



CIRCUITWEST



Looking In Our Own Backyard

The search for audiences

PART II

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INTRODUCTION

This resource is the next in our Audience Development series. It follows on from the research already undertaken across Western Australia, in determining why people do not like to attend non-commercial performing arts.

The intention is to grow audiences by looking to the barriers that stand in the way of attendance. We have no magic wand to attract those who do not like performing arts and we need to accept this fact. Instead, we seek to determine barriers that stand in the way of attendance and, hopefully, show how organisations have sought to remove or minimise these factors to grow audiences.

The questions asked in this research were developed from intelligence gained from participants in focus groups across Western Australian in 2018/2019, and the topics covered were those raised in group after group.

In saying this, the questions were of our choosing. We decided on the topics and barriers we would ask about. We need to remember by raising a barrier in research, we might just ask someone to comment on something they had never considered before, and thereby make it a barrier that does not really exist.

We need to be mindful that we all influence research outcomes in what we ask and how we ask it. So I ask that you read this research as directional data only that is worth considering for each presenter and producer. This report will only raise factors that appeared many times in results and led us to believe that this factor needed further thought, discussion and investigation.

The second consideration for the factors we raised in the research is, does it meet a reasonableness test in terms of what we know about populations and behaviour? Studies can often show that by raising a factor they can prove that it is important to a huge percentage of a targeted group. So we needed to see if any directions the data took were supported by other knowledge or experiences in our industry or other industries.

We don't want to look at performing arts in a bubble, so in this resource we have looked to other industries and how they have overcome similar barriers to grow their audiences.

To get to our sample, we could not follow the tried and trusted focus groups and research with the 'venue faithful' because we sought non-attenders from around the state. The research was sent digitally through social media and search engine marketing and this provided some unique challenges, the biggest of which was that distrust of the platforms. This meant many people did the survey but did not provide demographics. The volume of those who did not complete demographics was unusual and meant half of the data we had gave us no 'people' insights. Many survey respondents do not want to share personal insights, and this is likely because of high distrust of sharing personal data on social media and Google.

“We are seeking ideas of where there is opportunity to build audiences.”

The other issue was this was the ‘wild card’ sampling because we simply do not know who does not attend performing arts, and so the sample chose itself, which provided some challenges in terms of populations.

All in all, we are not seeking data that is an absolute on performing arts behaviour because that is a data unicorn. We are seeking ideas of where there is opportunity to build audiences. We were very keen to move away from existing research which regularly asked those who attend and love performing arts to tell us about

that love. We broke the mould and looked at haters, avoiders and absentees and this report will talk about the types of factors that impacted respondents and what directions are worth considering in the future.

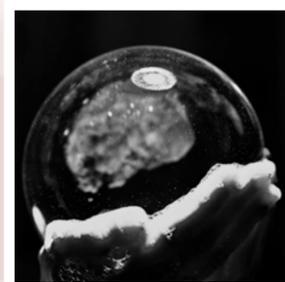
As with all of our research we called on the eminent USA performing arts researcher Dr Bob Harlow to analyse our data and give us his observations. Bob advised caution with reading too much into the data. He gave us great insight into the trends that could be seen in the data and that we should look further into several directions which that data took. We then looked to other evidence to see if the wider world supported the target groups we identified.

We are defining our new target groups under four categories and then we will discuss each in terms of the direction of this research, how this is supported by external factors and any relevant case studies, plus commentary from presenters who have experience in specific markets.

The categories identified are;



ENDS-MEETERS



LIVING IN A BUBBLE



SOLOISTS



THRILL-SEEKERS

Ryan Taaffe
Executive Director

NOTES FROM DR BOB HARLOW



This memo summarizes top-line findings and observations from the recent performing arts survey. Given limitations in question wordings and response patterns, the findings should be taken as exploratory, but they suggest that (perceived) cost and (perceived) availability might be preventing many interested people from attending the arts. These barriers should be explored further, with a particular focus on how much people know and understand about what’s on and how much it costs. There may also be untapped potential with lower-income groups.

The most salient barriers and incentives that respondents indicated were mirror images of each other. Respondents cited cost and availability much more than other factors as preventing them from attending, and they said they would be encouraged by affordability and having more shows in the region. These barriers may be real and should be better understood, but at the same time, a lack of information in and of itself can be a hidden barrier—people often don’t know what’s on (that is, what they want may in fact be available). People also may assume that attending performing arts costs more than it does, or lack information about concession pricing.

Any further research into cost and availability barriers should examine how much information could alleviate them. So, for example, explore the appeal of announcements that have clear cost information—e.g., “Ticket prices start at \$10” or “Saturday matinees are free.” Moreover, while large numbers of respondents say availability of performing arts inhibits attendance, those numbers may be driven by actual scarcity of certain performance types, awareness of what’s on, or both. Research at a regional level could provide some clarification by drilling down about specific past performances—especially for those genres’ respondents said they are most open to seeing, such as theatre (and for parents, children and family shows). If respondents were aware of them and still did not attend, there may be other more complex barriers at work that are difficult to surface in a survey format.

Cost may be a real barrier for lower-income respondents, whose stated interest in the arts is greater than their attendance levels, and who say lower prices would prompt them to attend. These groups (having incomes less than \$25,000 or \$25,000-\$50,000) are large, and if they are in fact as interested as they say and cost keeps them away, alleviating that barrier would have a noticeable impact on overall arts attendance.

