

Mount Alexander Shire council
PO Box 185
Castlemaine, Victoria, 3450

Matt Sheehan,
PO Box 63,
Chewton, Vic, 3451

RE: Phee Broadway Theatre - Future management and use

January 4, 2016

Dear Councillors and relevant staff of Mount Alexander Shire Council,

I am the Artistic Director of Three's a Crowd (3aC), a not for profit musical theatre company based in Castlemaine. I write this letter of petition on behalf of 3aC, Castlemaine Theatre Company, Castlemaine Youth Theatre, Such As They Are and other users of the Phee Broadway Theatre who have Co-signed this letter.

On Tuesday December 1, The Midland Express published an article titled 'Footlights can be costly'. 3aC was named in the article as one of the local users that would not be able to afford to use the venue if we had to pay a \$49 per hour technician fee. The Midland Express did not seek permission to mention 3aC in the article, nor has 3aC ever made this statement publically, as it over-simplifies and trivialises our position. I write to clarify our position, and to make a genuine offer to work with council and other users to find a workable solution for all.

3aC has long recognised the need for a review of the management and operational arrangements of the Phee Broadway Theatre. We are also not opposed to there being a dedicated technician associated with the hire of the venue. However 3aC and co-signatories are of the opinion that the model adopted by council is unnecessarily inflexible, which results in the arrangements being cost prohibitive and otherwise unworkable for users, most of which are not-for-profit community organisations that use the venue on an ongoing basis. We also believe the current arrangements do not address long-term upkeep and maintenance issues, which are essential for the safety of users.

The following submission has been divided into the following sections:

- SECTION 1 This section provides an opportunity for us to refocus the discussion by presenting a counter argument to what we claim have been misleading and inaccurate comments made by council to justify the changes.
- SECTION 2 Here we identify specific issues with the current arrangements that make them inflexible and impractical for many users. This section also proposes solutions to these issues.
- SECTION 3 Section 3 provides a succinct summary of the above-mentioned solutions, together with more aspirational suggestions to improve long-term venue management and functionality.
- SECTION 4 We provide case studies of the venue management and technician arrangements of different venues across Australia. We believe that by looking at the diverse range of models currently in use, council and users can develop a venue-specific management solution in partnership, which meets both safety and artistic objectives.

The future of performing arts and the viability of venues in the Shire rely on the establishment and maintenance of strong and respectful partnerships between the shire and arts organisations. We must identify shared interests, goals and objectives, and work together and help each other to achieve these through participatory consultation and decision-making. We look forward to working with council on this task

Yours Sincerely,

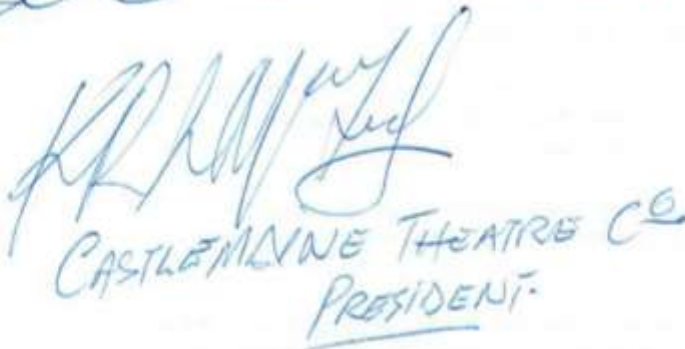
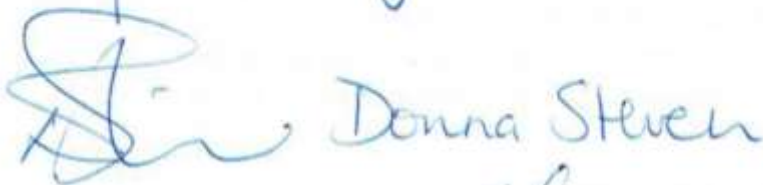
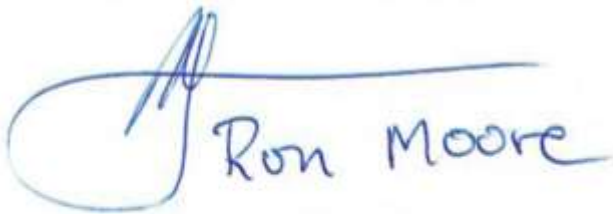


Matt Sheehan, Artistic Director, Three's a Crowd Inc.

