



**Anzarts Institute**

***Review of theatre and performance in the Northern Territory***

**A REPORT**

**by**

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# ***Review of theatre and performance in the Northern Territory***

## **1. The Brief**

In May 2008 Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Arts NT (hereafter Arts NT) and the Theatre Board of the Australia Council for the Arts (the agencies) retained the services of the Consultant to undertake a review of the theatre sector in the Northern Territory in order to obtain independent advice to inform future funding decisions and program strategies.

## **2. The Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference for this review included an examination of:

- Optimum structure/s for the support of theatre in the Northern Territory taking into account regional specificities, available infrastructure, existing groups and the current skills base;
- Prioritised funding strategies that are consistent with the existing policy context and resources;
- Potential partnerships for the growth of the theatre sector, both locally, nationally and internationally (if relevant) including cross art form and inter-disciplinary partnerships;
- Prioritised strategies for additional investments should funding become available.

## **3. The Process**

In consideration of the brief, the Consultant undertook to present policy options to these agencies leading to the formulation of such strategies.

For this purpose, the Consultant:

- Examined past and present practice in the field and the infrastructure within which it has been conducted;
- Consulted with staff of Arts NT, the Theatre Board and key stakeholders in the field both in NT and, where appropriate, elsewhere;
- Analysed a range of ideas on these matters which been canvassed prior to and during this study within the NT and elsewhere;
- Identified and analysed proposals/options for development, partnerships and collaborations that might be entered into for this purpose, and which might have a material bearing on the growth and sustainability of the theatre sector in the NT;
- Having regard to the likely financial and other resources available, proposed a range of options and a timeframe for their implementation and, to the extent possible, tested these.

## 4. The Context

Demonstrably, the circumstances of the NT in size, population density and distribution, geography, climate, culture and history are vastly different from those of most other parts of Australia. It may be that organisations and processes which are the mainstay of performance elsewhere are unsuitable or unsustainable there. On the other hand, it may be that structures and infrastructure that have worked in comparable places may be adaptable to NT or it may simply be that the Territory needs to grow its own solutions to its very special conditions.

The Northern Territory is a complex place – an enormous land mass of 1.4M km<sup>2</sup> with a just over 200,000 inhabitants. It is a place of immense climatic and physical contrasts and renowned worldwide for its spectacular natural beauty and as the epicentre of the contemporary Aboriginal art industry. Climate dictates that arts activity peaks in the Dry season and tapers off sharply in the Wet.

The Northern Territory Government funds twenty seven nonprofit arts organisations on an annual or multi-year basis through its Key Arts Organisations program. Most of these are service providers and are chiefly located in either Darwin or Alice Springs. There is no further NTG arts funding program for independent producers, who can only apply for a maximum of \$15,000 in project funds through Arts NT or rely on the Australia Council and other sources to support larger creative ventures.

The Territory hosts Charles Darwin University (CDU) with campuses in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs. CDU does not offer courses in either dance or drama although it introduced a Bachelor of Creative Arts in 2008 and has long had undergraduate courses in classical and contemporary music and the fine arts.

With little regional a structure and statistically exceptionally low levels of investment in arts and culture by local government arts, specific funding sources are limited to Arts NT (on behalf of the Northern Territory Government), the Australia Council for the Arts and in some measure other federal programs such as the National Arts and Crafts Industry Support (NACIS) program for Indigenous art centres, Playing, Visions and Festivals Australia.

Northern Territory Key Arts Organisations are predominantly funded through a combination of Australia Council and Northern Territory funds, where possible through harmonised arrangements. In 2007, the Australia Council through *artsupport* introduced a NT based manager who has assisted organisations to source funding from philanthropic sources. This position is based at Arts NT in Darwin. There is currently no state chapter of the Australia Business Arts Foundation in the Northern Territory and in general, corporate sponsorship is low.

## 5. The Performing Arts in the Northern Territory

Recruitment, development and retention of a pool of skilled theatre artists pose a major problem in the Territory in a context of low levels of overall activity, short seasons and limited touring opportunities. A small market necessitates short runs with little export potential. The kind of investment needed for longer development processes and skills and infrastructure support for national touring and marketing are largely lacking. The absence of tertiary training also means there is no body of recent graduates feeding local theatre practice.

Currently, no producer has formal links with any of the small number of presenting venues. Many Territory performances such as the Festivals, the Darwin Symphony and Tracks Dance make the most of the dependable 'peak' climate by programming site specific and outdoor works.

Major national productions that have been developed in or with the Northern Territory and presented successfully on the national stage such as *Ngapartji Ngapartji* (Big hART from an Alice Springs base) or *Crying Baby* (with Marrugeku and Stalker) and have strong cross border connections and national and/or interstate development and funding support.

Accordingly with no major 'State' theatre company, few independent producers and severely limited infrastructure support, arts funding dollars for theatre are spread thinly and the among the questions posed to this review were included: are investments and support structures at present appropriate to the Northern Territory's needs and aspirations? Is the modeling of Northern Territory structures on interstate models appropriate? And what can be learned from experience to date, and how should limited funding be best expended for maximum effect?

## 6. Key Questions

In addition to those questions posed specifically in the terms of reference, discussion in the course of the review raised others which are canvassed in this report in a variety of ways.

They include: what cross border opportunities exist for NT theatre-makers which might enrich and extend their work, offer it a longer life span and/or create circumstances for partnerships beyond the home base? How might access to the acquisition of professional theatre skills be developed in a situation where the main tertiary educator does not offer specific training in the theatre field? Are there other teaching institutions or training models that might be brought into the loop? Where might there be other good regional theatre models working considering? What other means of collaboration, production and distribution have been trialled in NT that might be worthy of investigation?

Clearly, there are collaborations which can introduce skills, experience and, by extension, training into the Territory but which also offer a wider, possibly even a worldwide platform for NT artists outside of it. For instance, do either the Marrugeku the Big h-ART *Ngapartji Ngapartji* projects offer potential models? What lessons might be learned from these? Are there practices worth adopting or avoiding or opportunities to be created?

What might sustainability look like in NT in five, ten, twenty years? In that context, is the concept of “companies” relevant in NT? What role might independent producers, festivals and arts centres play in a changed theatrical landscape? And finally: where is the market in all of this?

## 7. Methodology

In building this report, the Consultant:

- Reviewed all relevant written matter, policy documents, reports, assessments, documentation and other related material that shed light on past practice and had a bearing on the development of new strategies;
- Conducted an analysis of these and built a matrix for further investigation and consultation;
- Invited written submissions from persons in the NT and beyond whose experience, views, culture or location might have a bearing on this task;
- Consulted key stakeholders in the field within NT. Some opted also to make written submissions or supply written material as well as having face-to-face consultation, individually and in groups;
- Developed and shared an Options Paper with Arts NT and the Theatre Board as work in progress and tested it with them;
- Identified and consulted with a small group of key arts interlocutors as a reference group from elsewhere in Australia such as producers and presenters with knowledge and experience of NT or other regional enterprise or whose practice might have some bearing on development there or who have engaged in past collaborations and test emerging strategies with them either collectively or individually; and
- Researched and reviewed the likely range of cross border opportunities and collaborations for NT theatre artists including what has been successful what not and how best to access them.

## 8. Executive Summary

The great strength of the Northern Territory's theatre is its diversity and plurality. These are not, however, reflected either in the support mechanisms available to it or in the funding patterns or market development plans necessary to underwrite it. A resolution of those disconnects must be a priority in the development of new sector-wide strategies.

The future success and sustainability of the sector will be based on a small number of key factors. Paradoxically, perhaps, the most fundamental of these is a restatement and recommitment to its own identity and a re-affirmation of the Territory's practice as an exemplar and potential national centre of excellence in regional theatre. That should not be as a pale imitation of what happens in large cities elsewhere, but as a robust, creative locus of work with its own voice, telling its own unique stories.

This will be achieved most readily by building on the practice of the many independent producers and producing artists which the Territory enjoys rather than confining them in a single model. That will, in turn, be accomplished most effectively through the evolution of structures capable of responding to and nurturing the plurality of vision and practice. This contrasts with the more conventional "top down" model of theatre companies evolved elsewhere, but applied unevenly and to date with limited success in the Territory.

Many organisations which have been the mainstay of theatre practice in NT are in a state of flux. Others, of more recent origin, are re-examining their role and seeking to reinvent themselves. Some may have reached the end of their productive life. Meanwhile, still others are in conditions of growth and expansion and planning new ventures. In an arts ecology this has how it should be.

Two years ago the Theatre Board of the Australia Council issued a call for practitioners to "make it new". Those in the Northern Territory are well placed to respond. While the sector is experiencing flux, it has also expressed demand for change. Re-invention has led to calls to merge the functions of existing organisations in creative ways. This report endorses those calls and recommends that they lead to the creation of new theatre producing and presenting hubs in Alice Springs and Darwin. These hubs must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate indigenous and non indigenous artists as well as those working in cross cultural and intercultural forms in ways that conventional theatre companies have struggled to achieve.

At the same time, presenting agencies such as arts centres and festivals are exploring ways to invest in the development of new work and its presentation and promotion across the Territory and across the country. This report endorses those moves and recommends that they be supported and even extended.

Those initiatives have the potential to build capacity in the Territory and through that raise standards, expand the market and thereby engender sustainable employment. They are the three bases on which the sector can truly develop. .

Skills acquisition will be crucial and this report offers strategies for that. But the beneficiaries are not just the sector itself. Such programs can also contribute to the development of life skills and work skills that can be applied across the employment

spectrum. In a region of vast tourist potential, training offered through the theatre arts may also benefit the entertainment industry generally, events and event management, hospitality, tourism, community and regional leadership, communication and negotiation, small business management and independently employed or self employed persons. Properly deployed, the ramifications of this for the Territory's economy are considerable.

But much of the input to this review was about creating supply. The Northern Territory theatre also needs to grow demand. The Territory's burgeoning tourism industry offers as yet untapped opportunities for market-driven demand in both indigenous and non indigenous performance enterprises. These have the capacity to create a for-profit theatre dimension parallel to the non-profit and, in an ideal world, cross subsidise it. The report urges commercial analysis of these prospects with tourism providers.

Just as practitioners need to explore new market opportunities, so government agencies must find new and more flexible modes of support which are responsive to the evolving needs of the sector. This report recommends specifically the introduction of four such funds and urges that three of them be devolved for re-granting to entities close to the action. Meanwhile, the Territory requires time and stability to adapt to and absorb these changes. It is vital that Arts NT and the various departments of the Australia Council work together to evolve a plan for this purpose so that in the 2010-2012 triennium the theatre sector in NT can enjoy and prosper under a coherent integrated multiyear funding and enabling plan which harmonises Federal and Territory programs.

Throughout the report it can be seen how interconnected the elements of investment, development of product, exploitation of product are; how these feed into the development and retention of the skills base and out of that growth in employment opportunity. Consequently, there will be an elevation in standards leading to expansion in the market and thereby the ripple effect of diversifying the life and attractions of the Northern Territory as a good place to live, do business and make theatre.

## 9. Key Findings

The findings set out below are the formal recommendations of the review. There is other commentary in the report which suggests courses of action that might be followed either by individuals or organisations in certain circumstances. To the extent that these are taken up will be a matter for judgment by them

The recommendations which follow fall into three classes though they are not grouped as such: There are those which could be regarded as administrative decisions and might, without significant investment, be implemented almost immediately. The review of Key Arts Organisations funding procedure, the creation of a skills register, the use and support of spaces in Alice Springs and Darwin are amongst these.

There are those which could be implemented in the short-to-medium term and with modest investment such as the training recommendations, Darwin Festival's creative producer and the small grant programs. Or could be undertaken to some degree, with a reallocation of existing funding arrangements such as the two hub developments.

Finally, there are those which deal with medium-to-longer term strategic planning in which various stakeholders need to collaborate on big picture answers to big picture needs. Often these are cross-border issues or involve other jurisdictions where inevitably the timeframe will be longer.

### Recommendations

1: That the theatre sector in the Northern Territory continue to be valued and supported as a focus and centre of excellence in regional theatre with its own unique practice and strengths, giving voice to the stories and aspirations of its indigenous and non indigenous artists and communities.

2: That Darwin Theatre Company no longer provides an appropriate vehicle for the advancement of the regional theatre mode in the Northern Territory and the fulfillment of its skills and aspirations in the future development of the theatre sector in the Territory.

3: That the current and future strength and enterprise of the theatre sector in the Northern Territory lies with the work of independent producers, whether incorporated or unincorporated, and notably in the contribution they can make individually and collectively to the realisation of their work with and through the development of producing hubs in their respective centres.

4: That the Darwin Festival's proposal for an in-house creative producer be endorsed and adopted by both the Australia Council and Arts NT both as an crucial test case for future such development in the Territory, and as the important initiative in its own right.

5: That the Darwin Entertainment Centre's plan for greater participation and investment in the creative development and presentation of local performing arts product be welcomed and adopted, even extended by its Board both in its own programming interest and as laudable initiative in its own right.

6: That the Northern Territory's unique regional theatre practice requires unique solutions which are best realised through the development of producing/presenting theatre hubs in the two main cities rather than the maintenance of conventional "theatre company" models

7: That these hubs have as their core business curating, producing and co-producing the work of theatre artists living and working in NT, entering into partnerships to present and promote that work throughout the Territory and beyond; elevating the skills base, exposure and employment prospects of NT theatre artists; offering skilled production, presentation, management and marketing to their work; and acting as a focus of critical dialogue that contributes to the raising of standards of work and of appreciation of it

8: That the proposed merger of the Alice Desert Festival and RedHot Arts be endorsed and adopted as the basis for a new producing, presenting and facilitating hub for Central Australia in line with the objectives outlined in recommendation 7.

9: That, within the next twelve months, this emergent Central Australian hub enter into a joint strategic planning exercise with Araluen Arts so as to ensure the most seamless support for and delivery of the work of artists and producers in their region to the public of Alice Springs, the Northern Territory and beyond.

10: That Arts NT convene and facilitate a joint planning group including but not limited to the Brown's Mart Trust, Top End Marketing and select independent producers, to develop a plan for the integration of the key roles of producing, presenting, training and management currently undertaken in various degrees by each of them separately with the aim of creating a single new producing, presenting and facilitating hub for Darwin in line with the objectives outlined in recommendation 7.

11: That in consideration of this, the Company A/Company B model, as outlined, be the preferred basis for this new entity.

12: That in developing their strategic plans, Northern Territory theatre practitioners balance their preoccupation with the growth of product supply with a critical examination and strategies for growing demand, especially from non-arts based markets.

13: That Arts NT convene a task force, crucially including public tourism authorities and commercial tourism providers, to analyse the opportunities of the NT theatre sector to engage with and contribute to both indigenous and non-indigenous for-profit tourism needs and develop strategies for that purpose.

14: That Arts NT, ideally in association with another government or non-government small business development program, trial two "enterprise" fellowships per year (one indigenous and one non indigenous) commencing in 2010 aimed at helping the recipient develop a sustainable performing arts enterprise in which they buy the time to research partnerships, build skills, extend networks, seek investors and test their case.

15: That Arts NT, possibly in collaboration with the Australia Council, create a fund in the order of initially \$50,000, commencing in 2009 to seed new projects and that these be made on a "matching" basis with other funds secured by the recipient and that this fund be devolved to the proposed new theatre hubs for re-granting. .

16: That Arts NT create a fund again in the region of \$50,000 commencing in 2009 available for strategic investment/partnerships where the demonstration of joint private/public sector action could make a difference to a project's success and that these be made on a "matching" basis with other funds secured by the recipient and that this fund be devolved to the proposed new hubs for re-granting.

17: That Arts NT review the process by which the Key Arts Organisation category is applied to ensure that both the grant levels can be genuinely sustaining rather than inhibiting both to both the recipient company as such and to its artistic program recognising that this may result in fewer being funded to succeed rather than more to fail.

18: That Arts NT review the application of its "on notice" procedure so that it does not financially inhibit the recipient company from undertaking the very improvement in its practice that it is intended to achieve.

19: That the Australia Council's Theatre Board and Market Development and Community Partnerships programs work together to ensure that to the extent that the reinvention and potential amalgamations of both TEAM and RedHOT Arts with other bodies provides new and continuing services to theatre entities and practitioners, they do so in a way that meshes with the Australia Council's support which they receive for their artistic programs.

20: That these, in turn, work with Arts NT to ensure that there is a seamless delivery of support to the resultant hub organisations so that they are not crippled from the outset by disconnects in funding categories, timing or rationale.

21: That during 2008/2009 Arts NT and the Australia Council work to forge a new strategic partnership between them which takes account of the very special needs and circumstances of the Northern Territory to support and resource the theater sector there by means of a special joint funding framework for the 2010-2012 triennium aimed at underpinning the proposed the new hubs and helping them to stabilise themselves and launch their programs.

22: That the Northern Territory's participation in the Theatre to the Edge be maintained as a core function of, in the first instance the new Darwin hub, and extended where possible to Central Australian participation as need or opportunity arises.

