PLEASE do something to enable local practitioners cheaper access to hire theatre spaces in Wellington!"*
- 🗨️ *"Offer a discounted rate on venue hire of WCC-owned venues for a) local or locally-based organisations b) charitable organisations."*

### 6.2.2 Shared services

One possibility to consider to help local performing arts organisations control their costs is allowing local performing arts organisations to "piggy-back" on services the Council already provides, such as event marketing. This was suggested by some of the interviewees and survey respondents, such as this one:

- 🗨️ *"Link support with mentor for publicity and marketing and/or use council existing marketing and publicity to help promote events particularly those organised by small, charitable organisations who need support in this area."*

And it makes sense. Using a shared service approach to marketing performing arts events in Wellington would be much more cost effective than many small organisations attempting to do it themselves, Council owned organisations already have significant experience in this area, and performing arts events help attract visitors to Wellington and contribute to resident satisfaction.

It would also be worth investigating whether this type of an approach could lower ticketing costs and improve organisations' ability to access customer data for marketing purposes. Several people in the survey and interview commented that Ticketek is expensive and acts as a barrier to getting customer data that would be useful in promoting future events:

- 🗨️ *"Ticketing charges by Ticketek are very high - both for the audience and the event organisers. With new software and customer self-service on the internet, this cost should be reducing."*

### 6.2.3 Advocacy

Another suggestion raised by interviewees and survey respondents, such as the one quoted below, is the Council advocating on behalf of local performing arts organisations with Central Government and Creative New Zealand:

 *“I’m glad to see that this survey is taking place and the Wellington City Council is making a concerted effort to tackle this strategically. I think a long term concerted effort is needed, and not one that has a set date or asset as an objective. I would like to see the WCC take a much more involved effort to revive the performing arts, supporting fulltime staff to do so consistently, and engaging with government to make strategic choices about who and what they fund.”*

Some interviewees expressed the view that this type of advocacy is part of what has enabled the performing arts to thrive in Auckland in recent years.

Some interviewees and survey respondents also expressed the view that the Council could help advocate for the performing arts among the business community. They believe that a closer relationship between business and the performing arts would produce benefits for both parties, but that:

 *“There’s a conversation that can be had that’s just not being facilitated by anyone.”*

Such a conversation might include possibilities like having a Lighting Lab intake focused on performing arts organisations or creating opportunities for performing arts organisations and potential corporate sponsors to connect.

### 6.2.4 Shared sponsorship

Given the resource constraints many performing arts organisation are working under, another possibility the Council could explore is creating some sort of shared sponsorship arrangement whereby corporations or individuals could contribute to a fund that could subsidise multiple organisations either directly or via venue subsidies. That would enable them to spread their assistance across the sector rather than concentrating it on a single organisation. It would also reduce risk for recipient organisations because the disruption associated with a lost sponsor would also be spread across many organisations.

### 6.2.5 Shared seasons

A related idea would be to facilitate creation of season packages with performances bundled across multiple organisations and/or genres (e.g., one theatre, one music, one dance). This builds on the shared services idea described previously in that marketing costs would be shared, but could also help build the overall performing arts audience in Wellington by exposing people to different genres and organisations.

It could also enable virtual curation since one criticism interviewees had regarding theatre in particular is that most Wellington venues apart from Bats and Circa are venues for hire and are not curated so audiences don’t know what to expect. Offering shared seasons would enable virtual curation of shared concepts across organisations, genres, and venues.

## 6.2.6 Performing Arts Hub

An idea that came up in many interviews and survey responses, such as those that follow, was that of an artistic hub:

- 🗨️ *“Ultimately we need an artistic hub that is designed and run by and for artists and to achieve this WCC may need to start again from scratch.”*
- 🗨️ *“Look at investing in creative hubs where small and medium sized independent companies can share resources.”*
- 🗨️ *“Remodeling the structure of the Hannah Playhouse (there was some talk about this a few years ago, and I think the idea has great value) or the soon to be vacated Whitireia space into something along the lines of combined arts centre model (a successful model that exists worldwide) would be ideal.”*
- 🗨️ *“A dedicated arts centre ... rehearsal spaces, development spaces... For artists to be able to collaborate and hotspot and all these things they need to create great work.”*

A few people mentioned Q Theatre in Auckland as a model for this type of idea, and others mentioned BizDoJo and CreativeHQ.

Many benefits of such a hub were mentioned. One was supporting (through mentorship, production assistance, etc.) people in theatre in particular who are beyond University and have had some productions at Bats, but are not able to secure performances at Circa (because of their stage of development, type of work, etc.).

Some interviewees and survey respondents indicated that people in that situation tend to be drawn to Auckland or drop out of the industry:

- 🗨️ *“It’s an insane cycle to kind of push people out of the nest and let them grow to a certain size and then for them to just have to disappear.”*

Other benefits described included cross-fertilisation of ideas, easier sharing of resources and information, and having something like a café and bar that could attract people interested in the performing arts (as either audience or performers) and in doing so help subsidise some of the other initiatives mentioned.

