

The futures of the Jersey Opera House

A sector consultation exercise



Foreword

The Jersey Opera House, is, not for the first time at a crossroads. Its situation might, once again, be termed a crisis – something which the late J F Kennedy, in an oft-repeated misreading of Chinese calligraphy, referred to as the combination of danger and opportunity. Dangers abound for the participants and stakeholders of any large-scale public arts project, not least the danger of public criticism of being too bold, or too timid, to roughly equal parts of the public audience.

Yet in all of this the long-term opportunity far outweighs the short-term risks. It is an opportunity, of course, to deliver something of genuine value to the people and future generations of Jersey. The value of public arts goes way beyond the economic – although the financial value to tourism and leisure sectors should not be discounted. The value of arts is multi-dimensional and has both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects. The extrinsic value of the arts have been measured in numerous international studies – increased health and wellbeing outcomes, economic and financial benefits, educational effects, even impacts in areas such as criminal justice. Yet we don't do the arts merely for these extrinsic benefits. The arts are a public good for intrinsic reasons, that cannot be reduced to their impact on other societal measures. In Kevin McCarthy's 'The Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Value of the Arts' he wrote;

“These intrinsic effects enrich individual lives, but they also have a public spill-over component in that they cultivate the kinds of citizens desired in a pluralistic society. These are the social bonds created among individuals when they share their arts experiences through reflection and discourse, and the expression of common values and community identity through artworks commemorating events significant to a nation's (or people's) experience.”

The Opera House does not carry the mantle of delivering the whole of Jersey's public and performing arts needs. Its mission will always have a humility of ambition, to play its part in an ecosystem of players, who collectively weave the fabric of our shared community.

This brief report, of a short consultation exercise, is an opportunity for hopeful reflection, one that is honest to the steepness of the journey and not naïve to the scale of the challenges, but also one that sees the immense opportunity for a national performing arts venue that makes a real difference to Islanders' lives.

Contents

Foreword	2
Contents.....	3
Key Findings.....	4
Key Recommendations	5
The Consultation	6
Participants.....	6
Findings – 1. What are the challenges that the Jersey Opera House faces.....	9
Findings – 2. What have we seen that is good.....	13
Findings – 3. Ideas for growth / change.	19
Acknowledgements.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Key Findings

The following interim findings are subject to the need for more thorough research and investigations:

- 1) The current ownership and governance structure does not serve the function of the institution;
- 2) Government has played an ambiguous role in the past and should clarify its intentions (and stick to a long-term strategy beyond the political cycle);
- 3) The JOH does not stand alone in creating a viable offering to the public of Jersey – it exists within a web of interconnected participants in the commercial, charitable, voluntary and international sectors;
- 4) Different operating models – with different operators - may be more appropriate for the commercial / hospitality and artistic offerings of a relaunched body;
- 5) On the artistic side there is a great opportunity for the JOH to become a producer / exporter of works that generate income beyond the local run;
- 6) The producer / exporter model is attractive to investors, not just in the local market, and could become a channel for inward investment;
- 7) Local corporates want to partner with a prestigious, top-class performing arts venue for client hospitality, CSR and brand management purposes;
- 8) There is a space in the model for non-commercial shows which have a basis in educational, community or diversity policy aims;
- 9) The creation of an appropriate governance and funding structure; an appropriate artistic body and a well managed hospitality business, is no immediate fix – this work could take just as long as the building works which are required to get the fabric of the building into a safe and attractive state; and,
- 10) Such a transformation will necessarily require a set of competencies not present in the current structure of the JOH, nor the government.

These findings were independently reached by the consultees, but bear a remarkable degree of alignment with the findings of Tom Fleming in his report; The Performing Arts Ecosystem of Jersey – situation analysis and options appraisal for the Jersey Opera House, which the consultees have not seen.

Key Recommendations

The following interim recommendations are made without reference to the constraints of time, resource and budget, which would necessarily have to be worked up separately:

- 1) Establish a council of reference, independent of both government and the current JOH institution, to consult further on the topics contained in this report and provide impartial advice and guidance to whatever structure ensues;
- 2) Appoint a project manager, with significant performing arts management experience to develop a workable plan for the future of the venue (outside of any building works required to make it safe, attractive and functional), and to begin implementing such plan up to the relaunch of the venue;
- 3) Tie any future financial investment, (including investment into the fabric of the building) to changes in the operational model to ensure the Opera House becomes sustainable in its own right and not dependent upon periodic injections of capital;
- 4) Create a governance structure, and appoint appropriate people, that aligns with the stakeholder aims for the venue and that has the skills and capacities to drive change;
- 5) Be bold in slaying the sacred cows of the JOH's past, including taking on the risk of upsetting some interested parties who are wedded to an out-of-date model of public performing arts provision;
- 6) Investigate examples of best practice (as featured in this document) with some benchmarking visits for inspiration and intelligence;
- 7) Work with commercial operators to deliver world class off-stage services to make the Opera House a venue which people want to go to, almost irrespective of what is being shown that night;
- 8) Explore opportunities for the Opera House to become an all-day venue in the heart of St Helier, and close to the commercial centre;
- 9) Ensure decision-making has government, institutional governance and advisory council participation (with new Terms of Reference), all the way through the project;
- 10) Manage public communications carefully to ensure the relaunch is consistent with all key stakeholders' expectations;
- 11) Relaunch the Opera House's artistic offering well ahead of the completion of the refurbishments – putting on world class shows in innovative venues around the town and island, and,
- 12) Liaise with key corporate and HNW players who may be donors, supporters or influencers of the future venue's success.

The Consultation

A selection of people from the Jersey arts sector were convened for two plenary sessions on Friday 8 July and Friday 15 July, hosted by government in Broad Street and independently facilitated.

The sessions were held confidentiality.

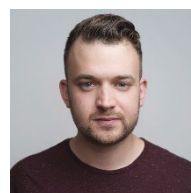
Participants were invited to observe the Chatham House rule. Under the **Chatham House Rule**, anyone who comes to a meeting is free to use information from the discussion, but is not allowed to reveal who made any particular comment. It is designed to increase openness of discussion. The rule is a system for holding debates and discussion panels on controversial topics, named after the headquarters of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, based in Chatham House, London, where the rule originated in June 1927.

The thoughts expressed in the report are of course just the result of two relatively short meetings and there is much more that can and should be said and taken into consideration before any decisions are made. The group may be able to continue to provide support and advice to help to find the right path for the venue.

Participants

Adam Flynn

Adam is a Theatre Producer at London Limelight (Jersey) Limited, with an impressive track record as a producer and director.

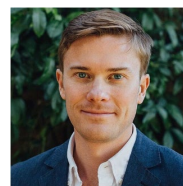


<https://www.aflynn.co.uk/>

Tom Dingle

Tom became the Director of Jersey Arts Trust in 2011. Since this time he has conceived and produced a range of developmental projects including, the New Plays Project, Creative Arts Programme and the Artist Lock In alongside the delivery of the wider programme.

Since 2016, Tom has driven the evolution of Jersey Arts Trust to ArtHouse Jersey with the expansion of the company's residency programme and international reach.



<https://www.arthousejersey.je/tom-dingle-bio>

Christine Jaspers

Contralto Christine Jasper relocated to Jersey during the pandemic, where she is in the process of establishing 'Moments Musicaux Jersey', continuing her successful series of house concerts she established at the Leighton House Museum in her former hometown London.



<https://www.christinejasper.com/home>

John Davey

John Davey has over 30 years experience in the finance industry and a wide portfolio of business interests. Outside of this he has supported several arts related charitable and social enterprises including the Branchage Film Festival, the Turner Prize winning Granby 4 Streets project in Liverpool and several independent film makers



<https://www.rockmountcapital.co.uk/management/>

Carolyn Rose-Ramsay

Carolyn is a Artistic Director at Ballet d'Jèrri. Ballet d'Jèrri, will be the first contemporary ballet company in Jersey.

Hoping to launch their inaugural season in January 2023, the company is looking for 10 classically trained dancers to form the initial core of the dance group. Carolyn has previously worked for the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, and the Norwegian National Ballet.



<https://www.linkedin.com/in/carolyn-rose-ramsay-58a758223/>

Toni James

In October 2021, Toni James was appointed as the Development and Operations Manager for Music in Action. Toni will lead programming by the Jersey Chamber Orchestra and Liberation International Music Festival, as well as Music in Action's education outreach programmes and community initiatives.



<https://www.linkedin.com/in/toni-james-127162226>

Government of Jersey

The following civil servants also supported the consultation

Paul Milbank	- Gov – Arts & Culture
Chris Kelleher	- Gov – Heritage
Lauren Sanders	- Gov – Local Economy
Victor Guerin	- Gov – Arts, Heritage, Culture, Sport

Note

Apologies for second session, which was called at short notice, were received from: Christine Jaspers and John Davey.

Findings – 1. What are the challenges that the Jersey Opera House faces.

Consultees were invited to brainstorm the challenges (other than those related to building condition) that the JOH faces. The following are presented in no prioritised or weighted order.