23: That Arts NT re-enter into dialogue with Arts Queensland and, where necessary other stakeholders such as Playing Australia, to ensure continued and increased investment in the Theatre to the Edge touring consortium

24: That Arts NT continue its vital support for Art Back NT Arts Touring as the most critical mechanism for the efficient and cost effective delivery of theatre product across the Territory and to maintain its nationwide services and product advocacy beyond the Territory.

25: That Arts NT investigate and implement, at the earliest opportunity, the most appropriate platform for an online, time-sensitive, performing arts skills register.

26: That the emergent theatre hubs in Darwin and Alice Springs, in consultation with Arts NT, commission a performing arts skills audit and needs analysis which might perhaps be undertaken by CHARTTES and with support from areas such as DEEWR, DEET and CDU with the intention of creating a skills plan focusing on the use and employment of resident theatre skills, the role of national theatre training providers and the delivery of courses locally.

27: That the emergent theatre hubs be responsible for identifying training priorities and providers with whom they would work to acquire suitably accredited courses to target and match trainees with training opportunities and provide scholarships to underwrite their participation, resourced by a training fund devolved to them by Arts NT.

28: That as critical resource to the theatre sector in Central Australia the purpose-built rehearsal room of the Araluen Arts Centre be returned to its performing arts use as a matter of urgency.

29: That, as the longer term issues of the proposed Darwin hub are developed, Arts NT undertakes, as a matter of urgency, to rationalise the financial base of the Brown's Mart as venue by increasing its operating grant both to ensure adequate staffing to deliver its core services and to compensate for rental foregone through the current provision of free office space to designated arts bodies.

## 10. The Current Situation

The theatre sector in the Northern Territory is not large but it is lusty. While there has not been a comprehensive plan, that has not prevented a great deal of activity taking place and some real accomplishments. Notwithstanding, most activity has been poorly or at best unevenly resourced and as a result much of the work has been underdeveloped.

Like most branches of the arts in NT, theatre has grown from a base of community enthusiasm, becoming professional only in recent years. Until comparatively recently, Darwin Theatre Company was the only funded organisation. Though that has changed, it has placed an unreasonable focus on this company, its successes and failures and an overemphasis on its role as a make-or-break element. This has not been helpful to the company nor to the sector as a whole.

In an industry as new and small as NT's, it is inevitable that the walls between organisations and artistic practices are more porous than in places where a greater division of labour is possible. Companies play many roles and arts workers, move readily between them. On the positive side, this is a reflection of a strong, collaborative spirit and a tendency to jump in and do the job when it needs to be done. On the other, it reflects an acute skills shortage, an uncertainty of mission and often a confusion of identity. Thus, when the term "producers" is used here, clearly some of these also present or self-present. "Presenters" like festivals occasionally produce. "Youth arts" crosses all these and provides services beyond a conventional youth arts model. "Service organizations" likewise are multifaceted and some are in the throes of change. Here are some of the key characteristics of the scene in overview

<p><b>Strengths</b>  Diverse population  Diverse cultures  Diverse practice  Strong artistic values  Talented individuals  Hard work  Some independent producers  Making new work  Great and unique stories  Some good partnerships  Determination</p>	<p><b>Opportunities</b>  Build new market based enterprises  New Creative producing models  New presenting hubs  Cross cultural exploration  Creating demand  Growing consistent employment  Build demand through cross border partnership  Build skills through practice  Build skills through cross border partnerships</p>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b>  Fragile infrastructure  Dependency model  No content development plan  Little expressed demand  No continuity of attendance  Poor marketing  Small and shallow skills base  Poor and inconsistent resourcing  No ongoing training facilities  Reliance on outmoded business models  Small market base  Scattered population  Fragile standards  Little national benchmarking</p>	<p><b>Threats</b>  Population grows without theatre-going habit  Public indifference  NT government loses interest  Failure to break dependency model  Low expectations  Silo mentality  Popular music competitors take live entertainment market  Visual arts takes tourism market  Event promoters become dominant entertainment providers</p>

## 11. Producers

### 11.1 Darwin Theatre Company (DTC)

Since much discussion has centered on this organization, it seems logical to begin with the Darwin Theatre Company (DTC). This was established as Darwin Theatre Group in 1957, an amateur theatrical society focused on the presentation of contemporary text-based works. The Company's long history has seen it operate in numerous ways and with fluctuating funding and sponsorship.

DTC is unique in NT and the region as being for decades the only funded professional theatre company and has long been a point of reference for theatre workers and enthusiasts relocating to Darwin. It believes that the regions have an important contribution to make to the development of a strong contemporary Australian culture and that it can best accomplish this by telling Territory stories as widely as possible. To achieve this it has sought to develop an interpretive understanding of the NT community; to retain NT's most capable artists and emerging artists by providing employment and development opportunities; to develop the alliances locally, nationally and internationally, and to optimise its resources and opportunities.

While some other regional theatre companies have created 'mini state theatres' DTC argues that it has adopted an innovative model, providing opportunities for professional, emerging and community-based artists alike throughout the NT to engage in theatre activity and produce quality theatre. It stresses that it collaborates rather than competes with local producers. This model aims not only to nurture local talent and the telling of local stories but to remain fundamentally connected with local audiences. DTC further argues that, in this, it has accorded with the objectives of the Theatre Board's 2006 *Make It New* paper in which certain companies might take the position of '*an acknowledged centre of excellence in their particular form of practice*'.

By these means, DTC has sought to embrace the role as a 'producer hub', generating opportunities for NT artists, the artform and expanding audiences for the benefit of the region and the broader Australian context. In the past triennium, its goal has been to consolidate its professional working environment to provide a reliable level of professional expertise and talent in the NT allowing for even more professional collaborations. DTC has also forged solid links with companies in regional Queensland through the Theatre to the Edge (TTTE) network, expanding opportunities for local theatre arts practitioners and local audiences.

DTC has a long funding history with both the NT Government and the Australia Council. It is currently applying for triennial funding from Theatre Board for 2009-2011 and is annually funded through Arts NT. DTC has consistently lost funding with Arts NT since the introduction of NT's competitive funding framework for key arts organisations in 2006. It is currently on notice from Arts NT and is now funded at barely half its 2005 level. As can be seen in the chart which follows, this represents a loss of \$22,000 in 2006, exacerbated by the loss of its rehearsal facilities in 2007 and the further loss of \$70,000 in 2008. Meanwhile, the Company has steadily increased its funding from the Theatre Board throughout this same period, securing program funding for the first time since a loss of triennial status in the mid nineties. DTC also secured project grants in the interim. Annual funding is used to employ a full-time Artistic Director (John du Feu), a full-time General Manager (until Feb 2008), a part-time bookkeeper, a marketing project

officer and casual staff as required. The Company currently has offices at Brown's Mart Reserve in the Darwin CBD and storage spaces at Winnellie.

DTC runs a core annual program of three productions being a mixture of work made in Darwin usually co-produced with others and exchanges with other NT and Queensland companies as well as touring, outreach, industry development and community activities.

### DTC Core Funding 2006 - 2008

Year	Source	Core	Project
2006	Arts NT	192,000	
	Theatre Board	50,000	
	Theatre Board (Minyerri)		50,000
2007	Arts NT	170,000	
	Theatre Board	55,000	
	NT Community Benefits Fund (play readings)		3,000
	Regional Arts Fund (Interstate touring)		20,000
2008	Arts NT	100,000	
	Theatre Board	74,000	
	DEEWR (Minyerri)		26,000
	NT DEET (Minyerri)		15,000
	(Rio Tinto Minyerri)		30,000
	OzCo Community Partnerships (Minyerri)		5,000
	Arts NT Remote Festivals Fund (Minyerri)		10,000
	NT Community Benefits Fund (Workshops)		2,000
Darwin City Council (Tracy)		3,000	

In the past triennium DTC has built a strong relationship with Minyerri, an isolated Aboriginal community near Roper Bar. In collaboration with CHARTTES Training Advisory Service the company has developed the project in training terms and worked with CHARTTES to assemble an impressive \$85,000 from state, federal and corporate sources for that purpose. With this, DTC hires artists, each of whom will have a training function, to develop a performance event with peripheral roles in lighting and sound, event planning, management and marketing, multi-media documentation, arts and crafts marketing and screen-printing. The continuation of the Minyerri project into the next triennium would result in a template for ongoing creative interactions with indigenous communities across the Northern Territory with a longer term vision of even greater indigenous involvement in the theatre arts.

In seeking to resource the theatre sector, DTC has taken other steps to increase employment for artists. In the past three years, it has successfully tendered for additional non-theatre employment for actors, gaining contracts with two departments of the NT Police and also with the Commonwealth Defence Department in 2007, totaling \$48,000. These contracts require management work from the Company covered by a 20% administration fee.

DTC has also worked to reinvigorate regular touring of the NT regions by the Company. . In 2008 it successfully toured Business Unusual's show *Tracy* which was already set to tour North Queensland under the TTTE banner and Michael Watts' play *Not Like Beckett* in a co-production with Red Dust Theatre through the centre to Alice Springs.

Perhaps most enterprising project of all is DTC's participation in Theatre to the Edge (TTTE). This is one of the most imaginative developments for the growth and exchange of original theatre work made in regional circumstances that has been evolved since the commencement of public arts funding in Australia. While many hands and minds have contributed to it, the kudos should go to Just Us Theatre Ensemble (JUTE) in Cairns for so vigorously pursuing it and Arts Queensland for sustaining it. Properly managed and resourced, it has the potential to transform the way in which theatre is nurtured and grown in Northern Australia and to offer a paradigm for its support elsewhere in regional Australia. NT companies should be congratulated for their part in extending it to the Territory.

Essentially, four regional theatres form the core of this consortium. These are DTC, JUTE (Cairns), Tropic Sun (Townsville) and Crossroad Arts (Mackay). Peripheral companies are Red Dust Theatre (Alice Springs) with the intention that Theatre Kimberley (Broome) should eventually also take part. In a nutshell, TTTE means that each component company can extend the life of its productions by touring them to the other centres as part of the seasons there. Thus, they extend the artists' employment and the life of the work. At the same time each company incorporates into its season the work, standards and voices of its partner companies from other parts of Northern Australia. In the process, all are contributing to the raising of standards through benchmarking against each other and the through critical response of a range of different audiences.

To date DTC has co-produced the following works under this banner: *The Boathouse* by Angela Murphy (with JUTE); *Not Like Beckett* by Michael Watts (with Red Dust Theatre); *Constance Drinkwater and the Final Days of Somerset* by Stephen Carleton (with JUTE and Tropic Sun); *Othello* by William Shakespeare (re-staging of their Darwin production with Tropic Sun). Later in 2008, it will co-produce *The Seven Australian Deadly Sins* by seven writers, three of whom are NT writers (with JUTE and Knock-em-Down Theatre) and in 2009 its plans to co-produce *Half Way There* by Mary Anne Butler (also with JUTE and Knock-em-Down Theatre). There have of course been other TTTE co-productions in which DTC has not been involved though in addition to this, it presents the work of TTTE companies in Darwin wherever possible.

In fact, all of DTC's productions are now co-productions in one way or the other - either working with local producers or else working with one or other of the TTTE companies. The Company believes this accords well with the concept of the artistic hub as described in the *Make it New* strategy.

As well, DTC was approached recently by Cavenagh Theatre, an organisation even older than DTC, to consider taking over the running of their amateur group which is in decline. This could be regarded as an opportunity for DTC which might without great effort absorb Cavenagh's organisation and assist it to achieve its goals while at the same time regaining its own pro-am base.

All this is a complex, at times baffling, portfolio of activity and while each component may be worthwhile in itself, is not clear why all have been attempted. It is hard to manage such disparate projects from a small and shrinking financial base. Moreover, it is obvious that the direction in which DTC's leadership has taken it, no doubt in the belief that it was necessary for its survival and the sector's growth, has left behind much of its original support base. Many in Darwin feel dispossessed.

DTC acknowledges that it has failed to sell these changes effectively to its stakeholders. This has undoubtedly contributed to its present dilemma. It plans to consolidate its work and the gains it has made in the coming triennium. One wonders if it may be too late.

### **11.2 Knock-em-Down Theatre (KEDT)**

Founded by long-term collaborators Stephen Carleton and Gail Evans, KEDT is an unincorporated, independent producer of new work based in Darwin. In 2007 the company celebrated ten years of professional local production, adding Mary Anne Butler as co-artistic director. KEDT has a reputation for creating professional theatre of original NT works which tell NT stories, and creating professional opportunities for NT theatre practitioners.

KEDT survives without dedicated funding, on a project-by-project basis. Its latest project, *Half Way There* by Mary Anne Butler is a producer/co-presenter project between KEDT, JUTE in Cairns, the Darwin Festival and DTC which will act as local presenters. *Half Way There* goes into production in 2009, with KEDT retaining full artistic control. The script received development funding from the Australia Council's Theatre Board and Arts NT, and production funding from the Theatre Board.

KEDT's proposed three-year program (2009-2011) which is entirely dependent on funding will comprise works written by its artistic directorship team: Mary Anne Butler, Stephen Carleton and Gail Evans. This work will consist of new commissions for all writers, plus seasons of the writers' extant work new to Territory audiences. This would fulfill the Company's mission, which commits KEDT to the production of new work that provides employment for NT artists, but which also draws upon national skills designed to contribute to the development of the Territory's small professional theatre scene. Equally conditional on funding is KEDT's proposal to return the End-of-Year Cabaret as a biennial event. This popular project will again draw on the contributions of an array of Territory writers, improvisers, comedians and musicians.

In the Company's second programming triennium (2012-2015), commissions for new work will be broadened to include other Territory and nationally-recognised Australian playwrights. While all shows included in the first triennium will be written by the KEDT core ensemble, all of them will employ other Territory arts workers. Some will import national talent (directors, designers, and dramaturges) to augment the quality of the work and develop the skills base of the Territory-based contributors; others will be co-produced with NT and interstate companies.

In 2009, guest dramaturge Peter Matheson will provide in-kind dramaturgy to the development of new scripts through the first year of the triennium as part of his Australia Council creative fellowship. Skills development processes (attendance at conferences and presentation of workshops, etc) will also comprise part of the Company's core business.

Again depending on funding outcomes, KEDT intends to present two professional theatre productions to Territory audiences each year, and to develop at least one more work contemporaneously for ensuing years. It will import talent where necessary, always holding the development of a core professional NT-based theatre pool as its central tenet. And it will seek to build upon the company's already excellent relationship with other NT (DTC, Corrugated Iron, Red Dust) and Queensland theatre companies (JUTE, Tropic Sun) in an increasingly ambitious plan to see Territory work take on national status. The company's core business will focus on Darwin, but its reach will extend Territory-wide where possible.

### **11.3 Red Dust Theatre (RDT)**

Based in Alice Springs, RDT is an emerging company. Since 2001, it has grown from a local project-driven enterprise to become an incorporated organisation with a reputation for producing dynamic professional theatre. In its short history, RDT has toured to the Adelaide and Darwin Festivals and regionally through NT. RDT's key artistic and business role is Artistic Director, Danielle Loy. As a result of an NT grant of \$50,000, 2007 was the first year that RDT has had full time employee working year round.

Since its formation RDT has undertaken 9 theatre productions of original works by Central Australian based writers: *Trainedancing*, *Dust*, *Under the Raintree*, *Waiting for Grace*, *Justice*, *Birds in a Cage*, *Barracking*, *As you wish* and *The Magic Coolomon*.

RDT strives to be accessible and inclusive of all peoples and to produce quality performance and, as a result, has achieved strong and consistently increasing local audience support. The Company is committed to fostering theatre that expresses unique stories with a Central Australian flavour and voice and sharing this initially with the rest of Australia and ultimately with the world. It intends to continue its focus on cross-cultural issues pertinent to the unique environment of Central Australia. Through its history of producing new works of this nature, Red Dust Theatre has aimed to reflect and enhance the cultural and creative aspirations of the Central Australian community and thereby positively contribute to cross cultural relations throughout Australia

Highlights of 2007 included the premiere of *The Magic Coolamon* in Alice Springs Desert Park. Written by singer/song writer Warren H. Williams, it is claimed as Central Australia's first indigenous musical and after sellout performances in Alice Springs is planned to be reworked and revived for other opportunities. As mentioned earlier, 2007 also saw the co-production of *Not Like Beckett* between RDT and DTC and its subsequent tour to Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Mataranka, Pine Creek and Katherine, as well as RDT's first solo tour of *Barracking* by Jane Leonard and Steve Gumerungi Hodder. This opened at the remote indigenous community of Ti Tree and went on to Ali Curong, Timber Creek, Tennant Creek and Katherine as well as appearing at the Darwin Festival and in Alice Springs. The Company also conducts a short play festival called *Bite Sized Theatre* and runs technical, acting and directing workshops, a community focused performance laboratory and seeks actively to commission new work.