Such a hub could also foster collaboration among performing arts organisations and people in the performing arts. Interviews and survey responses indicated some of that already happens, and:

- 🗨️ *“Arts Wellington is working towards more collaboration between arts organisations but there is more to do.”*

BLAG was also mentioned as another group attempting to foster greater collaboration within the performing arts community, so they and Arts Wellington may be well-placed to help shape an artistic hub.

### 6.3 Accelerate the renovation and reopening of the Town Hall (including the Ilott), but ensure it is accessible to a wide range of users

 *“Make the Town Hall available as soon as possible for performances.”*

The loss of use of the Town Hall and desire to see it re-open was one of the most frequently mentioned topics in the interviews and survey responses. Organisations performing music with less than a full orchestra miss having a professional venue with great acoustics and others noted that loss of that venue created pressure on others.

There is widespread support for accelerating the renovation and reopening of the Town Hall, with half of respondents to the hirer survey saying they would use that in preference to a venue they are currently using if it was an option.

 *“The Town Hall must be renovated and kept as a large auditorium. Its acoustics are excellent and the open ground floor flexible for many styles of performing arts.”*

 *“Open up the Town Hall and Ilott Concert Chamber again for public performances”*

 *“There is a real need for a 200–300-seat chamber music venue (e.g. a replacement for the Ilott).”*

 *“Support the redevelopment of the Wellington Town Hall’s performance spaces through the Civic Music Hub project, which has the potential to open up a number of new public performance spaces.”*

 *“Reinstating the Town Hall as a performance venue should be a top priority.”*

A concern that was expressed however was that the Town Hall would reopen but be inaccessible either because of high hire prices or because it would be reserved for the NZSO and School of Music. It seems important to ensure that neither of those things happens for the good of the performing arts sector and given the renovation would be funded by ratepayers.

 *“What worries me about the School of Music and the orchestra going in there is that there will be heaps of days that it will be used by them and won’t be available for other hirers... that’s everybody’s concern.”*

 [The NZSO and School of Music taking over the Town Hall is] *“a waste of a space. The space provided a great resource to the whole community ... people love it ...”*

Some of those expressing this point of view also noted that the Michael Fowler Centre is better for full orchestras anyway but not as useful for many other groups, so they wondered why the NZSO doesn’t stay there, keeping the Town Hall available for others.

## **6.4 Consider creation of a mid-sized venue, but with a focus on accessibility, affordability, and flexibility**

Overall perceptions of existing venues are relatively poor and there were many calls for a purpose built, mixed use venue somewhere in the 400-800 seat range. However, once again if such a venue is built it seems important to ensure it is not so expensive to build that most local organisations would be priced out of hiring it.

It also seems like an ideal opportunity to design in accessibility for children, people with disabilities and those who are not as familiar with the performing arts.

-  *"The gap in Wellington has always been for a concert room that is something between the Ilott size which is only about 330 ish or something and the Town Hall, which is 1800. In my dream world, Wellington would have superb concert venue with seating of about 800."*
-  *"Build at least one medium-sized venue with seating capacity of around 600."*
-  *A venue in the 200-400 seat range, with a food size stage and a good acoustic is very much needed.*
-  *"What's missing is a 500 seat black box theatre."*
-  *"Please look into building a purpose-built 250-400 seat theatre for local practitioners that can accommodate families and people with disabilities."*
-  *"Investigate the creation of a flexible performing arts space with seating between 600 - 800."*

## **6.5 Create or adopt best practice guidelines for making venues accessible and help venues implement them**

According to interviewees, even existing venues could be significantly improved in terms of their accessibility for people with disabilities and for families. It would be helpful to work with organisations such as Arts Access and Capital E to develop best practice accessibility guidelines for venues.

# 7

## Appendix: Participating Organisations

### Participating Venue Hirers

- Aroha String Quartet
- Barbarian Productions
- Big Sing
- Binge Culture
- Capital E Festival for Children
- Chamber Music NZ
- Festival of the Stars
- Footnote NZ
- Indian Ink
- Java Dance Company
- Massive Company
- My Accomplice
- Note Bene Choir
- NZ Comedy Festival
- NZ Festival / Jazz Festival
- NZ String Quartet
- NZ Symphony Orchestra
- Orchestra Wellington
- Orpheus Choir
- Show Pony
- Stagecraft Theatre
- Stroma Ensemble
- Taki Rua
- The Playground Collective
- Trick of the Light
- Wellington Chamber Music Trust
- Wellington Chamber Orchestra
- Wellington Community Choir
- Plus a freelance artist representing independents

### Participating Venue Operators

- BATS (Propeller stage, Heyday Dome stage, Studio)
- Circa (Studio and Main Stage)
- City Gallery Adam auditorium
- Futuna Chapel
- Hannah Playhouse
- WREDA (Michael Fowler Centre, St James Theatre, Opera House, Shed 6)
- Saint Andrews on the Terrace
- Victoria University (Hunter Concert Chamber, Adam Concert Room, Memorial Theatre)

### Other Participating Stakeholders

- Creative NZ
- Arts Access Aotearoa
- Performing Arts Network of New Zealand (PANNZ)
- Arts Foundation



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