

Review of Opera

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND AOTEAROA

Final Report

May 2015

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1. Background to the review

During 2015 Creative New Zealand reviewed its funding, priorities and initiatives for supporting opera in New Zealand.

The review considered the views of the opera community on what Creative New Zealand and the organisations and initiatives we fund could do to support and develop opera in New Zealand.

This report sets out the review recommendations that were agreed to by the Arts Council in April 2015.

What we mean by ‘opera’

An opera is a dramatic work that is mainly sung, is accompanied by musical instruments, and is presented theatrically. Because much of the dialogue in an opera is sung, it can be distinguished from theatre works in which music is incidental or clearly subsidiary to the drama.

For Creative New Zealand the term ‘opera’ means a staged production of an opera rather than just one of its component parts (for example, a composer’s published or unpublished operatic score).

Purpose of the review

The purpose of the review has been to identify:

- the rationale and focus for Creative New Zealand’s investments, funding and other interventions in support of opera in New Zealand, taking into

account the support and infrastructure¹ provided by local and central government, the tertiary education sector, and the private sector

- what our development priorities for opera in New Zealand will be from 2016 to 2020
- the key role in the opera infrastructure that Creative New Zealand will support through our Toi Tōtara Haemata (Arts Leadership) investment programme over the next five years
- how our various funding and capability programmes and initiatives will support the creation, presentation, distribution and promotion of opera in New Zealand over the next five years.

Our review of opera in New Zealand has enabled us to ensure that the way we support this artform delivers to our strategic outcomes (refer to pg. 6) and our statutory mandate to encourage, promote, and support the arts in New Zealand for the benefit of all New Zealanders.

The review process

We consulted with the opera community in February and March this year, through an online feedback process. A summary of the feedback we received is provided in section 3 of this report (at page 8). The Discussion Paper that formed the basis for this consultation is available on our website:

www.creativenz.govt.nz/en/about-creative-new-zealand/corporate-and-strategy-documents/opera-discussion-paper-2015

¹ By opera ‘infrastructure’ we mean all the elements that are necessary for groups and individuals to create, present, distribute and participate in opera in New Zealand.

The Discussion Paper summarised the history and state of play of opera in New Zealand, current international trends, and key issues for opera in contemporary New Zealand. It included a snapshot of operatic activity in New Zealand, acknowledging the contribution of a number of leading New Zealand arts organisations – for example, NZ Opera, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, the New Zealand International Arts Festival, and the Auckland Arts Festival, as well as regional groups.

In April the Arts Council considered the feedback to the Discussion Paper and approved the recommendations that came out of the review. These recommendations are set out from page 5.

Next steps

Creative New Zealand is publishing a request for proposals from organisations interested in filling the opera key role in the Toi Tōtara Haemata (Arts Leadership) investment programme. Any new funding agreement for this key role for opera will be offered from January 2016.

Funding applications for opera activity and projects will continue to be assessed through the Toi Uru Kahikatea (Arts Development) investment programme and through our Arts Grants and Quick Response programmes.

2. Summary of the review's results

Creative New Zealand's roles and responsibilities for opera

Creative New Zealand and its predecessor, the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, has been the core public funder of opera in New Zealand since the 1960s.

This current review has considered Creative New Zealand's continuing role and responsibilities in supporting opera. Some people who responded to the Discussion Paper thought that a national opera company should be directly funded by central government through the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, in order to provide ongoing funding and at a higher level than currently. Based on this review, Creative New Zealand doesn't support that view – we think the issues for funding opera will be the same whichever central government organisation allocates funding for this artform.

Opera infrastructure: Support through the Toi Tōtara Haemata programme

Through our Toi Tōtara Haemata (Arts Leadership) investment programme we invest in well-run and financially sound arts organisations to play key infrastructure roles in creating, presenting, distributing and/or encouraging participation in high-quality arts experiences. We fund these organisations for periods of two to five years, with options for renewal of these contracts.

The review of opera considered whether there should be changes to the key role for opera funded through Toi Tōtara Haemata. Before the review, the key role for opera was expressed as follows:

- Maintaining a consistently high standard of opera production to provide access to New Zealand audiences
- Developing and presenting New Zealand singers
- Developing and presenting operas composed by New Zealanders.

This role did not involve any requirement to **maintain** and **build** audiences. If opera is to benefit all New Zealanders, now and in the future, much greater weight needs to be given to building audiences and to ensuring they become more diverse and more representative of New Zealand communities. We recommended to the Arts Council that the key role for opera should reflect a greater emphasis on building public demand and on supporting audience development.

Similarly, opera not only involves singers but, as was made clear in the feedback for this review, also requires a range of other practitioners – such as composers, directors, librettists, dramaturgs and designers. We recommended that the role's second activity area ('developing and presenting New Zealand singers') should be broadened to include other types of New Zealand opera practitioners.

The third area of activity ('developing and presenting operas composed by New Zealanders') was the most controversial topic in the public feedback we received. At one end of the spectrum, some opera supporters think the focus should be on traditional repertoire, well-interpreted by New Zealanders, because they believe locally composed work is uninteresting, will not draw audiences, and will therefore threaten the financial sustainability of an opera company. There are, however, those who think that if opera is to develop and stay relevant as an artform, there must be opportunities for developing and presenting new New Zealand work.

Many respondents provided detailed suggestions on how new work could be developed most effectively and with a wider range of partners than in the past.

Those partners could include international opera companies and other New Zealand opera companies, and also orchestras, festivals and private foundations. These potential partners are already active in presenting and /or developing opera. Submissions from these potential partners supported the view that more effective collaboration within the opera sector is critical if opera is to survive and develop.

