

Manawatū Summer Shakespeare, Arts Heart Report: 2,000 dollar grant for educational activities for the 2024 production of Much Ado About Nothing

Tēnā Koutou katoa,

Thank you so much, Arts Heart for your contribution to the 2024 production of Much Ado about Nothing for Manawatū Summer Shakespeare. As we were not successful in the full amount of funding, we were required to scale back our proposed programme of activities for mentorship and development. Some of these activities remained through the donated time from our community and industry, and we prioritised the spending of our grant in the following ways:

\$750: A 3 hour Understanding Shakespeare for Performance workshop was led by Dr Hannah August to upskill our cast. Dr August was also contracted to provide dramaturgical support throughout the process, giving notes, working with actors with monologues and supporting and upskilling our Director in Shakespearean Dramaturgy.

\$1000 paid our Waiata Kaiako Reremoana Hokianga, to come in weekly to upskill our cast in Waiata rehearsals and wider exploration of production tikanga, enabling us to extend our Kaupapa through the process with a strong grounding in Te Ao Maori

\$250 Choreography mentorship. We allocated 250 dollars from Arts Heart into our Choreographers fee to spend time upskilling and training one of our cast in choreography leadership. Ihaia Kunaiti, our choreographer was engaged for 8 hours of mentorship to support and train our dance captain through meetings, one on one workshops and support. This lead to our Dance Captain taking the reins in rehearsals in between Ihaia's sessions to lead, develop and confidently extend the dance training of the whole company. Ihaia was paid a further 750 for his choreography for the dance and time spent with the whole cast.

We were unable to deliver our other scheduled programmes of bringing out of town practitioners to the region, and in spite of the challenges that face us going forward, we remain ambitious that we can try to offer these this year.

The future of Manawatū Summer Shakespeare heavily relies on our ability to upskill our community, and train our emergers to take the lead in the future. We thank you all so very much in supporting us in this. Thanks to a huge amount of in kind support, Our final, all expenses included production costs in 2024 totalled:

\$73, 706.84

Manawatū Summer Shakespeare (MSS) has successfully created opportunities for local communities to access and participate in the arts. With support from Arts heart, we were able to deliver many elements of our ambitious mentorship program, aiming to upskill and develop our local community. Please find below a summary breakdown of our development and highlights.

Strong team & Creative Opportunities:

The team for the Much Ado production included:

25 Community Actors, 18 Production Team, 15 Volunteers, (which included professional creatives donating fees as support and emergers investing in experience. This creative opportunity provided roles for a total of 58 people in Palmerston North.

Skill Development and Growth: A survey with cast and crew revealed that 100% of participants believe they have grown in their skillset and as practitioners due to their involvement with MSS. The collaborative environment allows artists to learn, share, and upskill.

Diverse Disciplines and Skills: MSS brings together a wide range of skills and disciplines. From seasoned actors supporting newcomers to incorporating dance, waiata, and impressive tech and set builders, the project fosters artistic diversity.

Number of Performers: With 25 performers, MSS provides a platform for both seasoned actors and newcomers. The blend of experience levels enriches the productions and encourages skill development.

Production Team and Volunteers: The 18-member production team ensures the smooth execution of each performance. Additionally, 15 volunteers, including professionals donating their time and emerging artists gaining valuable experience, contribute to the project's success.

Number of Performances: Despite weather challenges and unforeseeable events leading to the cancellation of 2 performances, MSS managed to stage 6 successful shows. Each performance was an opportunity for the community to engage with live outdoor theatre, something that isn't often offered in an accessible manner in the community aside from MSS.

Audience Attendance: Approximately 1600 attendees have experienced the magic of MSS in 2024. Families, long-time enthusiasts, and newcomers alike gather to enjoy the outdoor productions.

Loyal Audience: Testimonials from audience members highlight the enduring appeal of MSS. Some have been attending for 20 years, emphasising the event's consistent quality and unique experience.

Cultural Impact: MSS contributes to Palmerston North's cultural landscape, putting the city on the map as an exciting hub for arts and entertainment.

Manawatū Summer Shakespeare not only entertains but also nurtures talent, fosters community connections, and ensures that the arts remain accessible to all whilst bringing audiences together from within and outside the region.

What Worked Well/ 2024 Highlights:

Magical Setting and Quality Show: The familiar outdoor setting, combined with the high-quality performances, left a lasting impression. Attendees enjoyed the blend of luxury and simple pleasures that MSS offered, proving that the outdoor theatre is a big draw card for audiences.

Accessibility: MSS's commitment to accessibility was appreciated, especially by attendees in wheelchairs. By offering accessible art, the event ensures that everyone can participate and enjoy the magic of live theatre. Also keeping the event koha entry allowed many audiences to attend en masse and attend multiple nights if they wished. Koha entry also allowed audiences the ability to give what they felt the show deserved.

Modernization and Vibrant Experience: The event's modernization, audience participation, music, and waiata all contributed to a vibrant and engaging experience. MSS successfully blends tradition with contemporary elements.

Family-Friendly: MSS attracts a diverse audience, including families who might not attend other ticketed theatre events due to cost. The matinee shows provide an opportunity for families to share the joy of theatre together.

Regional and National Draw: The event attracted audiences from outside the region, contributing to its cultural impact in Palmerston North.

Utilising the Environment and Community: The beautiful environment of the Rose Gardens at the Victoria Esplanade served as a perfect backdrop for MSS. The event celebrates the diverse community of Palmerston North, showcasing local talent and fostering a sense of belonging.

Professional Development and Collaboration: For artists, MSS is more than a performance—it's a space for growth. Industry-level professionals lead the productions, offering mentorship and creating a collaborative environment where creativity flourishes.

Consistent Quality and Audience Loyalty:

With 21 years of engaging outdoor performances, MSS has become a beloved annual tradition. Attendees eagerly anticipate each summer's production, knowing they'll be treated to a unique and high-quality show.

Expands Creative Ecology:

MSS enriches the city's creative landscape by providing unique work that might not otherwise be available locally, with art constantly facing cuts, especially outdoor events such as Summer Shakespeare; the community appreciated the team's commitment to quality outdoor theatre.

Self-Development in a Collaborative Environment:

Participants valued the collaborative and safe environment for artistic growth. Working with an industry level amazing crew allowed them to create something magical and accessible for the Manawatu community.

Continually draws large crowds to the region:

Across the 6 shows, the approximate total audience attendance was 1600. With the final night boasting approximately 400+ attendees, this highlights that word of mouth and the quality of the show pulled further audience

Strong Brand Confidence: The event enjoys a positive reputation and trust from its audience. With 21 years of performances Summer Shakespeare has an established reputation and audience.

Consistent rehearsal & creation periods: The cast & crew work from November through to opening night late February to ensure a high quality, professional standard of production for the community. Having the donated rehearsal space from Massey University proved integral to the show's success and continued viability.

We see so much value in the work of MSS to enhance the creative opportunities for our city and our people. We are so grateful to this trust for the part you played in helping us develop the strengths of our community. We intend to develop this into the future to the point where our mentees, in time, become our leaders.

Please feel free to contact me if you'd like any further information or budget breakdowns.

Nga mihi nui,

Rachel Lenart

Creative Producer

Manawatu Summer Shakespeare