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AusStage Follows the Money:

**An introduction to the design and functionality of the new
financial table in the AusStage database**

AusStage, the Australian National Performing Arts database, was established in 2000. It is recognised internationally as “one of the most ambitious performing arts databases ever undertaken” (Varela 2021, 163) and in 2021 was inscribed in the Australian Register of the UNESCO Memory of the World. Today it holds almost half a million records on Australian performing arts events, artists, organisations, and venues from the 1780s to the present day.¹ After twenty years of working with event-based data, AusStage has turned its attention to the economic data behind performing arts production; it is the first major Australian cultural dataset to store aesthetic and financial records in the same relational database.²

When launching the Australian Government’s new National Cultural policy, *Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place*, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese “recognised the importance of art and culture to Australia’s identity, social unity and economic prosperity”.³ The federal government is committing \$286 million in funding over the next four years, which suggests that there is a clear need for analytical tools that conduct nuanced studies linking art and public money.⁴ These tools have been lacking in Australia, particularly as the changes to the information systems used in both federal and state government arts departments has made it difficult to track past patterns of subsidy.

Attempts have been made to capture the value of culture beyond the framework of strict government metrics (Meyrick, Phiddian, and Barnett 2018) with an emphasis on the experience of artists and self-evaluation, as well as qualitative assessment based on broad observation and subjective response. In addition, several recent research projects in the UK (Kaszynska 2018) and Australia (Fielding and Trembath 2022) have argued the necessity of having “a better foothold in relevant evidence and perhaps more importantly

the means and language to reflect on it in an intellectually honest way” (Kaszynska 2018, 6).

While debate around the use of metrics in the performing arts may be ongoing, the new financial table in AusStage aims to provide ‘relevant evidence’ by introducing economics into a relational data structure that holds information tables on performances, people, places, and organisations.⁵ With every change of elected government, new policies are announced, and new titles adorn the funding programs announced through the Australia Council (now named Creative Australia), and the states and territories’ arts departments. Using the AusStage financial table, researchers will be able to track subsidy as it flows through ecologies, companies, and bodies. They will be able to analyse the impact of public policies on modes of cultural production, and assess if they have achieved their stated aims. More broadly, as the data captured in the AusStage financial records is not restricted to government grants, it will facilitate research into how public money interacts with private investment, sponsorship, and commercial activity in the present and past performing arts of Australia.

The first part of this article provides an account of the design of the AusStage financial table; the second part reports on a pilot project that has integrated records from the financial and pre-existing tables in the database to generate new knowledge about the workings of the South Australian performing arts sector between 2011–2022.

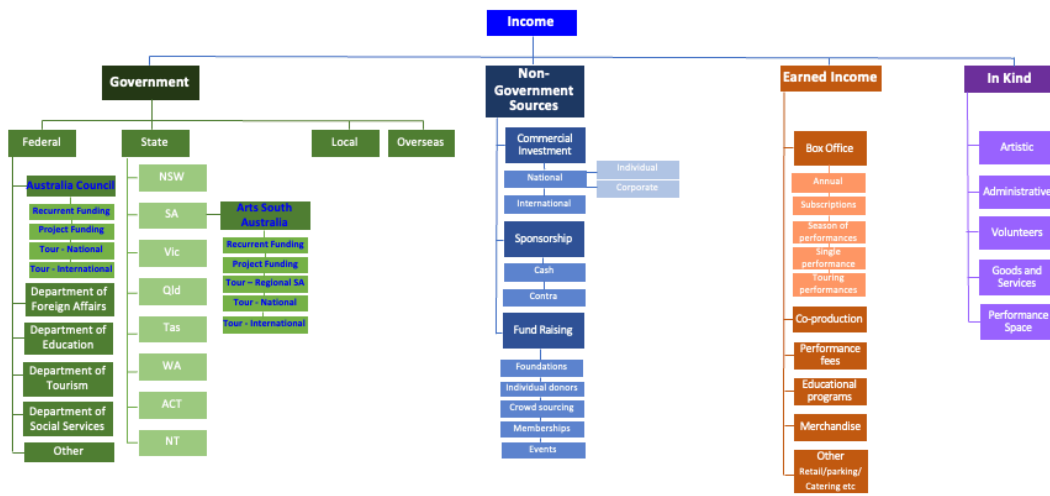
Building the AusStage Financial Table

To ensure that the figures captured in AusStage financial records were meaningful to researchers, the new financial table was designed in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Discussions were held with independent artists and producers, established performing arts companies, commercial entrepreneurs, government funders, and arts philanthropists. The seventy fields requested by stakeholders were categorised with four sub-headings under Income, and eight sub-headings under Expenditure (Figures 1 and 2).

Data Gathering and Entering

Having designed the financial table, the next task was to design the data-entry interface. Although AusStage is an event database, it is individuals and organisations, rather than events, that are recipients of funding and are accountable through taxation or legal requirements to produce audits or annual reports. For this reason, it was decided that all AusStage financial records would be attached to a contributor or an organisation and would cover either a calendar or a financial year.⁶ The system was tested using ten years of annual reports from thirty performing arts organisations across Australia. Rather than risk entering figures that were interpretations of source material, a protocol was established that any figure in an AusStage financial record must be an exact match to a

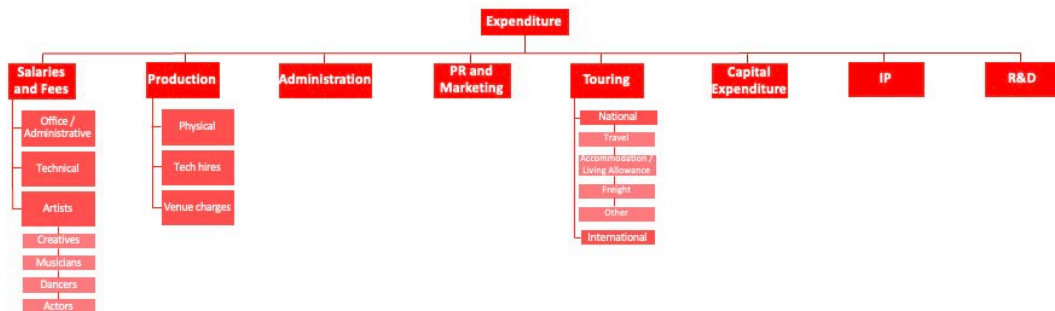
Finance Module - Income



Version 5.1
11 January, 2023

Figure 1: Income. The green fields cover government subsidy and were suggested by arts bureaucrats; the blue fields address the needs of the commercial sector; the brown fields were suggested by multiple stakeholders; and the purple fields reflect concerns from the independent sector about unpaid work. (Source: AusStage)

Finance Module - Expenditure



Version 5.0
11 January, 2023

Figure 2: Expenditure. The fields reflect the needs of different stakeholders. For example, capital expenditure is a key indicator of industry vibrancy for the commercial sector, while the lack of research and development is a serious concern across all sectors. (Source: AusStage)

field in the table. As there is lack of standardisation in the financial reporting used by performing arts organisations in publicly available documents, most of the annual reports used in the testing provided no more than a dozen or so figures that perfectly fitted the AusStage fields. We quickly became aware that the AusStage financial records would only reflect a small amount of the financial information contained in the original source documents. In certain respects, this limitation was desirable as it was our intention to provide a tool for longitudinal studies of money flows across the sector and not a mechanism for critiquing the performance of individual artists or organisations. To explain the logic behind our approach to entering financial data, we incorporated into the design an alert to users that the figures in any given record were not comprehensive. We also added explanatory text boxes against each of the fields to allow data entry personnel to provide additional notes. Wherever possible we attached the original data source as an AusStage resource.