Any additional research should also clarify to what extent barriers cited by respondents really do get in the way—just how much do they prevent attendance? A finer-grained measure of arts attendance could help. One tack is to ask about strength of the barriers, and another is to obtain greater clarity on how frequently people attend the performing arts to identify to what extent people are held back.



THE ENDS-MEETERS

Arts Lovers in lower income brackets

Can we build audiences amongst those on lower incomes?

CircuitWest research shows an apparent (or perceived) lack of accessibility of performing arts to those on lower income brackets. Can we build audiences amongst those on lower incomes? This section will highlight organisations that have done just that.

According to Dr Bob Harlow analysis of our data, “cost may be a real barrier for lower-income respondents, whose stated interest in the arts is greater than their attendance levels, and who say lower prices would prompt them to attend. These groups (having incomes less than \$25,000 or \$25,000-\$50,000) are large, and if they are

in fact as interested as they say and cost keeps them away, alleviating that barrier would have a noticeable impact on overall arts attendance.”

“(This) barrier(s) may be real and should be better understood, but at the same time, a lack of information in and of itself can be a hidden barrier. People may also assume that attending performing arts costs more than it does, or lack information about concession pricing.”



The proportion of people living in low-income households was 9.3% when last reported by AIHW. To provide perspective, this is more than 2,000,000 people in Australia who may have limited or no access to performing arts.

Looking at the research, there were many people in the \$25,000-\$50,000 income level. The median income in Australia is \$48,360 before tax (source ABS 2019) so actually many people who reported affordability issues were from households with median incomes.

Should performing arts, by nature, be available across all income levels? The answer may be, yes, but the practicalities are far less simple. Nevertheless, those regions who are seeing this disparity need to consider if they can develop ways of building their lower income audiences.

It is no surprise that some markets cannot afford performing arts or other experiences, however, the research suggests presenters consider looking further at how they can work with lower income groups with a stated interest in performing arts.

This means considering more than ‘health/seniors card’ discounts are there broader reaching programs that might reach out to the many people who have low incomes. Why do this? One reason is that we are aware of the ‘elite’ reputation of performing arts, earned or unearned, and we may need to reach around the concept that arts is “not for people like us”.

It is also because everyone deserves access to performing arts, irrespective of income, because it is easy to think of something as too expensive before you have tried it (and fallen in love with it), and because not all people on lower incomes are going to stay on that income.

What are the arguments against doing this? Because it might cause full paying ticketing income to drop, because the existing discount programs are working, because fixed costs need to be covered within budgets, because some people simply are not interested, because programs require resources or because such great ideas are not really supported by funding models.

These are all valid and worth discussion. Here are some examples from a producer and a presenter who have programs that increased their accessibility and inclusion.





A helping hand not a handout

Guy Boyce

Former CEO and Artistic Director
Mandurah Performing Arts Centre

Mandurah Performing Arts Centre in Western Australia's Peel region is at the centre of a region with a juxtaposed population of high income and low income.

According to former CEO Guy Boyce, there was a large population of people in the community who were economically disadvantaged and often removed their access to performing arts.

"Mandurah has a lot of people who would fall through the arts cracks and we decided on a proactive approach to engaging whole sections of the community. The strategy was not just about income, it needed to consider all areas of disparity that led to people missing out."

Lotterywest's focus on accessibility gave MANPAC the opportunity to really have a collaborative and listening approach to making performing art available to those who might otherwise miss out.

"This is not about giving out free tickets," Guy said. "It is about working directly with partners and communities and removing barriers so that people can engage with arts, and by doing this find those people who really love performing arts."

Four things coloured the thinking at MANPAC;

1 OPPORTUNITY

The size of the venue meant it often had capacity at great performing arts shows so it had an opportunity to share with the community.

2 PARTNERING

It also knew this was not a case of handing out tickets, it was a case of working with partners in the areas of community service and culture and having them reach out to those who might wish to engage.

3 CHANGING

It needed to consider how a performing arts venue, sometimes considered a very white and wealthy space, could evolve to welcome new diverse audiences.

4 FIT

It needed to focus on performances that were well suited to the new audiences.

"Over the life of the programme there have been more than 5,000 visitors in a year, and we can't really count the number who have become permanent arts lovers but there are many," said Guy.

"In the early days we had to evolve quickly and learn how to make sure the groups we partnered with, like our First Nations audiences felt they were welcome in in our performing space. We had a group that did not feel welcome in our performing space, and this meant finding out how to change. We established relationships and learnt how to change. Our lesson to other presenters is connect and listen to the people and organisations that are already engaged with your new audiences. Don't just hand out tickets, it doesn't work, connect, listen and evolve."

"This is not about giving out free tickets."

There is also work to do in getting connected to those on lower incomes who are interested in experiencing performing arts. Again, partnerships with community organisations are the key to welcoming people who would really like to attend, but just don't have the means.

The MANPAC strategy meant every time it booked a work it considered if the work fitted the programme, what capacity it would have and

who to partner with to make it work. It became part of how the venue delivered performing arts. There were other aspects of the program that supported the diversity of those the venue wanted to reach.

"We reached out with the knowledge that many who had not experienced performing arts by the age of 10 may never be a fan as an adult, so we needed to engage early. Our low-cost family shows became a feature of nurturing young fans," said Guy.

"Other aspects of what we did included our youth theatre company, Riptide, to provide low cost pathways to remove cost barriers for youth to come and see shows with their mates."

"We know there were performing arts sleepers, or those who had never seen performing arts and so did not know they loved it. So many entered the venue through low income programs and now are part of our permanent audiences who may have never accessed performing arts, were it not for these programs."

