

PERFORMING ARTS

The performing arts sector has seen immense growth in the past two decades. The development of arts venues catalysed a burgeoning supply of arts programmes, in response to growing demand for the arts. The number of performing arts activities, and registered performing arts companies and societies, has increased steadily. In 2016, an average of 26 performing arts activities took place every day in Singapore.¹ The number of performing arts companies and societies continued to grow, increasing from 2,689 in 2013 to 3,162 in 2016.²

Despite the growth in the number of groups and activities, ticketed attendance for performing arts events declined in the past five years, from 2.06 million ticketed attendance in 2012 to 1.81 million in 2016³, although overall arts attendance levels (including free events) continued to rise⁴. The profile of these arts attendees tended to be single, aged 15–34, and tertiary educated.⁵ Theatre (especially musicals) and music (especially pop, rock, and indie) were popular art forms within this group.⁶ Dance enjoyed strong support from the Indian community and students aged 15–24, as well as those aged 35–44.⁷ Arts consumption in the digital space decreased, possibly due to competing entertainment options, but music continued to lead in digital engagement of audiences.⁸

In terms of artistic success, original works by Singaporean creators, particularly in theatre and dance, continue to be of high quality and are often selected by reputable local and international festivals and venues. Singaporean musicians have also set a high bar for themselves in recent years, winning accolades and prizes, and performing at some of the biggest festivals in the world. However, a review of writing and assessments by critics and peer practitioners suggested that there was still much room for improvement in the sector's general artistic standards.

► ANALYSIS OF CURRENT STATE

Strengths

Attendance and participation in the performing arts have improved since the last sectoral plan. Beyond the theatre and concert hall, the performing arts are also effective at achieving national outcomes⁹, such as national pride, arts participation¹⁰, and community building¹¹. Our contemporary musicians and national orchestras have had successful overseas tours and placements on global streaming charts, awards, and invitations to perform at major festivals and venues. National venues and platforms like Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and the Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) have also built strong international networks to benefit other Singaporean artists.

Weaknesses

Critical writing about the arts is weak in Singapore and there is little research and documentation of the history and development of the performing arts here. Likewise, there is room for practitioners to improve how they engage and connect with new audiences with their work. The predominance of the English language over the Mother Tongue languages, along with uneven audience engagement efforts, have made it challenging for more people to connect with some art forms, especially those that require some language proficiency. In addition, artists working in the education sector require further support in developing their pedagogical repertoire in order to raise the quality of arts instruction. The level of professionalism in arts management and instruction, succession planning and support for freelance performing arts practitioners also needs to be strengthened. Lastly, the adoption of technology in the performing arts could be stronger.

Opportunities

To grow new audiences for the arts, non-arts considerations and interests could offer entry points for the uninitiated. Programming that cater to families with children, appeal to Singaporeans' interest in sports and exercise¹², as well as link common interests in music and food¹³, are potential growth areas for audience development. As youths increasingly express themselves online on social media, we can tap on this energy and develop their interest and ability to write critically. Global shifts in technology and music consumption patterns have also made it possible for emerging musicians to have international breakthroughs wherever they are based. The development of technologies for art-making, digital engagement, and marketing has made it possible for small but technologically-enabled countries like Singapore to be at the forefront of innovation.

Threats

While we celebrate the vibrancy and diversity of the performing arts, the increasingly crowded cultural calendar in Singapore has resulted in intense competition for audiences. Against the backdrop of population decline – and, consequently, shrinking school populations – opportunities to engage with the arts through co-curricular activities may decrease. This has implications on the longer-term career prospects of performing arts practitioners. The emotive power of the performing arts, while having great potential to unite communities and foster social cohesion, can also be socially divisive if they are politicised for particular causes. This could alienate supporters and funders, and erode public support for the arts.

► ENVISIONED STATE AND OUTCOMES

By 2022, NAC envisions a vibrant performing arts scene that is driven by an integrated ecosystem and embraced by audiences, with a growing pool of distinctive works. Our national orchestras inspire national pride among Singaporeans and are regarded as among the best in the world. At the same time, our performing arts practitioners receive local and international recognition and are embraced as role models by Singaporeans from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds.

Different segments of the population have myriad opportunities to engage with the performing arts through tailored programmes that spark curiosity, enable empathy, and cultivate a sense of national identity and pride. Internationally, Singapore's performing arts are recognised for their contemporary sensibilities and strong roots in the multiculturalism and diversity of this region. Our performing arts institutions and practitioners are recognised as up-and-coming leaders in using technology to make art and engage audiences.

●●● Strategic Thrust 01 Inspire Our People

Raise the public visibility of the performing arts by working with the sector to create a national focal point in the cultural calendar

Building on the vibrancy of the performing arts sector, NAC will work with cultural institutions and arts organisations to create a focal point for the performing arts in the cultural calendar. NAC could build on existing festivals and events, such as SIFA, Flipside, the M1 CONTACT Contemporary Dance Festival, and activities and

- 1, 2, 3 2017, Singapore Cultural Statistics.
- 4, 5 2017, Population Survey on the Arts.
- 6 2017, Population Survey on the Arts.
- 7 2017, Population Survey on the Arts.
- 8 2017, Population Survey on the Arts. Overall digital consumption rates dipped from 87% in 2015 to 61% in 2017, with 39% of the population reporting that they consumed digital music content.
- 9 2017, National Music Consumption Survey. Two in three Singaporeans said they were proud of Singapore's music and musicians.
- 10 2017, Singapore Cultural Statistics. The number of members in dance interest groups increased by 350% in a short span of six years (2011 to 2016).
- 11 2017, Population Survey on the Arts. 86% of dance and music attendees recognised that the arts help draw Singaporeans closer as a community.
- 12 2017, Population Survey on the Arts. "Sports and exercise" came out as the top activity that Singaporeans spent time on.
- 13 2017, Population Survey on the Arts. "Tasting different kinds of cuisines" was the second-most popular leisure activity among people who attended music events, especially PMEBs.



platforms organised by the national orchestras, arts education institutions, as well as other arts organisations to establish the branding of a national Performing Arts Festival in May or June every year. A national publicity campaign that celebrates the diverse forms and expressions of the performing arts could complement existing marketing efforts, appealing to new audiences in the process.