Many who provided feedback stressed the importance of opportunities for leveraging the resources of other players in this sector. For example, the professional orchestras already mount semi-staged opera programmes, and the bigger festivals have presented and found audiences for a more challenging opera repertoire. There is also an international trend of co-commissioning and cost-sharing for new work that is presented at multiple venues. There also continue to be private foundations deeply committed to furthering the development of opera practitioners, particularly singers.

A new key infrastructure role for opera

Taking into account the responses to our Discussion Paper, the Arts Council agreed that from 1 January 2016 a new key role for opera would be supported under our Toi Tōtara Haemata programme, from 2016 until 2020. This key role for opera, which a single organisation will be required to deliver, includes the following specific activity areas:

- Building diverse audiences and presenting high-quality opera
- Providing performance and development opportunities for New Zealand opera practitioners

- Collaborating with partners to develop and present operas created by New Zealanders.

In 2016 and 2017 Creative New Zealand will give priority to supporting the first two of those activity areas. That will also be a time for planning and partnership development in preparation for the third activity area, which will come into effect from 2018.

The activity areas for this new key role are intended to contribute to three of the strategic outcomes that Creative New Zealand seeks to achieve – namely:

- New Zealanders participate in the arts (*Outcome 1*)
- High-quality New Zealand art is developed (*Outcome 2*)
- New Zealanders experience high-quality arts (*Outcome 3*).

With this new key role, Creative New Zealand will continue to support a high standard of opera production but with the organisation filling the key role deciding which operas to present and how and where to present them.

Creative New Zealand has agreed in recent years that the organisation filling the key role should present opera in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. The agreement by the former Arts Board to include Christchurch was conditional on this being manageable within the available resources.

Support for opera through other funding programmes

Creative New Zealand is able to support opera activity and projects through the Toi Uru Kahikatea (Arts Development) investment programme. For example, the

annual New Zealand Opera School has a three-year funding agreement (2014–16) to assist with the costs of tuition and performances.

This programme complements the Tōtara programme and supports established groups and organisations to:

- develop skills, resources and networks required to create, present, promote, distribute or participate in high-quality arts or arts experiences
- research, create, present, distribute and/or tour programmes of high-quality work or art within New Zealand or overseas
- develop and/or maintain the infrastructure required to create, present, distribute or participate in high-quality New Zealand arts experiences.

Creative New Zealand’s grants programmes (Arts Grants and Quick Response) are accessed by companies, groups and individuals to develop and present new work or traditional repertoire, and sometimes to tour it regionally. Opera groups are also funded for workshops and performances that offer skills development and performance opportunities to singers. The grants programmes are also able to support professional development and other opportunities for practitioners.

Funding priorities

Creative New Zealand’s priorities for funding all artforms through Quick Response grants and Arts Grants as well as through the Toi Uru Kahikatea programme are as follows:

- projects or programmes of activity by, with or for young people
- projects or programmes of activity that involve the innovative and cost-effective use of digital technologies to create high-quality New Zealand work and/or engage and interact with audiences.

No additional funding priorities have been selected specifically for opera as a result of the review across our funding programmes. These programmes’ guidelines already allow for high-quality proposals within a broad range of activities (for example, skills development and performance opportunities for opera practitioners, projects for the development and touring of opera, and assistance with professional and creative development).

Capability-building

Creative New Zealand’s capability-building programme is targeted mainly at investment clients supported through the Toi Tōtara Haemata programme.

Audience development is going to be the critical issue for the sustainability of the opera sector in the next five years, and our initiatives are in place to support this need.

The opera community itself is also concerned about the development of singers and other practitioners (for example, directors, librettists and dramaturgs) and about how high-quality New Zealand work is developed and presented. While Creative New Zealand does not intend to set up targeted initiatives for these areas, our funding programmes can, as indicated above, respond to high-quality funding proposals.

3. Summary of feedback, February-March 2015

On 24 February 2015 Creative New Zealand published an Opera Discussion Paper and an accompanying questionnaire of eight questions. The closing date for submissions was 17 March 2015.

We received 138 submissions, which included responses (complete and incomplete) to the questionnaire as well as open submissions. Respondents included individual singers, tertiary education bodies, private foundations, opera societies, regional opera companies, opera studios, arts festivals and opera enthusiasts.

The following is a representative overview of responses to each of the Discussion Paper's eight questions.

Q1 What works well in the presentation of opera in New Zealand? What doesn't?

Respondents emphasised the high quality of New Zealand singers, as well as of NZ Opera's mainstage productions. The main shortcomings they identified related to: access outside the main centres; choice of repertoire; use of overseas singers rather than equally capable New Zealand singers; and new New Zealand work.

What's working well?

High-quality productions

What works well is that we have a national company which is capable of presenting fully staged operas and the training and development of singers seems to be progressing well. What is missing is more chamber opera including work by 20th Century composers, touring

productions/concerts for smaller centres and new New Zealand opera productions.

NZO stages an exceptional quality of world class operas in New Zealand. Generally speaking the cast, principal artists, directors and creative teams that are employed by NZO are first rate which leads to first rate, innovative, contemporary and relevant productions being staged. The product is excellent.

NZ Opera has improved the standard and professionalism in the presentation of European opera in New Zealand

Developing excellent singers

NZ Opera's high standard of delivery over the past 14 years has given innumerable young New Zealand performers opportunities to work alongside international artists

New Zealand produces a high number of fantastic singers as has been recognized internationally. The quality of teaching at the universities is extremely high with some of our most successful singers interested in teaching. The New Zealand Singing School, NZ Opera Emerging Artists and the Wanganui Opera School are opportunities to bridge the journey from student into a professional career.

A particular area of success that is notable in terms of opera is that New Zealand has incredible long term success in training world class opera singers. NZ's unique place in this global training should be recognised and fostered.

What's not working so well?