Co-signatories:



Kate Stones, Secretary, Castlemaine Theatre Company



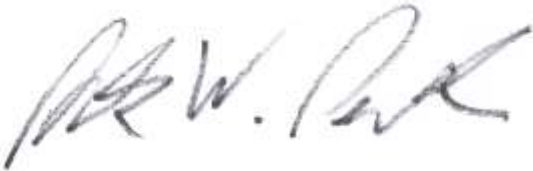
CASTLEMAINE THEATRE CO.
PRESIDENT

Castlemaine Theatre Company Committee



Kristie Babbage, Castlemaine Youth Theatre

Eliza-Jane Gilchrist, Such as They Are



Mark Penzak, Such as They Are

Phee Broadway

SECTION 1

3aC recognises that Council is committed to improving the management and safety of the Phee Broadway Theatre, Castlemaine's only dedicated performance space, and that the new hiring arrangement is a genuine attempt at achieving this. However, historically within council there has been a lack of recognition of the uniqueness of the Phee Broadway Theatre and how it differs from other council venues. It is our view that this historical context, together with insufficient consultation with users has led to the current situation where a management model has been adopted which is not appropriate for the venue or its users, and users feel disempowered, undervalued and unwilling to continue to utilise the space.

In the absence of participatory consultation on this issue, users were informed of the reasons for the changes to hiring arrangements through email, an information session or statements in the newspapers. Some of the reasons given were misleading and inaccurate and are discussed below.

The role of the technician

In the *Midland Express* article referred to in the cover letter, Council was quoted as saying *"The role of the technician is to oversee the safe and effective operation of the theatre when technical equipment is being used or when the audience is in attendance"*. 3aC argues this is not the purpose for which a technician was initially proposed (see below) nor is it the best use of technical expertise. The article goes on to quote Council as saying: *"This change was implemented following a thorough review of operations and the introduction of new safe work practices at the theatre to protect patron and user safety"*.

Part of the review was a consultant's report prepared by Theatre Safe Australia. 3aC have been told by Council staff that this was the main document used to inform the changes, specifically in relation to the appointment of the technician. However, the recommendation from Theatre Safe Australia was as follows:

'Theatre Safe Australia would recommend that the Phee [Broadway] Theatre create a full time venue coordinator or Venue Supervisor position. The positions sole purpose will be to maintain and monitor the venue and its operations. This role is an integral role of any theatre and is a separate role to a facilities manager or admin manager. This venue role has been created in other venues for not only the clients convenience but also the venues risk management.'

This is very different purpose and role to having a supervising technician only in the venue when there is a hirer present. The current arrangement means that the technician is only there to ensure that users are using the space correctly, but will not be there at other times to ensure the space is ready for use, that equipment and infrastructure is maintained, that inventories are kept of equipment and their condition etc. Nor will it allow for the technician to make small adjustments to the venue to improve the space.

It is also worth noting that each and every safety incident that lead to the closure of the venue did not result from hirers not using the venue safely or effectively. Each incident happened during the bump in (high-risk period) of shows and involved qualified technicians from The Capital Venues and Events, who have been providing the technician for the Phee Broadway Theatre since the new hiring arrangements were put in place. I also stress that these incidents were not due to negligence of the technicians, but because the building and equipment had not been maintained, equipment/infrastructure were not to specification and were not labelled. The idea of a technician is to oversee the venue and ensure a safe working environment, not to babysit users. We admit that there needs to be some level of supervision of users and someone to ensure corners are not being cut when it comes to safety. We also concede that there are a range of users, all with differing knowledge and experience in the use of theatres. Some suggestions are given in the next section of this letter to address these issues and differing capacities of users.

'The new technician fees and arrangements are industry standard for managed venues'

There are two problems with this statement. Firstly, There is no industry standard. There are common practices, of which what has been adopted at the Phee is one. However, there are many other common practices, each being tailored to the type of venue and its users. **Table 1** lists some of the management arrangements in use and **SECTION 4** gives specific case studies of different venues and their management. The model adopted at the Phee in relation to the technician is consistent with those in operation at venues that are members of the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPPAC). However, no other aspect of the Phee Broadway is equivalent to VAPPAC venues. For example, venue capacity, management arrangements, technical facilities and equipment etc. at the Phee are not equivalent and are grossly inferior to those of VAPPAC venues.

