

# **A RESPONSE TO THE BOTT REPORT**

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**Abbreviation used**

ACVC	Australian Concerto and Vocal Competition
AFCM	Australian Festival of Chamber Music
BRO	Barrier Reef Orchestra
CBD	Central Business District (of Townsville)
CPAC	Cairns Performing Arts Centre
EOI	Expressions of Interest
NQOMT	North Queensland Opera and Music Theatre
PAC	Performing Arts Centre
PDA	Priority Development Area
PIMPAC	Pimlico [State High School] Performing Arts Centre
PSHS	Pimlico State High School
QPAC	Queensland Performing Arts Centre
TCMC	Townsville Community Music Centre
TCC	Townsville City Council
TCS	Townsville Choral Society
TCT	Townsville Civic Theatre
TPAC	Townsville Performing Arts Centre

## **Executive Summary**

My response to the Bott Report expresses my views alone. It does not represent the views of any organisation nor is it in any way a criticism of Jenny Bott personally.

The Bott Report is superficial, poorly researched and fails to address the brief which was to investigate the feasibility of a Concert Hall.

The Report recommends a Performing Arts Centre with a 1000 seat concert hall to satisfy the need for a music venue, with a 250 seat studio, a large foyer function space, a bar/cafe/restaurant and also a multi-use gallery space. In order to support the CBD and to the benefit of visitors and tourists it recommends that this PAC be located at "The Hive" or Central Park. The TPAC proposal is rejected because of its location distant from the CBD. The recommended PAC is expected to relieve pressure on the Civic Theatre and improve its financial performance.

The Report not only fails to establish the feasibility of a concert hall but also fails to address our most urgent facility needs which are for a small and medium sized theatre and an outdoor theatre. Our greatest demand in music venues is for a recital hall and not the much larger concert hall recommended.

The Hive has already been rejected as an option. The recommended Central Park site is crucial inner city greenspace and streetscape; will be a main recreational node on the waterside promenade and is an impractically shaped site for a PAC development. It would be extremely expensive compared with the TPAC proposal, would have critical parking and access issues which would substantially reduce audiences and as a mainly night time venue would have little flow on benefit to the CBD. Dining options are best addressed in-house rather than trying to locate a PAC near existing dining.

The AFCM would not be appropriately accommodated in a large Concert Hall but would be better served by the TPAC concept which also provides a much needed multi-venue centre for Festivals generally and could generate considerable economic benefit and also potentially achieve a breakeven operating cost.

The Central Park facility would result in further increased rather than reduced theatre operational costs and will not solve the Civic's problems which stem from the lack of a medium sized theatre and the inefficiency of stand alone venues.

TPAC is centrally located on the future waterside promenade and would be part of a growing inner city that will be the CBD's best source of revitalisation.

The TPAC proposal remains the only economical and viable option, it is a PAC but with optimal access and parking to suit the 98% of patrons that travel by private car and it broadly addresses the city's performing arts needs. What Townsville lacks most of all is the civic vision and leadership to address these needs.

## **1. Disclaimer**

This response is a personal one and expresses my views alone and not necessarily those of others.

The Bott Report is a publicly released document and my response is in no way personal. I believe Jenny Bott to be an honest and honourable person and a tireless supporter of the arts, however this cannot inhibit frank comment, evaluation or criticism of the Report that she presented and which I believe has been uncritically adopted by Council with undue haste.

## **2. The Investigative Process**

The Report offers no hard evidence or data to support its arguments or conclusions. It lists numerous organisations that were consulted but few of these have any use for, or interest in, a concert hall. Notably the Report states that there are five high school symphony orchestras but in fact only one of these (Pimlico State High School) appears to have been consulted and little attention has been paid to the choral community.

The Report cites a number of “relevant” performing arts centres. It is unclear if any of these actually have a concert hall, but either way there is no uniform information provided on them that would enable useful comparisons to be made between them or their relationship to Townville’s needs.

In summary the investigative process seems to have been very general, lacking rigor and as a result has yielded no substantive indication of feasibility which was the point of the brief.

## **3. The Report**

Lacking hard evidence the Report consists largely of unsupported opinion and argument. At the risk of slight oversimplification the report’s conclusions add up to the following:

Townsville is short of performance facilities and the 1000 seat TCT is overbooked therefore new facilities are clearly needed. There is also need for a venue with suitable acoustics for music. By building a 1000 seat concert hall both problems can be addressed at the same time.

It is recommended that the new facility be a performing arts centre including the concert hall, a 250 seat black box type studio, a large foyer space suitable for functions use, a bar/cafe/restaurant and a multi-use high ceilinged art gallery space.