An early follow up action could be to do a stakeholder exercise to evaluate and prioritise these.

Exhaustion – many of the people involved in JOH have committed vast amounts of energy over decades, and yet still significant problems remain. Influencers such as media in the Island are also tired of stories about the Opera House’s problems.

Public perception – while there is no recent quantifiable data, the public perception of the Opera House, while sometimes fond and sentimental is not of a dynamic organisation setting its own future.

History – the JOH does have a history to be proud of, and a building which is loved by many, but its history could be holding back a sense of power over its own destiny.

Money – money is always a critical issue in contemporary arts and culture, but JOH does not seem to be a safe investment for discerning funds.

Relevance – what is the JOH for? And if it didn’t exist, would it need to be invented?

Vision – does the JOH, or its leaders, have a compelling and well communicated vision for the future.

Risk aversion – has the Opera House played it too safe with its offerings?

Distraction – the Opera House seems to have lurched from one crisis to another.

Audience engagement – does the Opera House really know who its key audience segments are, and what is its future audience?

Size – the Opera House is both too big AND too small for different ends of the artistic spectrum.

Flexibility – does the space limit the imagination of what could be done?

Quality – has the Opera House put on shows that did not stand the test of excellence?

Positioning ‘Opera House’ – it is really an Opera House? Is an Opera House what Islanders want and need? Is it competing against its own heritage.

Governance structure – does the governance structure match the funding model, artistic vision and risk model?

Leadership – who is leading the Opera House, who should lead it, what leadership characteristics are needed for the next phase?

Bureaucracy – is the Opera House’s future stifled by the layers and processes both within its governance and administration and that of its funders and partners?

Ownership – whose is the Opera House? In what sense do Islanders think it is “all of ours”?

Indifference / neglect – the fabric of the building shows signs of neglect – but is this symptomatic of a broader indifference to the future of the Opera House?

Lack of strategy / planning – if there has been a strategic view, it has not been evidently communicated to a broad audience of influencers.

Wrong KPIs – how does the Opera House measure its success? How do funders measure the impact of their investments into arts and culture? Are these aligned?

Lack of purpose – is there a common sense of purpose, both within the Opera House’s organisation and among its supporters and funders.

Reach – who is the Opera House for? How well does it reach this audience? What segments is it over-serving / under-serving?

Nostalgia – do people look back on the Opera House’s “glory days” – does this hold back a vision for the future.

Community perception – do Jersey people want a local economy based on low tax revenues to meet narrow interests, rather than an approach to creating an economy that supports the flourishing of all Islanders’ lives?

Accessibility – the building is not very accessible, but what about the programme – does it attract a diverse audience?

Government – to what extent is Government the problem? Is the involvement or reliance upon an inconsistent partner in government at the root of many of these issues. Does public ownership imply government ownership? Does government have the capability to change in its dealings with arts and culture? Do we have a government partner that will not let go of controlling everything?

Clarity – do the right people really have sight of the right information to make a difference.

Low tax / high wealth – we live in an island which has many highly wealthy families and businesses (albeit the median is not as high as many people would think), who do not pay much for public services – how can JOH tap the potential of this?

Communication – there has been a general lack of communication, sometimes unclear, perhaps even disingenuous, many false hopes raised / false starts/

Tip toe around the issues – to what extent has either JOH or government avoided the elephant in the room?

Resilience – how can the JOH build a funding model and operations model that makes it less prone to shocks?

Inflexible business model – how has the JOH been slow to change, when its own processes / model has been the problem?

Not seeing itself as part of broaden British performing arts scene – Venues and content providers in the UK have undergone a significant shift in their business models over the past generation – which has changed the balance of risk – why hasn't JOH taken account of this change?

Democratisation – a successful national arts venue must be felt to be “ours” by a significant part of the audience / taxpaying population. This sense of ownership need not directly align to the legal / financial model but can be achieved through attractive “ownership” benefits and rewards.

These findings accord with the headline strengths and weaknesses analyses of Tom Fleming in his report; The Performing Arts Ecosystem of Jersey – situation analysis and options appraisal for the Jersey Opera House.

Findings – 2. What have we seen that is good...

Consultees were invited to brainstorm examples of anecdotes and inspiring stories of local and national arts venues that made an inspirational difference to the communities in which they operate.

A useful follow up action could be to do a number of benchmarking visits for inspiration and intelligence, which may well also result in some useful partnerships arising relationally for mutual benefit.

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland



<https://www.rcs.ac.uk/>

The RCS holds “national institution” status, functioning as a higher education institution for both performing arts and trade skills. It also hosts a popular and financially sound performance programme across all its disciplines.