RDT is annually funded as a Key Arts Organisation by Arts NT and has received project funding from the Australia Council (Literature and Theatre Boards) and corporate sponsorship. RDT proposes to apply for Emerging Key Organisation status with the Theatre Board from 2010 when that category commences

### **11.4 Business Unusual (BUU)**

BUU is an independent professional company based in Darwin, formed in 1997 creating work that has toured NT remote communities, NT regions, South Australia and Queensland.

BUU is committed to producing original work that encourages creative collaboration; to exploring theatre form and excellence in production values by developing and using a combination of mediums such as mask text, puppetry and visual theatre together with original music. It seeks to create employment opportunity for local professional artists; to promote a sense of heritage and shared history for the culturally diverse population of Darwin; and combine arts professionals across national and international boundaries

BUU works with a pool of Darwin-based performers and artists and collaborates with professional Melbourne-based theatre makers to create work of a high production quality. Nicola Fearn is the Artistic Director of the company. BUU had toured extensively in remote communities including communities across east and west Arnhem Land, Gove Peninsula, Alice Springs, Batchelor, The Tiwi Islands and Groote Eylandt performing to a high proportion of aboriginal audiences.

Its most recent production *Tracy* in 2008 directed and written by Sarah Cathcart with Nicky Fearn as co-writer and performer, was co-produced with DTC and presented in Darwin and toured Queensland and NT. The Melbourne-based production company, Blackbird Productions is currently co-producing *Tracy* for a proposed national and international tour. *The Pearler* 2004 also directed by Sarah Cathcart, was presented at Brown's Mart and *Crab Clab* in 2000-2001 had a Darwin season and through Playing Australia went on to tour South Australia, Queensland and regional NT. Earlier productions include *Filling In Time* again co-produced with DTC which was a site-specific production at Fannie Bay Gaol Museum and *Just Another Day* whose Darwin season was followed by a NT remote communities tour and *The Fine Greenbird*, a small-scale touring show for regional and remote audiences which had an NT schools tour.

The Company has received project funding from the Australia Council, Arts NT and Darwin City Council as well as Theatre to the Edge touring initiative and touring support from Artback NT.

### **11.5 Tracks Dance**

Darwin based Tracks Dance is widely regarded as the leading performing arts company of the Northern Territory, known for its large-scale outdoor performances that bring together participants from diverse cultures and artistic disciplines. Tracks works with professional artists and community members to produce inclusive and dynamic dance performances. Tracks has on occasion produced 'text based' dramatic movement works and previously operated under the by-line 'Dance Theatre Performance' Arguably more than any other performance based company in NT, it has developed a physical aesthetic which is particular to the current cultural reality of the Territory.

Tracks' origins lie in a community dance program which was established at Brown's Mart in 1988. Housed under the same roof were other arts organisations such as Darwin Theatre Company, Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre, and Brown's Mart Community Arts. The dance program worked across all areas. Tracks itself was officially launched in 1994 and began to develop a reputation both in the Territory and nationally as working within a particular genre, that is, cross-cultural, large scale, strong movement with visuals, and with a strong connection between place and culture. *4WD - Sweat, Dust and Romance* was a classic Tracks' performance that placed the company firmly on the Australian cultural map and established the reputation of Tracks as a formidable movement-based company.

The process of creating a Tracks performance is unique. Since its inception, the Company has been using Community Cultural Development practices in its work. The Company's artistic product follows extensive collaboration with artists, organisations and communities, usually over many years. In addition to its large scale outdoor and smaller indoor productions, its work has also been characterized by its many rich residencies

and collaborations with indigenous communities and across the multicultural spectrum. Among its recent signature productions have been *You Dance Funny*, *Without Sea* and *Angels of Gravity*.

Tracks has had two co-artistic directors since inception (David McMicken and Tim Newth); employs a full time General Manager and has a small rehearsal studio adjacent to its office space co-managed by Ausdance NT. The Company is triennially funded (2006-2008) by both the Arts NT and the Australia Council's Dance Board.

### **11.6 Other Independent Theatre Work**

There are as well many other artist initiated projects which have occurred over the years too numerous to relate here. The current work of indigenous dance artist Gary Lang in Darwin in which has passed through various development stages with the assistance of DEC and the Darwin Festival where it will be premiered and cross-cultural work of Dani Powell of Red Shoes in Alice Springs are just two of those one could point to in this area. All have demonstrated the need for a host to nurture their work. Some have found it, but to an extent by accident and when found has not always been coherent or timely.

There is, too, the work made by companies in the Territory who are not themselves of the Territory but which have at various times made a major commitment of time, talent and resources to it. Between 1995 and 2000, the Stalker/Marrugeku company based in Sydney had a series of extended residencies in Oenpelli in West Arnhemland which led to the creation of two large scale, site-specific, physical theater works *Mimi* and *Crying Baby*. These productions – collaborations between the traditional people of the region, urban indigenous artists and non-indigenous artists were first presented in their community and went on to tour Australia and the world. Probably no works of NT origin have been seen in so many countries to such large audiences over such a long period of time.

More recently there has been the phenomenon of *Ngapartji Ngapartji* by Big hART. - a group of professional artists, arts workers and producers who have been making work together for 15 years – creating theatre, film, television, painting, photography, dance, new media and radio throughout Australia.

Big hART most often works in small communities around the country, with people experiencing the effects of marginalisation in regional, rural, and geographically or socially isolated communities. Big hART experiments with the process of making art with such groups over three-year periods, honing the quality of their work, which is showcased in national and international festivals and media. This often creates new opportunities for participants, helps build skills in communities, assists regional development and helps foster a more inclusive Australian culture.

Conceived in 2004 based on research undertaken since 1999 *Ngapartji Ngapartji* is a long term, inter-generational language arts project based in Alice Springs has been running on Arrernte country in Alice Springs since early 2005. *Ngapartji Ngapartji* has many layers involving language learning, teaching and maintenance, community development, crime prevention, cross cultural collaboration, creating new literacy training models as well as film, art and theatre making.

The project seeks to highlight the status of indigenous languages and generate a national and international groundswell for maintaining and preserving these languages.

This includes the development of the “ninti site”—an online Pitjantjatjara language and culture site where the young people, assisted by their families and elders, become the language tutors for the national and international audiences of the *Ngapartji Ngapartji* production. This production is a high profile touring theatre work, incorporating film and imagery, and which has been performed in Pitjantjatjara and English across Australia Premiering at Melbourne International Arts Festival in 2006 it since been seen at Sydney Opera House. Perth Festival, The Dreaming Festival in Queensland, Adelaide Cabaret Festival, Sydney Festival, Belvoir St Theatre and returns to NT in 2008.

Neither of these ventures has attracted more than token NT funding, though they both offer fascinating models for future consideration and have made a major contribution to the development of process driven inter-cultural creative development of new theatre work in the Territory. They of course very costly processes running to many hundreds of thousands of dollars largely underwritten by funding from the Major Festivals’ Initiative and Australia Council artform programs. and currently well outside the scope of NT performing arts support.

### **11.7 Superstar Productions**

Superstar Productions is joint venture between Darwin Entertainment Centre (DEC) together with the Darwin Chorale, Darwin Theatre Company and Cavanagh Theatre. Superstar Productions is responsible for the successful staging of productions such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1999), *Les Miserables* (2001), *Fiddler on the Roof* (2003) and *Guys and Dolls* (2005) and *The Sound of Music* (2008)

As the program suggests, Superstar exists to produce and present large scale productions of popular Broadway-type musicals. The original intention was that this would occur every two years. Its productions are regarded as successful and are well attended.

However, the consortium is an uneven one: DEC is clearly the strongest and best resourced of the partners and is perceived increasingly to have done the heavy lifting. Darwin Chorale’s ongoing contribution is its membership and musical skills. But the participation of DTC and Cavenagh has been diminishing, the former no doubt because of its own preoccupations and reduced funding and the latter because the company, by its own acknowledgement, is in decline.

While the Darwin public is entitled and clearly eager to see quality performances of this genre, it is improbable that any commercial promoter would in the foreseeable future bring such productions to the city. Superstar Productions is thus a worthy venture which ought to continue and it is understood that DEC has proposed that it may be better placed to produce a regular community musical in the future.

## 12. Youth Arts

### 12.1 Corrugated Iron Youth Arts (CIYA)

Corrugated Iron Youth Arts (CIYA) was founded in 1984, incorporated in 1998 and exists to expose young people to the arts as audience, participants and performers; develop young people's life skills, artistic skills and confidence through an arts medium; provide an outlet for young people's voice and an opportunity for peer interaction; and promote positive community perceptions of young people and the arts

CIYA began as a youth drama project at Brown's Mart Community Arts (BMCA) in 1983 and took its original name Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre - from the corrugated iron shed used for workshops and rehearsals, down the road from Brown's Mart. In the late 1980s, it soon established a reputation for high quality theatre productions, touring shows across the Territory and collaborating with Tracks and DTC. In 1998, CIYT relocated to the rebuilt Nightcliff Community Centre under a tripartite agreement between BMCA, Darwin City Council and the Northern Territory Government and at the same year incorporated as an association independent from BMCA. Within six months of incorporation, the new association changed its name to Corrugated Iron Youth Arts Inc to reflect a broadening of its arts practice. 2003 saw a return to performing arts as CIYA's core practice with a focus on performance outcomes.

Over time, CIYA has refined its processes for incorporating the diverse experiences of young people in performances. It has broadened and diversified its membership through projects targeting indigenous and marginalised communities. It has strengthened relationships with other local arts companies and non-arts organisations through collaborations and co-productions and has mentored and trained young and emerging artists to develop their own practice and become drivers for CIYA's artistic direction.

CIYA argues that it represents a unique and crucial opportunity for young people to participate in the arts, especially in a community which privileges sport over arts activity and where there are no arts training or study beyond secondary school. Its participants have identified an increase in artistic skills and life skills and claim that it provides opportunities for confidence-building and social interaction. In addition, to young and emerging artists, CIYA is an employer; a source of professional advice; an administering organization; a producer of their work; a meeting place between artists; and an office with facilities.

Local performing arts companies such as DTC and Tracks Dance, see CIYA as an incubator for future artists in their ensembles. Local presenters and producers, including the Darwin Entertainment Centre, Brown's Mart Theatre, Darwin Festival, Darwin Fringe Festival and Artback Arts NT, value CIYA as a developer and producer of new work for local audiences and potentially, audiences across the Territory. CIYA also is a professional access-point to the performing arts for non-arts community organisations including Alternative Education, Larrakia Nation, Melaleuca Centre for Refugee Support and Total Recreation (activities for people with disability).

CIYA is a Key Arts Organisation on triennial arrangements with Arts NT (\$109,846); and funded through the Youth Arts program of Australia Council's Theatre Board (\$58,500)

## **12.2 InCite**

InCite began as an umbrella organisation in 1998 under the name of Alice Springs Youth Arts Group (ASYAG). Formed following a public arts forum facilitated by Arts NT, ASYAG was a response to the need for a vehicle to express young peoples stories in a valid contemporary youth arts cultural context. As ASYAG, it presented youth arts activities on a project basis from 1999 to 2003 and from those beginnings ASYAG has grown to become InCite Youth Arts Inc.

InCite aims to provide confidence building and practical experience to develop youth initiated, original, relevant and innovative arts projects; to maximise opportunities for all young people to participate actively in the cultural life of this community; to provide practice and models of excellence and inspire commitment to the artistic process; and to utilise new technologies in relevant and exciting ways to provide inclusive pathways for youth to contribute to and participate in the arts.

Today, as an incorporated association in rented property in the Alice Springs CBD, InCite focuses on providing accessible and inclusive opportunities for all young people. It sees its key interest holders as being young people aged 8 to 25 including young artists and artworkers; organisations and people who work with young people: the arts and youth sector through schools, community groups and families; diverse and disadvantaged groups such as indigenous, multicultural, same sex attracted youth, youth-at-risk, young people with disabilities; government: and the media. In short all those who can help young people contribute to the expression of their unique, authentic and relevant cultural identity.

InCite aims to provide quality, innovative and relevant youth arts programs offering young people skills and professional development opportunities to express creative views and visions that genuinely speak the stories of young Centralians and to engage, develop, evolve and facilitate models of practice to foster intercultural relationships between young people; to engage community cultural development processes with young people as a valid social mechanism for change, growth and enhancing community identity

InCite's core and operations are funded by the Australia Council for the Arts Annual Program (\$120 000) and by Arts NT as a Key Arts Organisation (\$ 45,000) In addition, it has the following project funding in 2008: Australia Council for the Arts (\$17,495); Arts NT: (\$14,076). NT Sport & Recreation (\$1,287); NT Office of Youth Affairs (\$7,000); NT CBF: \$ 3 000; NT OMA: \$ 750 and from various philanthropic trusts: \$ 36,183 Fee for Service: \$ 33 000 (projected for 2008 calendar year) Other Earned Income: \$5,000

## **12.3 Missing Link**

There has also been a new arrival on the scene in the last two years seeking to revive the classic practice of theatre in education in Darwin. It has yet to demonstrate a clear vision of its work or obtain more than minor funding for it. Opinions today vary greatly about the value of such activity and the principals recognise that as a "stand alone" venture it is almost impossible to sustain. Yet it is the kind of initiative that with appropriate hosting might make a significant contribution to future audience development.

## 13. Presenters

### 13.1 Darwin Festival

The Darwin Festival is recognised locally, nationally and internationally as the premier Festival for the Top End of Australia and as a leader in the Asia Pacific region for its quality, diversity and innovation in arts programming and presentation. Its mission is to profile the Northern Territory as a cultural destination of choice through contributing to the artistic, cultural and economic development of the Top End, while offering opportunities to showcase and interpret the cultural and artistic diversity of the region.

The Festival began as the Bougainvillea Festival in 1976 - a celebration to help rebuild community spirit post Cyclone Tracey. In 1985 it became the Festival of Darwin and started to adopt a greater arts focus. In 2003, Malcolm Blaylock became Artistic Director and the name changed to the Darwin Festival with a corresponding shift in focus to be more in line with other capital city arts festivals that tour in both interstate and international works as well as presenting local works. The current programming themes around indigenous and international work from the local region were established and shortly after it joined the Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals.

The Festival is an incorporated association with a volunteer board of management and has enjoyed significant growth over the last 5 years growing from a \$0.49M event attracting 26 000 attendees in 2002 to a \$1.6 million scale attracting over 70 000 attendees in 2007. The Festival's core funding comes from the NT Government with the Festival recently being granted a three year funding increase taking its base line funding from NTG to approx \$730k per annum. The rest of its income is derived from box office, sponsorship, project grants, philanthropy and local government.

For the last twenty years the Festival's core business has been to present an annual, multi -arts event that strives to offer a balance of local, national and international work. It has now forged a place within the NT and the broader community which adds to the artistic strength and diversity of the Territory and returns both social and economic benefits to the Territory. In particular, a significant part of the Festival's brief is to present local and indigenous works. However, there are few mechanisms for developing new work in the Territory. The Territory does not have the range of funded, producing, small to medium sector organisations that would in other places be natural feeders for Festival presentations.

The arts environment of the Territory is different to that in other states and this has led the Festival to look at its model closely and to consider its role more clearly. Currently, the Festival is funded just to present and while this model functions for the capital city festival in others parts of Australia, it does so from a much higher base line of funding which allows some development work to occur as part of their annual activities. The unique nature of the Territory and the local arts environment means that there is a need to develop a specific and more effective local model that responds to the circumstances there. That has led the festival to contemplate changes which will be detailed later.

### **13.2 Alice Desert Festival**

Alice Desert Festival is a community based Festival which is entering its eighth year in 2008. A spring event every September, the Festival is a showcase of the diversity and quality of the arts as celebrated by the indigenous and non-indigenous communities in Central Australia. There are also a small number of national and international performances and artists, but the Festival attempts to adhere primarily to its grass-roots beginnings.

As each Alice Desert Festival has developed the indigenous content has become deeper and richer with exhibitions youth arts collaborations, indigenous new media works **and** the launch of 'Suburbia-Looking Around' – a joint Gap Youth Centre/National Museum of Australia youth photography project and Big Country, an exhibition of indigenous artists at Gallery Gondwana. Another major event is the Bush Bands Bash where many indigenous bush bands come to Alice Springs to perform in a showcase event, outdoors at the Festival HUB Space. It attracts an audience of about 3,000 indigenous and non-indigenous people who come together symbolically and musically for a harmonious occasion.

As well as a strong visual arts component with an emphasis on Indigenous work, all other creative arts are represented including theatre, dance, music, cabaret, culinary, film and literature. Community events also feature including the Wearable Arts Acquisition Awards, a Garden Fair, Night Markets, Alice Rainbow Picnic and Church Celebration Concerts. A signature event, Bushfoods/Wildfoods Recipe Competition is in its 4<sup>th</sup> year and continues to promote the vast array of wild and bush foods available in Central Australia.

