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Arts in Australia

The Major Performing Arts

A comparative study of 2018 audiences

Arts Research Papers - November 2019

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Introduction

The arts have an undeniable positive impact on social life, contributing to public engagement in cultural and educational activities, maintaining employment forces and providing sources of revenue to domestic markets. From an individual point of view, engaging with artistic activities imparts critical perspectives on the diversity of cultural layers and social values, enhancing creative reflexion and broadening the outlooks of a population’s wellbeing.

In a growing entertainment market where new forms of delivery have shaped access to content in transforming ways, the study of performing arts becomes essential in understanding the operation of creative industries. With the significant development of cinema, sports and the access to home-based streaming platforms in the recent decade, performing arts practices face singular challenges in engaging with their audience and sustaining their business operations. Reaching audiences is the main target of delivery for performing arts companies, a complex process involving many strategies that vary across different artforms and geographical markets. The analytical study of those dynamics helps in understanding how artistic organisations operate to deliver their activity, the structure of the national arts sector and where the opportunities for development lie.

With these perspectives in mind, we propose to present an evaluation of the arts sector in Australia, whose singular position in the international market forms an optimal enquiry into the state of performing arts and their role in shaping the public landscape. In Australia, the largest artistic programs are delivered by the Major Performing Arts, a group of government funded organisations representing a wide diversity of artistic practices, engaging in the presentation of performance and education events across the country. This paper analyses the 2018 audiences of the Major Performing Arts companies with the goal of uncovering dynamics within the group, and drawing out the relationships between audience reach, area of practice and geographical spread.

Our goal in this paper is two-fold. In a first instance, we aim to provide with a holistic perspective of the state of performing arts in Australia, exposing the artistic activity of the Major Performing Arts (MPAs), Australia's leading group of creative industries. Our evaluation delves into the audience delivery of these organisations, examining their 2018 results as a descriptive reference for the sector and a narrative piece of the current landscape of the Australian market. While we recognise the Major Performing Arts sector in itself is not a full representation of the arts sector in Australia in its entirety, we explicit the focus of this paper on this particular group of companies in the description of the Major Performing Arts Framework below, framing the distinct relationship between Major Performing Arts companies and the Australian Government. Our second goal is to present potential avenues of research in the analysis of arts companies, and the benefits of performing arts evaluation in guiding the sector to new markets, improving efficiencies and broadening audience reach. Future directions of research are explicated in side notes across each section, constituting current and prospective projects of evaluation.

A description of the data is available as an appendix to this paper, along with description of the different methodologies used and other references.

The Major Performing Arts Framework

Australia's Major Performing Arts (MPAs) form a group of 27 arts companies[1], considered as the country's leading performing arts organisations. The Major Performing Arts deliver major programs of activity across the country through various areas of practice involving a wide range of performance and education events.

Within the global creative industry, the specificity of this group of arts organisations comes from their compliance to a structured Government policy, the Major Performing Arts Framework, which supports the companies through funding from government (Commonwealth and Federal) sources. The Framework provides the guiding structures that sets funding appropriation for each company based on their business structure, area of practice and geography. The funding administration is managed by the Australia Council for the Arts on behalf of both the Commonwealth Government and individual State agencies. By providing funding certainty subject to regular monitoring of artistic and financial results, the Framework allows its member companies to engage in long term strategic planning in order to achieve the delivery of their artistic goals.

In their 2018 consultation paper, the Australia Council for the Arts presents the Major Performing Arts companies as playing a key role in the development of the arts in Australia, supporting the careers of performing artists and creatives, presenting large-scale performing arts productions and becoming established features at some of Australia's most iconic venues, festivals and other arts infrastructure[2]. In addition, the Major Performing Arts companies take part in a broader impact of the Australian artistic sector, through collaborative projects and support to other national areas of practice.

Within this context, our analysis of the Major Performing Arts sector ties into the structures described above, our purpose being to examine artistic audience results within a group of government funded bodies that provide a countrywide service of national artistic delivery.

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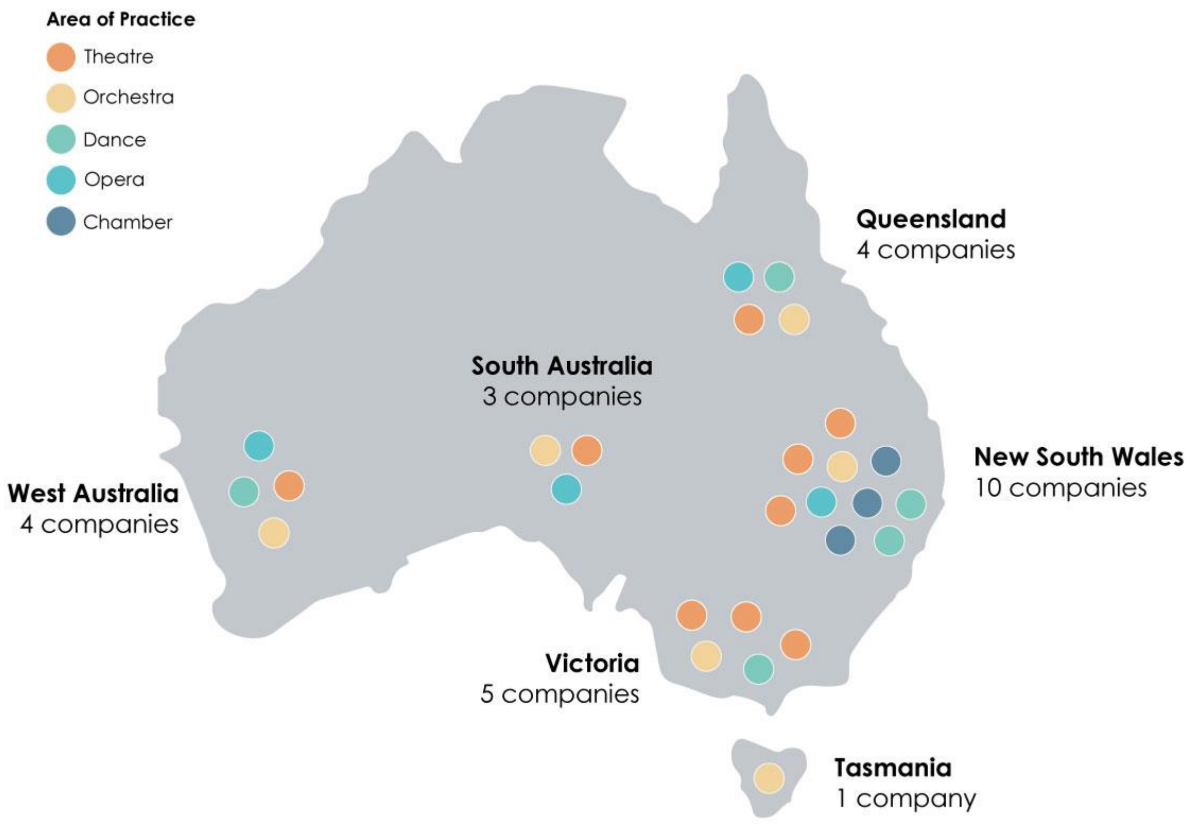
[1] Orchestra Victoria became a wholly owned subsidiary of the Australian Ballet in 2014. The two entities report jointly their activity and financials and are treated as one company for the purpose of this analysis.
[2] Australia Council (2018), *Major Performing Arts Framework Consultation Paper*

The Companies

The Australian Major Performing Arts companies present activity in the fields of opera, theatre, orchestra, chamber music, ballet and contemporary dance, with residences distributed across the six states in Australia: New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania.

Each company is presented in the map below, grouped together by their state of resident and area of practice (artform).