"The biggest learning we have had is that if we can take an audience member identified in such a program and engage them in the work, they are the most likely to engage long-term in performing arts. This has meant many things, from gaining arts skills from professional artists to becoming part of the work. This won't work for everyone, but for those who can be further absorbed, their engagement with performing arts will be deeper and long lasting."

According to Guy, the future of such programs needs to evolve to consider the creation of work in communities, especially those in areas of disadvantage and presenting work that is truly connected to the social or cultural group based on their experiences. So many barriers will no longer exist when the work is created from and engaged directly with a community.



Access All Areas

Peter Kift

General Manager
Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company

Yirra Yaakin produces such a huge range of far reaching work from world class productions to community and artists workshops, and it is essential that income is not a barrier for audiences to attend, according to General Manager, Peter Kift.

“A strong access and inclusion strategy along with programming innovation and connecting with communities has meant Yirra Yaakin’s work is available to a wide audience, well beyond mainstream theatre audiences, because of a commitment to preventing anyone from missing out,” Peter said.

“The programmes we have in place are to ensure that the key barriers of price, place and country are minimised in ensuring audiences are not disadvantaged by culture, income or location.”

To get to where they are, Yirra Yaakin have developed a great many partnerships through the state to connect its team and Yirra Yaakin artists with communities to make sure there is equitable access to its work.

This has meant working with various funding partners and bringing in a range of strategies and pricing levels that allow for people to have access to our work, the artists and the many types of workshops we offer.

“We have in place specific pricing for families, communities, individuals, schools and even disadvantaged and regional audiences that are inclusive and reasonable. If we consider an audience might miss out, we look at options to present it for free”, Peter said.

One of the reasons this is essential, is because Yirra Yaakin are very focussed on cultural and social impact, authenticity and strong educational and cultural values and the team really want works to be as far reaching as possible.

Whilst some presenters have questioned if low income and community pricing will impact their full price ticketing, Yirra Yaakin has found that full price ticket-buyers are happy to pay that price for our work. “Our experience indicates that offering a community price doesn’t affect the standard full-priced ticket sales overall, and our audiences are more aware of the need for equitable access and inclusivity of our communities. It just opens access to those who may otherwise miss out.”

It is critically important to Yirra Yaakin to diversify our audiences as widely as possible.

“When we recently premiered *Ice Land: A Hip h’Opera*, it was primarily aimed at an audience that would not normally come and see our work – hip hop music lovers and musicians in general. The social impact of the work is so important that we needed to ensure that the show was widely accessible and not make pricing a barrier to entry for those audience members who work in the wider arts community and are generally not flush with funds.”

“So much of our work is about giving voice, connecting with country, pride in who you are and respect for those around you and these are essential impacts of our art. We aim to make a difference in as many lives as possible. We also hope to show audiences, especially children, that art and culture is a powerful and achievable career pathway. We actually believe we have inspired many young people to become artists who have attended our work”.

So whilst the profitability models that others use may be different to Yirra Yaakin’s, it has a focus on working with partners and funders on models that deliver inclusivity.

“We believe that we will investigate anything and everything to deliver pricing that doesn’t leave anyone behind.”, Peter said.

“ Full price ticket-buyers are happy to pay that price for our work [...] offering a community price doesn’t affect the standard full-priced ticket sales overall.”





LIVING IN A BUBBLE

What to do when people won't read your advertising?

This chapter deals with part 2 of this observation from Dr Bob Harlow

“The most salient barriers and incentives to attending performing arts that respondents indicated, were mirror images of each other. Respondents cited cost and availability much more than other factors as preventing them from attending, and they said they would be encouraged by affordability and having more shows in the region.

These barriers may be real and should be better understood, but at the same time, a lack of information in and of itself can be a hidden barrier—people often don't know what's on (that is, what they want may in fact be available).”

Whilst lack of availability is a real situation (sometime there really is nothing on we want), CircuitWest's other research indicates that for many it was a perception, and that research respondents simply had not heard about performing arts available.

It's difficult to quantify the size of the 'living in a bubble' group who do not see communications on what is available, as many people actually develop marketing blindness and screen out so much of what is thrown at them.

There are examples of people who seem to live in communications bubbles. A study published in Forbes suggested many millennials were immune to advertising. Millward Brown added to this with a large study showing “Gen Z are even more likely than older generations to avoid ads. Brands need to adapt their creative development and media planning to reach this emerging group.”

In The Search For Audiences research around WA, a lack of information on availability was seen as a major reason for not attending performing arts. In regions and towns like Harvey, Carnarvon, Albany, Kalgoorlie and

Merredin, not knowing about what was on was one of the top 3 barriers respondents said stopped them from attending performing arts.

However, we need to provide some balance to this research. Whilst the adage that people receive 5,000 marketing messages a day is not really proven, there is no doubt we are bombarded with communications. Performing arts is competing with significant expenditure from far wealthier major retail brands, entertainment, and a plethora of everything from government messaging to the sea of social media users craving attention.

It's not always possible to cut through the giant amount of clutter that our potential performing arts audiences are seeing.

In saying this, there is always great cleverness in the marketing of arts, and we can take great heart from the powerful visual imagery and stories that we have to share. In addition, there is great value in stepping outside traditional communication channels.