The 2008 theme is *Many Roads One Voice*, acknowledging the contribution that indigenous people make to the Central Australian community. The theme explores diverse cultural experiences with common goals and a shared destination – Central Australia. While culturally we have walked many different roads, Central Australia/Alice Springs is a multicultural community that speaks with one voice for equality and justice for all people. *Many Roads One Voice* is also a choral concert and a highlight event, bringing together guest singers Rachel Hore, Kavisha Mazzella, Shellie Morris and musical director Kutcha Edwards to deliver workshops to Central Australian community choral groups culminating in an *a cappella* Festival performance on the Main Stage.

ADF calculates that over 41,000 people attended all events in 2007, including pre and post paid and free. ADF enjoys triennial funding from both Arts NT of \$166,300 and the Alice Springs Town Council of \$35, 000 in 2008 with further support from Tourism NT and Festivals Australia totalling \$50,000, It also attracts significant sponsorship support largely through in kind services.

### **13.3 Darwin Entertainment Centre**

Opened in 1986 the Darwin Entertainment Centre (DEC) located in the heart of the city is the premier entertainment and convention venue in the Top End of Australia. The Centre can accommodate performances or events, large or small, and has hosted major national and international acts as well as Darwin-based artists, local eisteddfod competitions, and school concerts.

Facilities include the Playhouse, a large, traditional proscenium arch theatre seating approximately 1000, and the smaller, more intimate, Studio Theatre which seats 290 in

theatre mode, or 200 in cabaret configuration. There is also an Exhibition Gallery and Rehearsal Room. Community use of the Centre is facilitated by the Local Hirers' Subsidy, funded by the Darwin City Council and the NT Government. The subsidy allows a wide range of community groups, such as local arts groups and schools, to hire the venue at affordable rates. Gary Lang's dance company is currently the company in residence although Tracks Dance has had a long term similar sponsorship arrangement.

The Darwin Entertainment Centre operates under the Darwin Performing Arts Centre, a company limited by guarantee administered by a Board of Directors composed of elected representatives and nominees of the Darwin City Council and the NT Government. Membership is open to the public and members enjoy voting rights and are able to nominate for election to the Board of Directors.

The Centre itself is owned by the Darwin City Council which shares responsibility for maintaining the facility with the NT Government. The Darwin City Council and the Northern Territory Government through the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts fund the Centre on a triennial basis. In 2007 DEC was in receipt of \$310,000 from the Darwin City Council and \$385,000 from the NT government. In that year it recorded total attendances of 44,021 to 97 ticketed events or just over 70% of capacity across the board. DEC is currently trading well and has reserves in excess of \$600,000.

#### **13.4 Araluen Arts Centre (AAC)**

Araluen Arts Centre is located within the Alice Springs Cultural Precinct which also incorporates the Museum of Central Australia, the Strehlow Research Centre and the Central Australian Aviation Museum, along with the studios and gallery of Central Craft. The Precinct also currently accommodates the offices of ArtsNT – Regional Office for Central Australia and the Barkly, the Alice Springs Art Foundation and the Central Australian Art Society.

The Centre is the focal point of Alice Springs' performing and visual arts scene, incorporating galleries and a theatre. Owned and managed by the NT government through the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, the Araluen Arts Centre, was designed and built around the 300 year old Corkwood Tree in the Sculpture Garden. This tree, another at the front of the building and Big Sister Hill are also considered sacred by the Arrernte people.

AAC houses a 500 seat theatre that is designed and equipped to enable professional drama, dance. The annual theatre program includes performances by national touring companies and many high quality local productions. Each year AAC presents a Performing Arts Program that features both local and Australian productions.

The Theatre is also home to Araluen's Arthouse cinema program, as well as corporate functions and conferences. The Centre includes a flexible rehearsal space which has doubled as a boutique venue, though this is currently out of commission.

The Araluen galleries feature a program of exhibitions with a focus on Aboriginal art from Central Australia, and contemporary art by local and Australian artists. The Albert Namatjira Gallery displays a rotating selection of paintings by this famous Aboriginal artist, his descendants and contemporaries. The gallery also features early works from Papunya and the "Hermannsburg School"

On average, over the past 5 years, Araluen has hosted had 150 performance nights in the Theatre per year, with the visitor attendance averaging 30,000 per annum.

The NT government appropriates an annual budget for AAC which in the 2007-2008 financial year amounted to \$4,295,000 in direct operational funds and personnel, with an income target of \$557,000. Budget allocations for the ongoing repairs and maintenance to plant, buildings and equipment come on top of this, along with capital items, minor new works and specific works programs, but those vary from year to year.

## 14. Service Organisations

### 14.1 Top End Arts Marketing (TEAM)

TEAM is a not-for-profit organisation that works with arts organisations and artists in the Top End of the NT to promote the range of art coming out of the region. . TEAM works across the whole of the Top End of the NT. From Tiwi Islands to Elliot, Borroloola to Lajamanu, including major centres like, Darwin, Palmerston and Katherine.

TEAM'S mission is to be a cohesive marketing and audience development agency for Top End arts which will help create a strong, versatile arts community that understands its audiences and communicates with them in a relevant way. Since 1999 TEAM has aimed at providing useful hands-on support and expertise to the arts along with strategically focused research and audience development initiatives. Using a combination of regular online, email and print communications, TEAM aims to provide effective and affordable opportunities for the sector to promote their events. It is designed as a "one stop shop: for those needing information about artists and arts organisations and the work that they produce - all artforms, all across the Top End as well things to do and things to see.

For that purpose through its website [www.topendarts.com.au](http://www.topendarts.com.au) it offers details on: what's on in arts and entertainment; information about arts organisations; news about Top End arts; and opportunities and jobs in the arts. It also publishes *Off The Leash* a monthly print guide to what's on which is available for free across the Top End at cafés, venues, libraries, galleries, info shops and accommodation providers and Ebulletin: *Off The Leash This Week*, a short information blast available to subscribers to keep them up to date with what's going on in the 7 days ahead. Curiously, however, TEAM seems to maintain no reliable data about the size or makeup of the performing arts audience in Darwin which one would have thought was a fundamental tool in building marketing capacity.

TEAM receives operational funding from the Market Development section of the Australia Council and Arts NT

### 14.2 RedHOT Arts (RHA)

Based in Alice Springs, RHA is an umbrella organisation designed to support the development and marketing of the arts in Central Australia. It provides services to community based organisations that fuel the local arts scene. Collectively, these produce events, hold workshops and develop community projects and a number of them are gaining national and international reputations for their distinctive cross-cultural and multi-artform practice. RHA services also include one-on-one mentoring for arts organisations and artists; collaborative marketing projects; resource sharing; national profiling of Central Australian artists; arts management training; advocacy and sector and arts industry research.

The RHA e-bulletin is for artists, arts workers and audiences in Central Australia and includes all the news on upcoming arts and cultural events. The weekly e-bulletin established in 2000 remains the flagship product of the organisation with strong community recognition and support. Project initiatives over the past few years have included; a major research project into audiences during the Alice Desert Festival and development of the first comprehensive Guide to Art and Craft in Central Australia,

targeted at tourists and art buyers visiting the region. The guide has been made possible due to generous support from Tourism NT and The Alice Springs Town Council.

RHA started as a project initiative of Arts NT in 1999 to support arts, artists and arts organisations with marketing and industry development activities in Alice Springs. After undergoing an independent review in 2003, an incorporated body was established in January 2005 to build on the former project's work with the support of the Alice Springs arts sector. RHA is funded annually by the Market Development section of the Australia Council and by Arts NT. In addition to this operational funding, the Company has secured project funds and earned income. The development of its website was supported by the Northern Territory Government's Community Benefit Fund

### **14.3 Brown's Mart Theatre and Reserve**

Brown's Mart was opened in 1885 by a local businessman Vaiben Louis Solomon and was designed by John George Knight who had helped to design several imposing buildings in Melbourne including Parliament House. In 1887, V.V. Brown and H.H. Adcock, with Mr. J. A.V. Brown, announced that in "premises opposite the Town Hall" they were commencing business as auctioneers and shipping agents, with part of the premises devoted to the purpose of a Mining Exchange. The building gradually became known as Daddy Brown's Auction Room, the Mercantile Auction Mart, or Brown's Mart.

It barely survived the Great Cyclone of 1897, was repaired, and became used as meeting rooms, auction rooms, a naval torpedo workshop during World War II, Crown Law Office and Police Headquarters. When in 1969 it was to be handed to Darwin City Council as part of the proposed Civic Square, and possibly demolished, Darwin Theatre Group, then an amateur society, spearheaded a campaign to preserve the building with a feasibility study proposing conversion to an intimate, open stage theatre space.

In 1970, the NT Administrator announced that the Mart would become "a little theatre, headquarters for Darwin's amateur repertory groups". "Brown's Mart Reserve" was excised from the land to be handed to the Council. In 1971 the land was reserved as a Place of Historic Interest and Trustees nominated by the Eisteddfod Council, the NT Arts Council, the Darwin City Council, the NT Historical Society, and Museum and Art Galleries Board as well as Darwin Theatre Group were appointed in October 1971.

In 1972, following interior conversion, workshops, rehearsals and working bees, the first public performance was held in the new intimate theatre. Also in 1972, an Executive Officer employed under grants from the Australian Council for the Arts, NT Administration, and the NT Arts Council took on the role of venue manager, and arts director and development officer. A range of community-based arts activities catering for Darwin and outlying regions developed under the auspices of the Trustees of Brown's Mart until, in 1979, Brown's Mart Community Arts Project Inc-- evolving from the Trustees' community arts advisory committee -- became a separate organisation.

Over three decades the Trustees, and then Brown's Mart Community Arts Inc which managed the venue on a fee for services basis until 2008 -- acted as a focus for local creativity. They either hosted or were actively involved in the creation of other arts organisations and events including Tracks Dance, a youth festival, Kids Convoy, Corrugated Iron Youth Arts, the NT Writers Centre, Ausmusic, the Darwin Fringe Festival, Fistful of Films, with concerts by a "Darwin symphony orchestra", and

contemporary original music. Since early this year the Brown's Mart Trust (BMT) has directly administered the venue.

BMT currently employs 1.9 full-time equivalent staff receives an operating grant of \$56,000 from Arts NT. It earns approximately \$40,000 from venue rent and bar trade but derives no benefit from the provision of free rent to resident arts organisations that are funded by Arts NT. Total attendance in 2007 was 8671 while venue utilisation rate of available evenings increased from 27% in 2006 to 40% in 2007. Based on usage levels this far in 2008, the Trustees anticipate a similar statistical outcome for this year.

## 15. Strengths of the Theatre Sector

As can be seen, the principal strength of the theatre sector in the Northern Territory lies in the diversity and plurality of its practice. There is an extraordinarily high proportion of the artistic community devoted to the making of new work, as against reproducing work created elsewhere or in another time. Paradoxically, it is also one of its weaknesses. Such practice requires a more than ordinarily strong skills base and regular, qualitative critical feedback. Both of these are problematic in the Territory.

Isolation from the rest of Australia and, in respect of Alice Springs and Darwin, isolation from each other has forged a culture of self-reliance which is admirable. This has contributed to the emergence of distinctive solutions to local circumstances. Those circumstances include rich and complex indigenous cultures often in remote communities: a complex multicultural society with strong Asian connections; a high degree of mobility in the population generally and in the artistic community in particular; a small audience base; and severely limited physical and financial resources.

The solutions to these issues have featured small cores of professional artists creating work on an intensive basis and with a high degree of community involvement. Depending on how it is categorised or by whom, this may be viewed as imaginative, popular empowerment or the limiting hand of amateurism. They have also included a high degree of cross-cultural and cross-generational work of a kind much rarer in the rest of the country, though not unknown in other parts of regional Australia.

These include the telling of local stories which have a clear resonance with local audiences, again to an extent rare elsewhere. But this has also meant that much work may be hailed more for its intentions than the skill of its execution; that while it is less reliant on work made elsewhere, it also has fewer skills in the making of it and in the critical evaluation of the result; and that even were these are successful, there is the risk of the best becoming formulaic and sometimes with a preference for emotional over intellectual engagement.

Traditionally, government has played a major role in life in the Territory. Therefore it is not surprising that agencies such as Arts NT and the Australia Council influence the destiny of theatre practice there today perhaps more than in other places. It is important then that they view these circumstances of the Territory and its artists as a positive rather than negative factor. It is vital that they and other key stakeholders see it as a unique existence, and that artists and government alike do not reply on adopting models from elsewhere in an attempt to compare themselves with other places, especially capital cities and in the process lose the Territory its personal and important voice.

Whichever view one takes, what is clear is that strong though this diversity and plurality is, it is not reflected in either the support mechanisms available to it nor in the funding patterns which are designed to underwrite the sector. The resolution of that disconnect needs to be a priority in the development of new sector-wide strategies.

## 16. Analysis of the Sector

### 16.1 Context of Regional Theatre

Some respondents to this review argued that what NT really needed was a “state” theatre to address the problems outlined above. This would fulfill functions and offer services comparable with those provided in other Australian capital cities. But that seems to be a misreading both of the Territory’s own needs and the function of “state theatres” in other places. In fact, if one examines the current and likely future practice of NT theatre, it is clear that it is essentially a regional not a “state” theatre phenomenon. And in considering this, one must be careful not to judge regional theatre and its function by criteria to which it does not correspond.

Regional theatre, whether in be in far North Queensland, rural Victoria or across Tasmania, has found its strength and its enterprise in constructing sui generis models built on local talent in writing, directing and acting; in finding an aesthetic that responds to and is “readable” in its time and place; that does not follow the trends and enthusiasms (however valid) of large capital city companies; that develops skills which are appropriate to its practice and its special needs; that does not compromise its standards because of its regionality, but rather seeks to measure it against the best comparable performance anywhere; and which draws shrewdly and scrupulously on guest talents that can contribute actively top its core business and not just for variety or “star”: power.

The history of regional theatre in Australia has been characterised by the extraordinary local writing, and forms appropriate to that writing, which have emerged from it, not by its imitation of work evolved elsewhere. One does not remember Theatre South or Hunter Valley Theatre Company for their Ibsen or Neil Simon, but for *Too Young for Ghosts*, *Diving for Pearls*, *The Star Hotel* and *Essington Lewis*. So the question we face in dealing with in NT is: what kind of entities can best deliver that regional outcome?

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

**That the theatre sector in the Northern Territory continue to be valued and supported as a focus and centre of excellence of regional theatre with its own unique practice and strengths giving voice to the stories and aspirations of its indigenous and non indigenous artists and communities.**

### 16.2 Darwin Theatre Company

In its most recent incarnation, DTC argues that it has moved toward becoming a “producing hub” and that in pursuit of this goal has added to its historical task of producing and presenting its own shows, the complex of other activities noted above.

There is a hint of desperation about this and a sense that it is not being driven by a clear mission, but rather by a clutching at straws. That is not to say that many of the tasks DTC has identified do not need to be done, nor is it to suggest that it may not do some of them well. .

The Theatre to the Edge is a case in point. While it is not a DTC initiative per se, the Company’s involvement has helped to grow it efficiently and demonstrate its value in action. It represents an effective means of offering Darwin audiences a varied menu of good theater product under a single presenting brand; a way of extending the

employment life of Darwin actors, writers and other artists and their exposure in other markets; and of maximizing the use of ever scarce subsidy dollar. It also offers NT a rare opportunity for cross-border collaboration with Arts Queensland, which has so far borne the brunt of this initiative. Above all, it demonstrates a regional aesthetic at work telling Northern Australian stories with a sense of place and of identity. It is win-win all round

The Minyerri project is admirable and the more so as DTC has displayed enterprise in raising non-arts money from training and employment sources to fund it and being creative with its application. The actors' tendering scheme is much needed and has clearly shown results. While the desire to help reinvigorate its amateur base through Cavenagh Theatre is worthy, one wonders whether the Superstar model (perhaps operating under the auspices of DEC whose needs it mostly feeds) is not a better vehicle for that purpose.

All that might be manageable were it not that it is the judgment of many theatre professionals in the industry, both in Darwin and beyond, that what might be reasonably regarded as the Company's core business i.e. producing its own shows, is in decline. Over the past three years DTC does not seem to have commanded the directorial skill to ensure this or in the immediate future to turn it around. The box office trend in Darwin over those three years would seem to underscore that judgment.