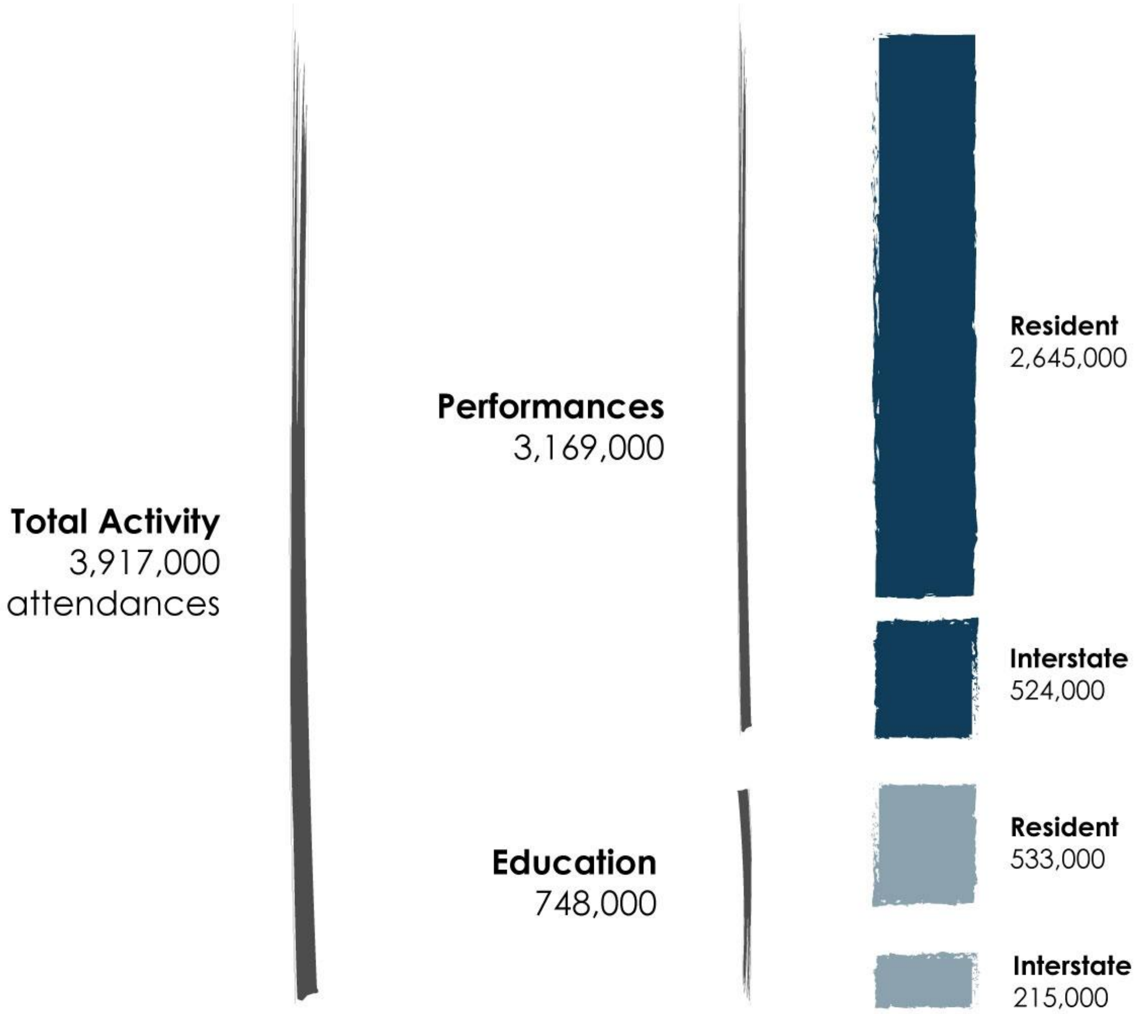


- Each Australian state is resident to one Orchestra Major Performing Arts company and all states excluding Tasmania also house a Theatre company.
- With 10 resident companies, New South Wales is the state with the most resident Major Performing Arts companies, twice the number of Victoria, the second large state of residence. New South Wales also houses the entirety of the Chamber Music sector, with all three companies residing in the state.
- Both New South Wales and Victoria are resident to three theatre companies, with all other states housing one each.

2018 National Audiences

In 2018, the Major Performing Arts companies attracted a total of 3.9m audiences nationally, comprising 3.1m attendances to performance events (81%) and 0.7m to education activities (19%). Of this total, 0.7m audiences were reached through interstate touring activities.

2018 National Activity



Note: Performance and education events are both considered as integral parts of the activity delivered by the MPA organisations[3]. Unless otherwise specified, audiences for both activity types are aggregated.

[3] For more information on how audiences are defined, please refer to Appendix A

Artform

Performing arts companies deliver artistic activity in various forms and involving a wide diversity of practices, including theatrical, musical and dance presentations, often combined within a single performance. Understanding the distinctive preferences of groups of audience and how they choose to engage with different means of delivery is a significant aspect of artistic programming. Performing arts companies adapt their direction based on the constant evolution of market segmentation and audience preferences.

In this context, the analysis of artistic delivery within artforms (or areas of practice) provides with significant perspectives on how current audience markets are structured around different means of delivery. Drawing out these patterns identifies where preferences are concentrated, allowing organisations to provide programs with a more diverse and targeted reach.

In Australia, the Major Performing Arts form a diverse group of organisations delivering a wide range of artistic activity. From Opera and Ballet shows, including the performances of the national flagships Opera Australia and the Australian Ballet, to contemporary theatre, dance and chamber music, the group encompasses a large variety of practices. Included in the group, the country's national symphonies all form part of the cohort and have residence within each Australian state.

While we recognise that each Performing Art company has its own unique way of delivering its practice, for the purpose of this paper, we group organisations into five standardised artforms: Theatre, Orchestra, Dance, Opera and Chamber. These artforms represent the classification adopted by the Australian Government and within the group, which we use for the rest of our analysis.

Research Notes – Artistic Ranges

Within each artform, there exists a wide diversity in the performances and presentations of artistic companies. Generally, the nature of programs varies across different artistic visions, with some companies presenting a more traditional repertoire and others focusing on contemporary practices. In Australia, all Major Performing Arts contribute to the creation of new works, developing original compositions that drive the national artistic landscape. In the development of arts practices, innovation forms a critical aspect of maintaining audience engagement and evolving artistic visions. These aspects are particularly relevant to reaching younger audiences, who are naturally more driven to innovative compositions and contemporary practices. In this perspective, a deeper analysis in the nature of individual programs could inform on where the main drivers of innovation lie and how opportunities for collaboration can help in maintaining the creation of new artistic work.