Here's a few of the exceptional ideas delivered by presenters and producers to cut through the clutter in their regions and get noticed:

- 1 The team at Harvey Recreation and Cultural Centre, who engaged the Erth's Dinosaur audience with a staff member in a dinosaur suit wandering through the community.
- 2 The giant dance step 'footprints' that were installed in various places as part of the *A Night Out* dance performance tour pre-show marketing.
- 3 The magic performer Pierre-Ulric who travelled to Narrogin to find a giant car sized magicians hat had been made for towns people selfies in the lead up to the show.
- 4 The Good Room's *I Want To Know What Love Is* at BREC that asked the town to anonymously submit their stories of love, long-buried memories, bedroom fantasies, crushes, and conquests.
- 5 The Last Great Hunt's work *Bali* where the venue team offered a free Bintang to entice the townspeople who were lovers of the island paradise, to see a play for the first time.

If current marketing is not reaching all potential audiences you may need to consider a new approach to looking at what activities might get noticed, BESIDES what we always do.

You can't possibly reach everyone who is living in a bubble, and some in the bubble maybe don't want to see performing arts, but for those who are a potential audience, oblivious to what is available, it might be time to look at other channels. As Henry Ford said,

“If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.”

BEING SEEN FROM INSIDE THE BUBBLE

“Creativity is intelligence having fun.”

- Albert Einstein

If there is a potential audience in your region that does not know what is available in your venue, maybe it's time to do some outside-the-box marketing planning.

This is a list of some great promotional ideas to get you thinking about keeping your region aware of what is available in performing arts when they are blind to mainstream marketing;

The photo cut-out

In the foyer was a cut-out of two life size ballerinas with their heads removed so selfie-ites could photograph themselves with their heads on the dancer's bodies. Images were posted on social media by the people being photographed and liked by thousands.

The team in costume

For 3 weeks before the visit of a popular marsupial stage show, the team at one venue and the shires customer service team, all wore possum heads all day, even to lunch.

Box seats

For 4 weeks all the ladies who visited the public toilets in Merredin got to read about the upcoming show on the back of doors to give them something to do whilst they sat.

A personal approach

In the recent Fully Sikh production, the team went face-to-face to engage with Sikh communities and even acted as paper ticket vendors.

Car park party

The venue set up part of its sound system in the car park facing onto a main road and treated the town to some lunch time Bach and Beethoven during which time there was a lunch time ticket offer.

Bring your mum for kid's prices

One of the stops for a well-known musical on aging for women, used a great play on the kid's prices promotion to get intergenerational ticket buying and much publicity with the oldest mum at a kid's price being 87 years old.

Sharing down the line

A group of venues on a dance tour agreed to post videos and photos of audiences having a great time in their venues on social media, and this was shared by subsequent venues along the route so everyone could see the fun had in the previous region.

“Imagine all mainstream advertising channels have been closed down. What would you do to ‘pop some bubbles’ and get seen?”

Ham it up

Three well known people from the town did a terrible reading of act one of the play coming to town. It was shared on Facebook and got thousands of shares under the heading - ‘Now come and see it done properly.’

Show and Tell

A regional drama about disconnection amongst youth arranged the youth cast and director to engage with agricultural college and high school students on the day of the work, significantly impacting the numbers who saw the play, (who would have never have seen the venues social media or emails.)

Start with the fundamentals, even if you have been marketing a long time, get together with any creative minds you know. The best advice is from our 30-minute marketing plan - for every work, think of one thing that you have never tried to show people what's on. Imagine your emails, social media, posters are unavailable and all mainstream advertising channels have been closed down, what would you do to ‘pop some bubbles’ and get seen?

“Creativity is like washing a pig. It's messy. It has no rules. No clear beginning, middle or end. It's kind of a pain in the ass, and when you're done, you're not sure if the pig is really clean or even why you were washing a pig in the first place.”

- Luke Sullivan





SOLOISTS

Building audiences one customer at a time

‘Soloists’ is the name we give to a group that are single adults with or without children.

What do we know about these people? It is a giant group – 17% or more of the Australian adult population is single depending on which statistics you look at.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies predicts that by 2026 single-person households will outnumber traditional nuclear families (Sydney Morning Herald 2019)

More than 2-million Australians live in lone-person households, according to the 2016 census, about 24 per cent of households. On top of that, 16 per cent were single-parent

households, indicating that at least 40 per cent of households would have single residents.

So it was no surprise that these people popped up in our research, who said they would consider going “if they had someone to go with”.

According to Dr Harlow’s research evaluation, “single respondents were also more likely than other groups to say they would be encouraged to attend if they had someone to go with, with 33% of single parents whose children had left home saying it would.” (Bob Harlow 2020).

We can add to this some industry data we are aware of, even if it is anecdotal. Women over 50 (and some say over 60) dominate ticket buyers and donors in many areas of performing arts. The fact that women often outlive men sees a great many of regular customers across all genres and locations.

“Given the sheer number of single people out there, and projections that there will only be more in the future, it’s time the policy positioning of government, the approach of business and the focus of academia properly considers the single person,” said Clare Payne, author of *One: Valuing the Single Life*.