<b>Productions</b>	<b>No of perfs.</b>	<b>Paid Attendance</b>	<b>Aver.</b>
<b>2006</b>			
<i>The Boathouse</i> *	7	400	57
<i>Othello</i>	11	769	70
<i>Melek mo Hani</i> #	6	215	36
<i>Sex and Beverages</i>	3	180	90
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1564</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>2007</b>			
<i>Not Like Beckett</i> **	10	111	11
<i>Constance Drinkwater</i> ***	7	965	138
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1076</b>	<b>63.3</b>
<b>2008 (to 15/7/08)</b>			
<i>Gods of Spicy Things</i> #	5	325	105
<i>FUTTZ</i> #	5	125	25
<i>Tracy</i> ****	13	662	51
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>1112</b>	<b>48.4</b>

#Buy-in

\* co-produced with JUTE who were lead producer;

\*\*co-produced with Red Dust Theatre

\*\*\*co-produced with JUTE and Tropic Sun;

\*\*\*\*co-produced with Business Unusual

It is worth noting that this decline has occurred in circumstances in which DEC has scored record attendances overall (though it admits that its hardest sell is theatre) and the Darwin Festival recorded attendances of 70, 000 for its 2007 event, admittedly from a preponderance of non-theatre events. While obviously that evidence is not conclusive, it does suggest that there is no diminution of interest in attendance at other live performance or "a night at the theatre", as such. To be fair, the decline has also occurred at a time when DTC's funding has been progressively cut and thus its capacity to produce and market those productions has been further compromised. It is also the

case that this is not the entire picture which is fleshed out by tours with NT and to North Queensland. Nevertheless, it is the *Darwin Theatre Company* and must finally be judged by how it fares at home.

Added to this, DTC seems to be a operating within model which is essentially dysfunction. Clearly the Company has great goodwill and some excellent projects, but they are trapped in a structure which has shown itself incapable of real reform. Tension persists between the historical base of its pro-am past in which volunteerism has been paramount, and the desire/need to find a new paradigm more congruent with current regional theater practice elsewhere and more suited to the needs of the times. The history of DTC morphing out of DTG has manifested this tension many times over the years and rarely has it been successfully negotiated.

The fact is that DTC has never left its past behind nor entirely embraced the future. The present suggestion that it might, as an attempt to resolve this dichotomy, embrace the ailing Cavenagh Group while noble, is one more instance of this Janus-like approach and another instance of the Company's lack of clear and strategic thinking.

It may be that DTC ought to revert to its community base as the most satisfactory resolution of its problems. It may be that a strong restating of its volunteer goals and perhaps working together with Cavenagh to revision the future of a community theatre role and perhaps taking the lead in the Superstar model is the way forward. It may be that its outreach projects in Minyerri and other projects are congruent with that. That would be for its Board and members of determine. Once done, it is possible that DTC could play a new and dynamic role in the Darwin theatre scene. But at the moment it limps forward. And if one adopts the view – seemingly endorsed by the majority of theatre practitioners in Darwin - that what is needed as a new model of operation, one cannot conclude that it can be formed out of DTC or grafted onto it.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**That Darwin Theatre Company no longer provides an appropriate vehicle for the advancement of the regional theatre mode in the Northern Territory and the fulfillment of its skills and aspirations in the future development of the theatre sector in the Territory.**

#### **16.3 Independent Producers**

In what follows, the review focuses on three companies not because they are the only ones meriting such attention, but because what they do and the stage they are at is indicative of the state of the field. The observations made of them can fairly stand for the issues and needs of the sector as a whole.

- **Knock-em-Down Theatre**

It is perhaps unfair to try to draw comparisons between DTC a company with a long and complex history going back to 1957 and relatively recent arrivals such as KEDT and BUU. On the one hand, there is an organisation that has struggled to adapt to changing conditions and changing and competing demands from its base, from the public, from funding agencies and from the respective vision of successive artistic directors.

KEDT, on the other hand, is newer and less complex. Its strength is a clear aesthetic in text-based theatre, in the writing and producing of good plays – and the encouragement of these - by a trio of artists with a strong track record in their respective practices. Its

weakness lies in having effectively no infrastructure and little producing experience. It has seized opportunities as they have come along and sensibly these have been to enter into partnerships with other more established entities, such as DTC and JUTE, when these have presented themselves. It members see that as a key part of their future – rightly it would seem. They don't seek to reinvent the wheel and they acknowledge that a strong ongoing entity (which they prefer to call a "state" theatre) is necessary in NT for this purpose. Any threat to that mission comes from the fact that their very success will inevitably breed imitators and the success of the collaborative producing model will encourage other emerging groups to try their hand and thus become competition.

In 2007, Knock-em-Down was advised by Arts NT not to apply for core funding in 2008 in light of the already over committed Key Organisations budget and competing priorities. Theatre Board staff have also recommended not applying for ongoing funding, suggesting that the *Make it New* model should alleviate the necessity for incorporation and the associated administrative load. However, the limited choices of strong local theatre presenters in NT means that *Make it New* is not always an effective model when applied to local producer/ presenter relationships.

Additionally, relying on the success of applications on a project-by-project basis is problematic, and projects can easily fall down with no financial safety net; the lack of incorporation status makes it extremely difficult to raise corporate or philanthropic funds; and lack of dedicated funding makes it extremely difficult to create a strong, forward-looking program across three to five years - which is the ideal scenario in order for the sustained development of new works, and for the benefit of local professionals who can then have some idea of what opportunities are arising in the future, hence can plan their professional lives around local activity. While KEDT has considered incorporating in 2008 in order to seek administrative and program funding from Arts NT in 2010, that seems unnecessarily burdensome and perhaps a more logical approach would be to explore the structural options available to it should the proposed Darwin producing hub be proceeded with..

- **Business Unusual**

BUU's highly visual theatre occupies a special place in the range of work being created by independent producers in NT and its two most recent successes *The Pearlers* and *Tracy* have been received as provocative and thought-provoking additions to the repertoire not only in Darwin but in other centres in NT and Queensland where they have been seen. But along with many independent artists, the company is finding it increasingly difficult to operate in the current climate where theatre resources are being cut from organisations like DTC which has been a mainstay of BUU, without any compensatory benefit to the sector. Those cuts in turn result in a loss of opportunity for the one-off project-funded theatre makers BUU represents and thus a diminution of the range and depth of worth able to be presented. .

BUU is an excellent example of a company that lacks infrastructure but for whom it would be clearly wasteful of time, energy and money to try to set itself up as a fully articulated theater organisation. Rather, what such bodies need is a host to which they could turn to continue creating work of a professional standard. BUU identifies this as a Darwin-based company that is able to produce the work of other professional companies without having artistic control over the product but offering services such as grant auspicing, budget writing, data bases, publicity and marketing support and administrative facilities. Access to a free/affordable rehearsal space is also a crucial ingredient.

The introduction of guest artists from elsewhere has been a feature of BUU's success. Recognising that there is a very small pool of professional theatre-makers in Darwin, no designers and few production managers, funding needs to provide for these interstate people thereby increasing costs. The growth of the sector as a whole through better planning for such project based entities would help Darwin to develop its theatre base so that more employment can be offered which could then in turn attract qualified professional theatre makers.

- **Red Dust Theatre**

RDT is a theatre enterprise based on a good idea which exhibits a startlingly impressive history, given its beginnings and lack of infrastructure. However, its founder and first director retired from the scene burnt out, and its current circumstances are extremely fragile.

At this time, RDT exhibits many classic symptoms of project-based performing arts companies trying to make the adjustment between the status of producing work, often driven by one artist's vision as the opportunity arises and resources allow, to forging an ongoing annual program of work that reflects an organisational mission and requires organisational skills. The danger of a project-based work is that the company that makes it often struggles to put identity and form around it. This is made infinitely more difficult in circumstances such as Alice Springs where there is little theatre context, peer support or mentoring available and no models readily to hand on which those engaged in this struggle can draw or partnerships on which they can rely. These dilemmas have been seen many times in other places. They are not unique to regional arts conditions, but they are most certainly exacerbated by them, often to an intolerable degree.

Where there is a clear and consistent aesthetic vision as with BUU or a consistent core group as with KEDT, these challenges can be confronted and may be overcome, though that is not to underplay their severity. But RDT does not seem to exhibit that core and one has the impression that in its quest to create an ongoing company form, it risks of getting too far ahead of the resourcing pack. Again, that is not unusual in this context. Risk is normal and sometimes has to be taken, but it needs to be calculated on the basis of experience and there would not at this time seem to be sufficient theatrical experience in RDT's leadership to warrant the risks it runs. Having regard to a stated goal of NT's Key Arts Organisation category that: *Strong arts organisations require more than funding – they also require advice, guidance and relevant and timely information*, RDT would seem to be a suitable case for targeted mentoring support as part of its funding status.

There is the risk too, which is shared by those who fund such enterprises, that they do not provide counseling and mentoring to ensure that what is invested is invested wisely and can be deployed coherently. It is about managing the circumstances, but also managing one's own expectations. As with producers like KEDT and BUU, clearly the most valuable thing for RDT is to have a reliable, nurturing and resourcing host rather than itself attempting to re-invent the wheel.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

**That the current and future strength and enterprise of the theatre sector in the Northern Territory lies with the work of independent producers, whether incorporated or unincorporated, and notably in the contribution they can make individually and collectively to the realisation of their work with and through the development of producing hubs in their respective centres.**



## 17. Towards New Mechanisms

### 17.1 The Need to Nurture

In the course of this review, many respondents argued that there were some performing arts institutions in NT which had the capacity to strengthen and bring coherence to this diverse practice, but which were seen not to be doing so. It was alleged that they have resources or opportunities which were “tied up in other ways” or “not fulfilling their function”.

To some degree, this may be more about potential to achieve, rather than current capacity to do so. To some extent, it may also be about lack of clarity in those organisations as to their own mission. In a number of cases, that mission is evolving and at the moment may be unclear even to the bodies themselves.

From the above information, one can see that both in Alice Springs and Darwin there are performing arts centres, festivals and marketing/management consortia funded in a variety of ways from Territory and Federal sources. Some have the power, both individually and collectively, to make a significant impact on the development of theatre in the Territory if they were to work together. Each in its own way has the support of local work in its mission. More importantly, each can benefit the process the process of its development as well as the result.

Self evidently, both festivals and arts centres are reliant on the availability of product. Sourcing and presenting it is what they do. In an ideal world, and unless they have a special mission to the contrary, that will be a judicious mix of the imported and the local. In the case of presenters in the Territory, there are even stronger reasons why there should be a balance between these two.

Clearly, these presenters have an obligation to ensure that their public, like audiences in other places, are able to see quality work as often as possible from around the country and around the world. Geographic isolation makes this especially true in the Territory, both for its own sake and to ensure that the public is exposed to the best standards that those presenters can ensure in order to build local critical capacity.

However, that same isolation imposes cost factors that make it difficult to import work as regularly as elsewhere. Lack of alternatives also places a special responsibility on these presenters to offer a platform for the work of local artists. This is in their own self interest, since local work, telling local stories has sometimes proven more popular than imported productions. As well, there is the worldwide interest in indigenous performance, in both traditional and contemporary forms, and the growing tendency to create cross-cultural theatre work of which the Territory has seen some notable examples and which it is uniquely placed to develop. Nevertheless, unlike the imported product, local work does not come ready made. It requires skilled nurturing and resourcing and the commitment of producing time and energy that is often at odds with the presenters' core business.

## 17.2 Producing Presenters

To date one organisation has recognized that need and is prepared to take immediate action on it. The Darwin Festival is growing and diversifying rapidly but recognizes that there is *a lack of new local works being developed through to presentation stage;* and what it describes as *“a qualitative gap between the standard of locally produced product and a nationally acceptable benchmark. This gap is a prohibiting factor in Territory work reaching a National audience”*.

For this reason the Festival has proposed, initially to the Australia Council, that it fund a creative producer position within Festival for an initial three year period and that the Festival leverage that investment to secure matching or greater investment from Arts NT as well as from philanthropic sources.

This represents a commitment by the Festival to produce new works across all performance artforms with NT artists and companies, with an emphasis on indigenous performance and that the resultant new works would be given a mainstage presentation within the Festival and actively promoted to national and international presenters and festivals. The Festival would work with ArtBack NT Arts Touring for ongoing management and tour coordination of those works.

Among the clear benefits of this proposal would be: new Territory works which are performance ready at first presentation; a contribution to the development of the indigenous performing arts sector; additional opportunities for local artists; showcase opportunities to a range of national presenters and producers including other major festivals; stimulation to the local arts industry and their output by the introduction of new creative influences and talents; the development of audience awareness and appetite for Territory produced works locally and nationally; and a pathway through to ongoing touring and management support for artists and companies; and enhanced training and mentoring opportunities. It must be noted that the presenting beneficiary here is the festival itself.

It is important to note that the initiative is not confined to theatre, in any three year period all the work created could in theory be music based. Nonetheless, it represents a major breakthrough in growing capacity in the sector and is to be applauded.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

**That the Darwin Festival’s proposal for an in-house creative producer be endorsed and adopted by both the Australia Council and Arts NT both as an crucial test case for future such development in the Territory and as the important initiative in its own right.**

While their plans may not be so defined or advanced, other organisations are also keen to adapt both their mission and their processes to accommodate these emerging needs. The Darwin Entertainment Centre has a twofold proposal along parallel lines. It has proposed to its funding agencies that it make an (initially modest) investment of \$20,000 per year in the creative development of new works for presentation by local companies in the Centre’s Studio Theatre. This support would be in addition to the existing rental subsidy scheme.

DEC’s goal is to have four such productions in the house annually in a variety of artforms not just theatre. However, in the light of the Centre’s considerable reserves, one

might hope that its Board, having regard to the need to invest in its own future, could be persuaded to go beyond the modest amount contemplated and at least double it. At the same time, the Centre's CEO wishes to recruit an administrative deputy to his staff which would free him to focus not just on "buy in" programming, but to act in a more hands-on creative producing role with these projects. As with the Darwin Festival proposal, one should note that the prime presenting beneficiary of these moves will be DEC itself.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**That the Darwin Entertainment Centre's plan for greater participation and investment in the creative development and presentation of local performing arts product be welcomed and adopted, even extended by its Board, both in its own programming interest and as laudable initiative in its own right.**

Were both of these initiatives to proceed, it would represent the two major nonprofit performing arts presenters in Darwin taking critical steps to underwrite the making and presentation of new work by local NT artists. No doubt there will be occasions where their interests will co-incide and they can collaborate on some of them to the general benefit

The process in Alice Springs is less developed because of changes being considered to key organisations there which will be discussed in the next section.

However, in order to advance this cause, it needs greater overall attention. That is beyond the capacity of any one organisation to achieve, Additional planning and resources need to be devoted to it, ideally from a mix of sources to ensure that genuine development can occur across the sector.

As we have seen, the initiatives undertaken by DEC and DF, however altruistic, are directed at their own programming needs. Beyond, there are sector-wide needs in the development and presentation of new work that should also be addressed. In this regard, to avoid duplication of effort and potential waste of scarce resources, there needs to be agreement within the sector as to who does what and on what basis.

**17.3 Need for a New Approach**

It follows naturally from the previous remarks, that as well as development within existing agencies there is also a need for new mechanisms to make new work. Given the diversity of practice, these may be less formal than a conventional "theatre company". Nevertheless, their intention would be to encourage and enable existing performing arts practice; to support and enable creative development of new work by individual artists or small companies; to creatively produce that work either alone or in collaboration with existing providers; and perhaps to have a role in presenting the final product, whether on their own or in association with others.

During this review, comment and concern were expressed about the lack of infrastructure in the Territory. That lack is apparent on every side. Even allowing for the range of support and encouragement that some organisations offer in particular areas e.g. Corrugated Iron Youth Arts and InCite in youth performing arts and Tracks in cross cultural dance theatre, there is a weakness at the heart of the system which has left many individual practitioners and small companies at a loss.

There is a strong desire among practitioners in both Alice Springs and Darwin to investigate new processes to which artists could have recourse to support, develop and even present their work. There was a disinclination to see new structures, per se, erected, understandable in conditions of already stretched funding. But there is a clear recognition that the present situation is not working and that an imaginative re-look at current mechanisms and/or a joining or realignment of existing bodies for this purpose is urgently needed.

#### **17.4 The Prime Features of a New Approach**

As well, there is a clearly expressed requirement to find better ways of growing the skills to do all of this. There is a need, through mentoring and/or training, to be able to make and perform the work at the highest possible artistic level and to support the resultant productions technically, as well as to market and secure funding for them. As seen above, some companies are taking steps to remedy this situation. However, the demand is broader than that. What is needed is something we might conveniently call “resource hubs”.

The purpose of a hub is to focus not spread. The body of evidence and demand is for an entity that:

- Curates, produces and co-produces the work of theatre artists living and working in NT;
- That enters into strategic partnerships e.g. with companies in other parts of NT and northern Australia to augment the diet in any one place through strategic collaboration, co-presentation and exchange;
- That in this process, offers skilled production, presentation, management and marketing to that product which in turn serves to extend skills, exposure and employment prospects in those areas;
- That in doing all of these, offers a hub of producing and presentation and critical dialogue that contributes to the raising of standards of work and of appreciation of that work; and
- In, an ideal world, manages the primary venue in which all of this takes place.

Essentially then, such hubs have four major functions: creative development, provision of space, upgrading of skills and the means of presentation. There are potentially three ways in which those need might be approached in current NT circumstances. One could:

- Create a completely new organisation in each of Alice Springs and Darwin which had those functions as its dedicated mission and recruit the skills necessary for its operation;
- Graft the necessary functions onto an existing organisation in either city and grow the skills gradually from that base;
- Realign some existing organisations into a new “hub” and seek to develop the functions through collaborative action among them.