Access to high-quality productions outside the main centres

I think that there needs to be more national touring of the regions and there needs to be support for regional opera

This answer depends on where you live and your ability to travel. The current model does not serve those who live outside of Auckland, Wellington or Christchurch. NZ Opera does not seem to consult with any other musical organisation about the timing of their productions, and relies on their heft to overcome conflicting events! Dunedin has one of the best Theatres in the country for the presentation of opera, and I would hate to see us relegated to smaller productions. Could all NZ Opera productions be designed so that they were fully transportable – to co-producers, and smaller venues, cities etc. If this is too creatively stultifying, then there should be a separate budget for touring productions given by both national and presenting companies. Do not replace any of the major productions in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Christchurch should have a second major production each year especially with the advent of the usage of the Isaac Theatre Royal.

Casting singers from overseas rather than equally capable New Zealand singers

I feel that there have been casting decisions made at times where the artists brought in from overseas have not been as good as the New Zealanders available. This has happened for all NZ companies and is part of the cultural cringe that sadly is still part of our culture. In other words some organisations still think that because something comes from overseas means that it is better than something or someone resident in NZ. What doesn't work is a staging of an opera that is a poor production, or where the singers are of an uneven standard.

Fine overseas singers are sometimes used, and should be used particularly for main roles if suitable NZ singers are not here. Often there are many NZ singers who could perform smaller roles, but they are given to overseas singers (at considerable cost, including per diems and travel costs). NZ singers could be supported much more.

The grand scale presentation of opera, by and large, works very well. I think some parochialism still exists in the main opera company, e.g. 'If the director comes from overseas they must be better than the directors born/living here.' I understand that many singers have to come from abroad as the vocal skills are so specialised but directors can surely be sourced from within our talent pool more often. I know of two directors in Wellington who have cut their teeth directing salon opera and proved themselves many times over and yet the NZ Opera are still reluctant to use them on big productions

Choice of repertoire and audience

Innovation and bravery – not being constrained to the 'Top 20' of the opera world. Having the funding and the support to present a wider range of opera (eg Baroque, 20th/21st Century). Supporting local artists – there seems to be a belief that in order for an artist to be considered worthy for the stage they must have studied overseas or be an international artist.

The main problem with opera in New Zealand is the extent of the focus on the limited range of well-known eighteenth and nineteenth century operas, for which the ticket prices are far too high for most New Zealanders, which reinforces the 'elitist' tag and discourages new audiences. This overwhelms and is at the expense of the many other possible approaches to opera – chamber opera, NZ-made opera, experimental music theatre, touring opera, community opera etc. New Zealand has produced many outstanding conductors and singers, many working overseas (as they should) but they should also be at the forefront of the New Zealand operatic scene. The standard operatic repertoire should be

performed, of course, but there should be much less focus on it, and far more emphasis on the growing of diverse 'operatic' forms.

The current model of faux 'Grand Opera' as produced by NZ Opera is not accessible to the general public both financially and culturally. The Company is hamstrung by an affluent audience who will only pay to see the narrow repertoire as described in the discussion paper. Their solution has been to use mostly offshore directors and designers to create evermore obscure and self-indulgent versions of the same. This in itself alienates more audience and ticket sales drop further as can be seen from the attendance figures over the past few years. The company does not foster the notion of accessible opera; most of their productions will see the upper circle of the Aotea Centre closed rather than sell these seats for \$10 to a member of the public who is on the lowest or restricted income.

new New Zealand work and small-scale opera productions

Over many, many years small opera groups presenting small-scale and pro-am productions have come and gone. I don't think the activity now is very different at all from the past. Most of these groups founder and do not go on to develop into long-term, professional companies. It would be hard to point to any equivalents of Indian Inc for example in NZ opera. No opera company (or even any music group, with the possible exception of NZTrio) has been supported to regularly develop and present new work. We are, therefore, left to uphold the European traditions of the past to a population that is increasingly uninterested in those traditions. Occasionally something comes along that suggests that we can and will create opera here – Earth and Sky, Waituhi, Bitter Calm, Alley, Outrageous Fortune, Hohepa and more – but the presentation of these takes heroic efforts from all involved and the lessons learned are not often passed on.

Q2 Should the current model of one national presenter be changed?

If so, what changes do you think should be made?

Of the 99 submitted responses, 57 (58%) believed that the existing model of one national presenter should be retained in its current form.

It is appropriate to have one opera company to service the art form for New Zealand. However the company could be more flexible and adaptable presenting a varied programme over three years. Such a programme could include a mix of fully staged operas, semi-staged operas, chamber operas for main centres and large regional centres, opera concerts as well as education and outreach work. All of this requires collaborations with other organisations such as orchestras, festivals, presenters, schools, teachers and more.

Forty-two respondents (42%) suggested a number of alternatives with a greater focus on regional touring, developing regional opera companies and supporting more collaborative projects.

Opera productions and associated events don't work well for those living away from the main centres. Friends in Queenstown & Wanaka would love to see NZO's productions near to their home, and are hoping the Emerging Artists may one day visit.

I believe there needs to be a better balance of a national company with regional companies, such as there is in the orchestra sector with the NZSO as the national company, with every decent-sized city having their own professional or semi-professional orchestra.

Yes, the current model could be modified. While the main focus of large scale, high quality productions in the main cities is important to retain, there needs to be scope to allow a wider distribution of funding to more areas. Alternatively, the 'one national presenter' could collaborate more with regional centres to encourage, foster and involve local communities.

For a national company to be strong, regional companies need to be developed. The training and exposure at the regional level will eventually filter up to the national company. I don't think a national company can establish a meaningful year-round presence in regions and should act more like a consultancy and partnership with regional opera authorities. It doesn't mean there won't be a national opera company presence in the regions. Annual trips to Christchurch for instance, could sit alongside smaller, less expensive regional productions much like the CSO and NZSO exist. Some regions may decide to invest time and money into bringing in opera productions. Some of this could be geared towards the national company visits, some could be directed towards smaller touring entities, and some could be geared towards local production if the region sees that as a viable possibility. In any event, opera in its current model is not conducive to growth or equitable distribution

[...] I think small-scale opera is not being presented enough – salon works for 3-8 singers plus little orchestra. This is surely a cheaper way of reaching out to provinces as well. Also a perfect opportunity for NZ composers to be exposed to the public.