Our major data sources were publicly available annual reports archived on the websites of the major companies. AusStage approached companies and requested digitised or hard copies for missing years. Annual reports lack the detailed breakdowns that appear in grant acquittals, but as the latter are private documents, they are not available for public scrutiny. There are also difficulties in getting data from the smaller companies in receipt of annual public funding that are not obliged to publish annual reports. These companies tended to cite worries about how the information will be used, as well as lack of staff to prepare data. Interestingly, the companies most hesitant about releasing financial data were among those that had experienced 'de-funding', either from the Australia Council or from Arts SA at some earlier stage in their history (McDonald 2016).⁷ Another important source of data are the government cultural agencies. For the AusStage pilot project, Arts SA released ten years of the project grant data and the Australia Council provided a ten-year record of successful grants allocated to the Terrapin Puppet Company. The latter company agreed to the Australia Council supplying AusStage with the history of their federal funding. In addition, figures gathered by Kathryn Kelly and Tessa Rixon for their research on national funding and defunding by the Australia Council (Kelly and Rixon 2023) were used for data-entry testing.

Simple Searching Using AusStage Financial Records

The Finance Search can be found under the AusStage advanced search function. Multiple organisations or individual artists/producers can be the subject of a single search, and it is possible to select from nineteen different categories of income and expenditure. The search returns the requested figures; full financial records can be accessed by clicking on the name of the organisation/contributor (Figures 3, 4, 5).

Contributor Name/s	<input type="text"/>
Contributor ID	<input type="text"/>
Organization Name/s	<input type="text"/>
Organization ID	<input type="text"/>
State	State <input type="button" value="v"/>
Date From	2023 <input type="button" value="v"/>
Date To	2023 <input type="button" value="v"/>
Date Format	All <input type="button" value="v"/>
Income and Expense Fields (Hold ctrl to select multiple entries)	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">IncomeFederal IncomeState IncomeLocal IncomeOverseas IncomeNon-Government IncomeEarned IncomeIn KindOther IncomeExpensesSalaries & FeesProduction CostsAdministration CostsPR & Marketing CostsTouring CostsCapital Expenditure</div>
Sort results by	Record Title <input type="button" value="v"/>
Number of results per page	100 <input type="button" value="v"/>
<input type="button" value="Search"/>	

Figure 3: AusStage Advanced Financial Search

Name	Income	Federal Income	State Income	Local Income	Overseas Income	Non-Government Income	Earned Income	In Kind	Other Income	Expenses	Salaries & Fees	Production Costs	Administration Costs	PR & Marketing Costs	Tourism Costs
Sydney Festival 2018/19 Financial Year	\$18,820,362.00								\$402,085.00	\$17,924,210.00		\$8,429,696.00	\$5,322,128.00	\$1,231,062.00	
Sydney Festival 2019/20 Financial Year	\$17,664,012.00								\$220,149.00	\$17,678,356.00		\$9,145,123.00	\$5,333,262.00	\$1,045,608.00	
Sydney Festival 2020/21 Financial Year	\$18,296,816.00								\$122,962.00	\$16,691,672.00		\$7,219,750.00	\$4,857,908.00	\$1,141,850.00	
Sydney Festival 2021/22 Financial Year	\$18,806,978.00								\$18,827.00	\$18,560,664.00		\$8,852,229.00	\$5,466,670.00	\$1,244,773.00	
The Adelaide Festival of Arts 2018/19 Financial Year	\$19,189,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$9,146,000.00		\$127,000.00				\$923,000.00	\$18,778,000.00	\$3,814,000.00	\$4,050,000.00		\$1,729,000.00	
The Adelaide Festival of Arts 2019/20 Financial Year	\$18,913,000.00	\$40,000.00	\$9,077,000.00		\$69,000.00				\$531,000.00	\$18,836,000.00	\$4,129,000.00	\$4,234,000.00		\$1,797,000.00	
The Adelaide Festival of Arts 2020/21 Financial Year	\$16,204,000.00	\$301,000.00	\$8,867,000.00		\$20,000.00				\$247,000.00	\$15,987,000.00	\$4,210,000.00	\$4,212,000.00		\$1,531,000.00	

Figure 4: An AusStage financial search result.

Financial Record Title	The Adelaide Festival of Arts, 2020/21 Financial Year																																																
Associated Organisation	The Adelaide Festival of Arts																																																
Period Format	2020/21 Financial Year																																																
Income Data	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Total Income:</td> <td>\$16,204,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total Federal:</td> <td>\$301,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total State:</td> <td>\$8,867,000.00</td> <td>▲</td> </tr> <tr> <td> SA</td> <td>\$8,867,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Local:</td> <td>N/A</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Overseas:</td> <td>\$20,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Non Government Income:</td> <td></td> <td>▲</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Sponsorship</td> <td>\$1,968,000.00</td> <td>▲</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Cash</td> <td>\$1,281,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td> Contra</td> <td>\$687,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td> Individual Donors</td> <td>\$797,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td> Memberships</td> <td>\$111,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Earned Income:</td> <td></td> <td>▲</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Box Office</td> <td>\$3,538,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total in Kind:</td> <td>N/A</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other Income:</td> <td>\$247,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Total Income:	\$16,204,000.00		Total Federal:	\$301,000.00		Total State:	\$8,867,000.00	▲	SA	\$8,867,000.00		Local:	N/A		Overseas:	\$20,000.00		Non Government Income:		▲	Sponsorship	\$1,968,000.00	▲	Cash	\$1,281,000.00		Contra	\$687,000.00		Individual Donors	\$797,000.00		Memberships	\$111,000.00		Earned Income:		▲	Box Office	\$3,538,000.00		Total in Kind:	N/A		Other Income:	\$247,000.00	
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Figure 5: An AusStage financial record.

From an AusStage financial record, researchers can navigate through all the tables in the database. As a methodological experiment, a pilot was set up to demonstrate how the tables could be combined to answer specific queries. The dataset used for the pilot consisted of AusStage records of the South Australian performing arts from 2011–2022.

The Pilot Research Project

The project began by looking at public data currently available on the South Australian performing arts, most notably the aggregation of income and ticket sales that underpin the reports published by Live Performance Australia (LPA).⁸ Data is volunteered to LPA by key culture providers: Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT), Adelaide Fringe, Arts Projects Australia (WOMADelaide), and ticketing organisations for commercial entertainment (Ticketek, Ticketmaster). In addition, production companies from the Australian Major Performing Arts Group contribute data (Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, State Opera of South Australia, State Theatre Company of South Australia), but despite the involvement of these producers, the LPA survey is still heavily weighted towards the retail sector. As LPA only records genre, ticketing and attendance figures, it presents a picture of South Australian cultural production dominated by major events and the attendance figures from the latest musical or tour by an international popular entertainer. While this approach gives a valuable snapshot of the commercial entertainment industry, it does not capture the multiple performances produced or co-produced by companies in the state. A different perspective uses information from the event table in AusStage to make a distinction between events produced exclusively by SA organisations and those that involved interstate or overseas organisations (Figure 6).

