

**2024 Presidents Report**

*Tabled at the 2024 Annual General Meeting*

*24<sup>th</sup> February 2024*

Ask anyone to describe 2023 in one word and I think collectively we would agree that that word is Challenging. Every member of our little committee has been faced with significant challenges both personally and professionally in the last 12 months and it's only through sheer determination and teamwork that we've been able to pull together the amazing events that we did. I for one am incredibly proud of everyone involved.

Among these challenges was securing venues – the Royal Whanganui Opera House was deemed to be unfit for use and has (and still is) undergone significant upgrades and renovations. Thankfully we were able to hold our July Performing Arts Festival in that wonderful space but it was touch and go for quite a while there.

Funding, or a lack thereof, was another big source of uncertainty as we were unable to secure a number of grants which we have depended upon in previous years. Not so much a reflection on WPA itself but an overall lack of money that has affected the entire arts sector across the country. With this in mind, I feel it is important to thank those who did support us in 2023 – Grass Roots Trust, Whanganui District Council – Creative Communities, Mainland Foundation, Four Regions Trust, Big Paw Civil, Clive Taylor Haulage, Hayley Sellars – Mezzo-Soprano, Isabella Trussel Memorial Scholarship, Nettlefold Memorial Scholarship and Friends of the Royal Whanganui Opera House.

The funding situation meant that we had to get creative as well as a little ruthless with our operations, we cut the April dance festival from our roster and replaced it with another online competition to help raise funds while still providing valuable feedback and support to the young people who come to us every year. The online competition is important for accessibility as well, meaning that performers who aren't able to travel are still able to participate.

Following our 110<sup>th</sup> celebration the committee decided to discontinue running the October dance festival also and we moved forward with this decision. As for our July Performing Arts Festival, I mentioned that we got a little ruthless, the committee decided to only offer the disciplines that were nominating for PACANZ that year. This meant, Musical Theatre, Modern Dance and Troupes were the only events we hosted. Leona Revell from Palmerston North adjudicated Musical Theatre which led to two exceptionally talented people earning PACANZ nominations for the first year that Musical Theatre was being presented at nationals. Lucy Hartley and Alyssa Hartley did us very proud. Catherine Reid joined us from Kapiti to adjudicate the dance which was nothing short of spectacular.

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Nominations were awarded to Myar Sanson and Shannon Tunbridge for Modern and to Red Star Dance – Finesse for Troupes. In line with our goal to provide more learning opportunities to our community, both adjudicators presented workshops as part of the festival, both of which were very well received.

In the middle of the year, WPA saw an opportunity to join forces with Repertory Theatre. This has proven to be a most fortuitous venture, as we are able to provide a youth education programme for them and we have access to a wonderful rehearsal and performance space for the Academy.

Lastly, 2023 saw the launch of the production side of WPA. Spawning from the Academy, the students did a tonne of research, putting together and presenting full scale proposals for the shows they wanted to present. The committee settled on Heathers – Teen Edition, to be headed up by Megan Hartley (Director), Hayley Sellars (Musical Director) and Lauren Ashton (Choreographer). Auditions were held in March, months of rehearsals followed culminating in 3 incredible performances at the Royal Whanganui Opera House in October. It was a massive undertaking for the team but it proved to be a wild success for WPA, the academy and the theatre community of Whanganui overall.

In conclusion, though it's been an incredibly tough year for us all, we remain the proud caretakers of a 111-year-old organization. We hold tight to our history whilst leaning forward into the future and working to cultivate and maintain a safe space for the creativity and growth of the next generation.

Lauren Ashton,  
WPA President.