This facility would be best located at The Hive project or at Central Park. the TPAC proposal is rejected on the grounds of its isolated location at the Civic Theatre site inconvenient to tourists and far from accommodation and dining.

The new facility would be well used by local and touring shows and this would help to liberate the Civic to become more successful adopting an entrepreneurial operating model.

This would also relieve the Civic of some of the financial disadvantage stemming from a high percentage of local group bookings at concessional rates.

This recommendation is in line with both the Pure Projects report recommendations and complies with Council's stated aim of supporting revitalisation of the CBD.

To be frank, I disagree with almost, but not every, aspect of the Report's arguments and recommendations. However the Report deserves a detailed and considered response which is what I wish to provide in the following sections.

#### **4. Townsville's Performing Arts Facility Needs**

The problem is not just a lack of facilities (noted in the Report) but also a lack of fit for purpose facilities. The Magistrates Court and The School of Arts are both seriously deficient venues but are heritage listed buildings that cannot be upgraded. C2 is a space never designed or intended for public performance at all. Riverway is an excellent 300 seat "black box" multi-use space but is not a theatre. Our only purpose built theatre is the TCT. It is an excellent 1000 seat drama theatre built in 1978 as stage 1 of a performing arts centre. We are still waiting for stage 2 which was intended to add bar/cafe/restaurant facilities, another venue and rehearsal space<sup>(1)</sup>.

Our greatest need is firstly for a small theatre (say 200 seat) and also a medium sized theatre (500-600 seat) and secondly for an outdoor theatre venue. Given our outstanding climate for outdoor events the lack of an amphitheatre is especially hard to understand. (see 8.3 below). We also need a venue with suitable acoustics for live music and voice – this is either a recital hall or a concert hall. Both are still theatres but unlike the drama theatre they have no proscenium arch or stage wings meaning that the stage and auditorium are one undivided space. Recital halls are small to medium sized venues, say 200 to 600 seats with a small stage whereas concert halls are large venues, 1000-1800 seat with a large stage area to accommodate a symphony orchestra and choir.

So does Townsville need a Concert Hall? The short answer is no, we have a much greater need for a Recital Hall.

The demand for a Concert Hall could be quantified as 1 day a year for the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, assuming they do tour which they have not always done; 3 days a year for the Barrier Reef Orchestra; 1 day a year for the symphony orchestra section of the Eisteddfod plus (with a question mark, see 8.5 below) 9 days of the AFCM. To these 14 days could probably be added a concert each for the four school symphony orchestras<sup>(2)</sup> making 18 days of performance.

The demand for a recital hall is the same 9 days of the AFCM, 12 days p.a. of Townsville Community Music Centre concerts, 18 days of the Eisteddfod and 5 days of the Australian Concerto and Vocal Competition – for both of these the recital hall would have to be co-located with at least one more venue. To these 44 days could be added probable figures of 8 days for various local bands, 5 days for local choral groups and 10 days for school instrumental ensembles and choirs – a total of 67 days. In both the concert and recital halls some additional days would also have to be added for bump in and rehearsal time – say 8 days for the concert hall making the total 26 days and 20 days for the recital hall making a total of 87 days.

It is crucial to recognise that much theatre use follows the facilities establishment rather than preceding it. To start off with 87 days (67 plus 20 bump in/rehearsal days) accounted for is pretty good going for a theatre especially as this is local bookings alone without considering any touring events. Conversely the concert hall has a total of 26 days p.a. with little prospect of touring events.

Clearly our greatest need is for the smaller recital hall, which has over three times the existing demand. It is noted that in either case these facilities designed for music and voice would receive multi-use just as the Civic does, the main issue is the size of the auditorium and stage. Neither the merits of a recital hall nor the demand is even mentioned in the Bott Report. This is further discussed in 5 below and the TPAC approach to the issue is discussed in 9 below. It should be kept in mind that our greatest need is for a medium sized theatre and this ties in with the smaller recital hall rather than the much larger concert hall.

## **5. The Townsville Civic Theatre**

The Report cites the overbooked and high operating costs of the Civic as evidence of the need for new venues, this is correct to a point, but it does not follow that a concert hall would be the solution.

The Report states that: 110 hirers are knocked back annually. This is incorrect – 110 potential bookings were knocked back in 2014.<sup>(3)</sup> There have been no figures given for either preceding or more recent years and the figure is certainly only the tip of the iceberg. The problem has existed for many years and we have no idea how many potential users simply don't bother to enquire. We also do not know how many of the local or touring events that are unable to book the Civic did not actually want the Civic in the first place but have no choice.

Any performance with an anticipated audience of over 300 has to book the Civic – as noted above we have no medium sized theatre. Even below 300 the option is only black box type facilities not theatres.

