

# Theatre sector plan 2010-2012



Stuck Pigs Squealing, *The Apocalypse Bear Trilogy*  
Photo: Paul Dunn

# 1.1 The Theatre sector in Australia

The theatre sector in Australia encompasses four main spheres: commercial theatre, professional subsidised theatre, unsubsidised independent theatre and participatory/amateur theatre. Within these spheres there is a diversity of genres including hybrid theatre, text based work, circus and physical theatre, installation theatre work, puppetry, media based theatre work, live art, and contemporary performance.

The Australian theatre sector has many strengths; good established infrastructure including festivals, venues, and companies, a diversity of practice, strong tertiary training institutions and most importantly – a core of outstanding artists.

The theatre sector has benefited from the growth and diversification of performing arts infrastructure over the last fifteen years. Opportunities for producers have grown and there is evidence of increasing interconnectedness within the sector across all four spheres of theatre, generating new partnerships and models for theatre making. A range of opportunities now exists for artists to make theatre work: theatre companies, venues, producing hubs and independent producers now operate successfully in the Australian theatre sector.

According to ABS statistics, the total number of people working as theatre performers (paid and unpaid) in Australia in 2007 was 80,400. David Throsby's research from 2009 suggests that there were 7,000 people who defined themselves as working theatre artists (performers).

Key findings of David Throsby's 2010 report *Do you really expect to get paid? An economic study of professional artists in Australia* confirms that professional actors continue to earn the highest creative income of all professional artists, and that these earnings have remained stable. This is partly due to their versatility, with most actors working on stage or in television or film, across art forms, as well as applying their skills in non arts occupations such as corporate training.

The Australia Council's 2010 report on Australian participation in the arts indicated that one quarter (26%) of Australians attended theatre in the last year. Most people attended traditional or contemporary theatre (19%), followed by Circus or physical theatre (10%).

Festivals, venues and companies are developing new ways to build audiences nationally and internationally. Australian theatre is increasingly being supported through partnerships and philanthropy.

Theatre companies and artists are engaging in the new digital creation and distribution platforms, which are providing opportunities for invention of new forms and diversifying audience engagement.

# 1.2 The Theatre Sector and the Australia Council

In 2009-10, the Australia Council invested almost \$21.1 million in Australian theatre. State governments provide a further \$9.6 million.

The theatre board currently funds 27 key organisations – a mix of ‘artistic explorers’, ‘artistic hubs’ and ‘national service organisations’. The board also funds 6 emerging key organisations, and 12 youth companies on a triennial basis. This framework was developed following extensive sector consultation during the ‘Make It New’ review undertaken by the theatre board between 2006 and 2008.

In 2010 the Major Performing Arts Board (MPAB) provided annual funding of almost \$9.1 million to 9 theatre companies (including Circus Oz which is included as a physical theatre company).