Research Notes – Programming Risk

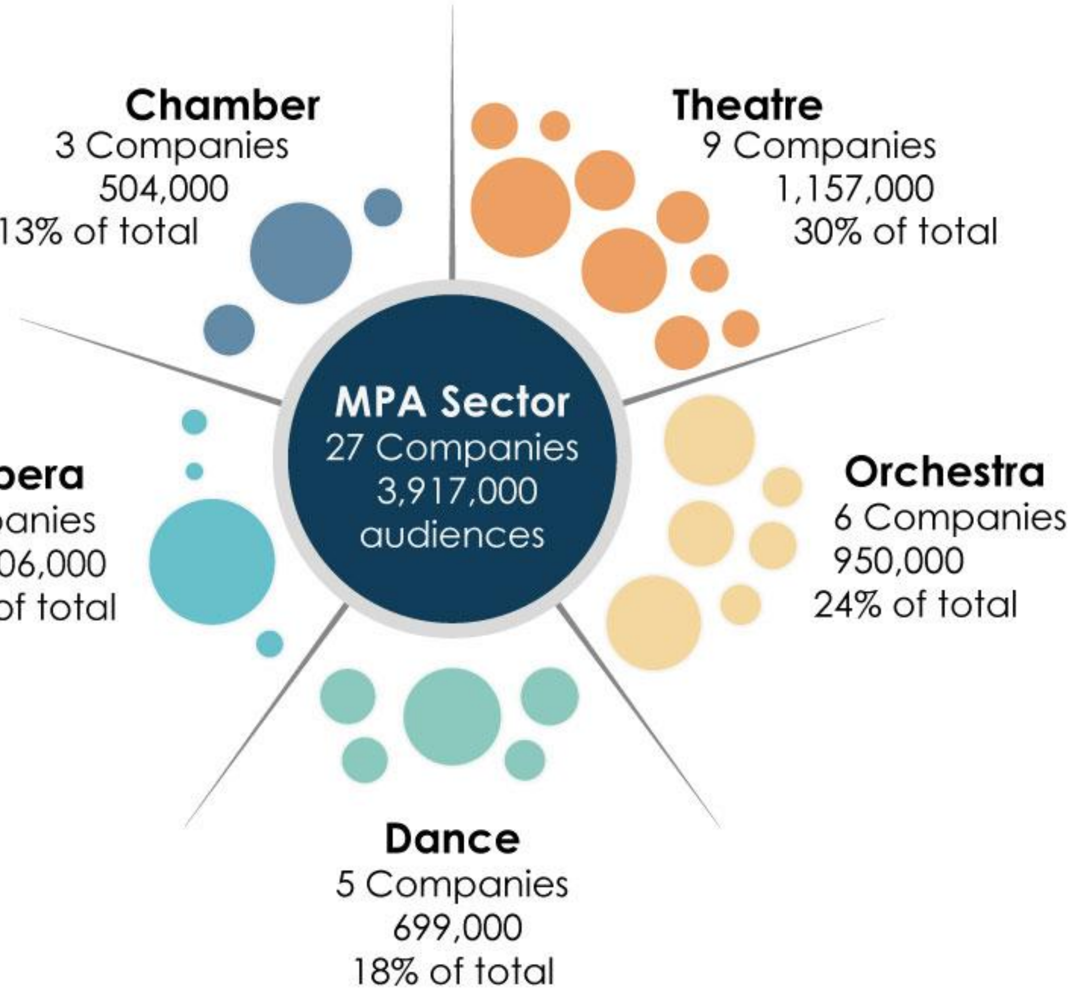
Generally, companies organise their season across a range of self-presented shows which they conceive, stage and organise box office ticketing for. Programs can also include other types of arrangements, from collaborations with other companies to contracted shows which can involve one-off fees or shared box office arrangements. The composition of different types of events are often dictated by artistic practice and form an integral part of an organisation's business structure, directing audience reach and financial income. For the purpose of this paper, we include audiences for all types of events to provide a holistic picture of audience reach in its entirety. For future directions of research, particularly in conjunction with income sources, the separation of programs by risk type can inform on how artistic companies organise their program income across different risk structures and assess how optimal arrangements and best practices are achieved.

Activity – by Artform

In this section, we proceed to examine the audiences attracted by Major Performing Arts companies in 2018, grouping them by their respective artforms (or areas of practice).

The figure below displays the breakdown of the results, with each circle representing an individual Major Performing Arts company, its size scaled to the total number of 2018 audiences attracted by that organisation.

2018 Audiences by Area of Practice



In absolute terms, audience totals are naturally proportional to the number of companies in each artform, with the nine Theatre Major Performing Arts recording the highest number of attendances in 2018 (1.2m, 30% of the total cohort). At the other end of the spectrum, the lowest total artform attendance was recorded for Chamber Music, whose three organisations attracted 0.6m audiences in 2018 (15% of the total MPA activity).

To get a more precise picture of audience distributions, we proceed to plot each company in a scatter chart below, with each dot marking the total audience of a single Major Performing Arts company, along with the median, smallest and largest audience values of its artform.

From the presentation of the data, the following conclusions can be drawn:

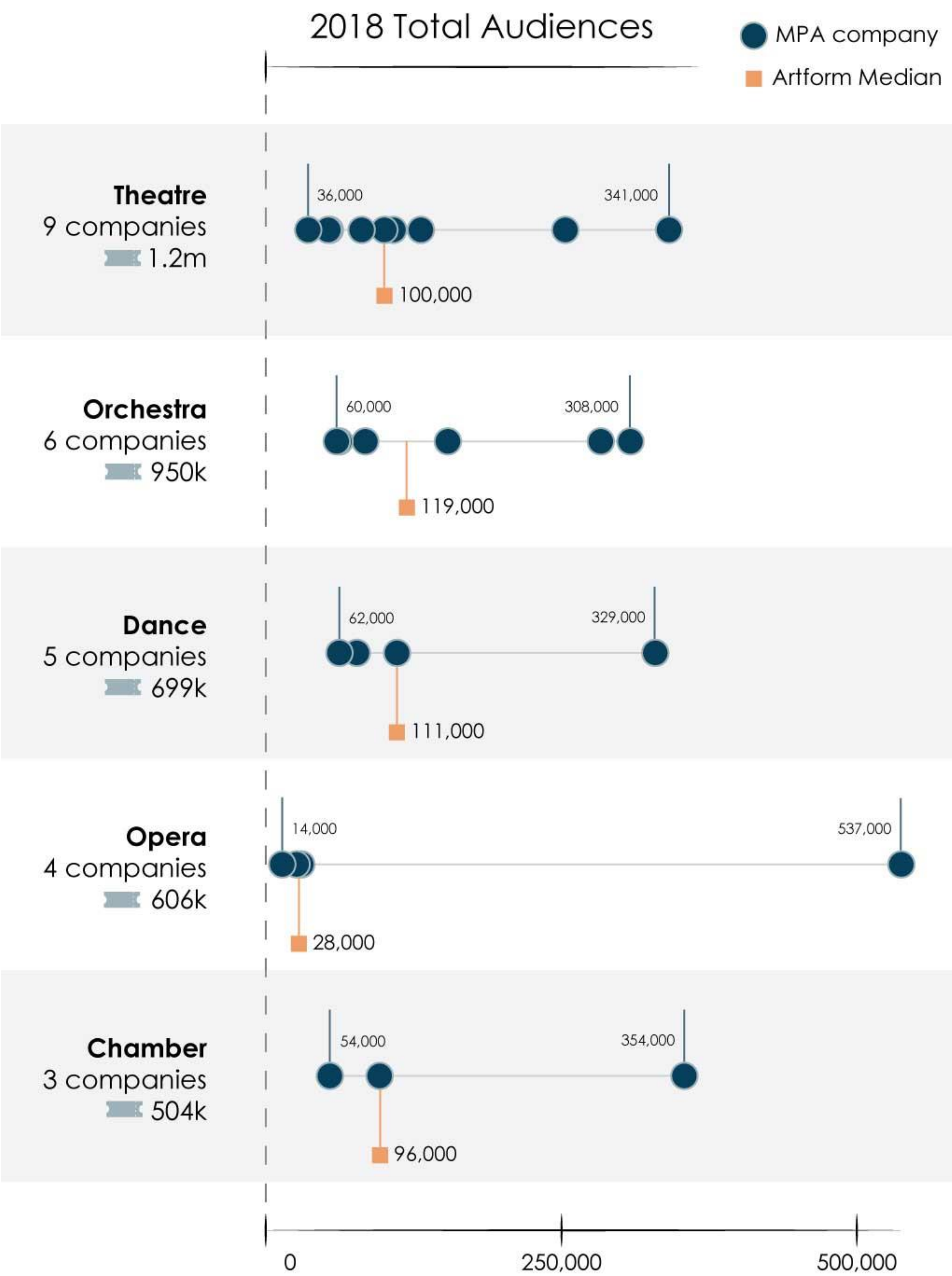
- Within each artform, there is wide dispersion in the attendances of individual companies with one or two organisations that dominate the audience market and smaller companies clustered at a lower end of the attendance spectrum. The difference in audience between the two groups is considerable across all areas of practice, with the largest company within each artform generating between 4 times (Orchestra) to 38 times (Opera) as many audiences as the smallest one. Overall, the seven largest companies across all organisations[4] account for 61% of total audience in 2018, with the remaining 39% of activity distributed between twenty organisations.