Secondly, the Phee Broadway Theatre is NOT a managed venue, and having a supervising technician in the space when there is a hirer in the venue does not transform it into a managed venue. Managed venues (and all those examples given in **Table 1** and **Appendix A**) typically have dedicated fulltime staff in the administration and technical management of the venue. They also often have front of house staff and booking officers. The technician's role is to manage the building and its equipment, ensuring the venue is ready for hirers, and ensuring all equipment is present and in working order after hire, and ensuring maintenance such as painting the floor etc. is carried out.

Table 1 compares and contrasts several venues in both Victoria and Tasmania, showing the diversity of management models that are in use. 3aC argues that the application of management models must consider the venues attributes such as seating capacity and technical functionality, as well as its user base and purpose. Venues shown in **table 1** without shading have similar arrangements to the Phee in terms of technician requirements and fees, yet the venues are much more sophisticated, with greater seating capacities and technical functionality. They all have very well established touring performance programs with staff to administer these and run the space. The Phee Broadway has a smaller seating capacity and is very restrictive in what can be staged, due to low functionality. -Venues shaded blue in **Table 1** are more comparable spaces to the Phee, and present more realistic fee structures and technical arrangements to those currently in place.

Table 1: comparison of venue management and tech arrangements for a range of Australian venues. Blue shaded cells show theatres that are considered comparable to the Phee Broadway based on capacity, configuration, functionality, technical capability/restrictions. The 5 unshaded theatres are venues with significantly greater seating capacity, technical facilities and functionality such as fly towers, orchestra pits and sophisticated equipment needing technical expertise to operate.

THEATRE	CITY	Managed venue	Owner/manager arrangement & Staffing	Capacity	Fly tower	Sophisticated rigging & equipment	Duty tech compulsory	Duty tech Fees
Phee Broadway	Castlemaine	NO	Council Own, Non-managed Staff: 1 x venues coord (Admin & venue bookings for 10+ venues) <i>No dedicated staff & no tech staff</i>	220	No	No	YES	\$49.00 hr
Engine Room	Bendigo	YES Not specific to venue	Council owned, Pvt operated Full-time admin & tech staff across 4 + venues.	120	No	No	NO*^	\$34.50 hr.
Earl Arts Centre	Launceston	YES	Council owned, Pvt operated Full-time admin and tech staff across 2 theatres	250	No	No	NO^	
Fortyfive Downstairs	Melbourne	YES	Pvt owned & operated Full-time dedicated admin and tech staff	120	No	No	NO^+	
Mechanics Institute	Willamstown	YES	Council owned, Pvt operated by resident theatre co.	182	No	Equivalent to Phee	NO	
Altona City Theatre	Altona	YES	Council owned, Pvt operated by resident theatre co.	244	No	Yes	NO#	\$26 hr.
Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre	Wangaratta	YES	Council owned & operated Staff: 4 x 1 FTE 1 x man, 1x box office, 1 x admin, 1xTech	520	No	Yes	YES	\$51 mon-fri \$61 weekend
Capital Theatre	Bendigo	YES	Council owned, Pvt operated Full-time admin and tech staff across 4 + venues.	495	No	Yes	YES	\$34.50 hr.
White Horse Centre	Nunawading	YES	Council owned & operated Full-time dedicated admin and tech staff	600	Yes	Yes	YES	\$35-\$45 hr
Her Majesties	Ballarat	YES	Council owned & operated Full-time dedicated admin and tech staff	600	Yes	Yes		
Ullumburra	Bendigo	YES	Council owned, Pvt operated Full-time dedicated admin and tech staff	1000	Yes	Yes	YES	\$34.50 hr.

* The engine Room only requires a venue duty tech to be present (and paid for by hirer in addition to venue hire fees) if the hirer wishes to use the venues equipment.

^ These venue requires induction by venue technician before commencement of hiring.

+ This venue identifies high risk periods associated with production (bump in and bump out). Venue technicians are required to be on site and supervise at these times ONLY.

Only non-resident theatre companies required a venue technician (which the resident theatre company provides at an additional cost (refer to Case study _))

SECTION 2: ISSUES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

From the perspective of 3aC's and the co-signers, the issue with the new hiring arrangements is that they are inflexible and impractical. We firmly believe that the new arrangements which are primary about ensuring user and public safety, risk compromising the purpose of the venue, which is to provide a space for the creation and presentation of art. We argue that the purpose of the space is equally as important as safety, and neither should be compromised. The following section outlines 3 issues with the arrangements and proposes solutions which will make the arrangements more accessible for users without compromising on safety.