Or, one could devise a solution which combined all three approaches.

Here is a simple exercise that sets out the pros and cons for each of these.

<b>Option</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weakness</b>	<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>Threat</b>
<b>Completely new organisation in each of Alice Springs and Darwin</b>	Fresh start New energy No baggage	Seen as imposition Lack of new resources Seen as taking funding from others	Chance to recruit new talent Chance to grow “NT” model not borrow from elsewhere	Impatience for results Rejected by locals
<b>Graft functions onto an existing organisation in either city</b>	Known quantity Continuity Use existing base Draw on resident skills/experience Local knowledge	Past baggage Seen as privileging one org over others Skills may not match needs	Chance to build on experience	Past history excludes some stakeholders Too slow to change pace Failure to adapt “brand” Poor critical feedback
<b>Realign some existing organisations into a new “hub”</b>	Collaborative approach Continuity Build on relationships Driven by creative community Broad local knowledge	Lack of leadership Blurred loyalties Government by committee Inward looking	Chance to build on community Chance to develop cross-artform projects	Lack of consistent vision Consensus decision making Poor critical feedback

Coincidentally, there are organisations in NT which are seeking to redefine or even remodel their roles. They may offer interesting prospects in this direction. Not surprisingly, the Centre and the Top End will supply appropriately different propositions. One size will not fit all.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:**

**That the Northern Territory’s unique regional theatre practice requires unique solutions which are best realised through the development of producing/presenting theatre hubs in the two main cities rather than the maintenance of conventional “theatre company” models.**

**RECOMMENDATION 7:**

**That these hubs have as their core business curating, producing and co-producing the work of theatre artists living and working in NT, entering into partnerships to present and promote that work throughout the Territory and beyond; elevating the skills base, exposure and employment prospects of NT theatre artists; offering skilled production, presentation, management and marketing to their work; and a focus of critical dialogue that contributes to the raising of standards of work and appreciation of it.**

### **17.5 An Alice Springs Hub**

This process in Alice Springs is already quite well advanced. The leaderships of RedHOT Arts (RHA) and of the Alice Desert Festival (ADF) respectively, are at this time engaged in negotiations which they confidently expect to lead to a merger between them. It is as much a merger of interests and aspirations, as of functions, though functions will be critical.

As we have seen, amongst regional festivals ADF is comparatively well resourced by two streams of triennial funding. It exhibits a strong indigenous and Centralian community focus in many artforms and social activities but it has not generally speaking engendered new professional work. Meanwhile, RHA has been advised that the funding which it has enjoyed from the Australia Council will expire in 2009.

The two organisations (together with others) are housed side by side in premises maintained by Arts NT. The Festival wishes to focus more on enabling the creative development as well as the presentation of local work. There are many potential partners in this. Companies such as Red Dust, InCite and Red Shoes, which are already working in their various ways in cultural and inter-cultural practice, are clear cases for further and more developed collaborations as are artists and collectives still emerging. A trans-border performing arts company of considerable success and sophistication, such as Big H-Art could also be a collaborator and bring skills, resources and connections of its own to the relationship.

In that sense – and perhaps not surprisingly in the circumstances - ADF's move parallels the similar aim of the Darwin Festival, discussed above. When the current festival director departs toward the end of this year, the new person would be recruited whose skills and experience emphasise a creative producing role.

Under the merger, ADF would become a producing and presenting arm of a more broadly based entity – perhaps to be called Central Regional Arts (CARA) - of which the services and management functions of RHA would be another branch. Such a merger would be in line with the third option, set out above, i.e. that of creating new structures from the re-alignment of existing bodies. That has the benefit of maintaining continuity of effort, and in some case personnel, corporate memory and existing community, government and business alliances.

If this were to occur, it could see the emergence of Central Australian “hub” taking on the existing marketing and business skills aspect of RHA, adding and/or upgrading other mentoring and training programs to underwrite the whole and embracing a rethought ADF directed towards the creative producing and presenting of local work.

There is, too, the prospect of collaborations beyond Central Australia which this hub would be well placed to develop, perhaps in association with ArtBack Arts NT. Quality work benchmarked against national standards has greater touring potential.

A strong producing and presenting hub can work with Artback to source export potential for its work both to other centres in the Territory and TTTE nationally. But it can also forge direct links with whatever emerges as the primary producing/presenting body in Darwin and look to facilitate exchange between them so that the very distinctive artistic

practice of the Centre and the Top End are regularly and appropriately shared across that crucial divide to their mutual benefit.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:**

**That the proposed merger of the Alice Desert Festival and RedHot Arts be endorsed and adopted as the basis for a new producing, presenting and facilitating hub for Central Australia in line with the objectives outlined in recommendation 7.**

This new hub might have a further spoke to its wheel: The Araluen Arts Centre (AAC) is also examining the balance between its existing functions of hosting local community presentations, itself presenting work from elsewhere in Australia, and its potential to present new homegrown productions. In that context, it has noted that attendances are frequently better for local than imported product. While clearly it cannot and should not abandon the task of providing as stimulating a menu of the widest range possible of quality professional product to the public of Alice Springs and its visitors, enabling the presentation of work by artists in Central Australia is also vital.

Just as the Darwin Festival is exploring a deeper association with the Darwin Entertainment Centre in terms of skills exchange and co-presentation to the benefit of the entire sector, so such a similar exchange of skills and a deepening of a presenting relationship should occur between the emerging CARA hub and the Centre. And just as DEC is looking to find ways to invest in a targeted fashion in its local producers, so AAC should rethink the proportion of its admittedly modest entrepreneurial budget in the direction of local investment rather than buy-ins. At the same time the NT government should give consideration to extending AAC's funding to enable it to do that more strategically.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:**

**That, within the next twelve months, the emergent Central Australian hub enter into a joint strategic planning exercise with Araluen Arts so as to ensure the most seamless support for and delivery of the work of artists and producers in their region to the public of Alice Springs, the Northern Territory and beyond.**

Were this to happen, it would offer a solution particular to the circumstances of Central Australia. It is clear that some of this re-alignment could be done within the existing funding levels though not necessarily within the current funding patterns. Taken piecemeal the initiatives are likely to be starved of resources. What is needed here is a joint strategic exercise between the key stakeholders and Australia Council (more broadly than the Theatre Board) and Arts NT to lay out and adopt a multiyear plan of action to give effect to this move and these recommendations.

## 17.6 A Darwin Hub

Meanwhile, there are three contrasting but potentially complementary organisations in Darwin which are also looking to reinvent themselves. As with Alice Springs, this process might offer solutions to some of the expressed needs of the Top End but in ways which reflect the demands of the artistic community there. These organisations are the Darwin Theatre Company, Brown's Mart Trust and Top End Arts Marketing (TEAM).

DTC was discussed in some detail earlier with the conclusion that despite some interesting even excellent collaborations, it does not have the capacity to be re-aligned to meet current and future needs. Some of its functions and projects should, however, be preserved in the new arrangement.

Brown's Mart has played an iconic role across the arts in Darwin over the past thirty and more years. Nevertheless, its recent severance from what is now Darwin Community Arts has left it with something of an identity crisis. Its present part-time management is essentially reactive and while not lacking skills, is unclear as to its mission and severely under-resourced to fulfill its function.

Notwithstanding, the venue alone is a key factor in future theatre development in the city and, by extension, the Top End. The expressed demand for a creative producing function to be evolved in the city needs a host. Logically this could be Brown's Mart. However, simply aggregating these functions to the existing Trust structure, would not suffice. .

TEAM like RHA, and for not dissimilar reasons, is seeking to reposition itself as its Australia Council funding and mission expire. Some of its marketing and sponsorship programs ought to be maintained. However, simply amalgamating these with another body would not of itself produce the needed outcome. TEAM has expressed an interest in becoming the organisation that contracts to manage Brown's Mart venue as previously BMCA did. But TEAM has neither the skills nor the experience to run a venue, still less fulfill the other major requirement of the hub which would be to foster creative development.

There may, however, be an opportunity to re-align some of the key functions of all three of these entities into a new "hub" around Brown's Mart with a new mission which builds on their strengths but sheds their baggage. If that were pursued, some bodies are likely to disappear.

Out of this rich and complex mix, it would seem the most logical way forward would be to create a two-tier mechanism not unknown in other parts of Australia, but pioneered by Belvoir Street theatre in the mid 1980s. It is widely known as the Company A/Company B model. Very simply, it is that one company owns and maintains the building as BMT is charged under the terms of its Trust deed to do; and the other operates and programs it. This builds has the attraction of building on Brown's Mart's own history and in some ways would reproduce but refine the arrangement that existed with BMCA until recently.

It would look something like this:

**Company A - Browns Mart Trust (BMT)**  
 The holding company - continues to operate under its current Trust Deed within the terms of the Act responsible for the integrity of the building and its purpose

Trustees are appointed by the Minister for Lands as before though consideration should be given to some changes.

Most of the trustees have been in office for a long time. Younger people are needed and more Trustees more broadly representative of contemporary arts practice while not neglecting community representation.

There would seem to be no need for the Trust to be funded direct

### CONTRACTS WITH

**Company B – Brown’s Mart Company (BMC)**  
 The operating company - **separately** incorporated. Works under contract from Company A

Seeks and Receives funds from a variety of Federal and Territory sources to fulfill its mission

Provides the following range of services

<b>Producing</b>	<b>Services</b>	<b>Venue</b>
Producing or co-producing of performing arts projects by companies or individual artists	Provides services in information, marketing, management and sponsorship to individuals and organisations	Manages building and venue Technical, operations. FOH
Collaboration and exchange of product with other producers/presenters e.g. through TTE. Artback etc	Provides training and mentoring in these	Schedules venue(s), offices and bar. Priorities being: a) Company B presentations b) Inde work c) Other hires
Curates and presents annual season of works drawn from the above and indeed work	Provides these services specifically to Company B (co-)presentations	Manages BMC Brand  Promotes and books outside hires
<b>Redefines, replaces and extends role of by DTC</b>	<b>Redefines, replaces and extends role of TEAM</b>	<b>Redefines, replaces and extends role of BMT</b>

While DTC has demonstrated a capacity at various times to do some of this and some of it well, it cannot do all. Put simply, it does not have the capacity nor, under its present leadership the organisational agility, to take on the task as a whole.

This model would require the recruitment of a skilled Creative and Executive Producer and small team; it would require the acquisition of skills in management and marketing and sponsorship; and the addition of a management and production team based in or shared with the venue. It would also allow Brown’s Mart, as the venue, to continue as a multipurpose arts theatre and become a centre of practical training for technicians, stage managers, event managers, and independent producers.

The challenge of running all this is great, but so is the appeal. It might mean recruitment from elsewhere, but Darwin also has skilled people in current positions and has demonstrated of late an ability to attract quality recruits. A collapsing of existing funding and rethinking of the roles of DTC, TEAM and BMT could achieve that.

There is a caveat: One of the strengths of regional theatre has been its ability to introduce artists of skill for key functions as needed. A talented Creative Producer is not necessarily a director and even if he/ she were, such a task is probably incompatible with the core business of developing, producing and presenting the work of others. The directorial talent pool in Darwin is shallow. The success of the locally produced product is going to rely on the selection of guests who will benchmark the work against national standards and in the process contribute to mentoring emerging directors. That, too, needs to be part of the mix. .

Were all of this to happen, it would offer a solution particular to the circumstances of the Top End but different from that of Central Australia while sharing certain common characteristics. As with the Alice Springs model, it may be that some of the Darwin re-alignment could be done within the existing funding levels though not necessarily within the current funding patterns. Here too, taken piecemeal the initiatives are likely to be starved of resources. Again, what is needed is a joint strategic exercise between the key stakeholders and Australia Council (more broadly that the Theatre Board) and Arts NT to lay out and adopt a multiyear plan of action to give effect to this move and these recommendations.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:**

**That Arts NT convene and facilitate a joint planning group including but not limited to the Brown's Mart Trust, Top End Marketing and select independent producers, to develop a plan for the integration of the key roles of producing, presenting, training and management currently undertaken in various degrees by each of them separately, with the aim of creating a single new producing, presenting and facilitating hub for Darwin in line with the objectives outlined in recommendation 7.**

**RECOMMENDATION 11:**

**That in consideration of this, the Company A/Company B model as outlined be the preferred basis for this new entity**

## 18. Money and the Market

It is difficult to discuss the arts in Australia without defaulting to “funding”. Almost invariably “funding” means subsidy i.e. government intervention in conditions of market failure. The arts need government assistance - usually as grants - because the market alone won't sustain them. And this is undoubtedly true. But it is not the only truth, and it cannot be a substitute for examining what the market can contribute.

However one considers it, the market is vital. Not just the audience as market, though that plays a part, but about how to build demand; how to create and sustain employment; and crucially how to seek out and exploit opportunity. It is not just about putting *value* on the arts, but also putting a *monetary value* on them. These are issues that the arts community in Australia has tended to avoid.

For that reason, this section starts not with government but with the private sector. First let us acknowledge that the theatre does not exist in isolation of economic reality. We live in a mixed economy. Why then is the economy of the performing arts not more mixed? .The market can be a tool for creativity, not just, as many see it, a threat. When the arts thinks about the private sector they think of sponsorship or philanthropy. Those can be just another kind of dependency. This is about creating demand.

### 18.1 Creating Demand

Can the theatre sector and, by extension the arts industry, grow out of dependency to become self sustaining in any way? Much of the focus over the past forty years of government intervention in the arts has been on supply and making *organisations* sustainable in order to generate supply. Obviously, it is one of the goals. But there is also a need to focus on how to make *individuals* sustainable. Public funding is one means. But is it contributing to sustainability or merely offering short term solutions? The other way is to consider what market can offer to creating sustainability both to organisations and individuals through demand.

How then can demand grow skills, training and retaining theatre workers, create employment and expand the customer base? In part the answer lies in being opportunistic. Earlier, this report looked at two cases which meet that objective. Neither was described at the time in terms of demand, but they are opportunistic. They are: TTTE and the DTC's tendering scheme.

The first uses the simple device of growing demand through extending the reach. TTTE is, at base, a mechanism to reduce the unit cost of producing new product in each market by trading it across markets and thereby increasing the potential customer base for each new work created. We know it has other (cultural) benefits, just as traded foodstuffs have the additional benefit of nutrition. It's good but in order to continue the venture and to expand it its scope, it needs more investment.

The Second - DTC's tendering scheme – looked outside the box and thought: where do other markets lie? It took a skills centre – actors and their highly specific talents – and promoted them to a non-theatrical market which employed and value added to those skills in another context. It enhanced employment, extended experience and contributed to the retention of the people and thus the skills in the community. Those acting skills were traded in the public sector it is true, but they might just as easily been traded in the

private sector for instance as corporate training, public speaking, leadership development or for tour guides.

These are simple devices but they serve to lift the arts out of dependency and into a mode of social enterprise by selling services. To take another example: given the immense daily focus on these issues, it is surprising that there seem to be little action in applying performance skills to the vital areas of indigenous health and education. The point is, that these are ways of looking at the sector which are about creating and exploiting demand, not just about building supply

This is not an argument that theatre practitioners should turn themselves into talent agencies, commercial promoters or tourist enterprises. But if a small and dynamic theatre sector is to thrive in NT, grow employment and retain skills it needs to be alive to those dimensions and how they can contribute to its success.

Since tourism is one of the largest and most profitable industries in NT it is equally surprising that there is little interface between it and the providers of live performance skills and talent. Tourists come to the Territory for its natural wonders, but they also come for its culture - for its indigenous culture amply demonstrated in the market for artifacts and the visual arts - but also for its unique non-indigenous "frontier" culture (if one may use that expression without offense).

The Territory is replete with examples of entrepreneurs who have made the "Territory experience" a dynamic and lucrative contributor to the bottom line. But where are the performing arts in all of this? Where are the so called *creative* industries? Cultural tourism is much talked about, but often in the context of attracting tourists to come to what arts providers are already doing. Festivals are often crafted with tourist attraction in mind but they tend to be the exception. Cultural tourism is also about *creating* demand either by positioning what is already on offer in a way that tourists can readily avail themselves of it, or by crafting work specifically for them.

The review cannot be prescriptive about these matters. What follows is a series of questions rather than answers.

Why, for instance, is there little or no performance equivalent to the highly successful indigenous visual arts sector? Why, in particular, are there no ongoing indigenous performance tourism enterprises in the Northern Territory? It may seem hackneyed to refer to the Tjapukai model in Cairns, but it *is* a real working model. Began in 1987 as a small dance theatre company in Kuranda, with the dedication and support of both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, the company has evolved into Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park, a \$9 million enterprise which gives employment and cohesion to an entire community in the tropical rainforest and is a recruiter, trainer and provider of theatre skills there.