- Among other artforms, the Opera sector displays a particularly notable structure with the presence of Opera Australia, the company recording the highest audiences in 2018 across all Major Performing Arts. This strong polarisation translates to a lower median audience (28,000) and a higher audience spread (537,000) when compared to the other artforms. In addition, all the smaller opera companies each recorded less audiences than any other organisation for the year, a further indication of a singular market distribution of Australia's Opera sector[5].

- Outside of Opera, the other artforms (Chamber, Dance, Orchestra and Theatre) display similar statistical characteristics in terms of median results (ranging between 96,000 and 119,000) and spread (between 248,000 and 305,000), indicating a relatively homogeneous market segmentation between those artforms and a diverse interest from the Australian population to engage with a wide variety of artistic practices.

[4] The largest companies in terms of audience reached in 2018 are Opera Australia, Musica Viva, Sydney Theatre, The Australian Ballet, Sydney Symphony, Melbourne Symphony and Melbourne Theatre

[5] For further discussion on the MPA Opera sector, we refer our readers to the National Opera Review (2016) published by the Australian Department of Communication and the Arts



Note: Each dot represents the audience results for a single MPA company, with median, minimum and maximum values displayed for each area of practice.

Research Notes – Market Structures

The polarisation of audience results observed between the Major Performing Arts organisations within each artform invites a deeper analysis of different market structures and the ways in which smaller companies compete with the largest ones. Particularly for the small to medium sector, further direction of research to assess levels of competition in each market could include the degree of funding appropriations, artistic program differentiation, prospective timing of profits and the nature of current regulatory control and monitoring practices.

Residence

The geographical distribution of audiences is a key factor in understanding how arts sector organisations operate within a country. Artistic programs are naturally imparted with the cultural influences of a specific region, reflecting a wide diversity of creative values and when combined, form the country's artistic narrative, tying together different creative landscapes into a nationwide artistic ecology.

By nature, performing arts have a significant relationship with their geographical setting, engaging with their resident population and also delivering events across different cities and regional locations within their geographies. In addition, larger scale touring programs are organised throughout artistic seasons involving movements to locations outside of areas of residence to spread activity and reach new audiences nationally.

In this sense, audiences can be analysed across two distinct dimensions: by location of residence and by location of activity. In the first case, we are looking at audiences reached by organisations residing in a specific location. For example, audiences by residence in Victoria analyses all the audiences delivered by Victorian based organisations, regardless of where they are presented (and includes audiences by Victorian organisations to events delivered outside of Victoria). With location by activity, we examine audiences based on the location where the artistic events are delivered. In this case, audiences by activity in Victoria would include all audiences to events that where presented in the state of Victoria, regardless of the residence of the companies that delivered them (including Victorian audiences by non-Victorian organisations).

In Australia, the Major Performing Arts companies are based across the country, with residences in each state: New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. Major Performing Arts organisations engage heavily with their resident audiences and also deliver their programs through a wide variety of touring networks across Australia, involving regional and interstate activities. In the section below, we examine audiences of Major Performing Arts companies by their state of residence to provide with the picture of artistic delivery based on where the organisations are located[6]. As funding appropriations in Australia are driven by local state agencies offering grants to their resident arts organisations, countrywide delivery based on state of residence provides a key insight on the origin of major national artistic programs and how their development contributes to the country's artistic ecology.

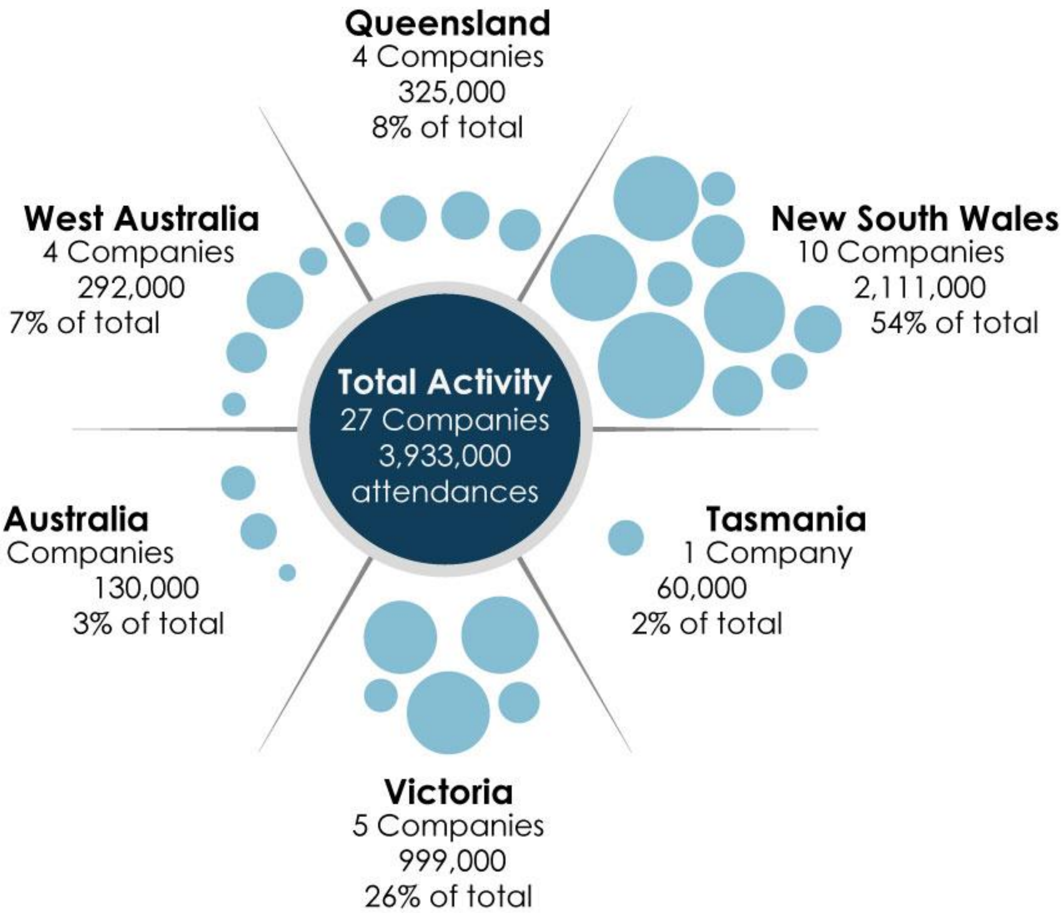
[6] Audiences by state of delivery are analysed in the touring section in later part of this paper.

Activity – by State of Residence

This section proceeds to group audiences based on the state of residence of each Major Performing Arts company. In this instance, audiences refer to national audiences attracted by companies residing within a specific state.

In the figure below, each circle represents an individual Major Performing Art, its size scaled to the total number of audiences attracted by that organisation.

2018 Activity by State of Residence



With the highest number of companies in the cohort, the ten New South Wales Major Performing Arts attracted a total of 2.1 million audiences across Australia in 2018. The figure represents more than the total audiences reached by all other states and twice as much as Victoria, the second largest state of residence (with 1.0 m national audiences in 2018). Companies residing in the remaining four states (Queensland, West Australia, South Australia and Tasmania) attracted a total of 807,000 audiences, 21% of the total cohort.

As with the artform groups, we plot each individual company result based on their state of residence on a scatter chart below, with each dot representing the total audience of one Major Performing Arts company, along with the median, minimum and maximum values for each state of residence.