I do not enjoy opera for its own sake, and sometimes find it contrived and 'trying too hard to appeal to youth', whilst only succeeding in alienating actual opera fans. I would like to see an institution such as Auckland's Opera Factory set up in Wellington, employing a range of emerging and established singers and other

practitioners. NZ-composed operas could be repeated, rather than just composed and performed once! I'm thinking of the Opera Bites show which was done some years ago in the Fringe (Wellington).

Content, context and geography are all challenges to the presentation of opera in New Zealand. In terms of content, there is a great range not presented ranging from early and baroque opera, to contemporary opera both international and New Zealand. These need not be on the same scale but offer the opportunity to engage audiences in a greater understanding of the art form and its continuing evolution – context. The presenting model should allow the company to be more flexible with venues across New Zealand and present performances in unique settings. In other places this has also proven to be a model that attracts extra resources eg, Opera on the Harbour in Sydney.

A model that supports local singers/ composers/ writers/ directors that provides real and beneficial training possibilities to suitably prepared and experienced emerging singers, better and more frequent engagement with schools, a tangible relationship with the universities and other opera related training institutions that avoids taking students before they are ready, that innovates and creates new works based on contemporary and historical NZ cultural themes that reflect and appeal to us that can have a life span beyond a single festival. I support a 'national-regional' model that engages regionally via touring, with fewer staged large scale presentations of the western classics in the big 3 cities, with some concert versions of less standard works, with a resident artist composer. The emerging artists should only be involved if they are at a standard suitable for the professional stage.

More opera could be available to more people with two related national companies, one in the North Island and one in the South. They could share artistic and creative personnel with only administrative staff needing to be duplicated. The one national company presents standard repertoire only, (why?), they do not have the courage to present avant-garde, NZ, or less popular works, probably due to financial restraints. The National company should not soak up all funding so that there is not an even spread of some operatic activity throughout the country.

Significantly absent from the models for presenting opera is the model of the independent small-scale opera company. The world is full of such examples – two of them would be Bampton Opera in the UK (www.bamptonopera.org) and Pinchgut Opera (www.pinchgutopera.com.au) in Sydney. These companies flourish by working from production to production, hiring professional performers as they go, raising funds as they need them, and developing loyal audiences. They often perform works outside the usual repertoire. They may or may not use a regular venue – and if so, they won't own it. They arise where there is already access to traditional opera in large-scale presentation modes.

I believe the model still holds for Auckland and Wellington main stage productions. It was always intended that Christchurch should become the home of smaller productions that could then tour regionally – this would be a strong model. As to repertoire, a mix of traditional and contemporary is required. The world has seen the rise of new exciting contemporary repertoire that has broken the mould (Dead Man Walking etc). NZ Opera must not miss out on this resurgence. Contemporary NZ opera is also important, but must be considered with audience in mind – make it accessible.

Direct line funding

A number of respondents expressed a view that, for a national opera company to be sustainable over time, it would need to be funded directly by central government in a similar way to the Royal New Zealand Ballet and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra:

[It is] essential to increase funding for the New Zealand Opera Company. At present it receives less than the Royal New Zealand Ballet which is funded through the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. We believe that the New Zealand Opera Company should be on the same footing as the Royal NZ Ballet Company, and thus funded through the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

Q3 What kinds of operas and opera productions do you think Creative New Zealand should support?

Respondents were asked to rank the following options in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 5 the least important:

- Large-scale professional staged productions of traditional grand operas
- Smaller-scale professional chamber opera productions
- Smaller-scale professional touring productions
- Smaller-scale professional semi-staged or concert performances
- Other (please specify)

Ninety-eight responses to this question were received.

Responses to Question 3



Sixty-five percent of responses argued that large-scale professional staged productions of traditional grand operas should take top priority. Smaller-scale professional touring productions were given second or third priority by a similar proportion of respondents (33% ranked this option as second priority, 35% as third). The option of smaller-scale professional chamber opera productions was ranked third by 32% of respondents. The option of smaller-scale professional semi-staged or concert performances was ranked clearly in fourth place (49%). Thirty-one respondents ranked 'other' as first or second priority. Some of their responses listed activities that are not immediately identifiable as specific kinds of opera production, for example 'education' or 'competitions'. One response made particular mention of community-based productions, referring specifically to NZ Opera's *Noye's Fludde* in 2014. Other responses elaborated further on thoughts presented in answers to the previous two questions:

The repertoire should also include 20th century operas as well, eg Benjamin Britten, Philip Glass and John Adams. These can often be semi-staged to great effect. The programme could be a balanced mix of all of the above over a three year period. This could be achieved if the opera was to have partnerships such as the ballet for opera/dance works, NZSO, Orchestra Wellington, CSO and APO for semi-staged concert performances and contemporary chamber operas in partnership with the Auckland, New Zealand and Christchurch Festivals. Chamber operas could also be developed in partnership with presenting venues in the larger regional centres.

The smaller-scale productions I have been involved with have lower operating margins but also perform to smaller audiences. As an example none of the Days Bay operas would fill the St James in the total number of audience for any single production. Audiences in small centres wouldn't support operatic performances of

unknown repertoire, including New Zealand work, and small-scale touring can be as expensive as a main-stage production and just as financially risky. The option of touring with a piano would put the operatic cause back 50 years and negate the work pioneers such as Donald Munro, Graeme and Angela Gorton did of raising the awareness of opera in the 1960s.