The biggest problem that we have with the Civic is that it is housing numerous performances with audiences below 600, if these had a medium sized theatre to go to the Civic could adequately handle those hirers who really wanted a 1000 seat hall. You do not solve the problems stemming from the lack of a medium sized hall by building a second large hall. In fact financially you increase the problem.

The high cost of operating the Civic is due firstly to the fact that it is a stand alone venue. This is intrinsically inefficient and the least economical theatre model which is why a Performing Arts Centre model is universally adopted where possible. However the cost of the Civic is further inflated by Riverway – the Civic is operating a stand alone satellite venue as well. To add yet another stand alone facility to this model, as recommended by the Report, is a recipe for financial disaster, especially as the recommendations also add yet another black box when we already have four (Riverway, School of Arts, Magistrates Court and C2)

The second major cost factor for the Civic is that the many smaller audience shows it has to accommodate also yield the theatre less revenue.

The Report identifies the “dominance” of local group bookings of the Civic (70%) as a major cost. In fact, if like is compared with like, the local group concession only equals a 12-15% reduction. The more significant factor is that local groups are often charging lower admission prices, even in some cases little or no charge at all, and additionally are not necessarily attracting the same audience numbers – many commercial touring shows are very popular shows and have to be to be viable for

touring. One of the crucial financial factors is therefore the theatre's percentage fee of the ticket sales, the smaller the audience and/or the lower the ticket price the lower the income.

The Report criticises the "hall for hire" operating model of the TCT, this is quiet unfair, if you are constantly booked out the hall for hire model is the only way you can operate.

Lastly it should be said that to have a high level of local hirers of a community facility is not necessarily a bad thing, indeed it could be seen as the opposite. Further the "high" cost of operating our performance facilities is actually a figure much reduced by income earned by these facilities. This is more than can be said for the visual arts who bring in a pittance or by the Libraries or Parks for example who don't earn anything at all. Our performance facilities do operate in a commercial market but they are firstly there for the community. One of the many benefits they bring is in providing venues for commercial shows which we would not otherwise receive, however they are not commercial ventures as such and should not necessarily be assessed in commercial terms. This said, it is clearly essential that they operate as efficiently as possible

The Report appears to assume that local groups demand is being satisfied whereas commercial touring shows are being lost. In fact there is a large unmet local demand. Increased facilities will have to address both local and touring unmet demand. "Unprofitable" shows shifted from the Civic to a new facility will still be equally costly in operational terms, this is simply robbing Peter to pay Paul. The only gain would be if they were moved to a venue more suitable for them and indeed to one that is cost efficient to operate.

## **6. Central Park**

The Report identifies The Hive or Central Park as the preferred locations. Council has already quite rightly rejected The Hive following the EOI process.

The PDA plans identified Central Park as the location of an arts precinct. No information was ever provided of what this facility might consist of and it was certainly not based on any understanding of Townsville's arts facility needs.

This arts precinct thought bubble was subsequently fleshed out a little by a "scoping report" which proposed an arts complex totalling 2 ha of floor are (actually 20,175m<sup>2</sup>). Just how such a very large development could possibly be fitted in Central Park was not explained, there were no plans whatsoever.<sup>(4)</sup>

Central Park is critical greenspace, indeed it is not called Central Park for nothing. The CBD has only two green areas – the Perfumed Gardens and Hanran Park, a narrow creek side strip running from Lowths Bridge towards Victoria Bridge. On the other side of the creek is Central Park accompanied by similar tree plantings on the opposite side of Dean Street. After that the nearest green space is Reid Park and then either Anzac Park on the Strand or West End Park.

There is more to it however than a simple issue of scarce greenspace and the fact that the park probably includes some of the oldest tree plantings surviving in the city. A key feature of the PDA scheme is the Waterside Promenade. This will not only form a pedestrian spine that will rival the Strand, but it is the crucial missing link in Council's long term goal of a pedestrian/ bicycle pathway from Pallarenda to the dam. The promenade will connect the end of the Strand with the start of the Ross River Parkway at the Ross Creek Bridge on Boundary Street. It will be about 2 ½ kilometres long

and one fifth of this is in Central Park, this makes Central Park a crucial recreational parkland node on the promenade.

Central Park is a long narrow curved, spear shaped area. 500 metres long, it is little over 50m wide for half its length, then gradually widening to 100m at the far (southern) end. The large old fig trees and Poincianas that front the road combine with the similar trees the other side of Dean Street to form a green avenue streetscape approach to the CBD. This also is a crucial green feature we cannot afford to lose. If you deduct both the large tree corridor and the promenade from the already narrow park you are simply not left with a viable development site for any kind of public performance facility. The park area is large but the shape is completely wrong.