From the presentation of the data, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- New South Wales and Victorian Major Performing organisations reached the vast majority of national audience in 2018. The two states include the seven companies identified in the previous section as the leading organisations within their respective artform, each one recording between 253,000 and 537,000 audiences in 2018. In comparison, the largest audiences reached by a single organisation for the other states of residence was 154,000 (Western Australian Symphony).

- The state of Victoria records the highest median national audiences in 2018 across all states (253,000), housing three organisations with leading audience reach. As a comparison, New South Wales is resident to six organisations with lower relative audience reach, resulting in a reduced median for the state (125,500).

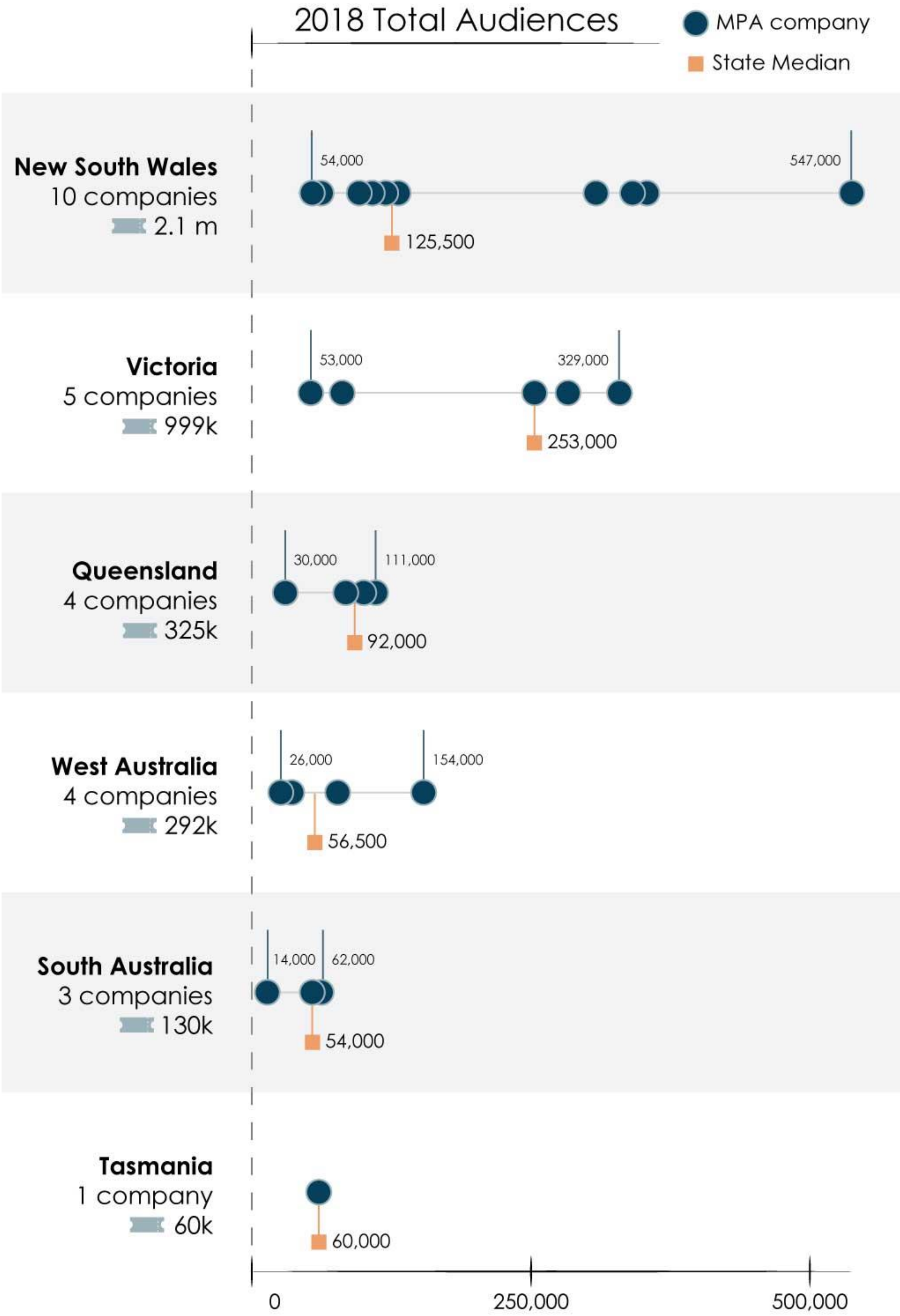
- Queensland organisations record a relatively higher median of total audiences than the other remaining states (Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania), with three out of the four Queensland companies attracting around 100,000 audiences each in 2018.

- Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania all display a comparable median range of total attendances (between 54,000 and 60,000), noting that Tasmania only houses a single MPA company.

Research Notes – States of Comparison

With a similar population for each state and the same number of resident Major Performing Arts companies and areas of practice, Queensland and Western Australia present an optimal ground for analytical comparison. A comparative case study of the artistic market within each state, both in terms of audience engagement and funding initiatives, could provide significant intuition on the drivers of audience reach to specific artistic events, particularly given the large variance of attendances within artform groups between the two states.

2018 Activity by State of Residence



Note: Each dot represents the audience results for a single MPA company, with median, minimum and maximum values displayed for each state of residence.

