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What's the state of Perth's performing arts infrastructure?

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Perth's needs twice as many arts venues

A report commissioned by the Committee for Perth and launched today has revealed that Perth's arts and cultural sector is flourishing. There has been healthy growth in the number of people attending performances and the city and Peel region generally have enough arts venues, particularly when it comes to large outdoor venues. But given our predicted population growth, the number of performing arts venues will need to approximately double to cope with increased demand.

"What we're talking about is Perth in 40 to 50 years with a population of four million and to cope with that the city will need performing arts infrastructure that is comparable in size and quality to what Melbourne has now. This means that what Perth has slowly built over more than 100 years has to be reproduced in only 40," said Committee for Perth CEO Marion Fulker.

"Cities today are increasingly competing with each other to attract and retain people and cultural vibrancy is recognised as central to a city's liveability. Right now, Perth is almost at breaking point when it comes to having enough and certain kinds of arts venues. We need to be planning now to make sure we have a dynamic capital city where arts and cultural appreciation are part of everyday life."

While in many other capital cities attendances at artistic and cultural performances have plateaued, Western Australia's share of the performing arts market is increasing.

The Committee for Perth report found that:

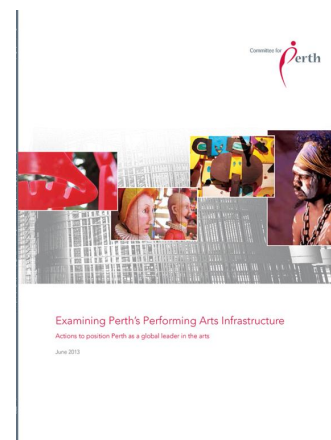
- 1,788 262 tickets were sold to live performances in 2011, a 22% growth in two years.
- Paid attendance to Black Swan productions increased by 60% in 2011.
- Western Australian Ballet's box office income increased by 15% in 2011.
- The Perth Festival exceeded its box office target of \$4.8 million, reached a paid audience of 190,000 people and approximately 500,000 people involved in festival activities and events this year.
- In only its second year, Fringe World doubled its ticket sales to 110,000 in 2013 with \$2 million spent on tickets and 215,000 people attending events.

"What's interesting is that a survey of Fringe World audience members found that 90% of them felt more proud of Perth because of the festival, 89% said it promoted Perth as a globally connected city and 99% said they'd attend festival events again," Mrs Fulker added.

The Committee's report *Examining Perth's Performing Arts Infrastructure* contained an audit of major performing arts infrastructure across the greater Perth metropolitan area including the Peel region and a comparison of major performing arts venues in Perth with seven other capital cities – Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Manchester, Hong Kong, Copenhagen and Chicago.

The findings revealed that Perth:

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- Has a comparable number of venues as other cities but ours tended to be smaller;
- Is well served in some arts venues such as dance and drama theatres and has a relatively large number of outdoor venues and stadiums;
- Has an undersupply of lyric theatres, with only one lyric theatre and no dedicated lyric theatre for musicals;
- Has an undersupply of concert venues and contemporary music venues; AND
- 70% of Indigenous Western Australians aged 15 years and older attended at least one Indigenous cultural event.

“It is evident that very substantial medium and long term investment is required in performing arts infrastructure to meet the demand that will flow on, not just from our population growth but increased tourist numbers,” added Mrs Fulker.

“Tourism WA plans to double the value of tourism by 2020 to \$12 billion a year, so we need to ensure our performing arts venues can cater for those extra visitors.

“We should also be able to offer locals and visitors an Aboriginal tourism experience and there is a growing need for an Indigenous cultural centre in Perth that includes a performing arts space.”

On the basis of its report the Committee for Perth is making the following four recommendations to the State Government:

1. The State Government prepares a long term Plan for Arts and Cultural Infrastructure that positions Perth as a global leader in arts and culture.
2. The Infrastructure Plan should be completed within 12 months and funding decisions flowing from the Plan commence in the 2014-15 Budget
3. Priority infrastructure requirements to be addressed in the Plan include:
 - the development of an Indigenous cultural centre in Perth that includes performing arts space in order to meet the demand for Indigenous cultural events both within the Indigenous communities and the tourism sector.
 - the development of a new major lyric theatre in Perth that is suitable for large scale opera, ballet and musical theatre.
 - whether there is a need for an additional concert hall or recital hall.
4. The plan should develop locational criteria for major infrastructure to ensure that it makes a positive contribution to the urban landscape and capitalises on the potential for city activation and economic benefits.

“Cities with a good supply of performing arts venues have reputations for being lively, culturally vibrant cities and there’s no reason we shouldn’t want to create a dynamic capital city that all Western Australians are proud of,” said Mrs Fulker.

The Minister for Culture and The Arts, the Hon. John Day, MLA received the report on behalf of government today. The Minister believes ‘Examining Perth’s Performing Arts Infrastructure’ will contribute to our collective conversations about the future of Western Australian arts and cultural infrastructure and is looking forward to the discussions.

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