Why is there no comparable plan or investment in NT? Clearly, for such a scheme to work in NT it would require investment of the corporate dollar, input from a tourism authority and probably some facilitation from Arts NT. Such projects are not easy, but demonstrably neither are they impossible. As governments and the private sector argue for sustainable indigenous enterprise to create real business capacity and real work, will theatre be the only industry to stand aside? The visual arts have long demonstrated

their capacity to generate work and a worldwide market for indigenous communities. Why cannot the performing arts be part of that thinking?

By the same token, given the patent enthusiasm about the telling of NT stories and the great deal of talent devoted to that end, why are there no "NT story" tourism enterprises employing actors and theatre workers? Tiny, isolated Norfolk Island with a population of 2000 has turned its Bounty history into a son-e-lumiere theatrical enterprise providing employment to locals and earning significant tourism dollars. NT has an equal urgency to tell its stories and is rich in writers. In Darwin alone the Town Hall ruins would seem to be a site crying out for such application. Again, this is not a matter of waiting for a grant. Rather, it is about vision, business planning, commercial investment and forging public/private partnerships. There is an abundance of models around the world. Government has a role to play but mainly in guidance and perhaps investing in the early stages. Ultimately, it is up to the market to ensure long term sustainability over dependency.

**RECOMMENDATION 12:**

**That in developing their strategic plans, Northern Territory theatre practitioners balance their preoccupation with the growth of product supply with a critical examination and strategies for growing demand especially from non arts based markets**

**RECOMMENDATION 13:**

**That Arts NT convene a task force, crucially including public tourism authorities and commercial tourism providers, to analyse the opportunities of the NT theatre sector to engage with and contribute to both indigenous and non-indigenous for-profit tourism needs and develop strategies for that purpose.**

**18.2 Reshaping Support**

None of the above is to suggest that public funding does not play a vital role in support of the arts, especially in emerging market conditions such as the Territory. But it is well to be reminded that it is only part of the picture.

There is a dilemma at the heart of public funding in such fragile circumstances as the Territory. A small population base will to some extent distort national patterns of assistance. The Australian government has always recognised such distortions and accepted them as a necessary corollary of low densities of population in a large land mass. Federal funds to Tasmania have long been such a case in point and the cause of some aggravation. In this context, the Theatre Board of the Australia Council reports that because of its particular circumstances NT receives a "disproportionate" 2% of its funding compared with 1% population. Interestingly, however, NT also has the second highest success rate by amount funded by the Board (52.8%) and by application numbers (47.1%). (In both cases the highest was South Australia.) Now, while actual dollars may not be great, in relative terms this is an impressive outcome for the sector.

These factors impose three critical conditions on any argument seeking greater public investment. The first and most obvious is that what is being given is used to its maximum advantage; the second that the State or Territory government is making a commensurate investment to the Commonwealth's and ensuring that it too is getting the maximum benefit; and that any case for more must ensure that the programs to be supported are genuinely advancing practice and performance in a way that is both

original and has impact. In NT it is not clear that this is always the case. Greater plurality of funding practice and greater sensitivity to a variety of needs is required to move forward.

- **Hubs**

The role of government in helping to shift focus from a concentration on sustaining organisations to one of sustaining individuals is crucial. The proposed shift from conventional theatre companies as the preferred funded model to a more production oriented base through the use of resource hubs, is one such instance. Theatre companies have characteristically been top-down instruments of making work. The hub tends to be driven by a variety of individuals and small groups and is thus more focused on research and development. It works from the bottom up and delivers out. To the extent that the hub is linked to training, management, presenting and export (touring) modules - again as its proposed - it lengthens the life of work and thereby employment opportunities, raises skill levels and contributes to individual sustainability. It does all of this without the artists needing to turn themselves into corporate entities with the entire largely non-productive even anti-productive burden that that imposes. Of course, that in turn contributes to sector wide sustainability. Multiyear government funding will be vital in this and the Key Arts Organisations rubric will be critical, perhaps with a few reforms along the lines mentioned below.

- **Incentive programs**

More attention should be paid to individual sustainability in other ways. A range of what we might call incentive programs is another mechanism of achieving this goal.

The Australia Council has usefully pioneered the concept of individual fellowships which give an artist multi-year support to develop ideas and concepts and research these. While, worthy as sabbatical exercises, they are usually not directed at building future capacity that sustains the artist's ongoing practice or future life. Arts NT should give consideration to adopting but adapting this plan. It could do so (perhaps in association with other government small business programs) by trialing two initial "enterprise" fellowships per year one for an indigenous person and one for a non-indigenous person. These should commence in 2010 perhaps rising in number thereafter, based on an evaluation of progress. The aim would be to help the recipients develop sustainable performing arts enterprises in which they buy the time to research partnerships, build skills, extend networks, seek investors and test their case.

In parallel with this, NT Arts possibly in association with the Australia Council, should also consider creating a small fund of say \$50,000 commencing in 2009 available to seed projects even before they are taken up by a hub or as an incentive for it. Since a key part of developing any project is not just to have a good idea or the talent to make the work, but also to demonstrate capacity to carry it through to completion, grants from this fund should be made on a "matching" basis. That is to say, the recipient needs to be able to demonstrate that he/she has raised or has commitment of other (ideally non-government) funds or investment according to some agreed ratio.

Beyond the "seed" level and at a later stage of a project's development there are occasions when where the demonstration of joint private/public sector action could make a difference to a project's success or to its securing a market opportunity. Accordingly, there needs to be a small fund, again in the region of \$50,000, commencing in 2009 available for strategic investment/partnerships

In both of these cases, for ease of access and turn-around time, consideration might be given to devolving the allocation of them to the designated hubs as being closer to the action and more responsive to the field.

One of the factors that has encouraged both these proposals has been the mix of non arts funds which some NT artists and groups already secure. It would be even more heartening to see these develop in ways that went beyond grant programs and started to involve the sources of these funds as partners and investors in the projects. Equally encouraging is the growth of a local government arts role in the Territory. Darwin City Council's recent adoption of a cultural plan and upgrading of its part time cultural officer to a full time position and Alice Springs Town Council putting ADF on triennial funding are some key indicators observed during this review. They all add to the mix of funding possibilities, diversifying sources of income and thus strengthen sustainability.

**RECOMENDATION 14:**

**That Arts NT, ideally in association with another government or non government small business development program, trial two "enterprise" fellowships per year (one indigenous and one non indigenous) commencing in 2010 aimed at helping the recipient develop a sustainable performing arts enterprise in which they buy the time to research partnerships, build skills, extend networks, seek investors and test their case.**

**RECOMMENDATION 15:**

**That NT Arts, possibly in collaboration with the Australia Council, create a fund of the order of initially \$50,000 commencing in 2009 to seed new projects and that these be made on a "matching" basis with other funds secured by the recipient and that this fund be devolved to the proposed new hubs for re-granting.**

**RECOMMENDATION 16:**

**That Arts NT create a fund again in the region of \$50,000 commencing in 2009 available for strategic investment/partnerships where the demonstration of joint private/public sector action could make a difference to a project's success and that these be made on a "matching" basis with other funds secured by the recipient and that this fund be devolved to the proposed new hubs for re-granting.**

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### **18.3 Key Arts Organisations**

The process might also be assisted by reviewing the ways in which the Arts NT's Key Arts Organisations funding mechanism operates. Currently there are 27 such entities. That is one for every 7500 inhabitants of the Territory. While such figures tend to get distorted in small populations, that does seem to spread the available resource rather thinly. Since each must be legally incorporated, governed and managed, it is possible that this is stretching needs, skills and capacity too far in the current circumstances. While clearly well intentioned as a mechanism to stabilise and reward those companies making a critical contribution to the sector, in some ways it may be having an opposite effect.

Its stated purpose is that: *Funding is offered to support both operational capacities (including staffing and administration costs) and core program activity. Organisations are offered a contribution towards the expense of delivering an identified and agreed program and outcomes.*

*Funding and Performance Agreements under this category reflect this intent, detailing minimum performance levels.”*

The Government declares that it seeking six outcomes from the Key Arts Organisation category. They are:

- 1. Excellent and innovative artistic work;*
- 2. Strong organisations which display active leadership within the arts and cultural sector;*
- 3. The nurturing of the Northern Territory’s creative capacity;*
- 4. Community engagement through attendance, participation and appreciation in arts and cultural activities;*
- 5. A positive contribution to Government’s cultural, economic and social policies; and*
- 6. Enhancement and promotion of the Northern Territory’s distinctive identity locally, nationally and internationally.*

It further declares that the admirable principles which underpin the Government’s funding arrangements for Key Arts Organisations are that:

- 1. Government can only successfully implement its arts policies and strategies in partnership with strong and successful arts organisations;*
- 2. Strong arts organisations require more than funding – they also require advice, guidance and relevant and timely information;*
- 3. High standards of management and governance are to be expected from organisations enjoying significant public funding;*
- 4. Multi-year funding enables arts organisations, and Government, to plan more effectively and to implement initiatives which require long lead times;*
- 5. Multi-year resources devoted to Key Arts Organisations should also, where possible, benefit other Northern Territory arts organisations and artists, through cooperative working arrangements, mentoring and in other ways; and*
- 6. Application, management and reporting procedures should be kept to a minimum, consistent with necessary accountability, and should, as far as possible, be harmonised with the arrangements of other funding agencies.*

Key Arts Organisations - Funding Framework 2008 3

However, the process and the outcomes are not always as straightforward as this suggests. There are two cases in point; that of Red Dust Theatre in Alice Springs and the Darwin Theatre Company. Of course, it is acknowledged that these are only two out of 27 but the question is as much one of due process as of frequency, and should be addressed on that basis.

If an organisation is deemed to be “key” it follows that it is not just its administrative existence that occupies that role but more importantly its program. If Key Organisation funding provides only the means by which the entity can support its core being, but must then seek by project for its artistic activity, it undermines rather than strengthens the chance of success. Moreover, it makes the funding agency in effect the surrogate artistic management of the company since its panel gets to chose what will proceed and what will not. The company is thus doubly disadvantaged. The recent case of Red Dust, having been funded by Arts NT as a Key Organisation received a grant of \$50,000 which barely covered the cost of its one full time employee. Granted, it was made on the basis that it was “seed funding” for an emerging organisation to allow it to leverage significant support from key partners especially the Theatre Board. However, when it sought project funding from Arts NT, this was not supported leading to an unseemly scramble to secure alternatives. No doubt the matter could have been better handled by both sides, but it does reveal a disconnect between policy and practice that needs attention.

Such instances cannot be seen in isolation. Australia Council programs also play a part in this. Attempts are made to “harmonise” funding patterns in certain instances and that is generally desirable. The situation of NT Key Arts Organisations issues is likely to be exacerbated by the Theatre’s Board decision to reduce access to annual program funding in favor of project or triennial support. Even allowing that from 2010 the Key Emerging Organisations category may offer a “safety net” for some, it is currently the case that a Key Arts Organisation in NT which is not triennially funded from the Australia Council might have just enough core funds to keep itself alive but little else. In the case of NT It is a lose-lose situation which cannot help but further weaken an already fragile theatre environment.

Though not directly related to this issue, the process adopted with regard to the Darwin Theatre Company and Darwin Community Arts would appear to have been equally unhelpful. Any reasonable person would presume that placing a company on notice is aimed at doing two things: it sends a “wake up” call that all is not well in the perception of the funding agency with the client’s achievement of its stated goals or delivery of the standards of work for which it has been funded; and it galvanises the organisation into taking action to rectify the situation. Such notice has been in other circumstances accompanied by a funding freeze i.e. no increase and the *potential* for loss if you don’t life your game. As with any punitive action, it should be accompanied by a clear and unmistakable statement as to the reasons and the agency’s expectations of what will remedy them. It is counter-intuitive to issue such a warning and at the same time cut the client’s funding, thereby effectively removing from them a key element in the capacity to redeem their situation.

**RECOMMENDATION 17:**

**That Arts NT review the process by which the Key Arts Organisation category is applied to ensure that both the grant levels can be genuinely sustaining rather than inhibiting both to both the recipient company as such and to its artistic program recognising that this may result in fewer being funded to succeed rather than more to fail.**

**RECOMMENDATION 18:**

**That Art NT review the application of its “on notice” procedure so that it does not financially inhibit the recipient company from undertaking the very improvement in its practice that it is intended to achieve.**

**18.4 A Joint Deal**

There are a number of ways in which the programs of Arts NT and the Australia Council intersect. In the latter case, these are not always programs of the Theatre Board. While “theatre” is the subject of this review it is not always been possible nor desirable to isolate theatre practice from the surrounding arts environment.

The endorsement of those mergers that might lead to the emergence of new hubs in Alice Springs and Darwin is reliant on support from other branches of the Australia Council, notably Community Partnerships and Market Development. At the same time, the implications of some of these realignments go beyond the theatre sector itself and touch upon other artforms which some of those organisations currently service. These are major shifts in emphasis and operation of the entities and activities concerned. The considerations are greater than any one grant program or indeed grant round but need to be assessed in an holistic way for the Territory and its special needs.

Accordingly, if this is to succeed there needs to be a bold new partnership engendered between Arts NT and the Australia Council with imaginative programs to support and resource the theater sector in NT. In that context, it may be that both should give consideration to building a special Northern Territory *joint funding deal* for three to five years in order to secure the new entities and help them stabilise themselves and implement their programs.

Given the complexity of this task and the number of stakeholders likely to be involved, such a plan would take time to develop and implement. The most prudent timeframe would therefore be to devote the balance of 2008 and early 2009 to that process, seeking to introduce it in 2009/2010 for the Triennium 2010-2012.

**RECOMMENDATION 19:**

**That the Australia Council's Theatre Board and Market Development and Community Partnerships programs work together to ensure that to the extent that the reinvention and potential amalgamations of both TEAM and RedHOT Arts with other bodies provides new and continuing services to theatre companies and practitioners they do so in a way that meshes with the Australia Council support which they receive for their artistic programs.**

**RECOMMENDATION 20:**

**That these in turn work with Arts NT to ensure that there is a seamless delivery of support top the resultant hub organizations so that they are not crippled from the outset by disconnects in funding categories, timing or rationale.**

**RECOMMENDATION 21:**

**That during 2008/2009 Arts NT and the Australia Council work to forge a new strategic partnership between them which takes account of the very specials needs and circumstances of the Northern Territory to support and resource the theater sector there by means of a special joint funding framework for the 2010-2012 triennium aimed at underpinning the proposed the new entities and helping them stabilise themselves and implement their programs.**

## 19. The Short Run Syndrome

### 19.1 The Life of a Production

One of the most crippling aspects of making product of any kind in and for a small market is its limited shelf life. In this, the Territory is just Australia writ small. As a nation we need to export our products because the domestic market is too small to sustain the cost of its growth, manufacture or extraction. Left to local consumers, the unit cost of production would simply preclude anyone wanting to invest in or purchase the finished article.

In that respect, the performing arts are little different. It may be that the cost of producing a theatre work to the same level in NT is no less, possibly greater, than in other parts of the country. But the size of population almost certainly ensures that it will have a short life, so that the chance of recouping a part of the investment equivalent to that in other places is slim. If a show can do 50 performances in another place, all else being equal, its unit cost will decline proportionately and the savings effected enable the producer to invest in other product. Thus, initial investment (in this case arts grants) falls as a proportion of the total cost of production in direct ratio to its "life". Extending the life of a work makes that investment more efficient.

However, this is not just a question of dollars. There is also an artistic or creative life to the product. No theatrical production is static, least of all a newly minted work. It changes and grows (hopefully for the better) with each performance. It does not automatically follow that a work goes on improving ad infinitum, but exposure to new and different physical circumstances, audience reactions and cultural differences modifies work in significant ways. The opportunity for the creative team to rethink and adjust over time; to learn skills on the job and apply these in the future are part of the life cycle of any production.

From a small market base, touring is the most secure way that this can happen effectively or perhaps touring linked to exchange. Thus the role of Artback NT in providing linkages throughout the Territory and with presenters beyond the Territory through arts markets, booking agencies and other networks becomes critical and the resourcing of that company vital to the health of the sector. The kind of networked touring/exchange and co-production exhibited by the Northern Australia Theatre on the Edge loop with Darwin Theatre Company, Knock-em-Down and Red Dust in NT and JUTE, Tropic Sun and Crossroad Theatre in Queensland is another effective means of achieving this end, the more so, because it operates in a multi-year framework.

Finally, there is the life of extended employment. The greater the exploitation of a given work, the more extended are the employment opportunities/income for its artists. That, in turn, leads to greater chance to hone their skills and for those skills to be retained in the Territory and their presence in turn elevates the quality of other future work in which they might be engaged. Overall, the skills base is raised and the training and mentoring opportunities that flow from that are increased.

There are two ways, both already operating, but each capable of much greater development that have the capacity to achieve some of this for the theatre sector. One goes direct to theatre practice. It is via The Theatres to the Edge (TTTE) consortium; the other is indirect, through Darwin Festival and Artback Arts Touring NT.