The Report proposes a concert hall, 250 person black box, a large foyer space, bar with cafe/restaurant and a gallery space. In total this will add up to a building footprint of 5 to 6000m<sup>2</sup> which because of the nature of the facilities will have to be almost exactly square – around 75m on a side. Not only will this simply not fit on the available narrow space but it would also as a minimum have to have truck, staff and performer access space to its rear and coach, taxi and disabled access to its front. This is without any allowance for general parking at all, which would presumably have to be at the Dean Street car park and/or the Stadium car park, at least 600 car parks would be needed (see also 8.1 below).

In summary, Central Park is crucial greenspace with very old trees which also form a vital streetscape. It will be an important parkland node on the waterside promenade and is completely the wrong shape to accommodate the proposed facility.

This problem could be partially reduced by enlarging the park area by a substantial (say 1 hectare) reclamation area, extending the park out into Ross Creek. Even if approval for this were obtainable it would be a very expensive exercise. Another costly option is to extend out over the creek on piles suspending part of the building over the water, also the promenade can if necessary become boardwalk to further save space but again to do so is very costly especially with our tidal range and the exposure of the site to cyclonic conditions.

Central Park is quite simply the wrong site for this development.

## **7. Cost of Proposed Facilities**

The Report does not address the cost of the recommended facility, all be it that this is surely a critical part of feasibility.

Fortunately someone else had done this exercise for us in the form of the Cairns Performing Arts Centre.

The CPAC has a similar sized theatre (940 seat) to that recommended by the report, a larger black box (400 seat) but a smaller foyer and no cafe/restaurant or gallery space. Cairns like Central Park has very limited site space for external works. Overall the Cairns project is comparable but smaller than the Bott facility.

The Cairns project was tendered at the absolute bottom of the building industry cycle at what I believe was around \$53.3million. They have also built an amphitheatre and associated landscape next door for a further \$12M. The Bott proposal can therefore be roughly costed at no less than



\$57M if it had been tendered last year. The reality is that anything under \$62M over the next couple of years would be completely unrealistic.

By comparison the TPAC proposal would give us a 800 seat Concert Hall, a 200 seat theatre, a very large foyer space, a 2000 capacity amphitheatre, ample bar and catering and a 950 capacity car park all currently estimated to cost \$42M – a saving of around \$20M whilst providing both more venues and more parking. How can this be so? It is largely because TPAC is not a standalone development but a large building extension which incorporates an existing facility that must itself have a replacement value of at least \$50M. To start again on another site, as recommended by the Report, is horrendously expensive in its unnecessary duplication of facilities.

The capital costs are only part of the picture. The TPAC model maximises economy of operation both in staffing, equipment, maintenance and administration whereas the Central Park option unavoidably greatly increases operating expenses.

It would be reasonable to expect TPAC to achieve a breakeven operational cost within two years of opening. There would still be Riverway operational costs to add to this. To operate a third separate facility as the Report proposes will result in yet higher costs being incurred with no compensatory savings.

## **8. Sundry Issues**

Various issues raised in the Report call for comment:

### **8.1 Parking and Access**

The Report notes (p 30) that: “the issue of location is crucial to this decision” (i.e. to recommending Central Park or the Hive as the location). Indeed it rejects the TPAC proposal almost solely because of it’s location which is : “counter-productive to the goal of enlivening the CBD” (p. 7), interestingly the report continues:

“while the location is not perhaps an issue for locals with cars, and an established interest in participation or attendance at arts events at the TCT, it is a significant negative factor for everybody else in the target market – particularly international and national tourists, and young people without cars”

Firstly it needs to be clearly stated that the goal of performing arts facilities is to effectively and efficiently service the communities performing arts needs and not to support the CBD, if they can fully address their goal whilst also supporting the CBD then well and good, but then and then only.

Secondly there is no “target market” at all, the “target” of the facilities is to provide the physical infrastructure, supported by the necessary equipment and staffing that is required by the performing arts activities both local and touring. Each activity or event will have its own individual “target markets” which may vary greatly. The Bott Report clearly sees Location, Location, Location as the crux of the matter. This is quite simply wrong. All other things being equal, e.g. show content, promotion, the weather and competing events, the crucial factor is Access, Access, Access. In any regional city this means: how easy and fast is the main road access to the theatre and how easy is it to park.