If 'Other' includes the work of the abovementioned Opera Factory, and Opera Studio, then their work cannot be overlooked. Opera Factory's incredibly full annual schedule of concerts and productions involving junior singers, and its roll call of those juniors who have grown into polished performers, is impressive to say the least. Training in stage deportment, movement, musical awareness, reliability, and knowledge of opera, is its focus. The organisation does not actually teach singing - but concentrates on how to combine singing with being on a stage. And Opera Studio's 'Sonnambula' and 'Lucia di Lammermoor' were fine examples of skill, imagination and dedication overcoming what must have been budgetary constraints.

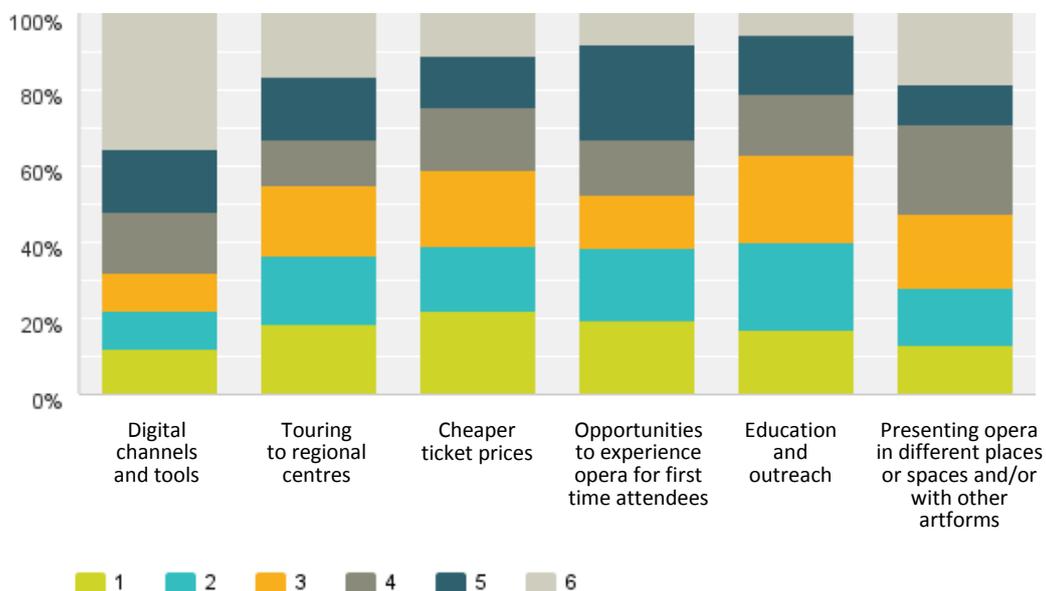
Q4 How do you think audiences for opera could be most effectively developed in New Zealand?

Respondents were asked to rank the following six strategies in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 6 the least important:

- Digital channels and tools, including social, video and mobile and broadcasting / online streaming
- Touring to regional centres
- Cheaper ticket prices
- Opportunities to experience opera for first time attendees in different settings
- Education and outreach
- Presenting opera in different places or spaces, and/or with other artforms, e.g. dance

We received 98 responses to this question.

Responses to Question 4



It is worth noting that a relatively large group of respondents (36%) all considered the use of digital channels and tools to be lowest priority. While 'cheaper ticket prices' and 'opportunities to experience opera for first time attendees in different settings' ranked highly relative to other strategies, respondents' accompanying comments accentuated the need to pursue all audience development strategies. The success of *Sole Mio* (brothers Pene Pati and Amitai Pati (both tenors) and their cousin, Moses Mackay (baritone)) was referenced as an example of how new audiences can be introduced to opera:

Sole Mio have demonstrated how opera can be popularised, and they make extensive use of social media and the like. However for the long-term popularizing of opera, the concerts of arias put on by the smaller organisations such as the Opera Factory, the Opera Studio, the concerts at the Wanganui Opera School and competition concerts (Lexus, NZ Aria etc) will attract people who are less familiar with opera.

All of the above [options] are important for developing audiences which makes it difficult to rank them. A missed opportunity for NZ Opera was *Sole Mio*. These three, highly talented young men have captured the New Zealand public imagination in an extraordinary way making opera truly accessible.

Q5 Capability-building opportunities for opera practitioners

The Opera Discussion Paper provided a summary of the range of opportunities available to singers and other opera practitioners for coaching, professional development and performing. Respondents were asked whether the range of capability-building opportunities available in New Zealand is adequate, and to identify any gaps they believe need to be filled.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents considered the range of capability-building opportunities for opera practitioners to be adequate. Those who disagreed identified gaps in the following three areas:

Singers today need to be trained to be more versatile to succeed in different repertoire and genres (eg, baroque operas and musical theatre)

NZers tend to think of all classical music singing as 'opera singing', but internationally there is a wide range of classical singing genres. Those who can perform to a professional level in 19th century operas do not always have the skills needed to sing other kinds of classical music, for example professional choral singing, repertoire from pre-1800 and contemporary music, and vice versa. Once you step outside of the 19th century, the requirements change. For example, in the recent production of 'Noye's Fludde' by NZ Opera, it was the voices with a more 'musical theatre' sound that were able to make themselves understood better than the traditional opera voices in the Wellington production that I saw. Different voices also suit different styles of singing. In NZ we tend to project the message that unless a young singer has a voice suited to 19th century opera, they will not be successful in classical music. However, I believe more of our singers will be successful in the profession if they can learn the skills needed for different kinds of classical repertoire. Because professional opera is so expensive to produce, it takes up a lot of attention. However, I think there should be development and performing opportunities for other kinds of professional classical singing that acknowledges the different skills required to perform that different repertoire.