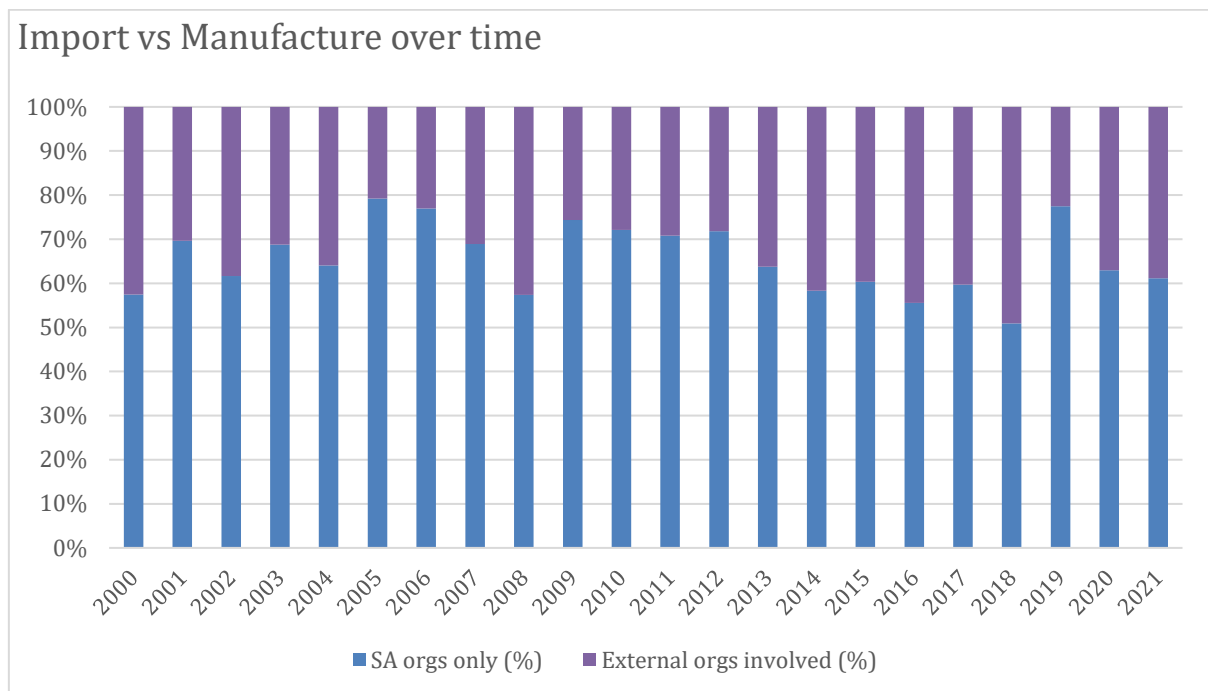


Figure 6: AusStage data showing relationship between events produced exclusively by SA organisations (blue) compared with events presented in SA that involved organisations outside the State (purple). (Source: AusStage, with graphic by Jonathan O'Brien)

Having established the importance of the manufacturing sector in terms of productions made rather than tickets sold, we needed to ensure that we had a high-quality dataset for analysis. We updated the records of the thirty-five companies, or producing hubs, that had received public subsidy in South Australia between 2011 and 2022.⁹ A maximum of thirteen producing companies have been on State annual funding during this period: two specialising in dance; four in theatre; one in opera; three in deaf, disability, and neuro-diverse performance; and three in youth theatre. An additional 22 companies have subsisted on project-based funding, some with limited lifecycles, others active throughout the years of the study. Together, these thirty-five companies have been responsible for 673 original works during the eleven-year timeframe. A breakdown of these works, organised by genre, shows that general Drama and Community Arts are the dominant categories (Figure 7), but, when we included shows that were remounted over multiple seasons and toured, the categories of Young People's theatre and Dance grew in significance (Figure 8).

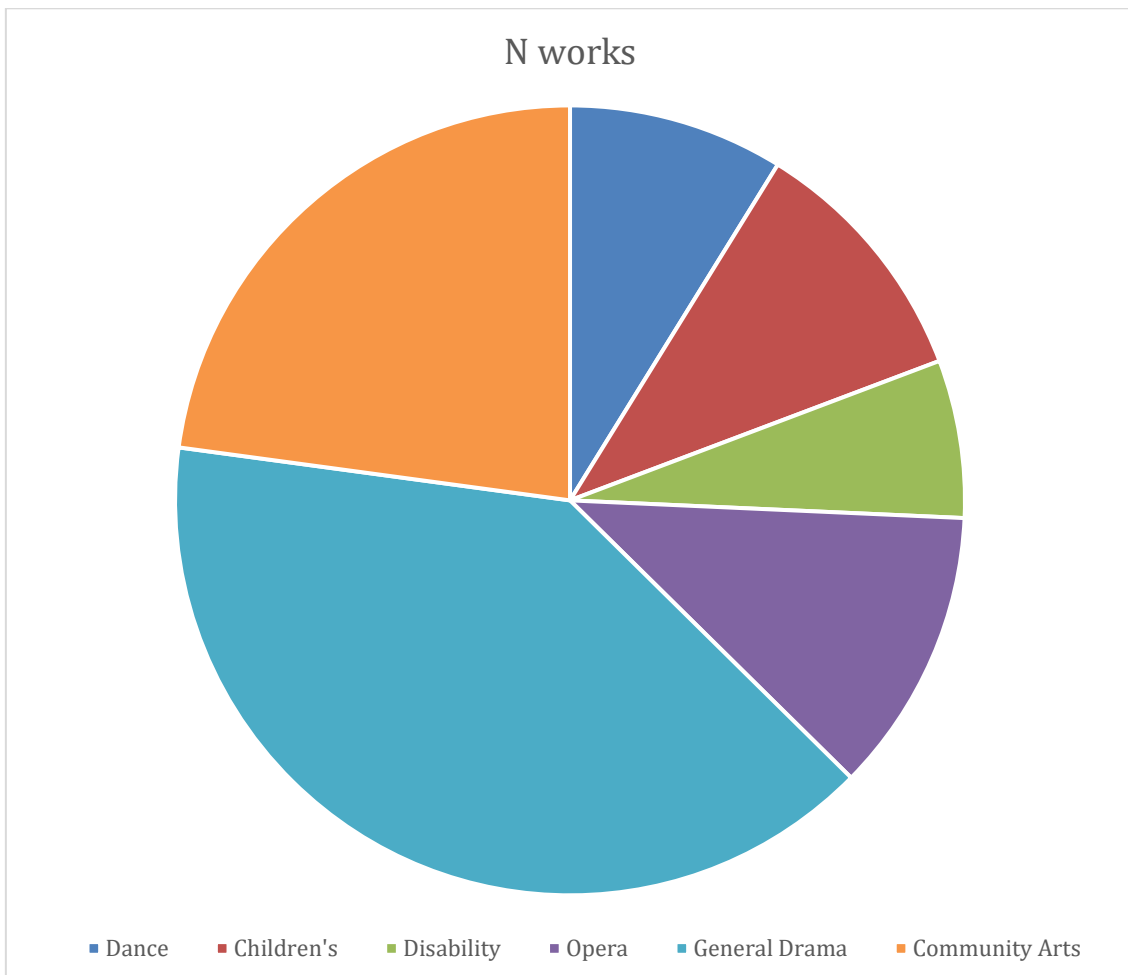


Figure 7: Genre breakdown of local cultural production in South Australia between 2011 and 2022 showing only new works. (Source: AusStage and Jonathan O'Brien)