In 2016 89% of theatre patrons were from Townsville,<sup>(5)</sup> these patrons obviously drove to the theatre (TCT or Riverway) in private cars. However a further 7% were from northern Queensland and almost all can be assumed to have arrived here by car. This leaves us with just 4% of patrons hailing from South Queensland or interstate but of them we must assume that all grey nomads have their own transport and many tourists also hire cars – this is how they get to Paluma, Charters Towers, Cromarty Wetlands etc. or even get around Townsville itself. Additionally many business visitors either hire cars or are lent company cars and people visiting friends or relations are assisted with transport by them. I suggest that at least half, and probably more, of that 4% therefore have private car transport. In other words 98% of our present theatre patrons all equally need swift access and parking. If we have a “target market” this 98% is it, and this is not going to greatly change in foreseeable decades.

The TCT site is absolutely outstanding – it has swift access to three of our arterial roads (Abbot St., Charters Towers Rd. and Woolcock St.). Townsville has one of the best arterial road systems in Queensland and the reality is that almost the whole city population can drive in the evening from home to the TCT in twenty minutes or less. They do so however with the absolute certainty that they will get a free offstreet car park within a minute or two’s walk of the front door of the theatre. In contrast the Central Park site would have most of its parking on the other side of an arterial road or south of the new stadium.

It is not possible to accurately quantify just how much theatre patronage the Civic Theatre’s incredibly good access generates but I would suggest that a TCT performance located instead at a venue at Central Park or “the Hive” would loose at least 30% of its audience in fine weather and 60% in wet weather. We take the TCT site for granted, to call it “isolated” is truly ridiculous, any other city would give anything for such a theatre site and the theatre patronage it generates.

The new Cairns Performing Arts Centre (CPAC) has just 180 off street car parks, which also has to cover performers and staff. Mackay has about 150, Rockhampton less. In each one of these cities your home is connected to the theatre by a less effective arterial road system and when you get there you have no idea where you will find a kerbside park – one, two or three city blocks from the theatre.

Theatre attendance is not compulsory, for most types of performances the “true believers”, who will attend no matter what, are probably less than 30% of the audience, the rest are precarious and easily lost.

The TPAC car park would provide 950 off street car parks allowing for say a full concert hall and Civic auditorium at the same time or for that matter a full amphitheatre and there is still plenty of overspill parking space in Reid Park.

Lastly it is noted that the “patron” figures given were patrons not ticket sales, each patron could be assumed to buy tickets for themselves and two others. The total Townsville city patrons were 13,920 which therefore probably represents 41,760 different people. This figure does not include the Eisteddfod (Townsville’s largest theatre event) nor the Australian Concerto and Vocal Competition both of which do their own ticketing. It also excludes free or general admission events so the real number is probably more like 45,000. This means about 25% of the city’s entire population attended the theatre at least once in the year, this incredible figure must quite

significantly stem from the excellent access. The same figure for a metropolitan theatre would not be more than a few percent.

The Bott Report and the PDA plan, makes the serious mistake of taking our theatre patronage for granted. Patronage is in fact critically affected by access and parking, it is entirely wrong to assume that the audience will go to wherever you build the theatre. This is well illustrated by Riverway which has consistently lower audience numbers due to the poor parking especially for night time audiences.

## **8.2 Dining**

The Report criticises the TCT for “uninspired bar and catering” (p.12) and later (p31) for a “single option” (during the AFCM for eight days), “This is not an ideal festival experience”.

As far as the AFCM goes the bar/catering contractor in fact ran one menu with a choice of four hot dishes for four days then ran a fresh menu for the next four days. A patron could in fact have dined every night on a different hot dish but also with a alternative of both cheese platters and dips platters as well. The prices were reasonable and the quality high. During the AFCM they typically served around 85 hot meals each evening.<sup>(6)</sup>

I believe this could be improved for Festival type events with an increased frequency of menu change. The catering during the 2017 AFCM was extremely popular and with the good efforts of the contractor is fast becoming a very well used service at TCT performances through the year especially at the Barrier Reef Orchestra concerts or the NQOMT and TCS musicals.

One of the arguments put forward for The Hive or Central Park is nearness to dining but significantly the report specifically includes a bar/cafe/restaurant in its recommended P.A.C. in Townsville most patrons will obviously eat at home, however there is certainly real scope, as is presently being well illustrated at the Civic, for dining at the venue. To dine elsewhere and take in a show is a lot less feasible. It is also likely that dining options would develop near to a performing arts centre. The model here is QPAC which has a very popular cafe and restaurant but subsequently acquired dining options nearby. On the other hand to try and locate the PAC near to existing dining is both unnecessary and impractical.

## **8.3 Outdoor Venues**

The Report touched on what it called “outdoor spaces” indicating that our needs could be easily addressed by installing shade [and] “I think that there are some low cost, high impact solutions here” (p 30). Frankly this is both unhelpful nonsense and also irrelevant in a report on the feasibility of a concert hall.