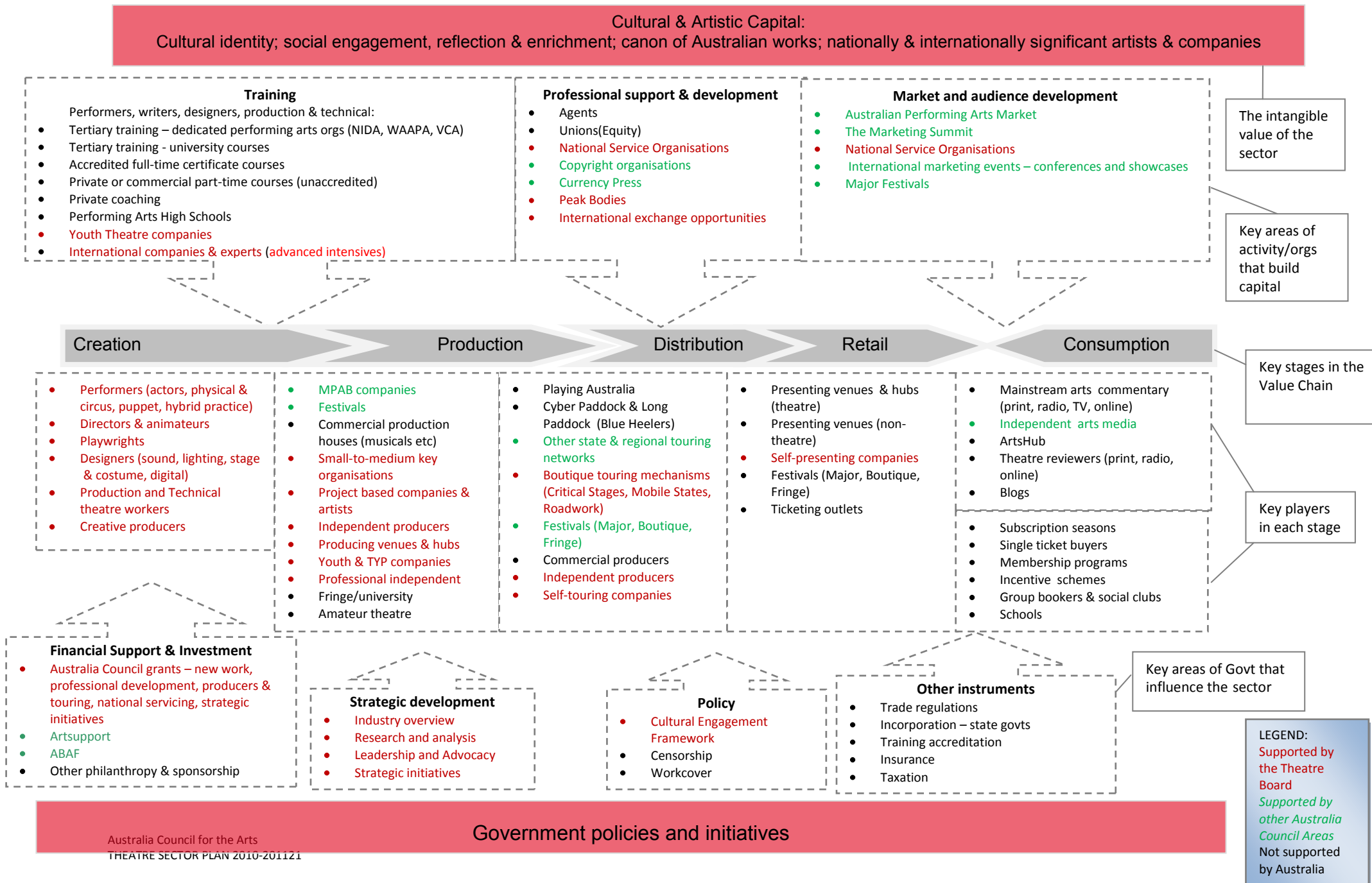
Beyond Australia Council’s MPAB and Key Organisation funding, there are a much larger number of companies and groups that exist on a mixture of state support and project grants. And beyond this again are companies that either seek or receive no subsidy.

In addition to support provided by the Australia Council, the sector is assisted by many valuable additional partnerships. State and local governments provide most of the physical infrastructure for the performing arts in the form of buildings for performance, rehearsal and administration as well as funding the ongoing management of these structures. They are also the main funding source for arts festivals and other such events. For example, there are approximately 120 members of the Australian Performing Arts Centre Association (APACA), many of whom would never have received any Australia Council support. The Australia Council’s contribution to the major festivals is also quite small, and mainly in the form of the administered Major Festival Initiative.

The Council has a large influence in the sector beyond the level of its financial contribution for the following reasons:

- its investment is primarily in the makers of work, both artists and companies, and in the long term the infrastructure forms itself around the creative energy, albeit often belatedly
- its funding decisions are strongly driven by artistic excellence, however defined. Such funding is rare and highly sought - most other funding sources have more mixed agendas. This gives its funds a leverage value well beyond the actual amounts involved
- the Council’s national overview allows it to spot trends and make linkages that are difficult for local agencies to detect, and from this flows a natural leadership role.

# 1.3 The Australian Theatre Ecosystem



## Sector issues of concern to the Theater Board

There is a need for greater investment in the development of work. Development of resilient leadership is a priority, in particular:

- succession planning for leadership positions, and development of diversity in leadership
- strengthening cultural leadership in fragile, marginalised or isolated areas of the sector
- we need better communication, networking and advocacy within the sector
- the sector will benefit from structures that can create opportunities for artists
- we should encourage a diversity of practice so that the artform is resilient to change
- creating career pathways for artists to increase sustainability for mid-career artists is a priority
- we need to encourage greater mainstage engagement with culturally diverse artists and audiences.

Ongoing challenges facing the sector include:

- lack of a peak body
- complexity of national touring
- poor career prospects for independent producers
- fee structures
- artists' administrative workload.

# 1.4 Theatre Board Goals & Key Performance Indicators 2010-2012

The Theatre Board has six goals for 2010-2012. It has adopted a **Cultural Leadership Strategy** for this period - focussing on Goals 1 and 2. The strategy aims to strengthen the sector's leadership generally, and specifically in areas where leadership capacity is under-developed or fragile. The focus is on developing diverse and sustainable leadership across the sector.

## **Support the best artists to realise their work, recognising the value of diversity**

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- Outstanding projects and artists consistently developed and presented.
- More opportunities for Indigenous and CALD artists to develop and practice.
- More vibrant emerging companies move toward Key Organisation status.