Build capabilities in gap areas such as the use of technology, arts education, fundraising, marketing, and arts management

To enable more use of technology to enhance the audience experience, NAC will work with partners such as Esplanade and Culture Academy to organise capability development programmes. NAC will also encourage the use of technology through the existing grants framework, and facilitate opportunities for artists to meet and work with the technology sector. In collaboration with our partners, NAC will continue to facilitate training opportunities to strengthen the sector's capabilities in fundraising, marketing, and arts management.

Improving the quality of arts education programmes in schools is especially important to inspire a new generation of arts lovers. NAC will provide more structured professional development opportunities for arts instructors and teaching artists in schools, and also work with the Ministry of Education to augment the opportunities available for students to engage with the arts as extensions of the school curriculum and to develop interest in the traditional arts from young.



**Strategic Thrust 02
Connect Our Communities**

Strengthen the sector's understanding of audience segments and behaviours through research, and support the development of critical writing in and about the performing arts

NAC will work with performing arts institutions to commission a range of audience research studies. This will include quantitative research at the art form level about audience segments and consumption patterns, and qualitative research to gain insights about audience behaviours. Initiatives such as Got to Move and Hear65, which raise public awareness of, participation in, and support for dance and music respectively, will also use data analytics to identify trends in public opinion, and to refine their strategies. In addition, the National Institute of Education will complete a study to identify and understand the space-based experiences of audiences and the needs within the Arts for Young Audiences (AYA) field.

NAC will seek partnerships with cultural institutions such as the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre to develop research that documents the development of the performing arts over time, including traditional practices and forms. Beyond that, NAC will develop the practice of critical writing in the performing arts by supporting intermediaries in developing the craft of writing among writers, and deepening critical discourse. Initiatives like Hear65 will also document contemporary music practices through articles, podcasts, and videos.

Develop capabilities in areas such as audience engagement, facilitation, and content creation for specific audience segments

NAC will also introduce initiatives with the aim of deepening connections with diverse communities in the creation and production of performing arts, such as a pilot programme involving teaching artists, communities and audiences, as well as cultural institutions such as Esplanade and arts education institutions like the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music. In catering to diverse audiences, support will continue to be given to inclusivity practices, such as surtitling, close-captioning, and sign language services to enable all audiences to appreciate and engage with the work.

Through programming at the Stamford Arts Centre, including residencies and public outreach programmes, NAC will develop upstream capabilities and foster collaborations between contemporary and traditional arts practitioners. This will support the cultural institutions' work of commissioning, co-producing, and presenting shows. In the AYA segment, organisations such as The Artground, Esplanade, and arts companies with a focus on children will champion and support experimentation and new design approaches for age-appropriate content. NAC will facilitate capability development opportunities for AYA practitioners to deepen their practice and collaborate with international artists. NAC will also continue to support the professional development of artists working in schools.

•••

**Strategic Thrust 03
Position Singapore Globally**

Strengthen the arts ecosystem through closer alignment with the performing arts institutions and strategic funding of initiatives and intermediaries

NAC will work closely and strategically with cultural institutions such as Esplanade, Arts House Limited, and the national orchestras to realise its vision for the performing arts. By working more closely with the major presenting venues, NAC will minimise the duplication of programmes with similar goals, and use our resources more effectively by supporting artists and arts groups that are ready for the international stage.

The national orchestras will also continue to support the presentation of Singaporean work, and connect visiting artists with Singapore's music practitioners through masterclasses and dialogues. NAC will work with arts companies and intermediaries like Dance Nucleus to provide stepped pathways for the creation of new work: from space and grant support to incubate works and facilitate international exchanges and collaborations, to workshops incorporating critical presenter and producer perspectives, leading to connections with international co-commissioners and presenters.



To nurture a robust performing arts ecosystem that supports the needs of arts companies and practitioners, including independent artists, producers, and arts managers, NAC will continue to support the growth of intermediaries that address key gaps in each sector. While the support for ground-up initiatives will continue to be a key feature of NAC's open grants framework, NAC will also channel resources towards strategic partnerships with intermediaries and arts companies to address sectoral needs, such as the establishment of a resource centre for arts freelancers.

► SUMMARY

This sectoral plan will strengthen Singapore's performing arts sector, which will be led by strong and sustainable institutions and companies that support a diverse range of practices and perspectives in a thriving ecosystem. This will enable the creation of a pool of distinctive works that will be well-received by audiences, which spark curiosity, enable empathy, and instill a sense of national identity and pride.

In summary, efforts in performing arts development will go towards:

- a Strengthening the sector's understanding of audience segments and behaviours, and supporting the development of critical writing in and about the performing arts;
- b Developing capabilities in the areas of audience engagement, arts education, technology, fundraising, marketing, and arts management; and
- c Raising the visibility of the performing arts by working with the sector to create a national focal point for the performing arts in the cultural calendar.