Townsville has a outstanding climate for outdoor performance which it fails to capitalise on by not having any useable venues. For it to be useable an outdoor venue must have the following:

- A roofed stage
- Backstage male and female change rooms and toilets
- A backstage store room

- Vehicle (light truck) access to stage
- A mounded audience area
- Fully fenced and secure audience area connecting to a secure stage and back of house.
- Public toilets at the facility or nearby.
- Adequate parking in close proximity, especially for performers, staff and disabled patrons.
- Adequate lighting if used for night time events.

In other words we need a proper outdoor theatre facility, one which adequately provides for the needs of both the performers and the patrons. Especially important is roofing the stage – this is essential weather protection for scenery, props and both sound and lighting equipment and it additionally has a vital acoustic function, focusing the performance sound towards the audience. Also crucial is the secure enclosure of the facility, without this admission cannot be controlled (or charged for) and scenery, props and equipment are not protected from theft or vandalism. There are issues here both of public safety, liability and insurance quite apart from the practical needs of the patrons and the performers. Our existing outdoor venues at Thuringowa, Riverway and Kissing Point are all tokens that are little used and will not be significantly improved by shade sails. Townsville has a substantial unmet demand for an amphitheatre.

#### **8.4 Benefit to CBD**

The Townsville CBD is unquestionably in big trouble and all-be-it this is principally a market place matter, it is a genuine community concern that the city heart is “dead”

TCC has invested vast sums of money in recent years to visually upgrading the CBD streetscape without apparently even slowing the decline.

At the time the PDA was launched it was stated that all arts developments in coming years would be in the PDA in order to support the CBD. It has to be noted that no such similar commitment of Parks or sporting developments for example was made, these continue to be widely distributed.

I believe this approach was both impractical and illogical, indeed the only hope of revitalising the CBD lies in fostering a growing and vital inner city which could be defined as about a two kilometre radius from the Grand Chancellor Hotel. This would include the Strand, North Ward, South Townsville, Railway Estate and part of West End.

Any development in this inner city area will directly or indirectly have flow on benefits to the CBD either in population increase, business activity or employment. It is in the inner city rather than in the CBD itself that you would expect to find the things we only have one of, such as Performing Arts Centres, Museums, Art Galleries etc.

However, it is crucial both that the activity and the attractions be widely distributed rather than concentrated. This not only spreads the benefit geographically but gives cohesion to the inner city generally as a place to live or to visit. Within this broad framework the individual developments need to be located to best serve their function not to artificially benefit one area ahead of another. The Central Park site is avocated as being near to accommodation for out-of-town visitors but in fact no more than half of Townsville’s hotel accommodation is within feasible walking distance of Central Park and we have a perfectly good taxi and Uber service.

With this in mind the TPAC proposal would create an exceptional attraction not only concentrating much of the theatre offerings at the one location but creating a festival centre for events drawing both visitors and locals. It is well inside the inner city area and right on the future waterside promenade and it perfectly serves the need of theatre patrons for easy access and parking. There should be other attractions to come – a new Regional Art Gallery, a museum of Townsville, a Community Art Gallery, a new Central Library, Art Workshops/studio facility to name a few obvious examples. All must be located to be functionally efficient and all if distributed through the inner city will corporately support revitalising the CBD.

To attempt to force the Performing Arts development to occur on a very unhelpful site simply for some presumed flow on benefit to the CBD is town planning nonsense. Additionally it is important to note that a Performing Arts Centre will predominantly operate at night when the CBD is largely closed anyway. The obvious facility for the Central Park site is a Regional Art Gallery which would support the CBD with its casual daytime visitation and is also architecturally far more flexible than a PAC and could be designed to suit the narrow shape of the site. An Art Gallery also requires far less parking.

An added feature is that Central Park could also become a sculpture park turning the whole park into an art gallery whilst maintaining the greenspace and recreational functions of the site. This would be a win-win approach to Central Park.

The Report claims agreement (p.10) in its recommendations with those of the Pure Projects Report. Pure Projects however did not seriously investigate or address the arts at all and simply recycled the AFCM lobbying for a concert hall.

### **8.5 Australian Festival of Chamber Music**

I am a strong supporter of the AFCM and it is second only to the Eisteddfod as our premier theatre event of the year. It is the only event that demonstrably attracts substantial out of town patronage, bringing direct economic benefit. It is necessary however to maintain perspective, the AFCM is still a very small part of the overall theatre year and it is also an atypical event – it is our only festival type event and it is narrowly focused on chamber music.

The AFCM Board have been pushing for a 1000 seat concert hall close to Palmer Street. While I can see the attraction to the Board of plenty of capacity and also the convenience to out-of-town patrons of a venue near to some accommodation I believe this is a short sighted approach.