## **19.2 The Theatres to the Edge Model**

The TTTE consortium, as discussed earlier, is targeted precisely at theatre work. Four regional theatres form the core of the network and its key activities are sharing of data, resources, skills and accumulated knowledge; co-production; presentation of each others shows; joint strategies for future national and international touring; joint strategies for development of touring and production funds.

Under the current arrangement this has been largely paid for by the Queensland Government through their ARTS Transit scheme which is administered by the Queensland Arts Council as part of the Arts Regional Touring Service (ARTS) though Arts NT has made at least one project grant to the process and has been in dialogue with Arts Queensland in 2006 and 2007 regarding a strategic partnered investment in TTTE. Those discussions made soon resume.

Through the TTTE presentations most partners have increased their seasons to five or six productions which, if left to their own devices, none of them could individually afford. TTTE is also an exchange. Each company presents the others' shows. This lengthens the artists' contracts from between 5 and 8 weeks per production to 8 to 11 weeks on average; provides a broader audience and more critical response for each company's work; makes their shows 'tour-ready' by testing them through a variety of venues; and permits bench-marking against the work of peers elsewhere, thereby encouraging higher standards of production.

In 2010, the current arrangements with ARTS will expire. To fill this gap TTTE is developing a joint strategy for approaching Playing Australia, along with the state governments of Queensland and Western Australian and the NT government as well as investigating other fund-raising possibilities.

Theatre to the Edge effectively unites the north of Australia as one production house. The partners believe that operating jointly will provide them with the best possible chance of raising the profile of their work, thus making national touring more likely. TTTE is already approaching Long Paddock and the presenter networks and attracting the attention of independent producers (for instance the Blackbird Productions tour of Tracy All of the TTTE companies have made approaches to overseas presenters with tours to Korea and Japan now definite (Tropic Sun's show *FUTZ*) and to Chennai and Singapore likely (JUTE/Crossroads show *Gods of Spicy Things*).

### **RECOMMENDATION 22:**

**That the Northern Territory's participation in the Theatre to the Edge be maintained as a core function of in the first instance the new Darwin Hub and extended where possible to Central Australian participation as need or opportunity arises.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 23:**

**That Arts NT re-enter into dialogue with Arts Queensland and, where necessary other stakeholders such as Playing Australia, to ensure increased investment in the Theatre to the Edge touring consortium**

### **19.3 Darwin Festival/Artback Model**

The Darwin Festival's proposed creative producing venture would offer a critical path for the work it creates through to touring and management support for the artists and companies. Again, one should be reminded that this concept is for the performing arts generally and is accordingly broader than just theatre. Thus, while it may from time to time benefit theatre projects, it is not dedicated solely to that end.

As has been noted, producing new work and getting it to presentation is just the first step in its life. Ongoing management and tour coordination is the other part of an often longer journey. Artback Arts Touring NT brings to that process expertise and capacity to coordinate tours and handle administration. Should its proposal succeed, it would be the Festival's intention to enter into an agreement with Artback about the works produced, to ensure that they have those services properly applied to them.

The Festival would also continue to support these works with the provision of materials such as: touring kits including media and marketing packs, tech specs and suggested fee structures that would make shows "tour ready". In the case of works that are co-produced with an existing company that already has the mechanisms for managing their own tours, the Festival would remain engaged in seeking touring opportunities for them, and remain as a resource to assist local companies to find pathways out of the Territory. This can be achieved in a number of ways such as bringing works to the Major Festivals Initiative (MFI) table and by championing Territory works at national and international performing arts markets. Part of that process is also sharing of expertise helping local companies to form national and international links with presenters.

The Festival would argue that it has already demonstrated its capacity to deliver on this proposal with its production of *Ngarakuruwala* which after showing to a sold out audience in last year's Festival has been presented at the Sydney Opera House and The Telstra Art Awards Opening event in 2008. The tour coordination for those performances was handled by Artback NT and the Festival has worked closely with them to not only secure the performances, but to also support the tour via the provision of marketing and media materials, advice and contacts. In addition to Artback NT, the Festival has a healthy relationship with a range of agents, managers and tour managers and would look to finding the most appropriate ongoing management structure for works.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 24:**

**That Arts NT continue its vital support for Artback NT Arts Touring as the most critical mechanism for the efficient and cost effective delivery of theatre product across the Territory and to maintain its nationwide services and product advocacy beyond the Territory.**

## 20. A Crisis of Skills

A small community need not imply a low skills level, though it may mean a small skills pool. However, a small community with a high degree of mobility but lacking a plan to recruit, train and retain will almost certainly have a skills crisis.

This is apparent across the theatre sector in NT. There is no full-time training program in the Territory. CDU, which has a number of interesting initiatives in music and media, seems disinclined to re-enter the field, though it might be prepared to host residencies and is open to discussion about the use of facilities for this purpose.

### 20.1 Three Options

Accordingly there would appear to be three ways in which theatre training occurs in NT:

- Through experiential means often in the context of multi youth arts activity e.g. CIYA and InCite. However, this is not necessarily about professional development. It is skills acquisition in the context of growing creative awareness and/or developing social/performance skills. Mostly it is directed at goals of social and community development, leadership, intercultural co-operation, communication and well being. That is not to say young people who pass through these programs cannot aspire to or achieve careers as writers, performers, designers, technicians or even managers, but it is secondary rather than primary.
- Through the provision of short term, unpredictable, and for the most part loosely targeted courses offered from time to time by providers either outside the industry or outside the Territory. For example, over the past few years NIDA's Open Program has held short courses in acting in the NT through the NIDA on Tour program. The courses are usually offered to 12-15 year olds and 16 years+ and in the period 2004 to 2007 have been variously offered from a weekend to two weeks length in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek. Some young people from the NT visit NIDA in Sydney during their summer program in January and some who attend Open Program short courses in NT find a way into the NIDA fulltime courses. There is clearly scope for development in this path which emphasises regularity, continuity and focus on professional development.

Meanwhile there are other avenues: CHARTTES Training Advisory Council is the principal advisor to the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training on Vocational Education and Training Matters, in the Cultural, Recreation and Tourism industries and community sectors. It runs some accredited courses in the entertainment industry and music including technical areas and promises more in the "performing arts". One of its more interesting recent involvements has been with DTC in the Minyerri project which suggests ways in which this function could be developed in the future.

- Through deep end, on-the-job training. Demonstrably, in NT this has been the most common means of entry into all aspects of theatre activity until very recently. Interested people have joined theatre groups and stayed to learn by example or be informally mentored. Clearly, its success depends on the quality of those from who they can learn. In technical areas it is still a common means of

induction into the industry everywhere in the country. It is not, however, always the best way. In the development of performance skills it is rarely adequate.

Of course, it will always be the case that some people leave the Territory, train elsewhere and come back to apply their skills. Again, NIDA offers audition/interview opportunities in Darwin for all the fulltime courses. In 2007 only 10 applied and auditioned – all for the Acting course. Often such émigrés do not come back mainly for lack of employment opportunity. NIDA is interested to find ways to attract more applicants and, in particular, to make young people aware of the career opportunities in areas such as production, design, costume or props making.

The same is true in technical areas. Some young people go to institutions in other cities, train, return and do find employment. Yet while these may enjoy peak periods in the dry season when they are overworked, they also experience downtime when they can scarcely make a living but when their expertise could be put to go use in training and mentoring others. As yet however, there is no coherent plan and thus no resources to support such a move. Similarly, in performance and technical areas, there is also the chance acquisition of suitably qualified people who come to NT and for whatever reason elect to take up residence. But however they have been acquired, it is clear that resident skills are not being deployed to their maximum advantage, leading all too often to a failure to retain them. Those timing issues and the “talent downtime” should be factored into any training plan that is developed.

Of course, it is important to acknowledge what might term “below the radar” training. The review has already commented on the contribution made to this in the youth arts sector, As well, the Darwin Festival provides limited training opportunities via an intern program with Charles Darwin University as well as informal advice to other Arts organisations and festivals in the Territory. With a full time creative producer as part of its team it would be able to extend its training and mentoring capacity with a view to linking up with training support organisations in the Territory such as CHARTTES. Given the large numbers of indigenous festivals in the Territory, the Darwin Festival would also look to take on an indigenous trainee producer in 2010 or 2011. The addition of a skilled creative producer to the Festival team will further enhance its capacity to be a site of expertise that is available to the rest of the Industry. Finally, the emergence of the proposed producing/presenting hubs will have its own impact through focusing and transmitting certain skills.

## **20.2 Registering and Researching Skills**

Knowledge is power and one simple and immediate way to focus on both the strengths and the gaps would be to establish an online time sensitive skills register. There are existing platforms within the NT government where this could readily be housed at low cost and maintenance with updates driven largely by those registering to ensure currency. Properly designed, this could be a user friendly and effective tool for employment generation and skills matching for producers and employees alike including those in other industries. .

This data could be used as the raw material for a theatre skills audit and needs analysis which might perhaps be undertaken by CHARTTES in consultation with Arts NT and the proposed theatre hubs in Darwin and Alice Springs. This could be done with support from any/all of DEEWR, DEET, CDU and access educational funds to augment pure arts funding. That in turn, should produce a skills plan that focuses on a) the use and

employment of resident skills b) the role of a national provider (such as, but not necessarily, NIDA) in performance and technical production and c) the delivery of courses locally under the aegis of say CHARTTES.

Skills are however not only about training. They are also about the use and disposal of information. There is a distressing lack of hard evidence about the size or characteristics of the audience. There is anecdotal comment that the public for hard top theatre in NT is in decline, though audiences for other kinds of live arts and entertainment appear to be growing. When the plan is developed it need also to focus on skills in marketing and market evaluation.

Skills acquisition is not just about theatre per se. It is also about development of life skills and work skills that can be applied across the employment spectrum. In a region with vast tourist potential, the training offering through the theatre arts may benefit the entrainment industry generally, events and event management, hospitality, tourism, community and regional leadership, communication and negotiation skills, small business skills and management skills for independently employed or self employed persons. Investment in this can be investment in the future of a more skilled and flexible work force not just for the theatre but for NT in general. These, too, need to be part of the plan.

**RECOMMENDATION 25:**

**That Arts NT investigate and implement at the earliest opportunity the most appropriate platform for an online time sensitive performing arts skills register.**

**RECOMMENDATION 26:**

**That the emergent theatre hubs in Darwin and Alice Springs in consultation with Arts NT commissioned for a performing arts skills audit and needs analysis which might perhaps be undertaken by CHARTTES and with support from areas such as DEEWR, DEET and CDU with the intention of creating a skills plan focusing on the use and employment of resident theatre skills, the role of national theatre training providers and the delivery of courses locally.**

**20.3 Towards a Training Strategy**

The processes outlined above for a skills register, skills audit and resultant skills plan are well understood in the education and training sectors with well developed protocols. Designing courses and their accreditation are likewise well established.

However, the task of targeting those courses to areas of greatest need and ensuring their cost effective delivery where they can most benefit the sector is another matter as is the need to adequately resource them. Since the development of the means to make better theatre has been identified as a central task for the proposed producer hubs, it is logical that such training be a key part of their responsibilities.

To that end, these hubs as being closest to the needs of their constituents and therefore most sensitive to them should be made responsible for identifying training priorities and suitable training providers to meet these. They would work with those providers to buy in and/or design, commission or adapt suitable accredited courses over an appropriate time frame. At the same time, they would also target recipients and match them with training opportunities and provide scholarships to underwrite their participation.

In order to ensure that this process and its services are as seamless as possible, Once the plan is adopted, Arts NT should devolve training funds to the respective hubs to be managed by them to engender this scheme.

**RECOMMENDATION 27:**

**That the emergent theatre hubs be responsible for identifying training priorities and providers with whom they would work to acquire suitably accredited courses to target and match trainees with training opportunities and provide scholarships to underwrite their participation resourced by a training fund devolved to them by Arts NT.**

## 21. A Need for Space

Artists create their work in many ways and by many means. Place is not the only issue but it contributes to identity and a sense of belonging and these are key factors in nurturing a sustainable and distinctive theatre sector for the Territory.

For all this diversity of practice to be sustained and grow, appropriate spaces within which this can occur are critical. Even acknowledging that much work of excellence in the Territory is created for outdoor presentation, proper indoor rehearsal and work space is vital. In this respect, there are a couple of log jams which could easily be resolved.

In Alice Springs one can imagine a reconfigured resources hub, as discussed earlier, offering a range of services to companies and independent theatre artists, indigenous and non indigenous, and work being developed and presented for the benefit of residents and tourists alike. But at the moment, there is effectively nowhere in the city in which this development can occur, and no suitably scaled place where it can be tested and showcased.

The reason for this is that the purpose-designed and built rehearsal room of the Araluen Arts Centre with sprung dance floor which can also double as a small performance venue is being used as a temporary storage area for part of the museum collection. Patently this is absurd and a crippling inhibition on the theatre sector there. It should be reversed at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **RECOMMENDATION 28:**

**That as critical resource to the theatre sector in Central Australia the purpose-built rehearsal room of the Araluen Arts Centre be returned to its performing arts use as a matter of urgency.**

In Darwin the current uncertainty about Brown's Mart is of a different kind. There the lack of clarity of its role and a dysfunctional income arrangement have rendered access to it problematic. Unlike Araluen, there is no physical inhibition other than the need over time to upgrade its facilities. However, the requirement to run a cost recovery operation has rendered the Brown's Mart spaces out of the reach of many of those who most need them or to whom they might be most valuable.

As noted above, the longer term resolution of this conundrum is linked to a clarification of the organisation's overall mission. Nevertheless, a simple interim rationalising of the financial base of Brown's Mart, qua venue, in respect to the balance of grants, rents and earned income as against staffing and services, could be done at any time and independent of the bigger picture, and would restore both confidence and focus to its use.

### **RECOMMENDATION 29:**

**That, as the longer term issues of the proposed Darwin hub are developed, Arts NT undertake as a matter of urgency to rationalize the financial base of the Brown's Mart venue both by increasing its operating grant to ensure adequate staffing to deliver its core services and compensate for rental foregone through the current provision of free office space to designated arts bodies.**

## 22. Summary - A Question of Standards

Standards is a tricky topic and yet one which is widely broached. In part, it is linked to the issue of skills. But there are bigger questions. Size and mobility of population are clearly factors, but they may not be the only factors. Self awareness also plays a part.

Concomitantly, there is an acknowledgement amongst practitioners that standards of performance, production values and technical support in the Northern Territory are also lower than in other parts of the country. This appears to be accompanied by a lowering of expectations which, accompanied by a very natural tendency to barrack loudest for the “home team”, has led in the view of some to a vicious cycle of aspirations and reality chasing their tail. “Good enough for the Territory” was an expression heard frequently during the study and only occasionally was it used with irony.

Lack of quality media comment; a desire to hear and see local stories told above all; a very natural desire to see local activity almost at all cost; together with a shallow and constantly shifting skills base have no doubt contributed to a diminishing or at least static culture of critical response.

None of this is to say that good work is not produced in NT. But critical faculties in any area of human endeavour, if not regularly sharpened, blunt over time. There is a concern that the above factors have now made it difficult for the NT public to distinguish between the genuinely good and the also ran not because they can't, but because they have no regular, reliable standard of reference.

How might that be assisted? .A regular diet of performance from elsewhere is critical. This is not because it is inevitably better (it may indeed serve to show how good local product can sometimes be by comparison) but certainly because, if it is well chosen and carefully curated, it ought to be the best available. That needs to be sustained.

Providing a well informed and informing context for both local and imported presentations so that the producer and audience can enter into a critical dialogue about it is also important. The exporting of local work so that the work itself and its associated artists are exposed to other kinds of evaluation and self evaluation in different social and cultural contexts adds an important dimension. As we have seen, there are ways in which these can be fostered and expanded.

Engaging the critical resources of the various arts programs of CDU as a means of developing this dialogue might also be useful. And using various forms of contemporary online social and communal networks such as blogs, facebook, mi-space and the like, to elevate discussion and create active dialogue and in the process bypass the traditional media will be increasingly valuable. Well managed, they could have a profoundly positive impact.

On that note and in closing, it is worth remarking that an entire generation has had its awareness and self awareness profoundly and probably permanently reshaped by the internet. Social behaviour, the way we live our lives, the very nature of community, as well as personal and communal ethics have been or are being changed, perhaps forever. It was surprising, then that these earthshaking changes barely surfaced in the course of this review. Even amongst the young, there was a sense that they were

making work for a set of social conditions that no longer existed. It is not for a review such as this to prescribe how artists should work or with what materials or processes they should engage. Nevertheless, this lack of concern seemed to distance this practice from many real world concerns.

Properly nurtured the theater sector of the Northern Territory has a potentially great and distinctive future. It is uniquely positioned to tell original Australian stories to Australia and the world provided it can acquire and sustain the skills to tell them effectively. Well managed, it can make a unique contribution to the lure of the Territory to visitors and settlers alike. As a social enterprise it has the capacity to offer interpretation, harmony and understanding between and across cultures. But in order to do all this it must value itself enough to create and pursue a plan.