

# CONTENTS - OH YOU BEAUTIFUL STAGE !

## BENCHMARKS FOR PERFORMING ARTS CENTRES

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## HISTORY - Benchmarks for Performing Arts Centres

This document was initially produced in partnership with Arts Victoria and first published in 1999. Its intent was to establish a set of benchmarks against which venue owners, predominantly local government, in Victoria could implement plans to improve and upgrade the infrastructure and operations of their performing arts centres with financial assistance from State Government.

The publication was very successful in the first instance. Many venue owners across Victoria took advantage of the opportunity to make significant improvements to their performing arts centres. The benchmarks also served as a framework for the design and construction of several new centres in Victoria.

The demand for a set of criteria against which to measure and assess the needed infrastructure and operational characteristics for a performing arts centre grew at an alarming rate. The first publication of OH YOU BEAUTIFUL STAGE sold out within a few years. Reprinting the document was considered a necessity and a new project brief was developed.

The excellent research and operational specifications set out by the initial research team remains a valuable reference tool. However, the many technical specifications it contained became outdated with the advent of new technology especially in the areas of stage audio and lighting.

In considering the work required to update the many technical references, the VAPAC Executive elected to utilise our collective expertise within the network to assess and make recommendations for a new set of technical specifications. Who better to provide us with the new specifications than the people who work daily with the new technology, constantly assessing its suitability and monitoring the technological developments, our own theatre technical staff.

In 2005 VAPAC put together a reference team (see 1.4.3) and appointed a well respected theatre and production consultant, Richard Stuart, to lead the team, update the specifications and re-work the publication. The publication has now been re-configured into four discrete sections. Book 1 provides all of the initial reference to the operational aspects of performing arts centres. The additional books, Schedules 1 through 3, contain the technical and other specifications for proscenium arch theatres, other format theatres and concert venues. Future publications will simply require updates of the Schedules 1 through 3 to partner Book 1.

In each case all of this research and reference to specifications must always be related to relevant Australian building codes and Australian standards.



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Gregory McGrath  
Chair, VAPAC 2003 - 2006



# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Project Background

### 1.1.1 Project Scope

In late 1996 the Victorian State Government, through Arts Victoria, commissioned a consultancy to undertake the following:

- Survey identified Performing Arts Centres to collect data on existing venue infrastructure, level of equipment and operations
- Develop Benchmark Categories to categorise the Performing Arts Centres
- Recommend a facilities development program, with prioritised development requirements for the various classes of facilities

### 1.1.2 Background

The project was undertaken under Arts Victoria's "Arts 21" strategy, that aimed to emphasise Victoria's role as an international centre for the arts.

Performing Arts Centres in Victoria serve local communities primarily by presenting local and toured performing arts events. Communities are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their expectations of venues as patrons become accustomed to high quality facilities and services.

Touring productions have become bigger, more expensive, and technically much more complex, in response to the demands by audiences for challenging, evocative and thought provoking entertainment.

The Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC) promotes and fosters the network of performing arts centres throughout rural and regional Victoria. VAPAC strives for best practice in management, operations and artistic programming, and involves both centres' professional managers and owner representatives.

### 1.1.3 Project Leadership

The project was a joint initiative of Arts Victoria and the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC) and the project control group comprised representatives of both organisations.

### 1.1.4 Consultant Team

A consortium led by Bill Williams Pty Ltd Architects (hereafter referred to as BWAC) was appointed in December 1996 to undertake the project. The consortium included the following consultants and personnel:

- *Virginia Ross, Bill Williams Pty Ltd Architects, (Consultancy team leader)*
- *Bill Williams, Bill Williams Pty Ltd Architects*
- *Denis Irving, Entertech Pty Ltd, Theatre Consultant*
- *Phil A'Vard, Theatre Management Consultant*



- *Peter Fearnside, Carr Marshall Day Associates Pty Ltd, Acoustic Consultant*
- *Peter Holmes, Carr Marshall Day Associates Pty Ltd, Acoustic Consultants*
- *Ian Gardner, Meinhardt (Vic) Pty Ltd, Building Services and Asset Management*
- *Duncan McKenzie, Duncan McKenzie & Partners Pty Ltd, Building Surveyors*
- *Peter Kirkpatrick, Newton Kerr & Partners Pty Ltd, Quantity Surveyors.*

## 1.2 Study Approach and Method

### 1.2.1 Performing Arts Industry Consultation

At the core of the study approach was the aim to integrate a wide range of skills, expertise, and therefore viewpoints, amongst the consultant team, the project control group and from the performing arts industry. In addition to assisting in the achievement of an appropriate set of Benchmark Categories, consultation was considered important in order to generate a sense of ownership by the performing arts industry in the completed Categories and to maximise recognition and acceptance.

Consultation with the performing arts industry was by means of a Benchmarking Workshop held in late January 1997.

Participants for the workshop were drawn from a wide range of industry sources and activities, comprising performing arts centre management, commercial and subsidised touring company representatives - both producers and technical - and prominent arts organisations.

### 1.2.2 Existing Conditions Survey

In parallel with the development of the benchmarks, a detailed questionnaire was issued to all participating Performing Arts Centres.

The Existing Conditions Survey sought information about the nature, extent and condition of existing facilities, the level of activities in the centre, management resources, technical infrastructure and inventories of technical equipment. Specific problems and development priorities were also sought.

The completed surveys provided a briefing for the consultant team prior to conducting site visits, and information from the questionnaires was subsequently incorporated into the Facilities Audit.

### 1.2.3 Facilities Audit Site Visits

Each centre was visited by a team comprising Architectural, Theatre, Acoustic & Sound, and Services Engineering specialists.

The site visits were undertaken in parallel with the development of the Benchmark Categories following the Benchmark Workshop, and provided an effective opportunity to test the Categories in detail during the Facilities Audits. The site visits prompted the inclusion of a wide range of detailed elements in the Benchmark Categories.