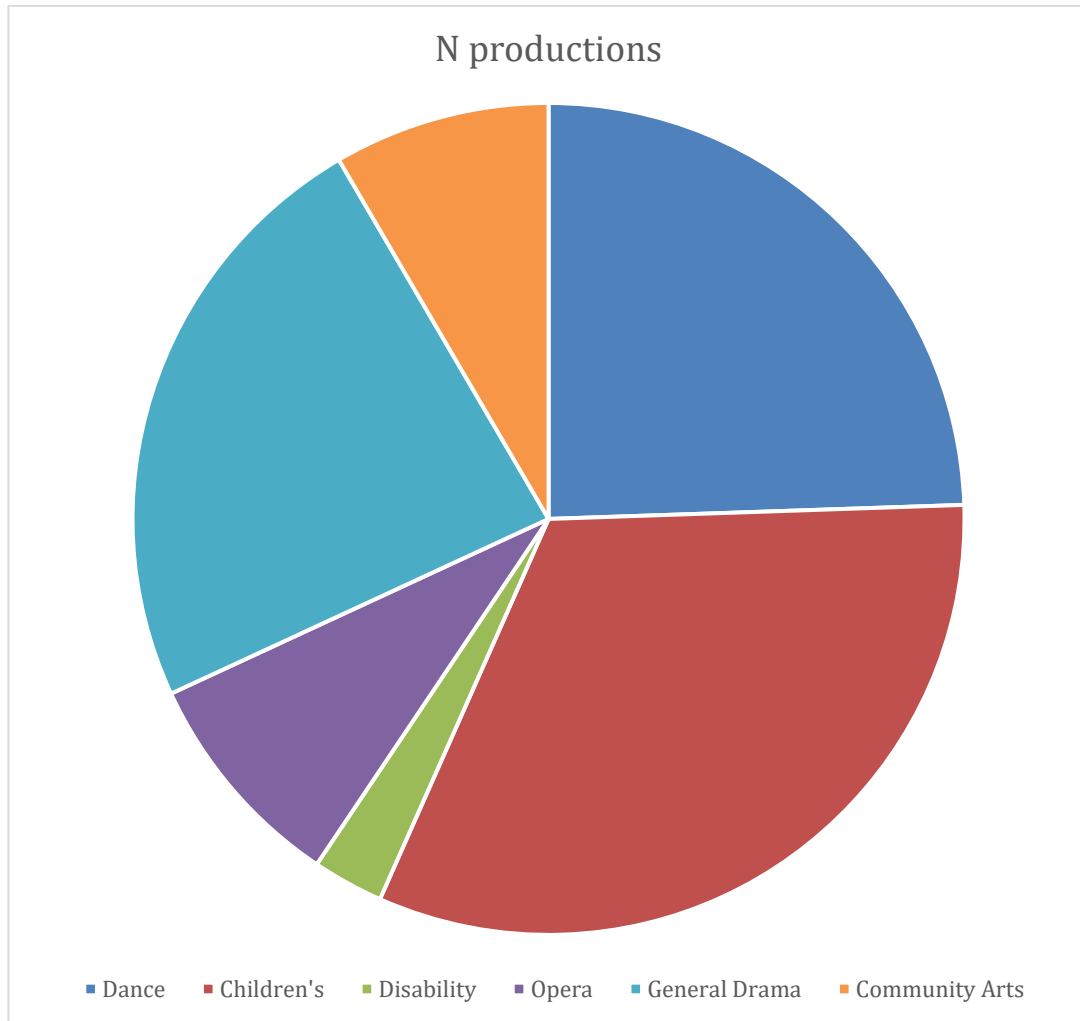


Figure 8: Genre breakdown of local cultural production in South Australia between 2011 and 2022 showing new works plus repeat seasons of works already in repertoire. (Source: AusStage and Jonathan O'Brien)

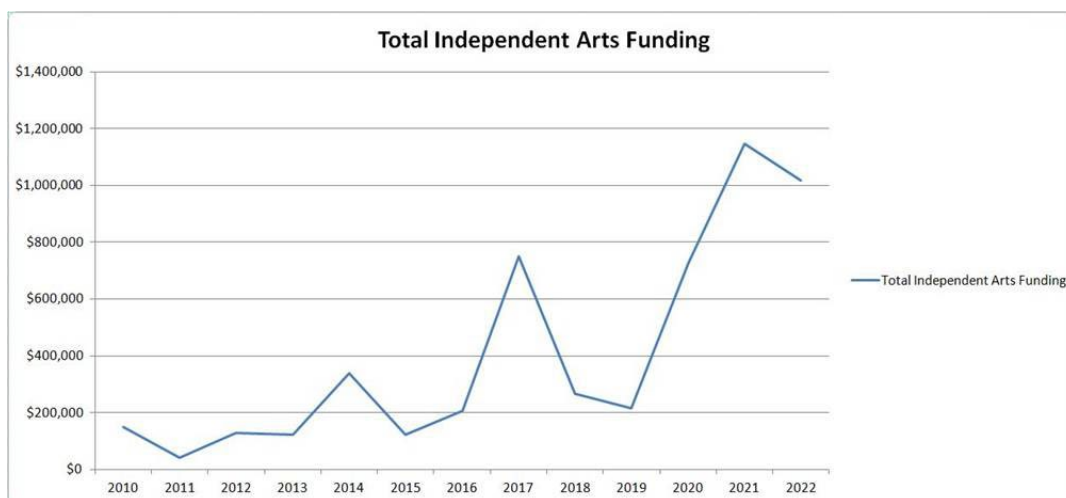


Figure 9: State funding for creative projects to independent artists/producers over the period of the study including the economic stimulus during the Covid-19 pandemic. (Source: AusStage and Sean Weatherly)

A further enrichment of the dataset involved entering records of 144 new works created by independent artists/producers. To trace these productions, we used publicly available data on performing arts grants, and filtered out grants awarded for contemporary and classical music as these genres are not recorded in AusStage. We also removed the project grants awarded to individual artists for travel or professional development, and the Covid-19 support grants that were not tied to the creative development of new productions. We then used multiple data sources, including social media postings, to identify which of the funded projects had resulted in public performances. The total state funding for creative projects to independent artists/producers over the period of the study was \$5,535,894. This figure includes the economic stimulus distributed during the COVID pandemic (Figure 9). This sum is negligible in comparison with the annual public subsidy to major arts organisations (the AFCT received \$15,496,000 for the financial year 2021–22), but from a research perspective, the independent sector is one of the least visible areas in the South Australian performing arts, and we wanted to trace its connections with the wider industry.