A concert hall is far too large and unsuitable a venue for chamber music for which a 600 seat recital hall would probably be the optimum, achieving a responsible compromise between maintaining the intimacy called for in chamber music performance with a reasonably large capacity for economic support.

It is also important to understand that typically only about 100 patrons at the AFCM concerts arrive by festival buses or by taxi, the remaining patrons – anywhere from a further 200 to 800 patrons, depending on the concert program and the venue, arrive by private car. So, whereas typically 98% of theatre patrons arrive by car as explained in 8.1 above, in the case of the AFCM the figure is actually more like 78% - this is clearly still the vast majority of patrons that benefit from, and are encouraged by, the easy access and parking at the TCT.

I believe that a large concert hall venue will diminish the quality and status of the AFCM – it might be an acoustic improvement but it is still substandard, additionally locating it at Central Park will inconvenience the majority of patrons especially for the daytime concerts when even the Dean Street car park may well be full.

The TPAC proposal would in contrast, provide a proper festival venue for the AFCM. The smaller concert hall (still 800 seat but a 600 seat sized hall) would be adequate, and the small theatre and also the foyer space would add excellent AFCM venues. It is noted that although the Report summary lists an 800 to 1000 seat concert hall, it is the 1000 seat hall that is recommended – “Ideally this should be 1000 seats – perhaps 850 in stalls plus 200 in a gallery” (p. 29).

All organisations, including the AFCM must accept that reasonable compromises need to be made in order to achieve new facilities that broadly satisfy our overall performing arts needs and that are reasonably economical to build and operate.

## **9. TPAC**

There has only been three locations proposed for performing arts facilities – the Hive, Central Park or the TCT site. The Hive project is neither large enough to accommodate the needed facilities or financially viable for Council. Central Park is an unsuitable and very costly option.

TCC considered all of this forty years ago and quite correctly decided that the best site for Townsville’s PAC was on Boundary Street where there was good access, enough space but was still close to the city centre.

The intent of the TPAC proposal is to now finally implement this civic vision but to do so in a way that is updated to address our present, and very urgent, performing arts needs. It is not intended to provide facilities specifically tailored to any individual users needs but rather compromises to achieve as broad a spectrum of use as possible.

With the PDA, including the waterside promenade (which must run around the Civic’s creek frontage) and the added cross creek bridges the site will be well integrated into the growing inner city. The TPAC car park with a capacity of 950 cars could be used as a long term daytime car park – the walking distance from it to the western end of the CBD is the same as the distance from the Dean Street car park to the eastern end of the CBD.

Crucially TPAC creates a very powerful festival venue enabling Townsville for the first time to both attract and also generate festival events which can bring substantial economic benefit. The operational efficiency of the facility could greatly lower Council’s theatre costs and also provide a better deal to users, particularly local groups.

TPAC is a plan for the past not the future. It is a catch up measure giving us now the facilities that should sensibly have been built by the late nineties. The site however retains space for future growth – a dance theatre (say 250 seat), a large black box (say 450 seat) for circus, events experimental theatre etc., a cinema, a restaurant are all future options that could be added as extensions to the eastern side of the complex.

The recently completed revision of the TPAC scheme provides five critical venues each with multiple potential use:

**A small theatre** – 200 seat theatre with proscenium arch stage, including a thrust stage area which allows choral or musical ensembles to perform in front of the proscenium arch. Retractable seating allows for flat floor use (e.g. theatre restaurant or dining functions). The auditorium could also be used as a rehearsal space or a marshalling area.

**A medium Theatre** – 600 seat raked stalls with a 200 seat balcony. This theatre is in concert hall format. It is an unusual design and could either be seen as a large recital hall with an oversized stage or alternatively a concert hall with an undersized auditorium. The stage would have to be fitted with a fully retractable systems of curtains that could modify it for various uses other than musical concerts.

The intent is to address our need for a medium sized theatre and for a recital hall but by including a large stage it becomes suitable for dance and for orchestral performance. Smaller musical performances can be accommodated in the small theatre venue.

**A large theatre** – the 1000 seat Civic drama auditorium is retained but with some minor improvements.

**An outdoor theatre** – a 2000 capacity amphitheatre with large roofed stage with full access to back of house facilities.

**A Foyer space** – TPAC includes a separatable foyer space which can function as a fifth venue. It could dine up to 500, has both front of house and back of house connectivity. It could be used for trade displays, functions or performance and has its own access to the central bar and catering which also serves the lobby. Apart from the 1000m<sup>2</sup> foyer space, the Centre also has 630m<sup>2</sup> of lobby and 720m<sup>2</sup> of covered veranda available to serve the other venues if the foyer space is in use.

