

"Daggers in the heart of blokey blokes."

RESEARCH RESPONDENT



RESEARCH REPORT DESPERATELY SEEKING THOMMO

SEPTEMBER 2021

A study on why men in regional areas reject funded performing arts

INTRODUCTION

THIS RESEARCH HAD A SIMPLE INTENTION; TO ASK MALES OVER 18 IN REGIONAL AREAS WHY THEY ARE RARE TO NON-EXISTENT AT FUNDED PERFORMING ARTS.

The profile of the target research subjects was built on intelligence from regional presenters; (characterised as 'Thommo') most likely to be **working-class male, agricultural or trades employed, with a high propensity towards club sport.**



The style of the research was conversational, face to face 1:1 or 2:2 'chats' with an interviewer experienced in gathering personal stories. This provided a bespoke way of investigating the lived experiences of individuals with (or without performing arts). We even allowed them to bring a beer and a mate if it made them more comfortable to tell their stories.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After hearing from more than 85 interviewees across 5 Western Australian regions, the research team discovered a nagging consistency. So many respondents reflected on their lives and told us that:

85

- Funded performing arts was considered a negative experience.
- It was seen as elitist and "not for people like me; and
- Many openly influenced others with their negative view

FROM THE MOUTHS OF THOMMO'S

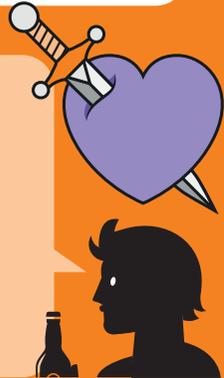
"So, words like theatre ballet opera?"

RESEARCHER



"those three words are basically daggers in the heart of any blokey bloke ..."

RESEARCH RESPONDENT



"My conception would be - I'm not sure exactly the term - like a little bit upper echelon - lah de dah when you put your little finger up with you drink your cocktail - high end - golden triangle sort of people - flash car maybe a chauffeur"

RESEARCH RESPONDENT



"Blokes enjoy rough and tumble football we don't enjoy watching people dance"

RESEARCH RESPONDENT



"I think growing up if someone at school found out you went to phantom of the opera you wouldn't be a very liked sort of a person. And it would have the stigma going around it as well, the same as the ballet. Even though there is massive talent in it, there is stigma I think, for most boys"

RESEARCH RESPONDENT



THE STUDY DEMONSTRATED THAT ANTI (FUNDED) PERFORMING ARTS SENTIMENT ALSO HAD NO BOUNDARIES OF AGE, EDUCATION OR GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

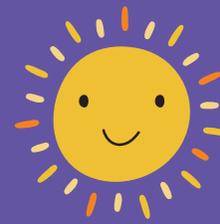
The sample was hugely diverse from 16-84 years old, a massive mix of metro and regional people (despite being conducted in regional areas) with a vast array of occupations from manual to professional but a chemist from Perth working in the Pilbara was every bit as likely to reject performing arts as a farmer from Beverley.

At the end of the study, the factor that was most common to the negative majority of the subjects was a lack of performing arts experiences in teenage years. **There seems to be a direct link between performing arts positivity and high school arts experiences.** So many had simply no experience as a youth and in adulthood had formed often cynical perceptions based entirely on guess work.

ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM WAS THAT THERE WAS RISK TO ENGAGING. IT MAY HAVE LED TO BULLYING OR RIDICULE AND THIS WAS A CLEAR DETERRENT FOR SOME.



THERE WAS ONE VERY POSITIVE FINDING.



A small part of the cohort that had been part of a community arts engagement (The Beauty Index – Annette Carmichael Projects) dance project not long before this research.

It had transformed their views in a positive direction. It made some Thommos see performing arts through a very different lens because they had first-hand experience. Whilst the sample was small, the impact seemed huge.



"being in the change room after the show felt like we had just won the grand final"

BEAUTY INDEX DANCER



"Growing up we didn't have much opportunity to engage in the arts just because of the demographic that we lived in"

RESEARCH RESPONDENT

RECOMMENDATIONS & REFLECTIONS

- 1 There needs to be more investment in performing arts for young people. We risk losing the next generation of arts people to Netflix. During this research, we could find no youth focussed performing arts choices for audiences in WA.
- 2 Schools – where are you? It seems performing arts, especially theatre, is slowly disappearing in the public system when most research says it's essential to education.
- 3 Funded performing arts is often seen as dull when we know it is a deeply emotional interaction with the world. The brand needs serious reimagining.
- 4 Are we addressing "not for people like me" class perceptions – we all know they exist?
- 5 Removing Barriers – how can we create more engagement work, like The Beauty Index, in communities that brings Thommo into the conversation.

A FINAL THOUGHT Thommos won't change and why should they? We all know a Thommo or two, they are the quintessential Aussie bloke from popular culture. Everyone hates something, it's just normal. This research was never intended to see how to change Thommo, it was meant to understand the gap in audiences with the subject most presenters felt was absent from venues. The research aimed to understand what made Thommo have Thommo's views on performing arts to see if there were pathways to help the sector reach new markets. **We can't change Thommo at 40, but can we change him at 14. That requires a much more concerted effort on youth from arts.**