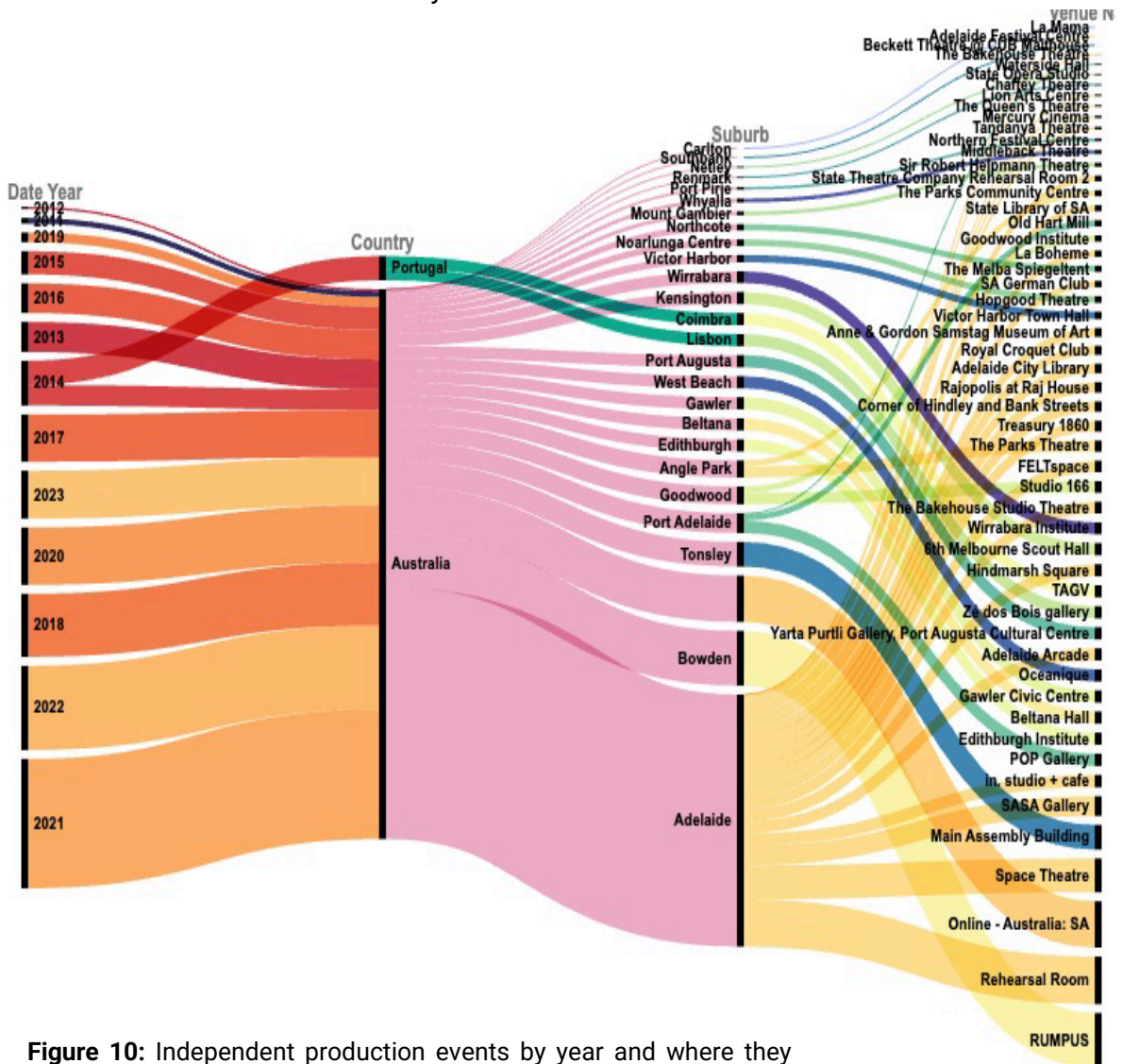


Figure 10: Independent production events by year and where they were performed by county, suburb, and venue.

Using the AusStage venue table, which includes geo-coordinates, we were able to trace the locations in which these 144 productions took place. We grouped productions by year together with the place of performance by county, suburb, and venue. Apart from one production that toured to Portugal in 2014, all the performances were in Australia, with a solid presence in regional South Australia as well as a couple of Melbourne venues. Predictably, Adelaide and its immediate suburbs dominate; the preferred venues are Rumpus, a recently-closed site in Adelaide city, and two venues in the AFCT: The Space and The Rehearsal Room. That so many independent productions find their way into South Australia's major art centre supports the notion that the independent sector is providing significant content for the local industry (Figure 10).

As the list of venues associated with the independent productions suggested that there were other companies involved in the presentation of these works, we used the AusStage organisational table to visualise a network graphic showing all the connections to the 144 productions. The number and variety of organisations in the network was impressive, with as many as ten supporting a single production. There were city councils, universities, and corporate bodies in the network, but our focus was on interconnections between South Australian performing arts entities. Using only the organisations with records in AusStage, we subdivided the independent productions into four categories: completely independent of other production hubs; associations with other major and minor companies acting as production hubs; presentations within festival programs; and an 'unknown' classification for creative developments without a traceable final public performance. As we were interested in the flow of project grants through these organisational associations into the retail sector and major manufacture producing hubs, we calculated the public subsidy attached to each category as a total (Figure 11) and as a timeline (Figure 12).

Only 22.23% of the creative developments reached public performance as completely independent entities. Although 17.85% of the funded projects fall within the "Creative Developments/Unknown" category, public performances may have taken place under different titles from those recorded in the grant information, and recently funded works may still be subject to a timing difference between creative development and production. The remaining creative developments in the unknown category may have tried and failed to get production funding from Arts SA as multiple small seeding grants are awarded (below \$20,000), but only a handful of large grants (over \$100,000) are awarded to support professional production.¹⁰ This may also explain why the 36.92% of projects that did succeed in reaching public performances were partnered by additional producing hubs.

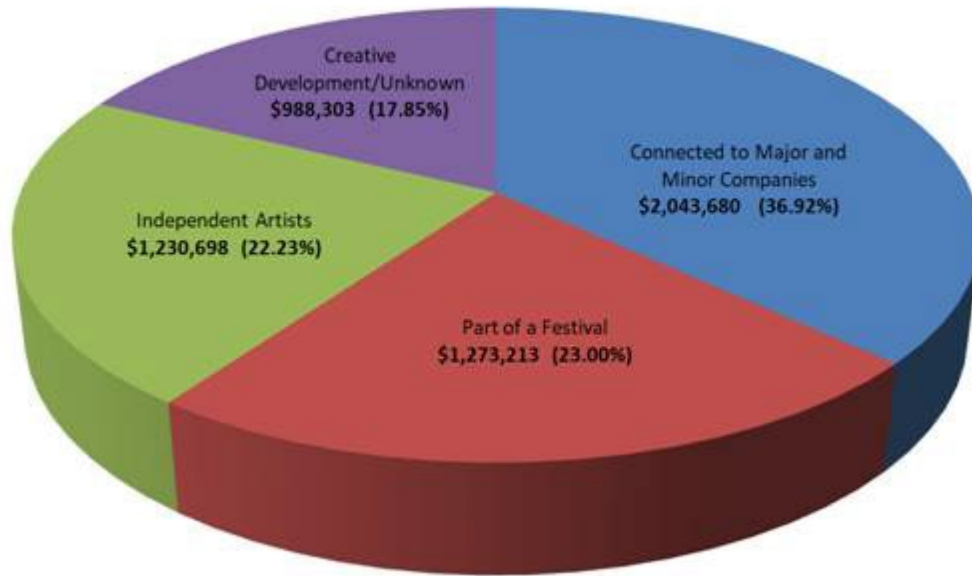


Figure 11: Division of independent projects by organisational associations supporting public performance: completely independent of other production hubs; associations with other major and minor companies acting as production hubs; presentations within festival programs; and an ‘unknown’ classification for creative developments without a traceable final public performance. The figures in the pie chart represent the total public subsidy attached to the productions in each category that came from project funding from ArtsSA. (Source: AusStage and Sean Weatherly)