Capability-building and professional development is needed for accompanists, composers, costume-makers, directors, dramaturgs, librettists, set designers and technical staff

Professional development not just for the singers but the costume makers, tech staff and stage managers. These

skills are valuable to NZ and hard to find, and useful to the world. More could be done to promote this work.

There is no training for librettists. Good theatre needs a good 'book'!

I'm also interested in the development of directors for opera. These are very thin on the ground in New Zealand and while it is easy to bring international directors in, we are missing the valuable input directors can have in the development of New Zealand work. The ability to work with composers in fashioning a piece and realizing it on stage is something that would hugely benefit development of work in New Zealand. This absence means we are also missing innovation in the form, how things are staged, use of new technologies all of which could be solutions to presenting opera more suited to our context.

Our young singers need more opportunities to perform on an experimental and small scale to develop their theatre craft. Additional funding for companies like Opera Factory in Auckland to stage productions and train singers would be money well spent.

More equitable coverage of opportunities across the North and South Islands

The range and types are adequate, but the coverage is not. South Island in general is very lacking. Christchurch in particular is terrible [...]. Especially problematic when the national presenter brings North Island based singers south rather than utilising and developing local talent (e.g. to sing cover and comprimario roles).

Q6 How can support for the creation and staging of new New Zealand opera be improved?

We received 101 responses to this question. A number of respondents used this question as an opportunity to criticise New Zealand operatic works without suggesting

how creating and staging them could be improved. More constructive responses highlighted a number of possible solutions.

The significance of large multidisciplinary arts festivals in the development of new New Zealand opera and the advantages of collaborative approaches

I agree that creation and staging of new New Zealand operas should be an important part of the development of the sector. However, I also agree that arts festivals seem a natural umbrella for such works [i.e. new New Zealand operas] to be developed, perhaps because their audiences respond more readily to new works. I do think however, that arts festivals can work in partnership with the professional NZ Opera to ensure works are developed to their fullest potential

Collaborative and interactive productions that involve secondary and tertiary students more. Relevant topics for New Zealand audiences

Collaboration across the music and theatre sectors (both practitioners and educators) to develop a collaborative approach and decide on one or two strategies would be a good start.

There is clearly an ambition from composers and librettists to create uniquely New Zealand stories including cross-cultural works such as Hohepa, Parihaka and Star Navigator. However, the stage technique to bring these together in an authentic way needs more exploration than the current models allow. Again this speaks to a more collaborative approach.

Opportunities for opera practitioners to develop new work

I have noticed that many composers have a limited understanding of how to write for the voice and the requirements of different voices. I think composers should be encouraged to expand their skills in this area,

maybe by emphasising this skill in the competitions that already exist. I think there should be more support for writers to develop skills in libretto writing. I also think composers should continue to be encouraged to write chamber operas for small groups of singers and instrumentalists that can be used by amateur groups and university music departments [...]

There are many fine New Zealand composers but there are very few writers who understand the discipline of writing a libretto. It is a very specific task and just because someone is a fine writer doesn't mean they make a fine librettist. Many recent New Zealand operas have fallen over because of their appalling libretti. Good music doesn't save bad words. If Creative New Zealand wants to seriously develop indigenous opera then it should turn its attention to this specific piece of the jig-saw and develop librettists not composers.

I am aware of quite a number of opera projects undertaken by composers who have been supported to write these either through the institutions they work for or through CNZ grants – and many of these are strong musical propositions. Where I find there is a need is assisting the composers in developing music compositions into a dramatic form. Either dramaturgical input or workshopping the score with an experienced director or stage practitioner would hugely benefit the composers in their understanding of the form and how it is practically realized. This means both cultivating the culture of constructive dialogue and allowing enough time for this to occur.

Risk-taking

Creating new work means allowing people to fail. And we are not very good at that. I feel like a dinosaur quoting old successful projects, but one of the little companies that made a pretty good fist of developing new work was Wellington's Pocket Opera, They were very much a Bats-based collective (but did do seasons at Downstage and other venues). Their development plans

included the commissioning of new work but they realised that they had limited experience and resources, and weren't really sure about which composer/s they wanted to work with. The result was Opera Bites, a project (funded partly by CNZ) which presented 5 x 15 minute operas with small ensembles. The operas were chosen from a call for proposals and wildly different from each other. The ultimate plan was to work with one or more of the composers from the project to create a full-length work.

For the audience, the five Opera Bites were kind of like a short film festival – if you didn't like one, then it was only 15 minutes before you could see the next (i.e. not a big risk). The feedback also gave the company a good idea of what audiences responded to. Of course, the project budgeted for very small audiences – because we all know that the audience for new work is so small – yet there were in the end nearly 20 performances with excellent houses, including several from local schools. The project had the potential to be a real 'brand' for the company and a great way to create and present new work, but sadly without any funding for administration the company leaders burnt out and closed down.

One of the most important areas for the creation of contemporary opera or musical theatre in New Zealand has to come from the Maori and Pacific Island artists. They have such strong singing traditions and produce incredible singers that it is time to focus on developing a unique New Zealand opera or musical theatre form. 'The Factory' was a start and there have been others. Watching the televised Te Matatini performances in Christchurch over the weekend attended by over 30,000 people is a testament to the power and creativity that exists here. For example, the women in MAU's 'Stones in Her Mouth' mostly come from kapa haka backgrounds and they produced a contemporary choral work of great beauty. In my view, this is an example of a new, contemporary opera with simple and beautiful design.

There has to be more and this is the future. We have the stories that can be adapted with voice for stage.

Acknowledging that a longer timeframe will be required to achieve quality results

The most important message I would like to get across is that whatever strategy/project you choose, you must commit to it for at least 5 years – good opera takes time – and often longer than 5 years.

Q7 Should Creative New Zealand’s key role for opera be changed?