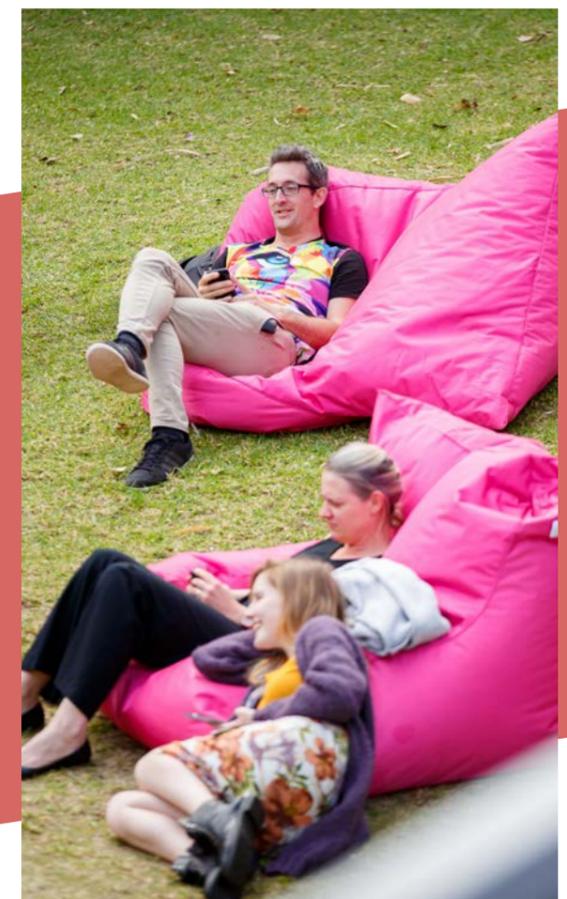
So, when we are planning for presenting performing arts, what do we have in place for this group in society? The fact of the matter is that it is rare for this group to be the subject of much in the way of planning. Most ticketing and promotion is based around families, couples and large groups, and most venues are set up to welcome these target markets, because they are core markets.

The bottom line is, we don’t even know how to plan for singles, (after all we are not dating bars), so how do we even start?

The issue is there is no formula to develop audiences amongst singles, but there is great value in trying some strategies to see what works. It’s worth finding out how many people are home on a Saturday night when there is a great show on at the local venue because there was no one to attend with, and trying to make soloists feel they will have a good experience if they come alone.

“ They would consider going “if they had someone to go with”.

“ If up to 17% of your adult market is single and not attending, it’s worth some effort.





Soloists and the travel market

One of the great case studies in singles marketing has been travel, a marketplace that has really begun to take this rapidly growing segment seriously.

Between 2013 and 2015 the percentage of people polled who travel on their own grew from 15% to 24% (Visa Global Travel Intentions Study 2015)

Interestingly, this matches some the direction of some of the data in the CircuitWest study

According to Solo Traveller World their research on solo travellers asked, 'why do solo travellers go solo?' Respondents could choose more than one response. 59% said they want to see more of the world and they're not willing to wait for others. 45% like the freedom to do what they want when they want.

45%
like the freedom
to do what they
want when they
want.

So how has the travel industry managed to build the travel market? These are suggestions hotel resource Little Hotelier provided for its members:

Update your website to appeal to solo travellers

➤ Make sure that all of the photos that you display aren't groups of people having fun together, or families making memories. Add a few vivid, happy photographs of solo guests enjoying your grounds or exploring the local area.

Promote events on social media

➤ Create events specifically designed for solo travellers, such as cocktail hours in the garden or trivia night in the lounge. Talk about them on social media in order to generate buzz!

How is the travel industry managing the change in the demographic of travellers? If you search singles traveling experiences you will get 16,500,000 results in Google, a great many of which are genuinely providing experiences aimed at solo experiences. If you look at marketing, it shows sole travellers enjoying experiences with a notable lack of multiple pricing. It's clear this is seen as a major market, and not one especially related to dating.

Cruise travel built its singles market around the premise that actually single people wanted to have experiences, without being lumped in with families and couples and ending up the loose end. Plus there was the obvious possibility that singles might actually want to get out and make friends. If anything, this was a positive marketplace, people didn't have to debate with a partner what they would choose, they would make their own decisions.

And yet on cruise lines that provide singles marketing and pricing, they still have couples and families on the same ship, they just ensure they provide options and pricing that suit the solo traveller.

In recent times, small operators like wine tours are getting very focussed on singles with one operator providing tours only for singles in the Yarra Valley. In the arts industry, many galleries have embraced the idea of having singles focused events specifically targeted at solo art lovers, and movie theatregoers.

The common approach of so many of the tourism and leisure offerings is to have communications that celebrate solo experiences and products that show that services ensure singles feel they are considered and catered for. In performing arts, we still need to consider this audience.

Tip: Have communications that celebrate solo experiences



Desperately Seeking Singles

The Casino Bus Programme

Sam Lynch

Former Head of Promotions, Burswood

I was responsible for Burswood's bus programme for many years and I understood it had a reputation as a hook to get older people to come and lose their life savings on the poker machines. I cannot say this is untrue.

A couple of times a week buses collected people from all parts of Perth and deposited them at the Casino doors. The programme was based on a model from the USA that made gaming floors look busy during the day. It was a numbers game to create a buzz, like everything else it was about gambling, but more than half of the people who came weren't simply punters.

For a small fee, they got lunch, a coffee, a tribute act and vouchers for a game of bingo, a spin on the chocolate wheel or roulette, and they got a big like-minded group to hang out with for the afternoon.

The program taught me two things. Firstly, you can lead a horse to poker, but you can't make it bluff. The majority of people in WA don't gamble much outside lotto and the Melbourne Cup and the majority did not attend for gaming. Secondly, it showed WA is full of lonely people seeking friends, not love for most, just company.

WA is full of lonely people seeking friends, not love for most, just company.

I spoke to hundreds of program customers in my time as the Head of Promotions at the resort. It was very unusual to see many couples; the common attendee was single.