ISSUE 1: Requirement to having the technician there all the time

3aC have 3-week seasons (8 performances). Our seasons have to be this long to cover costs (approx. \$21,000). Having a duty tech there at \$49.00 an hour on top of the tech we already employ to run our lights and sound is cost prohibitive. We also argue that this level of supervision for a **non-managed venue** with 'skeleton setup' for users with their own techs, familiar and inducted in the space, is not necessary. The risk to users and the public is relatively low once the show is running, particularly in the presence of other trained technicians.

SOLUTION: that the venue duty tech be only required (at the cost of the hirer) during high-risk times, to be defined as bump in, tech rehearsals and bump out. At other times, the venue tech does not have to be there as long as there is another qualified technician on duty. This is similar to models in place at fortyfivedownstairs, refer to **Table 1** and case studies).

The users could nominate qualified technicians who would be willing to supervise users in the absence of the venue technician. Council could run inductions (at the expense of user group) with the personnel. The technicians would be placed on a list held by council and considered by council suitably qualified to supervise community users outside of 'high-risk' periods.

This solution means that hirers still pay for the venue technician at 'high-risk' times, but this compromise means that the fee increase will be considerably less.

ISSUE 2: All users having to vacate the theatre when technician has scheduled breaks.

When we bump in for a show, we have limited days in the venue before we open. There is so much to do, some of which is technical (lights, set, sound) and some of it is creative (rehearsing, re-blocking for the space, altering costumes etc.) Every second that we are in the space we have to utilise it. Of course everyone has breaks but not at the same time. Things cannot come to a complete stand still.

SOLUTION: The solution to 'Issue 1' above will address this to some extent. Additionally, when the venue technician has his/her scheduled break, all technical work (rigging etc.) and use of technical equipment could cease. However the space could still be used for other low-risk activities associated with staging a performance. One of the hiring organisations techs/inducted personnel **MUST** also remain in the venue at all times when the venue tech is absent.

ISSUE 3: Duty tech must remain in venue after show is over & technical equipment is turned off.

There are often tasks to do after a show, such as meetings, repairs to costumes, re-blocking, cast/crew meetings awards ceremonies or networking. Many of these happen in the foyer or the dressing rooms. They are low risk activities, but essential and there is no need for the tech to remain in the building at the hirers expense.

SOLUTION: The solution to 'Issue 1' above will address this to some extent. Additionally, someone from the hiring organisation who has been appropriately inducted into the venue could be permitted to lock the venue after the duty tech has left. If need be, the venue duty tech could lock the auditorium before leaving, just leaving dressing room and the foyer to be locked by the hirer.

SECTION 3: SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL FOR IMPROVING HIRING/MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS OF THE PHEE BROADWAY THEATRE:

SHORT TERM SOLUTION:

1. Users pay for a compulsory meeting (1 hour on site) with tech to discuss tech requirements/limitations etc. prior to bump in at no more than \$49 hr
2. Users take part in a compulsory induction run by the technician included in hire.
3. Users fill out the risk management template provided by council and identify wardens etc.
4. The venue tech provided by council must be present at a cost of no more than \$49 hr for **'high risk periods'**, defined as bump in, tech rehearsal and bump out.
5. If technical issues are experienced during the run outside 'high risk periods', or if changes to rigging etc. are required, the venue technician must be called in at an additional cost to the hirer of no more than \$49 hr.
6. At other times outside the 'high risk period' the user must have a suitably qualified crew-member on site who is on a Council list of approved personnel. In the absence of this person, the hirer must pay for the Council's technician at a cost of no more than \$49 hr.

LONG TERM SOLUTION:

The above solution provides a compromise that maintains safety and increases flexibility and affordability for users. However, it still leaves the venue unmanaged and vulnerable to the development of maintenance issues outside of hiring times. There is no-one to identify maintenance or compliance issues, do repairs or identify opportunities to improve the venue. For the Phee Broadway Theatre to become a vibrant and viable performing arts space, it must a) be one, and b) be treated as one by its owners and users.

To address a) Council must honour its minuted commitment to seek additional funding to return the venue to a fully functional theatre. There are currently rolling funding opportunities such as the Australian Governments 'Catalyst' program that could be applied for.