The New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich



<https://www.wolseytheatre.co.uk>

The New Wolsey’s mission is to create, develop and produce a vital and dynamic programme of theatre, and other live performances and projects, for all the people of Suffolk and surrounding areas.

Stephen Joseph Theatre

The home of truly great theatre. It offers a unique, intimate experience in our renowned theatre-in-the-round as well as the more traditional end-on McCarthy theatre and cinema. Home to first-class drama, music, films, comedy and live streaming and are known for its commitment to new writing, including Alan Ayckbourn's 80+ world premieres. With an extensive and cross generational programme of OutReach work - with, in and for the local community.



<https://www.sjt.uk.com/>

Theatre Royal Bath

Brimming with history, the Theatre Royal Bath is one of the oldest and most beautiful theatres in Britain. Comprising three auditoria, the Main House, Ustinov Studio and the egg theatre for children and young people, a wonderfully varied programme of top-quality entertainment is on offer all year round.



<https://www.theatreroyal.org.uk/>

Chichester Festival Theatre

With a mission is to enrich our communities – locally, regionally, nationally and internationally – through compelling, entertaining and enlightening theatre. Over the past six decades, myriad productions originated at Chichester have transferred to the West End or toured nationally and internationally, from musicals to significant new plays and classic revivals.



<https://www.cft.org.uk/>

Alte Werft Papenburg

The once abandoned factory halls of the former Meyer shipyard have been revived since 1992. As part of extensive renovation and conversion measures, the Forum Alte Werft was created as a cultural centre for the city of Papenburg.



<https://stadt.papenburg.de/kultur-freizeit/forum-alte-werft/>

Bayerische Staatsoper

Opened in 1818, the National Theatre is the main venue of the Bavarian State Opera, the Bavarian State Ballet and the Bavarian State Orchestra. The classicist building offers space for a total of 2,101 spectators. The stage, newly built after the Second World War, is one of the largest in the world with 2,500 square meters. Works such as Richard Wagner's Tristan und Isolde or Die Walküre were premiered here.



<https://www.staatsoper.de/nationaltheater>

Academy of St Martin in the Fields

The Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble was created in 1967 to perform the larger chamber works with players who customarily worked together, instead of the usual string quartet with additional guests. The Academy is one of the world's finest chamber orchestras, renowned for fresh, brilliant interpretations of great orchestral music.



<https://www.asmf.org/>

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

The Royal Scottish National Orchestra is one of Europe's leading orchestras with a rich history stretching back over 125 years. It is one of Scotland's leading cultural institutions, and an orchestra with a variety of work that is almost unparalleled amongst its British peers.



<https://www.rsno.org.uk/>

Bristol Old Vic

Bristol Old Vic is a British theatre company based at the Theatre Royal, Bristol. The present company was established in 1946 as an offshoot of the Old Vic in London. In 2012, the theatre complex completed the first phase of a £19 million refurbishment, increasing the seating capacity and providing up to ten flexible performance spaces. Whilst the theatre was closed, the company continued to present work in the Studio and Basement spaces, as well as at other sites around Bristol.



<https://www.oldvic.ac.uk>

New Theatre Royal Portsmouth

The New Theatre Royal in Plymouth, is an example of a venue in a similar position. The theatre reopened in October 2015 following an extensive refurbishment project that included improvements to the stage, fly-tower and backstage area. The capacity of the main house has also been increased to just under 700 seats.



<https://www.newtheatreroyal.com/>

Hackney Empire

As a registered charity Hackney Empire depends on the support of the people who love it. As it celebrates 120 years of being at the heart of a community there's never been a better time to show support.

Since 1901, Hackney Empire has been a place where people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities come together. Generations have had their first experience of live performance in a legendary venue and each year thousands of young people discover here a safe space where arts and creativity transform lives.



<https://hackneyempire.co.uk/>

Sadler's Wells

Sadler's Wells is a registered charity, and relies on donations to keep making and sharing the dance people love. As one of the world's leading dance organisations, its dedicated to dance in all its forms. Sadler's Wells has been a home for the arts for more than three centuries. It commissions more new work than any other dance organisation in the world, actively support artists at every stage in their careers, partner with local communities and reach new audiences through events and workshops.



<https://www.sadlerswells.com/>

Grimaldi Forum Monaco

Recognisable by its spectacular glass and steel design, the Grimaldi Forum Monaco (GFM) is the Monaco Government's Congress and Culture Centre.

