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Media Release



Major performing arts companies are robust and well-managed

Australia's major performing arts companies are robust, stable and have continued to expand their city audiences in line with population growth, according to the latest Australian Council Snapshot of Major Performing Arts Company Key Trends released overnight.

They have also extended their reach and engagement in regional and remote communities.

The report, drawn from an extensive set of audited data provided by the major companies, contextualises the external influences and impacts to make sense of the data.

'Given the complexity of the breadth and depth of activities undertaken by the companies it is vital we understand the big picture—and how well managed they are,' Ms Bethwyn Serow, Executive Director, said today.

Working capital has increased across the group by \$11.9 million and whereas in 2001 only 9 companies had positive reserve funds, that number has more than tripled in 2011.

'Growth has not been built on the back of higher box office prices. Ticket prices have only increased in line with CPI yet the breadth of activities including free or subsidised activities has grown.'

The report found that major performing arts companies' education programs reached out to over half a million school children last year¹ as well as running workshops for over 28,000 attendees and other free and self-presented performances.

Although the GFC and the associated drop in national and international tourism had a negative impact on opera audience figures, opera as an art form is not in decline. New business models are generating new audiences, the results will come through strongly in the 2012 data.

The trend over the past ten years incorporates the strong growth before and after the GFC. For example, from 2002 to 2011 paid capital city attendances at performances by major performing arts companies have grown by 13 per cent. Regional access and participation has also grown substantially, with attendances of 800,000 in 2011.

Ms Serow said the majors were also active and dynamic players in the online environment, strengthening their audiences, and building new ones.

'Many of the major companies have now partnered with national broadcasters ABC and SBS to record and broadcast their live performances for radio and television.

'They have also developed additional digital content for cinema screenings, live digital simulcasts around regional Australia and are offering program and behind-the-scenes interview downloads on the internet. The Australian Ballet is extending its reach through digital engagement when not another performance can be added. A recent live stream of *Bodytorque* reached an audience 20 times those in the theatre both here and overseas.'

Estimated digital content audience reach has grown exponentially. In 2011 the major performing arts companies reported over 225 000 friends on facebook, and almost 12 million online visitors.

The companies are not only providing backstage peeks and access to performance clips, they are partnering with digital specialists to develop new ways of engaging. The Australian

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Chamber Orchestra has developed a world first—a digital three dimensional orchestra; Musica Viva is set to roll out a revolutionary new interactive digital music education software program in 2012; and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra launched its free educational iPhone and iPad App, *MSO Learn*, in June 2011 and has already received a staggering 20,000 downloads and is featured in iTunes stores in over 50 countries.

Australia's major performing arts companies are not-for-profit organisations. Their purpose is broad—to produce art at the highest level, to deliver that art to the broadest possible audience, to inspire young people to participate either as producers or consumers, and to initiate new work that reflects Australian society.

'Their brief is not just about filling the seats. It is not to deliver dividends to shareholders,' Ms Serow said. 'They could play to a large and ever-growing regional audience if they limited their spread to major regional towns, but in fact, they meet their obligations to the Australian community by travelling to places like Whyalla, Launceston, Mt Isa, Broken Hill, Dubbo, Burnie, Tamworth, Townsville while generating sustainable business models'.

The companies are also major producers of new Australian works (103 in 2011) and interpreters of classics and new productions of work (273 in 2011). In the three years to 2011, they produced over 380 new and new Australian works, and 389 new productions. This is also part of their mandate.

The companies also help to build an identity for Australia internationally as a sophisticated, creative, intelligent and culturally rich nation. In 2011 they performed 218 times in Asia, Europe and North America to 121 000 people. That's up on the five-year average of 189 international performances.

In 2012 the major performing arts companies are touring all over the world, including to Slovenia, Britain, Japan, America and Canada. Less than a week out from their Canberra season Bangarra is now in Mongolia as the first Australian major performing arts company to tour the country. It will perform in the Ulanbator Culture Palace, conduct workshops with local groups and colleges, and embark on a three-day trip into the desert to speak to locals about their culture and exchange ideas.

'The resilience of the companies to embrace breakout successes while remaining committed to new works, and broad access and engagement is reassuring,' Ms Serow said.

'Despite the sort of shockwaves companies have navigated recently such as the GFC, floods in Queensland and the two-year refurbishment of Hamer Hall in Victoria, they have shown strength and maturity in continuing to deliver strong results.

'This stability also underpins companies' moves to broaden their creative partnerships. Since 2009 almost 60 per cent of major performing arts companies have formally partnered with small-to-medium companies, entering into co-productions, mentoring artists from the small-to-medium sector and presenting works from small-to-medium companies.

'The Australia Council report shows that these companies can deliver a strong fiscal performance for both government and private sector donors, as well as pursuing their brief of providing access to people living in remote and regional areas and, most importantly, nurturing future generations of enthusiastic and knowledgeable arts audiences.'

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ⁱ arts companies performed to 571 000 children and spent 795 000 hours in schools in 2011.