When we did research hoping to hear praise for our glitz and glamour, the results surprised us. The biggest factors that influenced the final decision to visit surprised us. We were seen as a safe, comfortable space, cool in summer, warm in winter and not suffering from red flags of other spaces such as drunken bad behaviour. It showed people were comfortable coming alone.

Research highlighted this point to the management team, how many places can you really go to alone as a single? When we brainstormed, we came up with few places, you can, after all, only do so many spins of an art gallery. There are few choices, non-dating related, for people who want to go out by themselves, but not be by themselves.



There are few choices for people who want to go out by themselves, but not be by themselves.

So we moved forwards from believing that the casino was somewhere for people who wanted bright lights and spinning wheels. What we discovered was that our role for some of the programme visitors was connecting many lonely people in a safe space where they can have a good time. It sounds more like a book club than a casino, but actually we unknowingly became a meeting place of friendship for the half of our customers who were single, and often lonely.

But you won't see this in the poker ads, and this should not be seen as a whitewashing – we made money in the same way all other casinos do.



THRILL SEEKERS

Reversing negative images

Do we dare examine the idea that audiences don't come to see performing arts because they think it won't be interesting?

Dr Harlow's commentary on the CircuitWest research made these observations on the reasons people indicated they were not interested in attending performing arts:

"Those who say flat out that they are not interested in attending performing arts, find nothing attractive about it. The top reasons they provide (below) suggest lack of excitement – they think it would be boring and would rather do something else. Men (49%) are more likely than women (20%) to say they think it would be boring, and also elitist (12% of men say so, compared to 5% of women)."

Again we need to remember that this research is not an exact statistical measurement of markets, but the direction of the data is interesting and highly reflective of the view of performing arts standing on the outside looking in.

Last year, when Bob Harlow was on our stage at WA Showcase, he showed us one of the key issues with our marketing was that most of our effort was put into images of performers or images of stages and seating, which is great for audiences who love performing arts. What does that say about the experience they will have for their night out? Are we demonstrating the whole picture of a great experience? Are we showing people actually having a good time?



“One of the key issues with marketing was that most of our effort was put into images of performers or images of stages and seating.”

“What does that say about the experience they will have for their night out? Are we showing people actually having a good time?”

Jump forward to this research direction and it really does support what was observed by Dr Harlow in his session last year. We often pin our hopes of gaining customers on an image of an actor or dancer caught mid pose, or maybe a video of 60 seconds of show scenes. If you go to venue websites there is often an image of a voluminous empty auditorium to promote the space. This might be all a potential new arts lover will be shown about the entire night out.

Think of when you consider going to a movie to see your favourite stars on the big screen. What are you expecting from your night out? For many of us, whether the movie is good or bad the lasting impression of going to the movies is actually popcorn and other treats. Or maybe it's a bit of romance. Whilst it's not a like-for-like experience, the movies are synonymous with a range of positive experiences AND a great movie.

If most of us look back to our recent performing arts experience marketing, we might see that there is little in the marketing about the whole experience, the focus is only on the performance. This is the critical part of why existing customers attend, but is it enough to bring new audiences? Performing arts competes with many other experiences. The performance

is at the centre, but what are the components of the whole experience? Regional venues are often leading the way in creating gatherings rather than just performances.

To see a new approach at marketing the performing arts we can go to Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB) who did a huge study with Dr Harlow about getting young people to attend the ballet.

Their research shows for young people as Bob said, “a lack of familiarity with PNB, combined with stereotypes of the performance hall experience as boring and stuffy, kept them away.”

Pacific Northwest West Ballet did a great number of things to try and attract young audiences including changing marketing to improve perceptions of the experience (see examples page 24 and 25), increasing social media activity (over the four-year grant period, the organisation's Facebook page grew from 2,000 followers to more than 90,000) and introducing promotions aimed at specific markets like the successful 'beer and ballet' concept. “PNB's momentum with teens has continued. TeenTix, for example, sells thousands of tickets annually,” Dr Harlow said.