Inaugurated in 2000, it's the expression of Prince Rainier III's desire to position Monaco as one of the main business tourism destinations in Europe and as a cultural highlight.



<https://grimaldiforum.com/>

Findings – 3. Ideas for growth / change.

Consultees were invited to consider how the Jersey Opera House could change and grow following a relaunch in refreshed premises. The ideas suggested have been collated thematically.

A useful follow up action could be to work up these ideas further with specialist legal, financial and practical support and to build an business plan with actionable objectives.

a) Ideas around ownership / governance structure

Participants were clear that “this comes first”.

It will be important to de-politicise the governance structure, so that any role the Government has as funder or guarantor is not subject to the cycles and pressures of Ministers seeking re-election. A one-time endowment, with some prudent spending rules, would be better than a continuing funding relationship with government. Government could have a continuing role as coordinator – government is uniquely placed to coordinate participants in the transport and logistics sector and also tourism and hospitality. Government could also support and coordinate the provision of specialist equipment hire e.g. lighting.

One or more private operators could probably do a better job of managing the day-to-day operations than either a government or amateur trustee board. State funding and private operation are not the only models available – a “third way” might energise the engagement of both workers and audience members, delivering emotional value and tangible rewards to participants.

A blended business model could have a charity with several operating companies. The charity could have the principal relationship with government with a mandate to coordinate, facilitate and subsidise. The operating companies could run programming, bar and catering and administration.

A charity could be an appropriate body for oversight, but not operational control – it could mandate a service level agreement with a private operator, that set broad parameters without getting into the close details of “how”.

One thought expressed by the panel is that we are stuck in the framework of a perceived need to keep the opera house because of sunk costs and budget allocated to renovate it where an

alternative is to just give it away to somebody in the private sector or have the government wash its hands of it.

There is a re-branding opportunity to lay claim to the 'National Theatre of Jersey' or similar.

Example: 'Jersey Opera House operating as the National Theatre in Jersey'

Government could provide a financial backstop / underwriting and in-kind support. Some government funding could be tied to commissioned programs – e.g. education.

There is a great opportunity to tap the market for corporate sponsorship / CSR.

There are also tax advantages to private investors outside of Jersey to invest in productions originated in a new JOH.

This is in line with the recommendation Tom Fleming in his report; The Performing Arts Ecosystem of Jersey – situation analysis and options appraisal for the Jersey Opera House, who argued for a new governance and legal model, with a new board and senior management / development team.

b) **Ideas around artistic service proposition**

JOH is uniquely positioned to host a multi-arts offering. There is value in an institution like the Opera House doing the "wacky" / "cool" / "different" / "weird". As a 'national body' the Opera House should offer something for everyone, with some loss leaders (not necessarily the community / diversity offerings). It needs to have a mix of the experimental and the mainstream bankable shows. Some productions could even be offered on a "pay what you think it was worth" basis.

The producer / exporter model has been very successful in both regional and national performing arts venues, sharing expertise and risk to generate income-producing assets.

Any programming should have space for local / community / amateur work at an appropriate value point with transparency of costs.

Festivals present an opportunity to programme a wide range of shows with an appropriate range of price options.

The audience experience is not just about what happens on stage - need a whole customer experience e.g. costumes and venue dressing.

Tom Fleming. in his report; The Performing Arts Ecosystem of Jersey – situation analysis and options appraisal for the Jersey Opera House, would seem to agree this direction of travel in his Option 3 – Creative Island Performing Arts Hub.

c) Ideas around the broader commercial / ancillary proposition

The Opera House has a significant revenue raising opportunity from the corporate hospitality market, both for direct client entertaining and for vanity marketing / co-branding.

A commercial operator could run the bar, restaurant, café as a concession – remitting fixed fees or a revenue share to support artistic activities.

In the long term a site expansion might be necessary to get a better mix of the artistic and hospitality functions.

Need to include some VIP / donor incentives. Think about the demographics we're trying to attract. Make it a transformative experience – needs to be of the highest quality to retain high value support.

What about making space for non-arts users of performance space e.g. corporates, conferences. This could leave to cross-pollination as people get inspired.

Could consider a training partnership e.g. with Highlands students in catering with themed menus, or more broadly to Highlands offering a Theatre Management/Lighting/Production Management Course in cooperation with a UK college.

This is not something which Tom Fleming in his report; The Performing Arts Ecosystem of Jersey – situation analysis and options appraisal for the Jersey Opera House, goes into much detail on, although it can be inferred from some of his recommendations in respect of his Option 3 – Creative Island Perfuming Arts Hub.

These recommendations are summarised at page 6 of this report.