Creative New Zealand’s current key role for opera consists of the following three activity areas:

- Maintaining a consistently high standard of opera production to provide access for New Zealand audiences
- Developing and presenting operas composed by New Zealanders
- Developing and presenting New Zealand singers.

Of the 90 responses received, 63 (70%) endorsed the current key role:

We believe that only the first of these key role [activities], ‘maintaining a consistently high standard of opera production to provide access for New Zealand audiences’, should be fully fixed into the future. This is something that only the NZO, as the fully professional opera company, can be expected to do.

Those respondents (30%) who believed that the key role should be changed provided a range of views, often expanding on ideas given in answer to previous questions, such as:

- presenting New Zealand singers in lead roles

- presenting more performances outside the main centres
- developing not only singers but other opera practitioners (eg, librettists, directors, répétiteurs, conductors and technicians)
- greater collaboration with other smaller opera organisations
- educating audiences
- removing or adapting the role for developing and presenting operas composed by New Zealanders.

‘Developing and presenting operas composed by New Zealanders’ could be possible where additional funding is available, but it is unrealistic to expect that with only two operas per year in Auckland and Wellington, this could be accommodated within these. This key role overlooks the fact that New Zealand directors can also add a uniquely kiwi voice to an opera of any period or origin, as can Kiwi designers, singers, orchestras and other creatives. While Opera is clearly a music-based art form, there are many other ways to give it a flavour of Aotearoa, than only the composer.

‘Developing and presenting New Zealand singers’ could be considered as two separate key role activities.

Remove the point about ‘developing and presenting operas composed by New Zealanders’ and replace with ‘developing and presenting opera productions created by New Zealanders’.

Development of New Zealand singers is clearly an important consideration for New Zealand’s professional opera company. A well put together intern/ training/ development programme will be invaluable for aspiring and talented singers. There are many opportunities for developing singers in New Zealand, some of these are discussed in the CNZ document. It could be possible that

NZO has a leadership role in co-ordinating development opportunities across all these different avenues.

The standard of opera production over the last few years has been impeccable - and that's not just the fully-imported-overseas-productions-complete-with-set-and-genuine-kimonos-bought-in-Japan. How to encourage operas composed in NZ? Perhaps gentle advice that using the diatonic scale is not a hanging offence. And 'presenting' NZ singers - perhaps companies could be encouraged to use NZ singers more often.

Casting is a specialised skill and it would be a pity to push New Zealanders into roles just because they were New Zealanders and not because they were suitable. Although New Zealand has a strong and proud history of great singers, this, like all artistic endeavours seem to be, is cyclical, and it would be damaging to young singers to push them into roles too early. There is also the issue that as New Zealand's flagship opera company, NZO should be aiming to present artists of the highest possible calibre, regardless of where they were born. Failing to do this will lessen the impact of the performance and the opera itself and will surely be detrimental to the future of opera in New Zealand.

More involvement of and decision-making by other groups – eg, Opera Factory, the regional companies, local theatre groups. Perhaps even a schools representative group, overseen by NEWZATS/IRMT/Opera School/National Singing School.

Augmentation of the large-scale opera productions with smaller-cast, smaller-ensemble, touring productions of high standard, that would reach regional centres beyond Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Presentation of opera in the smaller regional centres would build audiences in the regions and for main seasons. Creating opportunities for outstanding young artists and production staff to develop their skills in a professional environment. The NZ Opera repertoire should be based on large scale traditional grand opera and judicious

presentation of small scale professional chamber and touring operas, including contemporary works.

Creative New Zealand's priorities

We have two priorities that apply across all artforms:

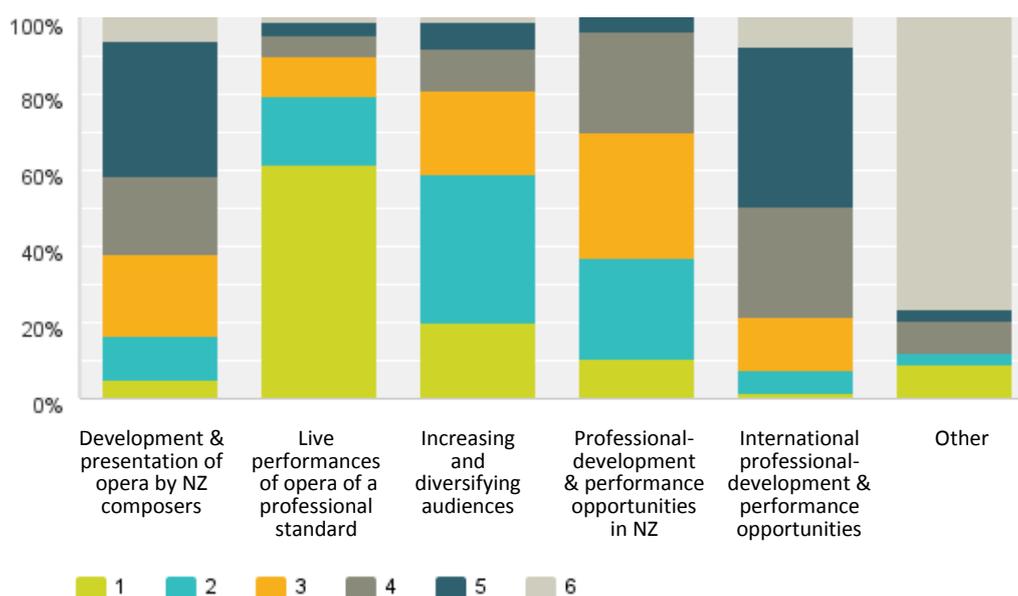
- projects or programmes of activity that are by, with, or for young people (that is, people up to the age of 18)
- projects or programmes of activity that involve the innovative and cost-effective use of digital technologies to create high-quality New Zealand work and/or to engage and interact with audiences.