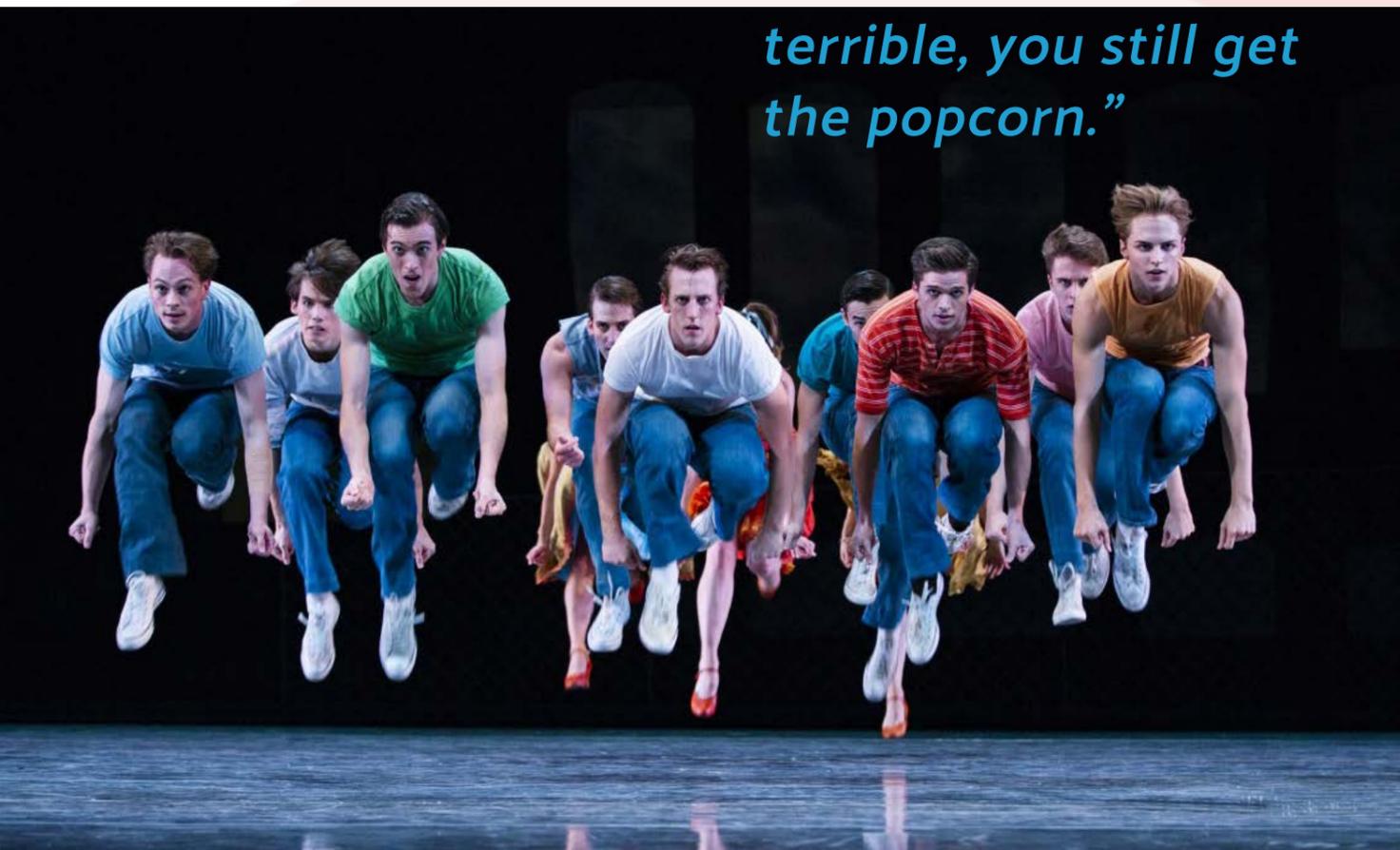
The Search For Audiences Research in 2018/2019 The Art Of Gathering came up in many communities, as respondents, especially those who did not generally attend performing arts, were far more interested in an experience in a performing arts venue if it formed part of a bigger 'gathering' which might include meeting people, socialising with friends, eating, drinking and so on. The thinking, especially in regional WA, is why spend up to an hour getting ready and to and from a performing arts venue to sit in the dark for 90-minutes, even if the show is amazing?

It must be noted that the principal reason this conversation is happening is because we know that performing arts is central, critical and cathartic to any overall experience, and without it our society is hugely poorer.

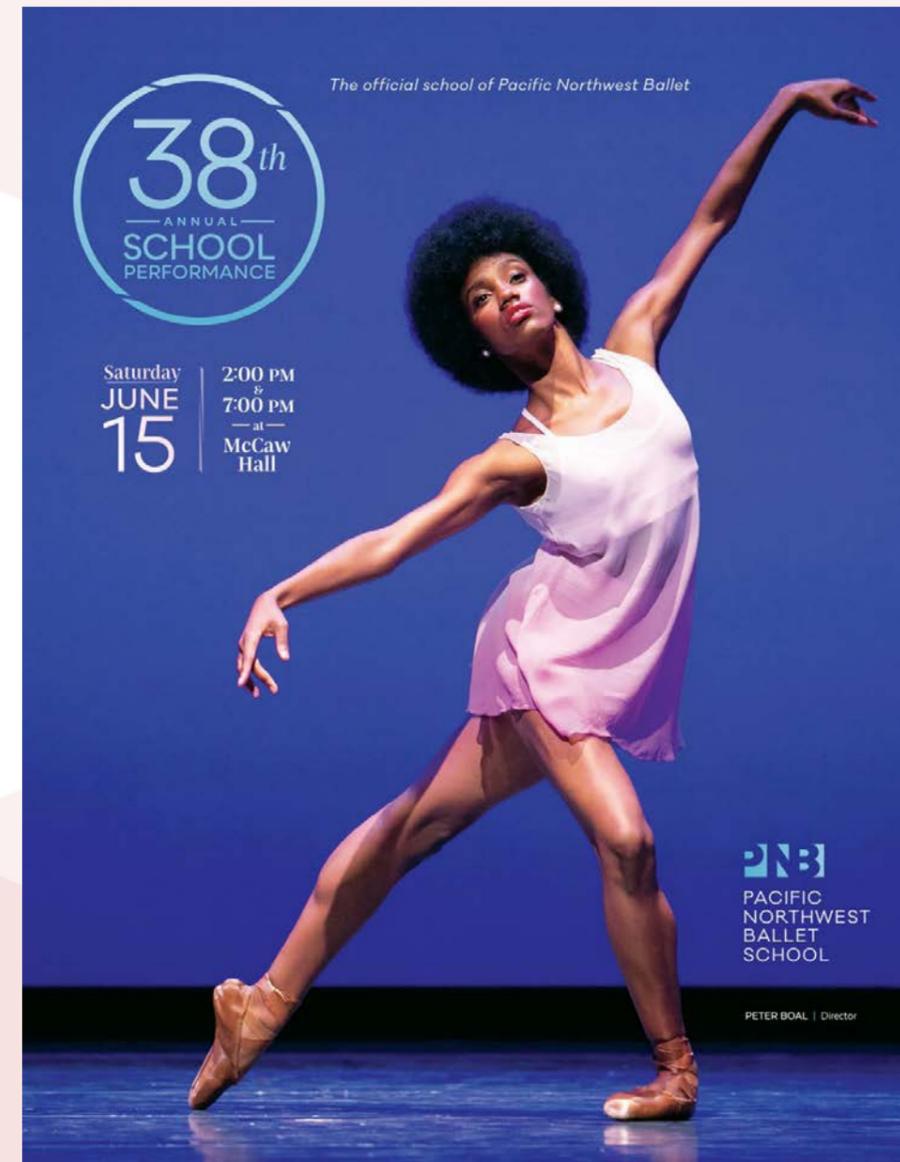
In saying this, the seemingly high propensity of people across a range of studies that avoid performing arts because of the risk it will be uninteresting, suggests we have a brand problems that we need to overcome about arts experiences AND/OR we have a product problem in terms of developing or communicating complete experiences in that are stimulating and desirable.