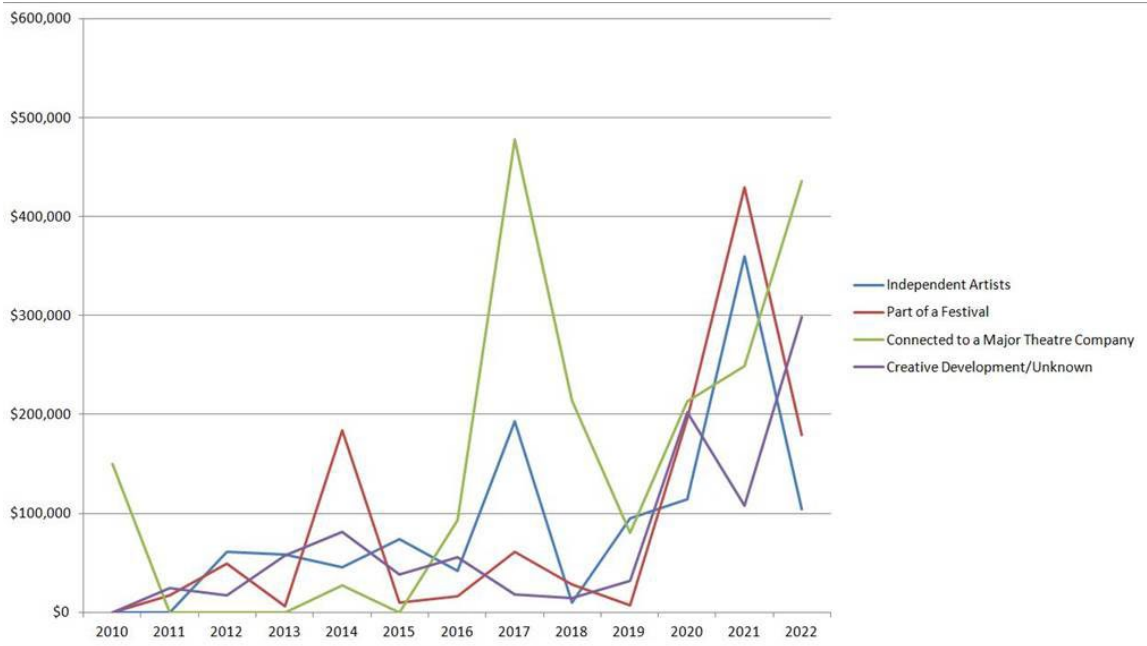


Figure 12: Public subsidy attached to each category of organisational association as a timeline. (Source: AusStage and Sean Weatherly)

To get a clearer picture of these partnerships, we used the AusStage organisational table to track the associations between the independent projects and major and minor producing companies. Of these projects, three-fifths were presented by companies with a track record of production but no permanent funding (some of the companies appeared on the initial applications for funding; others were later additions to the project). The remaining two-fifths were co-productions with established performing arts companies that receive annual or multiple year funding. While it is possible to quantify the total project grant monies that the independent sector brings to these collaborations (Figure 13), the level of the support offered by the associating companies is hard to gauge, though it is probably tied to production costs rather than creative development. Overall, these collaborative partnerships are symbiotic: they provide production resources to independent artists, increase the productivity of the established companies, and are a pathway for aesthetic transmission between artists.

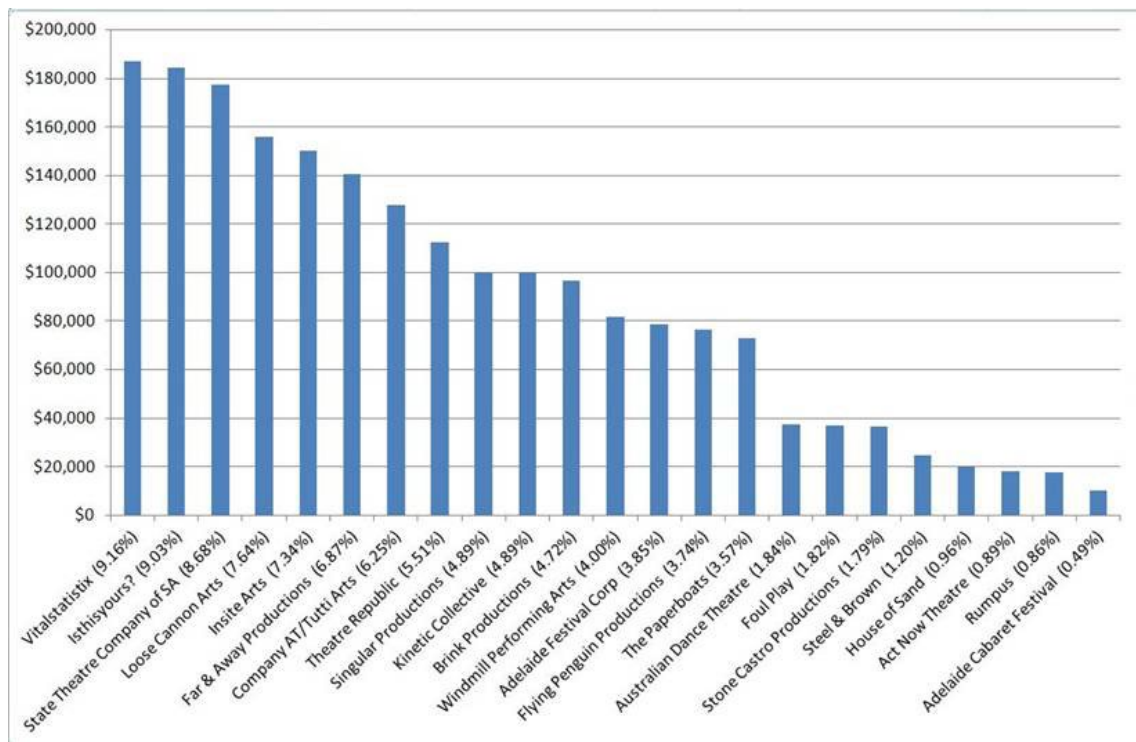


Figure 13: List of major and minor companies associated with independent projects organised by project grant funding underpinning collaborations.

Finally, we looked at the remaining 23% of projects that received a total of \$1,273,231 and were subsequently presented in festivals (Figure 14). Seven of the festivals presented less than a tenth of these projects, four of the remaining five are curated by the AFCT, and the last and biggest beneficiary of work initiated by the independent sector is the Adelaide Fringe.

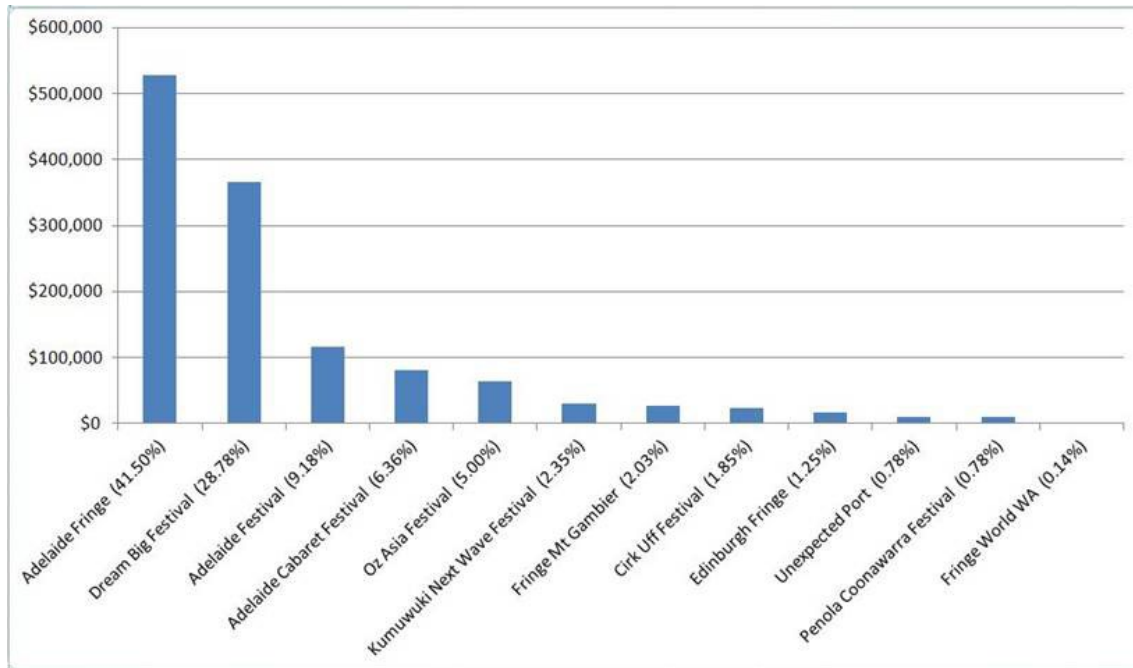


Figure 14: List of festival presenting independent projects organised by project grant funding underpinning content creation.

The linking of the independent sector with the major festivals in South Australia concluded the data interrogation phase of the pilot project. This phase began by enriching data in the *event table* and by using the *AusStage genre field* to visualise a breakdown of events into generalised categories of performance. A further enrichment of the dataset involved entering records into the *financial table* for all the project grants awarded to independent artists/producers. These records were used to trace and enter more performances into the *event table*. The *venue table* with its geo-coordinates was used to trace the distribution by year of independent productions; by place (country/suburb); and by venue (in Australia and overseas), demonstrating the flow of subsidy through space. The final visualising technique was a network analysis using the *organisation table* to visualise the integration of independent projects with major production hubs and key retail organisations. The only table not directly used in the data interrogation process was the *contributor table*, but it was to prove crucial in the next stage of the pilot: the data interpretation. We used this table to identify a small group of performers, who had worked across all the performing arts sectors, and invited them to act as informants in the interpretative process. Their contribution added contextual knowledge regarding industrial structures, employment, and remuneration.

Data Interpretation

Whereas data analyses provide *distant visions*, data interpretations allow for *distant observations*. Our first observation of the South Australian performing arts ecology is that there is an unstable balance between the public subsidy to the retail and manufacturing sectors. The Adelaide Festival of Arts (AF), the AFCT, and the Adelaide Fringe, received almost \$27,000,000 in public subsidy in the 2020/21 financial year.¹¹ In contrast, the manufacturing sector, which includes the major state theatre, opera, and dance companies, together with the specialist producing hubs, and the whole of the independent sector, received approximately a third of this amount in the same financial year.

Our second distant observation is that the distribution of public subsidy to the manufacturing sector follows the pattern established over forty years ago of dividing grant recipients into three categories: peak state bodies organized according to nineteenth-century performing arts genres of opera, theatre, and dance; small companies in receipt of annual funding with or without a multi-year commitment from the state; and independent artists/producers competing for project funding.

While this tripartite structure appears fixed, there has been a fundamental change in the internal workings of the sector. In the 1990s, publicly funded companies had permanent or semi-permanent ensembles of artists; enabling a clear flow of public subsidy from government to practitioners. Today, all the South Australian companies, except the Australian Dance Theatre, have transitioned into small production houses organised around a single artist or producer. All the remaining production hubs with guaranteed annual funding, with one exception, are specialist entities: theatres for young people; performance by deaf, disability and neuro-diverse artists; creative developments of new works by female identified artists; and performances with a social justice imperative.

The producer model was introduced to attract new sources of funding into the manufacturing sector, but it has failed to generate significant private and commercial investment. As a result, the sector continues to be reliant on public subsidy. While AusStage has records for 2594 artists active in the South Australian performing arts between 2011 and 2022, less than twenty are on full-time annual contracts. In contrast, the websites of the three major institutions (AFCT, AF, and Fringe) list approximately one hundred full time managerial and support staff. The producing hubs claim that they are spreading artists' employment by using freelance contracts but, as the production costs have risen—particularly with the introduction of technological innovations in sound, light, and projected images—the numbers of artists appearing in front of the audience has progressively dwindled. AusStage data shows a gradual decline in the cast sizes of theatre productions from approximately 10 to 3 over the past thirty years (Figure 15).

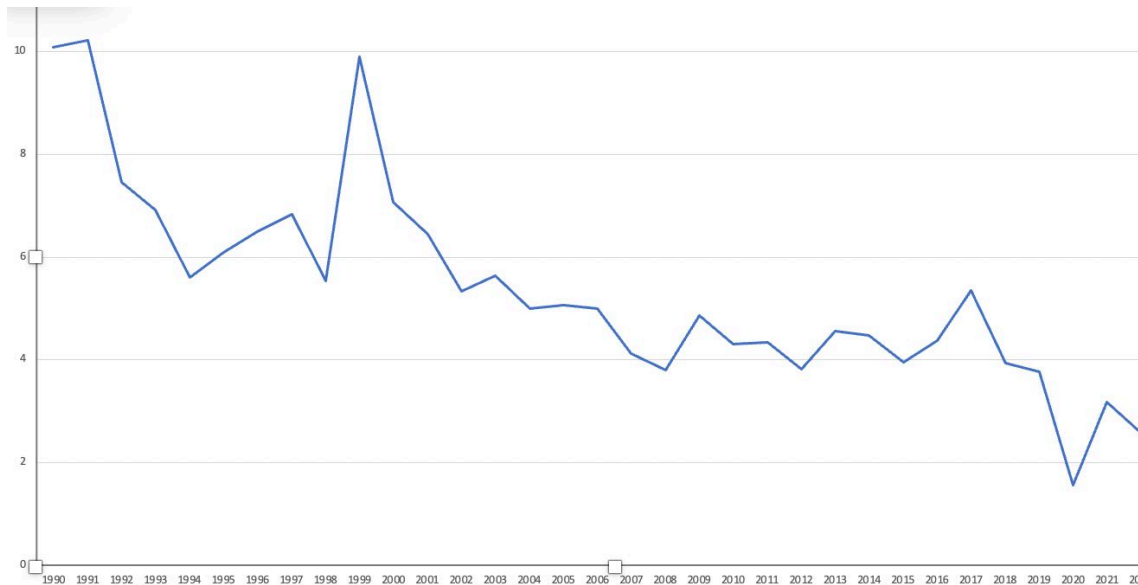


Figure 15: Gradual decline in cast sizes of South Australian theatre productions from 1990 to 2022.

To examine the relationship between diminishing cast sizes and artists' wages, we took 2018 data based on 31 separate events presented by twelve organisations (including the State Theatre Company of South Australia) and established that there were 122 roles for actors in that year. We then used the *contributor table* in AusStage to identify the ten most employed actors in the past decade, and asked them to help us interpret the data. Using their employment history as a guide, we calculated that the duration of an average contract was no more than eight weeks; and, as they earned the equivalent of the average Australian wage of approximately \$60,000 in a 'good' year, we used this figure to calculate the state-wide wage bill for professional actors in 2018. The total was \$1,200,000. In the same year, the marketing and publicity budget for the AFCT was \$1,983,000.