## **Develop the skills and opportunities of theatre artists and cultural leaders**

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- Increased skills base across the sector.
- More cultural leaders developed from diverse parts of the sector.
- Increased development opportunities for young and emerging artists, and for facilitators working with them.
- Greater engagement with digital opportunities across the sector.

## **Increase opportunities for smaller companies and independent artists to create or present high quality contemporary theatre work**

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- More high quality Australian work developed and presented.
- Deeper and more extensive connections between all layers of the sector.
- Greater engagement with the artistic leadership of MPAB companies.
- National base of producers enriched and expanded.

## **Increase interconnections between all parts of the sector**

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- More high quality Australian work developed and presented.
- Deeper and more extensive connections between all layers of the sector.
- Greater engagement with the artistic leadership of MPAB companies.
- National base of producers enriched and expanded.

## **Increase national and international markets for high quality contemporary theatre work**

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- More independent and risk-taking works exposed to a national audience.
- Increased international opportunities for Australian theatre works.
- Increased opportunities for international co-productions.

## **Enhance the sustainability of Key Organisations**

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- Financially healthy and artistically vibrant Key Organisations.

# 1.5 Theatre Board Work Plan 2010-2012

## 1. Support the best artists to realise their work, recognising the value of diversity

- Six new emerging key organisations supported.
- Support the work of two senior artists through the fellowships grant category.
- Offer grant categories that fund the creation of excellent new work.
- Cultural diversity research.
- Fund case studies investigating best practice engagement with culturally diverse artists.
- Development of initiatives to increase cross-sector engagement with culturally diverse artists and audiences.
- Support a National Indigenous Theatre Forum through the Qld Indigenous Theatre Initiative.
- Partner with the Music Board to deliver a Music Theatre Initiative.
- Partner with Inter-Arts to resource the Visible City Live Art project.

## 2. Develop the skills and opportunities of theatre artists and cultural leaders

- Launch new Cultural Leadership Skills and Cultural Leadership Program development categories to strengthen diversity in leadership.
- 12 Program - Youth Arts companies supported 2008-11.
- Young Artists' Initiative component of new work categories offered.
- Circus and Physical Theatre Initiative developed in partnership with circus peak body.
- WA Indigenous Playwriting Initiative (Broome) facilitated through PlayWriting Australia.
- Partner with the MPAB to progress recommended actions from the Women Directors action-planning forum, and develop sustainable pathways for women in creative leadership.
- *Major Performing Arts Board supports:* Arts Executive Leadership Program, Emerging Leaders Program, Executive Mentoring Program, Philanthropy Mentoring Program, Young and Emerging Artists program (OYEA), Creative Professionals Program.
- *Artstart and JUMP program.*

## 3. Increase opportunities for smaller companies and independent artists to create or present high quality contemporary theatre work

## 4. Increase interconnections between all parts of the theatre sector

- Offer at least four more Program Presenter grants.
- Partner with the Dance Board and state agencies to support Managing and Producing Services (MAPS) hubs set up in Vic, Qld, WA and NSW.
- Partner with Arts NT to support a Northern Territory Producer Hub '32 degrees'.
- Fund the WA Theatre Development Initiative (WATDI).

- Partner with Arts SA to support Local Stages SA.
- Development of performing arts centre theatre-making guidelines.
- Make It New monitored and evaluated biennially until 2013 against original objectives.
- *MPAB supports*: Interconnections projects, annual networking summits of ADs of MPA and Key Orgs companies & heads of tertiary arts training institutions.
- *Marketing Development supports*: independent producers initiative, OYEA producer mentorships.
- *Community Partnerships supports*: Regional Stages Qld.
- *Major Festivals supports*: commissioning of new contemporary Australian works.

## 5. Increase national and international markets for innovative, high quality theatre work

- Resource international touring through the Key Organisations category: International Status.
- Partner with the Dance Board and Inter-Arts to fund the Mobile States National Touring Initiative.
- Fund Critical Stages independent theatre touring.
- Partner with Dance and Marketing Development to fund the Road Work regional touring initiative.
- Partner with Marketing Development to resource the Script Export Strategy.
- *Marketing Development supports*: Going Global program, Go-See fund, international performing arts markets and networks, APAM, IETM project.

## 6. Enhance the sustainability of Key Organisations

- 27 Key organisations supported 2009-11.
- Work with Arts Development to harmonise application and reporting processes with state and territory funding agencies.
- *Marketing Development supports*: Company development fund, the Marketing Summit, ADVICE research and data collection.
- *Artsupport resources*: philanthropy mentorships.

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