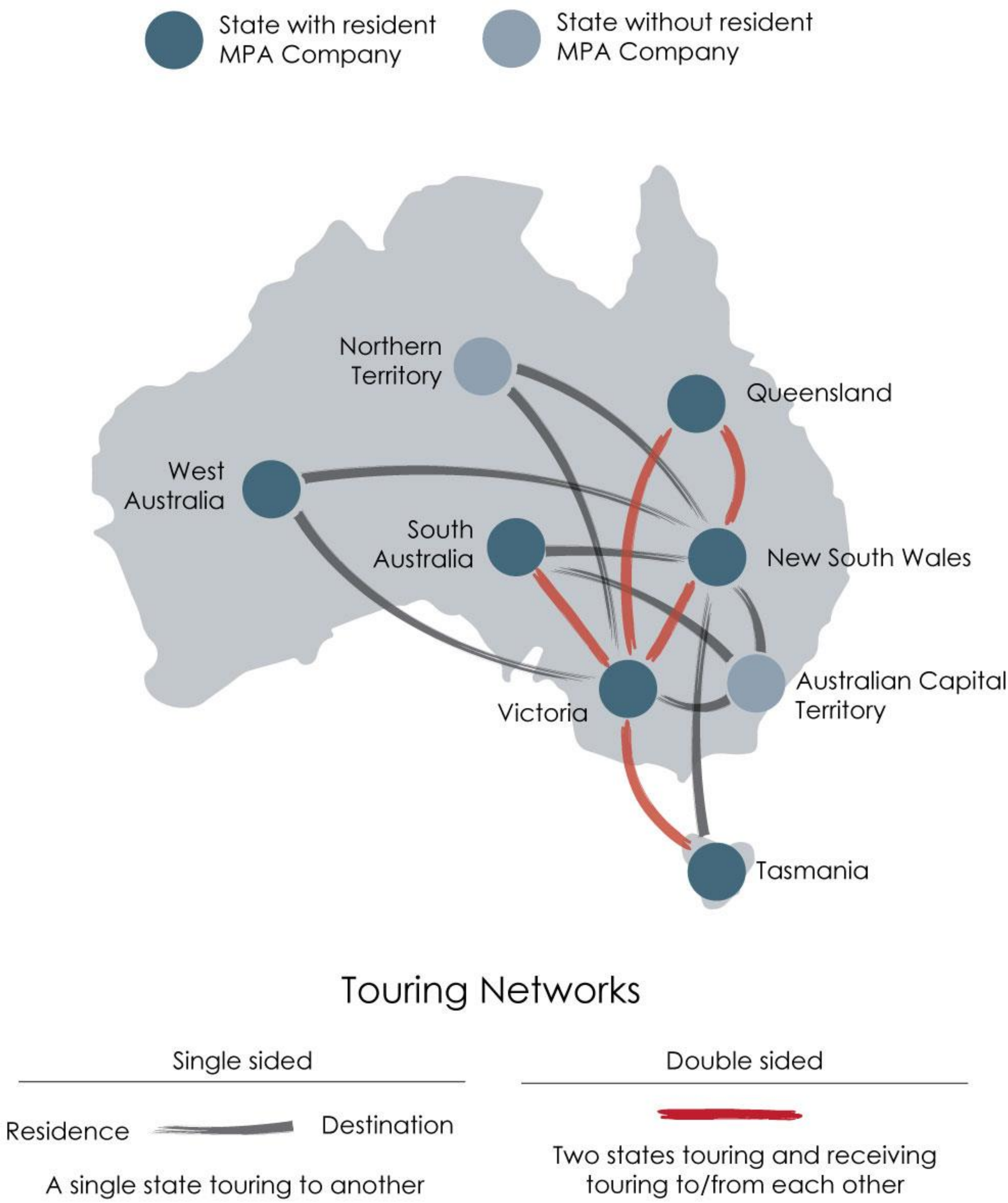
Touring

Delivering activity across a wide range of geographical locations is a central aspect of the operation of arts organisations. Touring activities expand the reach of a company's artistic delivery, broadening their market of operation while providing employment opportunities to the local workforce. The analytical study of national touring networks and their development in the arts sector provides the methods to ensure appropriate coverage is maintained across the country. A holistic picture of the national touring landscape offers arts organisations with better ways to target audiences across different geographies and expand their programs to new areas. From a public funding perspective, a strong understanding of the geographical coverage of artistic activities ensures appropriate support is provided for widespread access to artistic programs, including regional and remote areas.

The Major Performing Arts deliver activity across Australia through a complex network of touring channels connecting states across the country. This section analyses the dynamics of interstate touring between company groups and how programs are structured to cover the national landscape. Regional and international touring are individually covered in separate sections.

The 2018 national touring network of Major Performing Arts activity is presented in the diagram below, showing touring networks between states across different origins and destinations.

2018 Touring Networks



- In 2018, Major Performing Arts activity formed a total of 14 unique touring networks between Australian states. The large part of touring activity remains concentrated in the eastern part of the country, where the majority of the population resides.

- New South Wales and Victorian companies delivered activity to all other states across Australia in 2018, including the two territories without Major Performing Arts resident companies (Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory).

- Due to its remote nature, Western Australia is the only state whose resident companies did not deliver interstate touring in 2018, receiving touring from Victoria and New South Wales Major Performing Arts.

Research Notes – Seasonal Tours

The presence of interstate touring activities is variable from one year to another, with certain programs occurring at a relatively lower frequency (every 2 years for example). Because of those cyclical patterns, the 2018 results might not fully reflect all existing touring patterns across the country on a larger time frame. As a solution, a historical research of interstate activity could solve the cyclical component and provide with a normalised picture of touring patterns.

Destinations

In order to get more details as to the exact nature of interstate touring, we expand geographical reach by breaking down each network of delivery into the state of origin and individual destinations. The results are presented in the figure below.

From this distribution of touring audiences, the following can be noted:

- In 2018, interstate touring activity from Major Performing Arts companies was distributed along 19 networks of delivery that attracted a total of 742,000 audiences across the country.

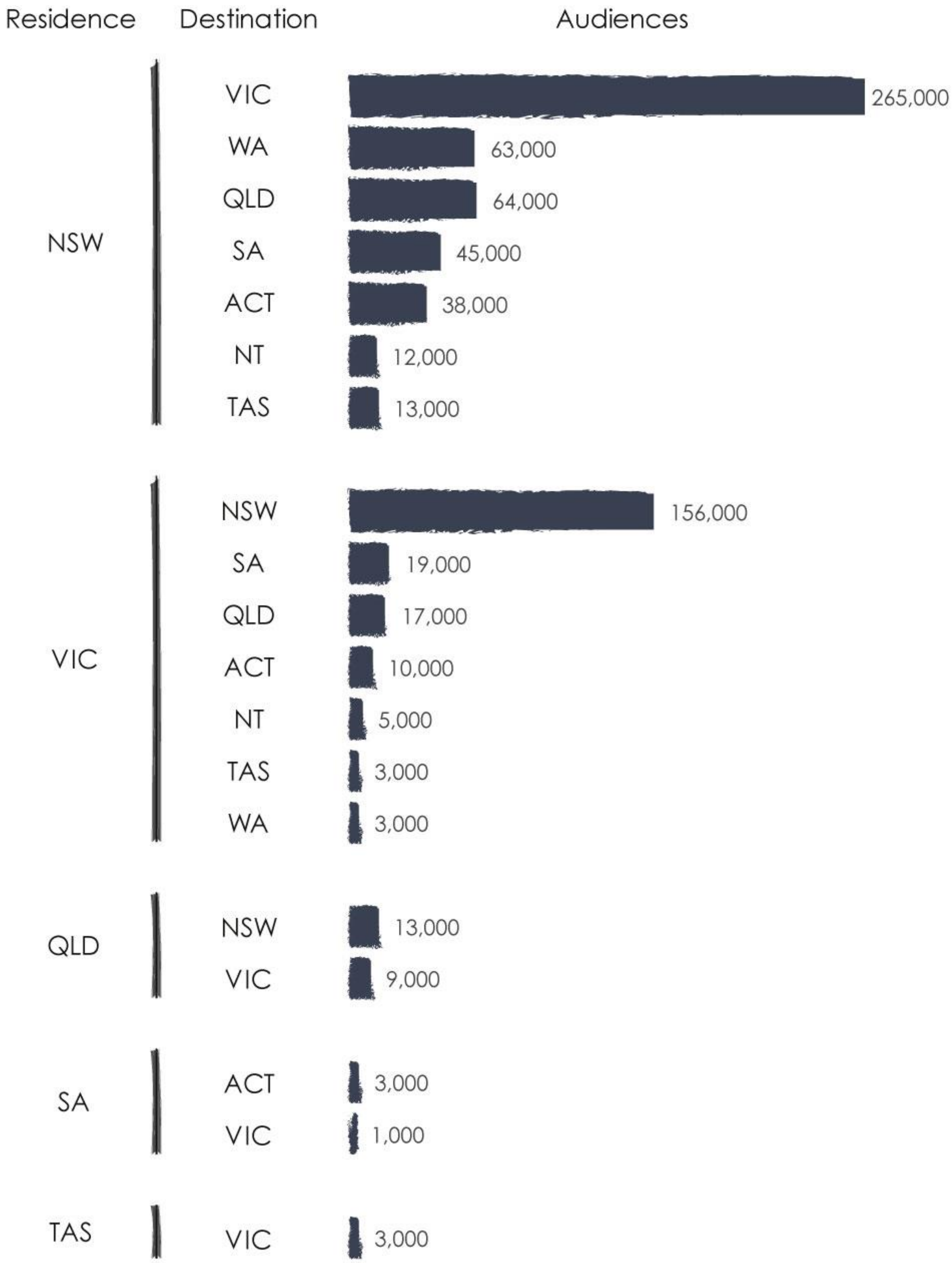
- The majority of interstate touring originates from companies residing in New South Wales and Victoria, with touring networks from these two states accounting for 96% of all interstate delivery in Australia. New South Wales and Victorian companies deliver activity to all other states across Australia, but to a lower degree than the activity that they engage between each other: in 2018, New South Wales arts organisations delivered 53% of their interstate activity to Victorian audiences (47% to all other states) and Victorian companies delivered 73% of their interstate activity to New South Wales audiences (27% to other states).

- Outside of New South Wales and Victoria, the state which receives the highest levels of interstate touring is Queensland, with 81,000 audiences reached from the interstate touring activities of its resident Major Performing Arts. Queensland is also the third largest state that delivers touring outside its residence with 22,000 audiences reached in 2018 from activities in New South Wales and Victoria.

- Western Australia, South Australia and the Capital Territory receive between 51,000 and 66,000 audiences from interstate touring activities, primarily from New South Wales and Victorian Major Performing Arts. We note that West Australian companies did not deliver interstate activity in 2018, with no other state receiving artic activities from West Australian Major Performing Arts.

- The Northern Territory and Tasmania received the lowest absolute amount of external touring activity in 2018 (17,000 audiences, respectively 16,000). These results are intrinsically dependant on the lower population of these states, an aspect which we proceed to examine in further detail in the section below.

2018 Interstate Touring Destinations



Interstate Touring Activity – by State of Delivery

In this section, we proceed to analyse interstate touring distributed by state of activity. In this sense, we are focusing on the state where the events are delivered. The chart below presents audiences within a certain state that attended either resident activities (that were delivered by the companies residing within the state) or touring activities (delivered by companies residing outside the state).

Interstate Touring and Resident Audiences – by State of Delivery

- In 2018, all Australian states received some level of touring from Major Performing Arts companies, representing 20% of their total audience in median across the group. This value excludes the Capital and Northern territories who are not resident to Major Performing Arts companies and therefore only record interstate touring audiences.

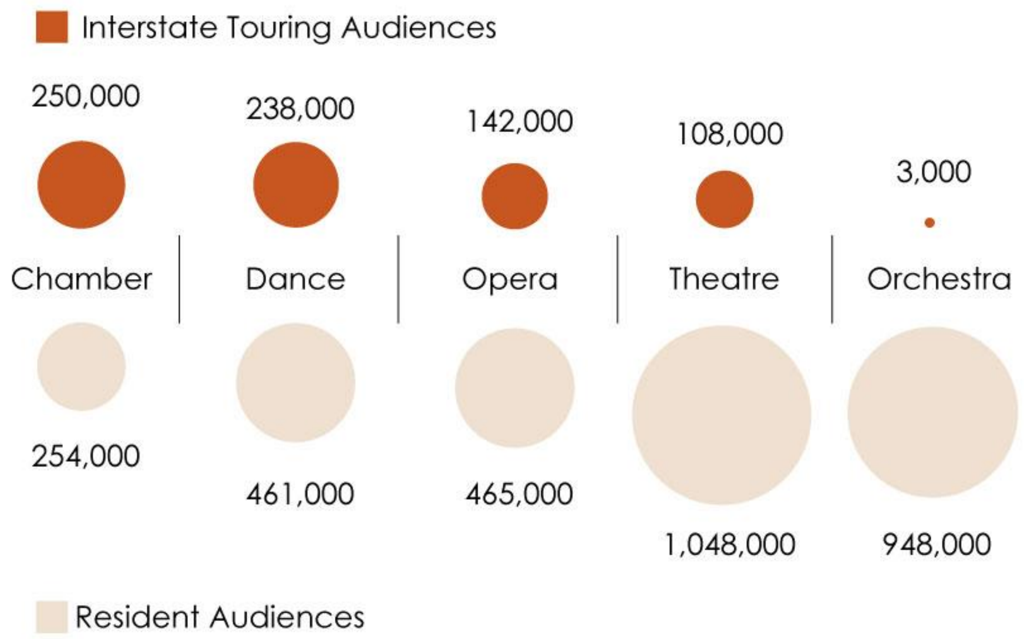
- Interstate touring is particularly significant for South Australia, where 34% of the total audiences attended activity from touring Major Performing Arts. The value is 26% for Victoria, the second highest state dependant on touring. Queensland, Tasmania and West Australia recorded similar proportion of audiences to events organised by external companies, representing around 20% of their total audiences to Major Performing Arts activity in 2018.

- New South Wales is the state with the least dependence on interstate touring, with only 9% of audiences attending activities from touring Major Performing Arts in 2018. The relatively lower value indicates a self-contained market of activity, which can be attributed to the larger diversity of companies and areas of practice residing within the state.

Interstate Touring Activity – by Artform

We proceed to expand our presentation of touring by specifying the nature of interstate activity relative to artistic practice. As above, we separate the audiences of Major Performing Arts companies in two categories: resident audiences (events presented inside a company's state of residence) and interstate audiences (events presented in other states).

Interstate Touring and Resident Audiences – by Artform



- In absolute terms, the Chamber and Dance artforms provide the highest interstate touring attendances (250,000, respectively 238,000), noting that Chamber Music sector is the only artform that also provide more activity outside than within its own state of residence, a strong indication of the importance of touring for this particular area of practice.
- Levels of interstate touring are relatively smaller for Opera and Theatre (142,000 respectively 108,000), noting that proportionally, Opera delivers a higher amount of interstate audience (23% of its total attendance against 9% for Theatre).
- Interstate touring activity is less significant for Orchestra, a result that can be put in the context of resident Orchestra companies existing for each state, reducing their necessity of touring across the country.

To provide a holistic view of touring within artforms, we separate areas of practice into individual companies and analyse the percentage composition for each organisation between resident and touring attendances, presented in the figure below.

- Overall, half of all Major Performing Arts companies engaged in some form of interstate touring activity in 2018. Chamber, Dance and Theatre exhibit consistent and significant interstate touring audiences across their companies (with a majority of companies in each artform engaging in interstate touring programs).

- Interstate touring is particularly significant for Chamber music organisations, with all companies presenting a large proportion of their audiences from locations outside of their resident states (between 24% and 55% of total audiences for each Chamber Music company).

- Interstate touring for Dance and Theatre exhibit a common structure with two companies in each artform displaying high rates of interstate audiences (between 35% and 58%) and other companies within these areas of practice recording relatively lower levels.