Q8 In addition to these two priorities, what should Creative New Zealand's priorities be for opera projects?

Respondents were asked to rank the following six priorities in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 6 the least important:

- Development and presentation of opera by New Zealand composers
- Live performances of opera of a professional standard
- Increasing and diversifying audiences for opera in New Zealand
- Professional-development opportunities and performance opportunities in New Zealand for New Zealand singers
- Professional-development opportunities and performance opportunities internationally for New Zealand singers
- Other

Responses to Question 8



‘Live performances of opera of a professional standard’ was considered by a majority of respondents (61%) to be of primary importance (note that ‘live performances of opera of a professional standard’ does not necessarily mean ‘large-scale productions of traditional operas’ – see Question 3 above). This ranking was followed by ‘Increasing and diversifying audiences for opera in New Zealand’ and ‘Professional-development opportunities and performance opportunities in New Zealand for New Zealand.’ As with Question 4, respondents believed that all of the suggested priorities were important in some way and that it is difficult to rank them:

I do not believe it is helpful to ‘rank’ the above priorities as requested. The promotion of opera in NZ must be an organic process, where every one of the above priorities is accorded roughly equal status.

Again I can't rank these. For a vibrant operatic environment, they are all equally important.

These are all essential for a flourishing operatic environment, and I cannot rank them. CNZ itself in partnership with sponsors to develop each of these fields further would be a tremendous spur to the industry

As in answers to previous questions, respondents also reflected here on how ‘opera’ has evolved and how opera can offer opportunities for greater collaboration between groups and organisations:

I think CNZ should allow composers to innovate with the definition of opera, so that their compositions don't have to fit into ‘a dramatic work in which almost all the dialogue is sung’ and they don't have to use ‘operatic’ voices, but can use other kinds of singers.

[...] we feel that Opera is not an art form that stands alone. We have already stated the need for proper orchestral accompaniment for all significant productions. Many of the great operas include significant Ballet scenes which are regularly omitted, because of claimed

cost overheads. If a closer collaboration between NZ Opera and the RNZ Ballet (who we regard as an extremely professional and well-managed Company), were to be included in the mandate, perhaps we could really enjoy opera of the standard that we can obtain at Covent Garden, The Met and other significant overseas opera houses. Finally, repeating the appreciation of the high standard concert productions provided by the NZSO and the APO, it seems that all of the major musical art companies should be strongly encouraged to avoid a competitive attitude and constantly share resources and work together.

4. Creative New Zealand's support for opera 2016–2020

The table below sets out how Creative New Zealand will support opera in New Zealand through our funding programmes and initiatives from 2016 to 2020.

Programme / Initiative and types of opera activities supported	Description / Who can apply / Criteria	Funding details
<p>Creative Communities Scheme Activities supported include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local music-theatre productions ▪ Opera recitals 	<p>For communities to undertake local arts activities.</p> <p>Three funding criteria relating to: broad community involvement; diversity; and young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Administered by City and District Councils ▪ Short-term projects ▪ Up to four funding rounds a year
<p>Quick Response Grants and Arts Grants Activities supported include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ development and performance of new operas ▪ writing libretti and setting them to music ▪ professional development for singers and composers 	<p>For individuals, groups, practitioners and organisations to undertake projects in less than a year, with priority across all art forms given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Projects or programmes of activity by, with or for young people ▪ Projects or programmes of activity that involve the innovative and cost-effective use of digital technologies to create high-quality New Zealand work and/or engage and interact with audiences. 	<p>Quick Response Grants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ up to \$7,500 per grant ▪ three funding rounds a year <p>Arts Grants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ up to \$65,000 per grant ▪ two funding rounds a year

Programme / Initiative and types of opera activities supported	Description / Who can apply / Criteria	Funding details
<p>Toi Uru Kahikatea Arts Development Investment Programme</p> <p>Activities supported include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professional development for young New Zealand singers 	<p>For established groups and organisations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ develop the skills, resources and networks required to create, present, promote, distribute or participate in high-quality arts or arts experiences ▪ research, create, present, distribute and/or tour programmes of high-quality New Zealand work or art within New Zealand or overseas ▪ develop and/or maintain the infrastructure required to create, present, distribute or participate in high-quality New Zealand arts or arts experiences. <p>Priority will be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Projects or programmes of activity by, with or for young people ▪ Projects or programmes of activity that involve the innovative and cost-effective use of digital technologies to create high-quality New Zealand work and/or engage and interact with audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No set request limits – investments range between \$45,000 and \$500,000 per year ▪ Funding from one to three years ▪ Applications accepted once a year

Programme / Initiative and types of opera activities supported	Description / Who can apply / Criteria	Funding details
<p>Toi Tōtara Haemata Arts Leadership Investment Programme</p> <p>Proposed key role for opera:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build diverse audiences and present high-quality opera (priority for 2016 and 2017) ▪ Provide performance and development opportunities for New Zealand opera practitioners (priority for 2016 and 2017) ▪ Collaborate with partners to develop and present operas created by New Zealanders (as of 2018). 	<p>For established² organisations to play key infrastructure roles in creating, presenting, distributing, or encouraging participation in high-quality arts experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contract to deliver identified activities for between two and five years ▪ Contract renewal options ▪ No set request limits.
<p>Capability-Building initiatives for opera</p>	<p>Workshops, training and coaching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Audience and Market Development – Arts organisations can develop and grow their audiences by learning how to apply audience insight and intelligence. They can also learn to take advantage of the power of digital tools and online marketing. ▪ Strategy and governance – Arts organisations will acquire the skills to develop strategic plans, digital strategies and effective boards. This is done through a series of workshops, strategic consultations, and follow-up support and advice. 	

² Tōtara applicants need to be able to meet additional requirements, including criteria relating to their financial and organisational management.

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