To further track the amount of public subsidy that was flowing to performers through the tripartite funding structure, we asked the actor/informants about the employment conditions in the independent sector. They had all been involved in independent production, particularly early in their careers, and had worked for an honorarium or profit-share; but for those who had also produced independent work, the weeks of unpaid labour necessary to initiate projects made them weary of repeating the process. The financial data shows that of the 105 named artists who were successful in obtaining a project grant in the ten-year period, only 36 were responsible for more than one production.¹² As one actor/informant observed, if a grant application reflected the actual amount of in-kind work invested in the administration and production of an independent project, it would "blow out the budget" and undermine its viability. According to their feedback, the competition to secure funding from an increasingly small pool means that independent producers "are all hiding [the actual amount of unpaid labour] from each other".¹³

Two-thirds of the successful grants awarded by Arts SA are for less than \$20,000. This level of funding might be justifiable if artist/producers initiating collaborative projects were able to recoup their costs by selling their intellectual property, but the standard practice of the retail sector is to limit financial assistance to the costs associated with public performance. This system has been so normalized that independent artists and producers are expected to undertake the research and development of new product without any remuneration.

Awareness that the manufacturing sector in South Australia needs additional government stimulus underpins the recent public letter written by 50 leading arts managers, academics, and practitioners to the South Australian Premier, Peter Malinauskas. This letter states that without additional funding and strategic support for artists:

South Australia's status as a leader in the arts will continue to deteriorate and we will be viewed as the most backward of Australian states, where once we were seen as the most progressive. (Keen 2023)

If there is an acceptance within government that the manufacturing sector of the performing arts in South Australia requires investment, there is still a problem with identifying how and where stimuli should be applied. AusStage data for the years of the Covid-19 pandemic show the impact of economic stimuli specifically tied to artist employment. To stabilise the industry during a period of forced unemployment, an additional one million dollars was distributed to the independent sector by the South Australian government under the guise of creative development grants; \$751,994 was used to create work that resulted in public performance. This resulted in a marked increase in productivity during the pandemic. In addition, the federal scheme RISE funded an ensemble of young actors at Slingsby, one of the production hubs specialising in youth theatre. The pandemic also revealed the dependency of the performing arts retail sector in South Australia on interstate and international product and its vulnerability to blocks on supply.

Concentrating on the employment and remuneration of performers opened one of the possible interpretative pathways generated by South Australian data. It highlighted the fact that public subsidy has favoured the retail sector; that the production hubs in the manufacturing sector have absorbed resources for infrastructure at the expense of artists' employment; and that independent artists are rarely compensated financially for their intellectual property. It exposed an inherent contradiction in the current system as it is creative innovators, initiators of independent projects, and those who stand in front of audiences who are receiving the least financial reward.

Conclusion

The first part of this article outlined the design, deployment, and workings of the new AusStage financial table. Consultation with key stakeholders was central to the design, as the aim was to capture figures deemed useful for research—not to create a tool to monitor the performance of individual companies. The second part of the article focused on the pilot project, which explored techniques of combining data held in the new financial table with data in the pre-existing tables of AusStage. This approach was intended to supplement the techniques used in AusStage research, by adding economics into the analytical mix.

Having generated data visualisations that combined data from the financial, venue, and organisational tables, the pilot turned to the *contributors table* to address the challenges of interpretation. Although the table contains records on performing arts practitioners identified through 464 job descriptions, the pilot concentrated on actors and ran a data query to find the twelve actors associated with the most productions in South Australia over the period of the study. Their contribution to the interpretation process highlighted the inequalities in employment conditions in the sector, particularly those pertaining to independent artists and producers.

The AusStage financial table is in its infancy: it holds 2000 records, as opposed to the 132695 event records and 196972 contributor records. For this reason, it is not possible to include conclusive evidence in this article that the new table has increased the potential for AusStage data to be used predicatively, but there is a suggestion that this may be the case. AusStage research, drawing on all the tables in the database, is being used to assist the AF re-engage with independent artists in South Australia. The intention is to revive the artist-audience that was a major feature of past festivals. Fifty leading independent artists and producers are to be given free tickets to major international productions at the 2024 Festival, as well as invitations to meet with the visiting artists, thus re-establishing the reputation of the AF as a major promoter of aesthetic transmission and artistic stimulation in the country. The fifty artists have been selected using financial data to find the artist/producers of new performances, and network analyses of contributors and events to identify the influential freelance artists in the independent sector. A small number of donors are funding the scheme. This example of the collaboration between AusStage, arts philanthropy, and the AF suggests that the database has the capacity not only to facilitate retrospective analyses but also to support change.

AusStage has always been led by research and it is impossible to predict how it will be used in the future, but the new financial table, when combined with its pre-existing tables, can provide researchers with “a better foothold in relevant evidence” and the “means and language to reflect on it in an intellectually honest way” (Kaszynska 2018, 6).

Notes

1. AusStage researchers have explored the aesthetics of performances as recorded in 256 secondary genres and 1131 subject fields; they have visualised networks of practitioners, organisations, and performance events, and used maps to track performances across 12957 venues.

2. Other theatre databases that hold data on performance events with related financial accounts include the Comédie-Française Daily Register <https://www.comedie-francaise.fr/en/daily-registers#> and IBDB Internet Broadway Database <https://www.ibdb.com/shows>

3. Office of the Prime Minister of Australia. *Revive: Australia's New National Cultural Policy* (Media Release), <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/revive-australias-new-national-cultural-policy> (Accessed 18 February 2023).

4. An advocative approach to championing the arts and culture tend to stake claims that lie well beyond the realm of artistic expression:

We know that participation in arts and culture (more so than attendance in many cases) has positive effects on people at all life stages and in a wide range of situations. We know it can improve quality of life for older people as well as the impact of long-term conditions such as dementia; it can provide personal, social, and educational gains for young people including at-risk youth; we also know about the impact of arts and cultural engagement on subjective wellbeing and mental health more generally. (Kaszynska 2018, 18)

Assertions such as these—allying the arts with mental and physical health benefits, educational development, and social cohesion—may be justified, but they lack solid evidence on how public subsidy of creative arts production can realise these social goods.

5. The table was built as part of AusStage LIEF 7 'The International Breakthrough' funding by the Australian Research Council and fourteen participating universities. The team developing the new financial table was led by Julie Holledge. Timothy Lucas was the software consultant, JAC, the software engineers, and Peter Beaglehole was the industry consultant for the table design. The data-entry design and testing was undertaken by Sean Weatherly, Pam Lee, and Liz Larkin. Research for the pilot project referred to in this article was conducted by Sean Weatherly on the Independent sector, Tiffany Knight on actors' employment, and Jonathan O'Brien provided additional data visualisations. Alex Vickery-Howe assisted with the qualitative interpretation. The names of the actor/informants who assisted with the pilot project are not included in this article for privacy reasons.

6. As the data sources used in a record could come from multiple sources, it was decided that any organisation or individual could have a maximum of three record in any two years which would allow figures to be entered from calendar year and financial year sources.

7. If the use of the financial table for arts advocacy proves successful, we hope that the confidence will grow in the independent sector that there is a benefit in sharing financial data.

8. LPA Ticket Attendance and Revenue Report 2018. <https://reports.liveperformance.com.au/ticket-survey-2018/states.html#sa-results> (Accessed 10 February 2023)

9. The pilot project relied on multiple data sources, but a curated dataset of the size used in the study will inevitably have some gaps and errors. AusStage encourages artist, companies and

venues to check their records and send notification of errors using CONTACT on the AusStage website.

10. For ethical reasons, no attempt was made to contact individual recipients of funding subsidies to ask for additional information.

11. This imbalance has recently increased with the announcement by the Malinauskas Government of a further investment in the Adelaide Fringe and Adelaide Festival of Arts.

12. Of the 117 grants visualized in Fig. 9, there were 81 named artist recipients. The remaining 26 grants were awarded to artists using a company name in their application.

13. Response documented by Dr. Tiffany Knight.

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