The place we can start, because we have seen successful strategies in the past, is to show potential new audiences that an experience at a performing arts venue, beyond seeing amazing art, is anything but boring.

“The movie will likely be great, BUT if the movie was terrible, you still get the popcorn.”



Pacific Northwest Ballet dancer Ezra Thompson (center) and members of the company in Jerome Robbins's *West Side Story Suite*. Photo by Angela Sterling.



Page 24 and 25: Examples of some of the Pacific Northwest West Ballet's new promo images

2018 Professional Division graduate and former DanceChance student, Nazirah Taylor, in the 2018 school performance. Photo by Lindsay Thomas.



Lesley Rausch and former PNB principal dancer Karel Cruz in *Agon*. Photo by Angela Sterling.



Apollo staged by Peter Boal with Seth Orza and Carla Körbes. Photo by Andrea Mohin.



Changing Minds and Engaging People

Arts Narrogin

In 2018, research with the people of Narrogin recommended a number of changes to how performing arts was delivered.

Whilst 75% of the respondents supported performing arts, there was extensive feedback shared on considerations for choosing arts, but the overall experience was as big a consideration as the arts form.

Whilst Arts Narrogin had worked hard to create a positive environment in its regular performing space, it retained perceptions as both uncomfortable and uninteresting.

Arts Narrogin had some concerns about audience sizes and the impact the space was having, plus there were significant limitations in improving the experience because of limitations of catering.

Since its own soul searching, and the research, Arts Narrogin has considerably turned around the perceptions and built audiences with a range of great ideas;



- Programming theatre matched with a 'foody' experience in a shared community space outdoors;
- Increasing the ability to cater at events by activating other spaces in the region including the aptly renamed 'The Narrogin Opera House';
- Being active on social media and showing Arts Narrogin as vibrant and diverse and most of all, fun;
- Introducing a formal ticketing system allowing for more positive information about the venue;
- Programming once in a decade experiences that attract a packed house;

Programming high engagement 'fun' events that improve the perception of attending a performing arts event.

Overall, the turnaround for the rest of the performing arts community has been impressive. Arts Narrogin has improved both its reputation and its attendance with a highly flexible and creative approach to showing people performing arts is far from dull.



30-years of Listening

Ravensthorpe Regional Arts Council

Ravensthorpe Regional Arts Council (RRAC) is the leading arts and cultural body within the Shire of Ravensthorpe responsible for delivering a diverse and full annual program of activities.

It is a volunteer-based organisation that provides a diverse and adventurous artistic program of events including the presentation of professional performing arts events.

The team at Ravensthorpe have 30-years of experience in presenting diverse experiences and have learnt a thing or two about bringing people to art.

"We don't just put on a show," said RRAC's Ainsley Foulds, "we put on an community gathering for our community that includes an important performing arts experience."

RRAC often programs work around community needs and gaps, and listens hard to what the people of the region are saying.

One of things RRAC stresses in communications is all the things that are important in the night out. This means people, food, drinks, as well as a great arts experience.

"We provide the people of Ravensthorpe with a range of important components of the experience with the art sitting at the top."

"It might take some people an hour just to drive to see an RRAC show, so we think it's worth making a night of it and giving people many reasons to come."

RRAC's recent attendance at the touring *52 Hertz* show sat 5% of the entire region attend. This is amazing if you think that would equate to 2,500 people in a bigger regional town.

"We are really focussed on getting the people of our towns to see great performing arts, and to do that, we remove all the barriers we can."

CIRCUITWEST

CircuitWest brings together a sector that builds and reflects community and cultural life. First and foremost, CircuitWest stands for inclusive, thriving communities, enlivened with rich cultural expression and engagement. CircuitWest makes a difference through its leadership – articulating the value of the performing arts and its role in increasing wellbeing at individual, local, regional and State levels. CircuitWest is also a ‘critical friend’ to the professionals in the sector – enabling them to continuously strive and grow in their understanding and application of best practice. Last but not least, CircuitWest has a pathfinder role – identifying and addressing systemic issues to ensure the sector is moving forward as a whole.

CircuitWest is the service organisation for the performing arts in Western Australia and amongst many roles convenes WA Showcase, TechWest and provides Tour Coordination services for Western Australian artists and companies within Western Australia. CircuitWest represents Presenters, Producers and Artists and has strong ties with Local Government.

www.circuitwest.com.au



Department of
**Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries**