



NTC Inc - A PROFILE August 2022

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WHO ARE WE?

The longest-established and largest adult theatre company in the Hunter Region, with 200 members, 10,000 patron visits per year, and over 110 days of public programming per year. NTC is the most highly-regarded of any theatre group in Newcastle (Shane Bransdon doctoral research 2019). NTC is volunteer-based with just 24 hours per week of paid office support plus box office services.

NTC Inc is an Incorporated Association with charitable gift status, established in 1957 as Newcastle Repertory Club. It is based at premises at 90 De Vitre St Lambton which include a 140-seat proscenium arch theatre, foyer, kiosk/bar, office, greenroom, rehearsal studio, costume and props store, workshop and laneway.

GOVERNANCE:

A 14-strong Management Committee is currently headed by Zac Smith as President and includes directors with professional expertise in law, accounting, management, education, business, media, and theatre. The Theatre Manager is Cheryl Sovechles. NTC's Patron is Dr Carl Caulfield.

PROGRAMMING:

Up to 20 ticketed events each year including 7 mainstage productions staged over 3 weekends; an "Indie Season" of 4 shows featuring more challenging work by new and emerging directors, actors and creatives; a concert program; and a collaboration with Opera Hunter each Xmas.

PARTNERSHIPS, SPONSORSHIP and COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:

Strategic partnerships with Opera Hunter, CONDA Inc, Metropolitan Players and Young Peoples Theatre. Sponsors include Tamburlaine Organic Wines, Realized Design, Rotary Club of Newcastle Enterprise, Principle Project Management, Solvere, Wattyl and Jo Michel Consulting.

NT enjoys loyal and generous patronage from local individuals and small businesses without which it could not survive.

NTC supports local charities through charity previews, donations, use of facilities and loans of costumes, props and equipment. NTC has strong community connections. It was a Creative Partner

for Love Lambton 150 Years event (June 2021), conducts Open Days twice a year, and hosts tours for local groups such as U3A, Rotary and schools.

CULTURAL, SOCIAL and ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION:

NTC is proud to be an inclusive, age-friendly creative space. Members are aged from 18 to 80+. Membership is open to both creatives and supporters and costs just \$35/\$30pa. Ticket prices are modest - \$35/\$30 with all tickets on Wednesdays just \$25.

NTC's programming is designed to entertain, engage and stimulate audiences, and to provide new and established practitioners with opportunities for creative expression and growth. NTC stages classics, Australian plays, comedies, music theatre and crime drama/thrillers. Skill development is fostered through mentoring and coaching. New writing in short-form is supported through script development workshops and play readings. NTC also provides a platform for local writers by staging new work by playwrights such as Scott Bevan, Carl Caulfield, Sally Davies and Emma Wood.

NTC stimulates in excess of \$400,000 per annum in economic activity and provides a significant boost to the local economy including cafes, hotels and restaurants as well as service providers and other local businesses.

CRISES IN 2019 and 2020:

In 2019, Newcastle Council fined NTC \$4000 for late submission of its annual fire certificate. (This happened at a time when new staff and a new Committee had just come on line.) The subsequent fire inspection led to a report requiring \$200,000 worth of fire remediation work to be done to the theatre to comply with new regulations. NTC at this time had \$14,000 in the bank as well as a substantial mortgage. It seemed that we would have to close the theatre after more than 60 years of operation. But we were not giving up without a fight.

Determined to save NTC and establish it on a stronger footing for the future, and knowing that we could not look to government for support, we developed a fundraising and grants strategy. A public appeal for funds, well-supported by the media, led to \$100,000 in donations from members, patrons and supporters. Principle Project Management found a way to reduce the cost of the work to \$100,000 – albeit with the loss of 5.3 square metres of stage space. Rotary Club of Newcastle Enterprise sponsored our application for funding under “My Community Project” (NSW Government) to refurbish the theatre (new façade and laneway, new air conditioning in the auditorium, and removal of an unauthorised storage shed). With the support of the community through a public vote, we won funding of over \$192,000 and the work was completed in 2020. It has transformed the theatre. Further funding has been secured in the form of Volunteer Grants through the office of the Federal Member, Sharon Claydon. Over \$20,000 has been raised so far through a “Sponsor a Seat” campaign to fund new auditorium seating.

FUNDING CHALLENGES:

Despite determined efforts, many applications for funding have been unsuccessful. Why?

- Narrow criteria – for example, funding rarely supports physical infrastructure, preferring to privilege new creative work, yet NTC’s main challenge is maintaining and improving its facilities and meeting changing and increasingly onerous compliance requirements.
- Eligibility - NTC has been ineligible to apply for some government funding because Newcastle counts as either and sometimes neither metropolitan nor regional.
- Competition – many worthy groups are applying for a very small pot of often very modest funding. The success rate for applications (which can take 100 or so hours to compile) is very slim.
- Politics - recent revelations indicate that being located in a Labor-held electorate has been detrimental to our chances of government funding, despite the quality of our proposals.
- Regional location - business partnerships or sponsorships are harder to secure in Newcastle as businesses’ decision-makers/head offices are located elsewhere – usually in the capital cities.

DIVERSIFICATION OF INCOME STREAMS:

In 2020 NTC secured a Liquor Licence and sponsorship from Tamburlaine Organic Wines, and this has diversified and strengthened our income stream since we reopened in September 2020.

In addition, NTC offers commercial hires.

IMPACT OF COVID 19 AND COSTS:

NTC was “dark” from March to September 2020 due to COVID 19 and this had a severe impact on our finances as box office represents nearly 100% of our operational budget. State and Federal government support such as JobKeeper was invaluable in helping us stay afloat but our position continues to be precarious.

NTC is uniquely privileged in Newcastle as an independent adult theatre company having its own theatre premises but the running and maintenance costs are very high. Council rates, for example, were in excess of \$15,000 pa. Through our own offices, we learnt that NTC was eligible to apply to Council for an exemption from the general rates levy on the grounds of our charitable status – NTC’s Statement of Incorporation indicates that our Object is charitable – the promotion of culture in the city. A significant amount of work went into our application, jointly made with Young Peoples Theatre (YPT), and we were delighted to have the exemption for both companies approved in 2021.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON!

We have been gratified by the return of patrons – and creatives - to the theatre since the 2020 lockdowns, although the 80% audience capacity achieved in 2019 is yet to be achieved, with productions currently attracting 60-70% attendance, a diminution which severely impacts our income. In addition, business continuity continues to be put at risk by cast and crew illness mandating periods of isolation.

The 2022 season has featured productions of *Wyrd Sisters*, *Barefoot in the Park*, *The Fine Art of Deception*, *The Les Darcy Show* and *Tons of Money*, with *The Rest is Silence* and *The Watsons* yet to come. Two of these - *The Fine Art of Deception* and *The Rest is Silence* - are world premieres by local

playwrights (Carl Caulfield and Scott Bevan). Indie shows in 2022 included *Trevor* (in collaboration with Knock and Run Theatre), *84 Charing Cross Road* (in collaboration with Maitland Repertory Theatre), *Lysistrata* (a new translation by local scholar Prof Michael Ewans – a collaboration with Stray Dogs Theatre Company), *Eden* (a new play by local writer Daniel Scott in collaboration with Pencil Case Productions), *Bash*, and *The Wolves*. In addition, NTC will host an Opera Hunter show in December.

NTC is a leading cultural organisation which is continuing to contribute significantly to the region culturally, socially and economically, despite significant challenges.

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Office hours 3-6pm Mon-Fri and one hour before performances