All of these venues can be adapted for varied performance or events use according to need. Staff, equipment, administration and both back of house and front of house facilities are shared by all venues except for the amphitheatre which has its own entry off the veranda and its own refreshment and toilet facilities but has direct back of house access. One external box office serves all five spaces.

## **10 Conclusion**

Regrettably the Bott Report fails to achieve a sufficiently objective view of our performing arts needs and as a result proposes a very costly and inefficient solution. The Report is however not all wrong. It quite correctly recommends a performing arts centre as the model for new facilities (a conclusion TCC itself came to forty years ago which resulted in establishing the TCT site).

The Report concisely identifies our core (arts) problems (p.10) as a lack of suitable venues, a dead city heart and a lack of civic vision or leadership. The point concerning the CBD is especially perceptive – it is not the arts letting down the CBD but the CBD letting down the arts. The lack of vision is also critical. The PDA launched two years ago has ill considered boundaries failing, for example, to include either the north rail yards area or Reid Park. The scheme included two community facilities – an arts precinct and a waterside promenade but both are yet to be clearly presented to the community even as preliminary concepts. It was reported that both design and funding was underway on the promenade but remarkably this was not for the 70% of it that can be easily developed on vacant dry land from the Ross Creek bridge on Boundary Street all the way to

Denham Street but was for the costly, challenging and least necessary section from the Strand to Denham Street where road and footpath connectivity do at least already exist.

The TPAC proposal's reception is also telling. It was submitted to Council over two years ago and is very probably the most substantial and detailed proposal ever received by Council from the community – it has virtually been ignored. It appears to never have been properly appraised nor has any response or constructive criticism been forthcoming.

Townsville desperately needs practical, cost effective and clearly presented visions addressing the needs of a growing city. Nowhere is this clearer than in the arts where our facilities are shamefully inadequate. Whilst there is no genuine race between northern cities it is telling that while Townsville claims the lofty title of “capital of the north” it is Cairns that is fast consolidating an unchallengeable status as the arts and cultural centre of northern Australia. The TCC adoption of the Bott Report has contributed to this dichotomy in further delaying any sensible action in addressing our performing arts facility needs.



## Notes and References

1. Civic Theatre Townsville 31/3/78
2. There are in fact presently five school symphony orchestras but PSHS produces two of them. Kirwan SHS, Cathedral School and Grammar are the others.
3. Townsville City Council *Performing Arts and Events Strategy 2016-2018*
4. *North Queensland Arts and Cultural Centre* Central Park. 2015
5. Based on 2016 box office figures
6. Information from Essentially Fresh, the bar/catering contractor. Attached are the two 2017 AFCM menus.



ESSENTIALLY  
FRESH DELI &  
CATERING  
BY *Michel*

## Australian Festival of Chamber Music 2017

### To share

#### International Cheese & antipasto platter \$14.00

Selection of Australian and international Cheeses, Selection of Australian Deli Meats, mixed olives, dried fruit & crackers

#### Dips and Crackers \$10.00

Selection of three dips, crackers & grissini's

### Main meals

#### Michel's Pumpkin Soup (V) (GF) \$10.00

Classic soup served w/ bread roll

#### Traditional Lamb Shepherd's Pie (GF) \$16.00

Served w/ side salad & bread roll

#### Creamy Spinach & ricotta Tortellini (V) \$16.00

Served w/ bread roll

#### Roast vegetable Frittata (V) (GF) \$14.00

Served w/ bread roll

### Sweets

#### Assorted Cakes \$6.50

Served with cream

#### Coffee \$4.00

#### Coffee & cake special \$9.00

#### Snacks \$3.00

Assorted Chocolates, chips & nuts



ESSENTIALLY  
FRESH DELI &  
CATERING  
BY *Michel*

## Australian Festival of Chamber Music 2017

### To share

#### International Cheese & antipasto platter \$14.00

Selection of Australian and international Cheeses, Selection of Australian Deli Meats, mixed olives, dried fruit & crackers

#### Dips and Crackers \$10.00

Selection of three dips, crackers & grissini's

### Main meals

#### Michel's Chunky Vegetarian Soup (V) (GF) \$10.00

Classic soup served w/ bread roll

#### Creamy Garlic Prawns (GF) \$16.00

Served w/ rice & bread roll

#### Chicken Curry (GF) \$16.00

Served w/ rice & bread roll

#### Potato & Leek Frittata (V) \$14.00

Served w/ salad & bread roll

### Sweets

#### Assorted Cakes \$6.50

Served with cream

#### Coffee \$4.00

#### Coffee & cake special \$9.00

#### Snacks \$3.00

Assorted Chocolates, chips & nuts