To address b) The Phee must become a managed venue that recognises its user base. 3aC proposes that council considers one of the following long-term solutions in addition to measures 1-6 above:

7. Council employ at 0.5 – 1 FTE technician to manage the Phee Broadway and potentially the Town Hall. Duties would be managing all equipment, doing routine maintenance (stage painting etc). **THIS WOULD NOT INCLUDE VENUE BOOKINGS**, however it could if that would make it a more realistic full time role.

OR

8. Look at other management models such as service agreements with resident theatre companies (refer to CASE STUDY 2).

SECTION 4: CASE STUDIES OF VENUE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICIAN ARRANGEMENTS IN THEATRES ELSEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA:

CASE STUDY 1: FORTYFIVEDOWNSTAIRS

fortyfive
downstairs



Description:

fortyfivedownstairs is a privately owned, not-for-profit theatre and gallery based at 45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. They showcase independent, experimental and thought-provoking visual art, theatre, live music and discussion. It is a managed venue.

Capacity: 120 approx.

Venue Management Arrangements:

fortyfivedownstairs employs full time technicians and administrative staff to run the facility.

Hiring requirements with respect to a technician:

Hirers are required to pay an hourly fee for their duty tech to be present for induction, bump in and bump out – periods of a production that they identify as high risk. At other times the hirers' technician who is appropriately inducted and familiar with the space is present.

Contact for Further Information:

Andy Turner
Technical Coordinator
03 9662 9966, 0466 895278

tech @fortyfivedownstairs.com

CASE STUDY 2: WILLIAMSTOWN & ALTONA THEATRES



Description:

The municipality has two main performance venues: the Williamstown Mechanics Institute (above left) and the Altona Theatre (above right).

Capacity: 182 (Mechanics Inst.) 244 (Altona Theatre)

Venue Management Arrangements:

Both venues are council owned. However, management is split between council and the resident theatre companies. These are Not-for-profit community theatre groups that reside in the space and provide all technical equipment and technical expertise.

Resident companies are engaged under a service agreement. Some aspects of the service agreement include:

- Resident companies have exclusive use of the venue for 4 weeks prior to their performances and over the run their shows.
- Resident companies pay a quarterly utility charge for the venues (\$400-600 per quarter)
- Resident theatre companies pay approximately \$1 per ticket sold to Hobsons bay Council
- Council manage venue booking services and FOH and cleaning services to other users

Council also buys in shows and works with resident theatre companies to work around their use.

Hiring requirements with respect to a technician:

- The resident theatre company provide technician services for other users. This money goes to the resident company not the council and they charge \$26 hr.

Contact for Further Information:

Marcus Cassidy-Anderson

Venues Services Officer

T: 9932 4176

mcasand@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au

CASE STUDY 3: WANGARATTA PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE



Description:

This is a sophisticated modern proscenium arch theatre.

Capacity: 520

Venue Management Arrangements:

The Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre is a council owned and managed venue, with permanent fulltime staff employed by council in the roles of management, administration, box office and technical management.

Hiring requirements with respect to a technician:

All users are inducted into the space. The theatre requires a technician to be present at all times during hiring at a cost of \$51 per hour on weekdays and \$61 an hour on weekends.

CASE STUDY 4: THE ENGINE ROOM



Capitalvenues
&events



Description:

The venue consists of a black box performance space with a seating capacity of 120, and a timber floored mirrored studio of similar capacity. It is smaller than the Phee, but similar in terms of the types of show it can stage and functionality of the space. It is more similar to the Phee than the Capital Theatre is.

Capacity: 120

Venue Management Arrangements:

The Engine Room is one of the many performance and function facilities owned by the City of Greater Bendigo and privately managed through *Capital Venues and Events*. Venues include the Capital Theatre, Ulumbarra Theatre, the Engine Room, Bendigo Town Hall and Dudley House. *Capital Venues and Events* have a large team of full-time administrative staff, front of house staff, marketing managers and technicians. The Engine Room does not have any dedicated staff, but they are shared from the other main performances spaces as required.

Hiring requirements with respect to a technician:

All users are inducted into the space. The Engine Room does not require a venue duty tech to be present during hiring **unless the hirer intends to use lights or other technical equipment of the venue**. Rates in this instance are \$34.50 per hour in addition to venue hire.

Contact for Further Information:

Ben Van Dyllen
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