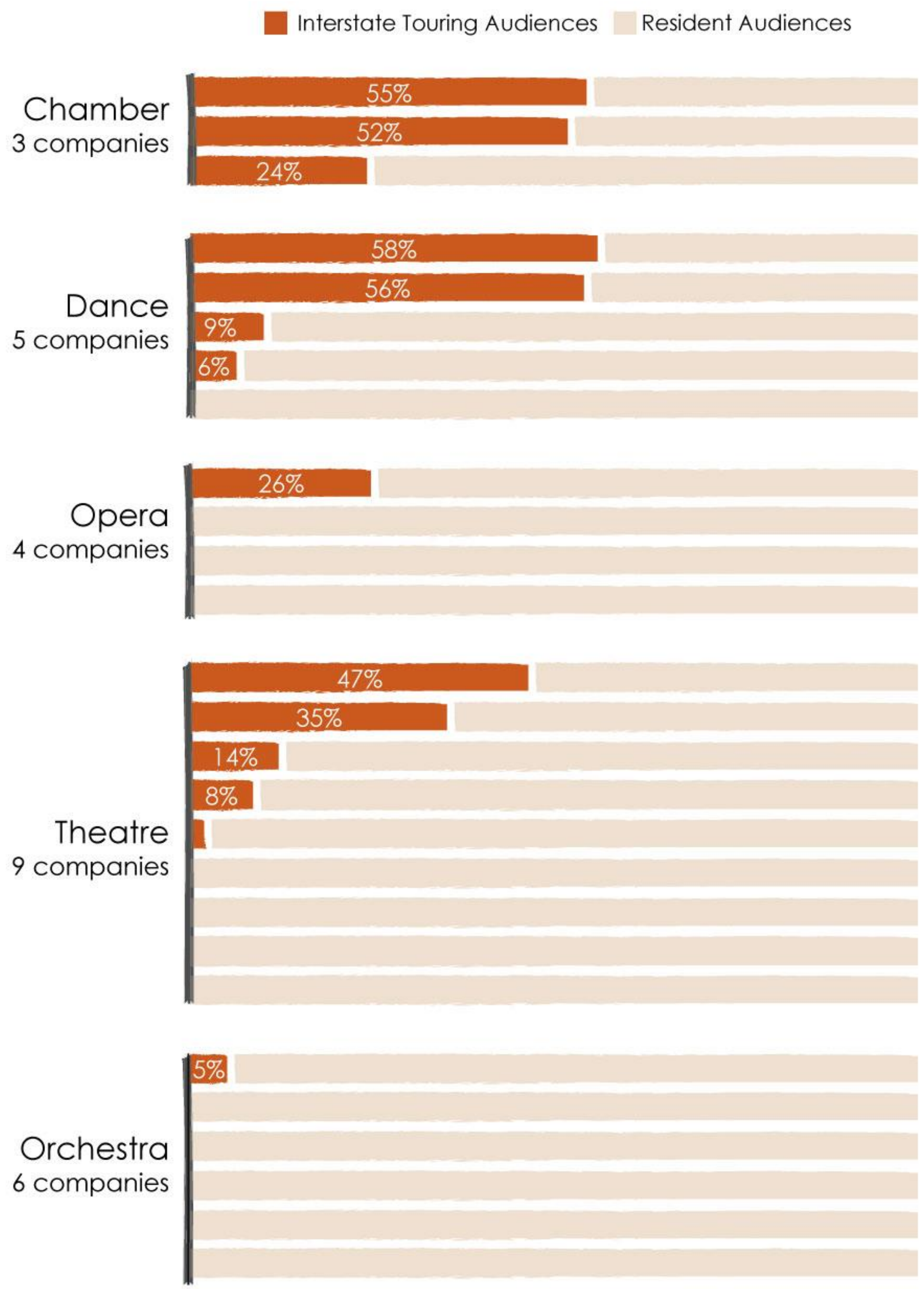
- Orchestra and Opera companies are primarily concentrated in resident activity with limited interstate touring for those two artforms. We note that Opera Australia is the only Opera company that recorded interstate audiences in 2018, representing a high proportion (26%) of its total audience.

Research Notes – The Cost of Touring

While offering the potential of expanding into new markets, touring activity generally involves significant costs, which are directly dependant on the nature of the events that are being toured. Companies with large stage installations must consider the transport of equipment, props and costumes as well as technical crews. A more precise evaluation of these cost factors across a wider range of companies could identify economic efficiencies for different areas of practice and help in expanding touring opportunities.

As an added difficulty, being residents in one of the largest countries in the world, Australian arts companies face the singular challenge of large distances between touring locations. A potential for comparative research could be the analysis of national touring across countries of comparable size (Canada, United States, Russia) and how government structures inside those countries approach the subsidisation of touring initiatives for a wider reach of the population.

Interstate Touring Ratios by Artform (% Total Audience)



Regional Touring

Outside of interstate touring networks, the Major Performing Arts engage in significant touring activity to regional locations within their state. The engagement of regional population is a significant aspect of community development and access to creative practices in remote locations, representing a key delivery in the nationwide distribution of artistic events.

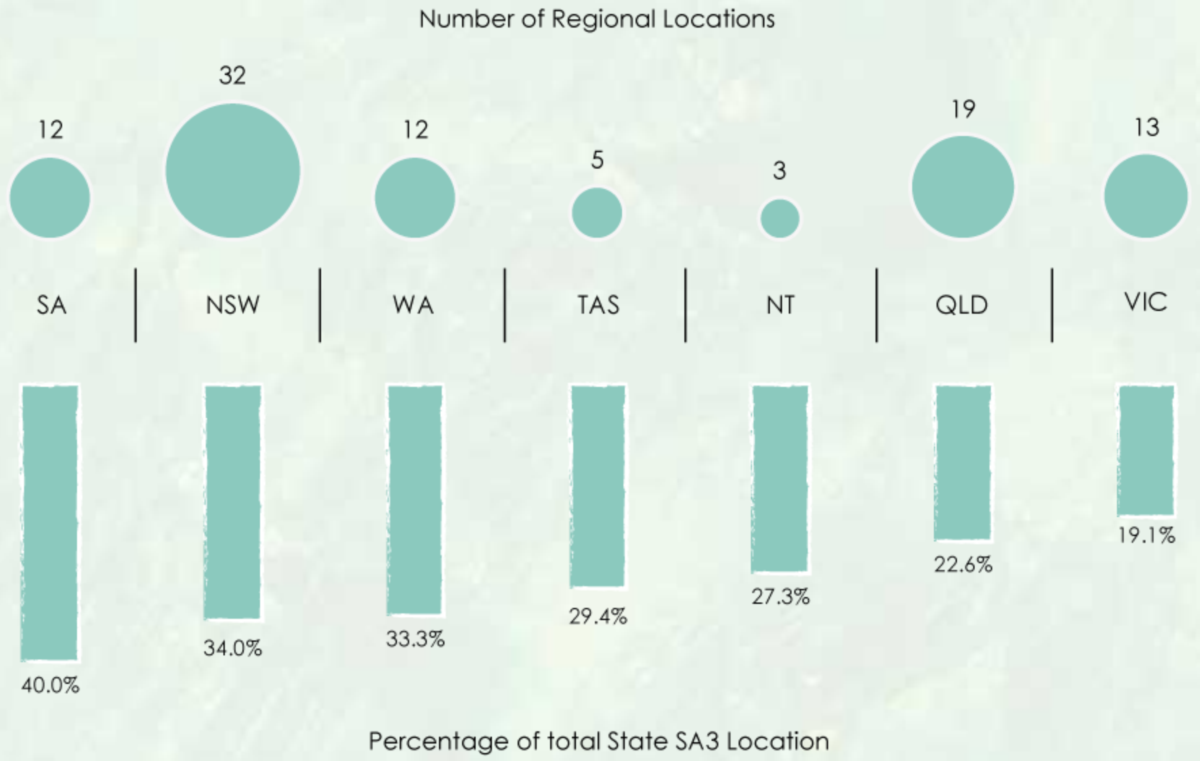
In 2018, the Australian Major Performing Arts toured their performance activities across more than 170 programs involving 100 unique regional locations across the country.

2018 Regional Touring Locations

Note: Each dot in the map above represents a regional touring destination by a Major Performing Art company in 2018. Only Performance events are included.

In order to provide analytical intuition on the geographic spread of regional Major Performing Arts touring, we relate distinct touring destinations to the total number of geographic areas in each state. In order to do so, we use the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Level 3, designed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the output of regional data[7].

2018 Regional Performances Touring Locations



- In absolute terms, New South Wales recorded the highest number of regional destinations with 32 unique locations reached by the Major Performing Arts in 2018. Relative to the total number of locations in each state, South Australia recorded the highest coverage, with toured regional destinations accounting for 40% of all SA3 locations in the state.

- While recording the second highest absolute number of regional locations toured, the state of Queensland received a relatively lower level of coverage, with touring destinations accounting only for 22.6% of total SA3 locations. The state of Victoria recorded the lowest regional coverage of the group, with 13 regional locations toured in 2018, accounting for 19% of all SA3 locations.

[7] For more information of SA3, please refer to the Appendix B

International Touring

The International presence of artistic activity is a significant component of delivery for major arts organisations. Touring programs to other countries allow the showcase of the national artistic portfolio and provide opportunities to engage with unique artistic perspective from cultures around the world.

2018 International Touring

EUROPE

Belgium
France
Denmark
Spain

Germany
Luxembourg
Austria
United Kingdom

Poland
Serbia
Slovenia

AMERICAS

Chile
Colombia

ASIA

Japan
New Zealand

China
Hong Kong
India

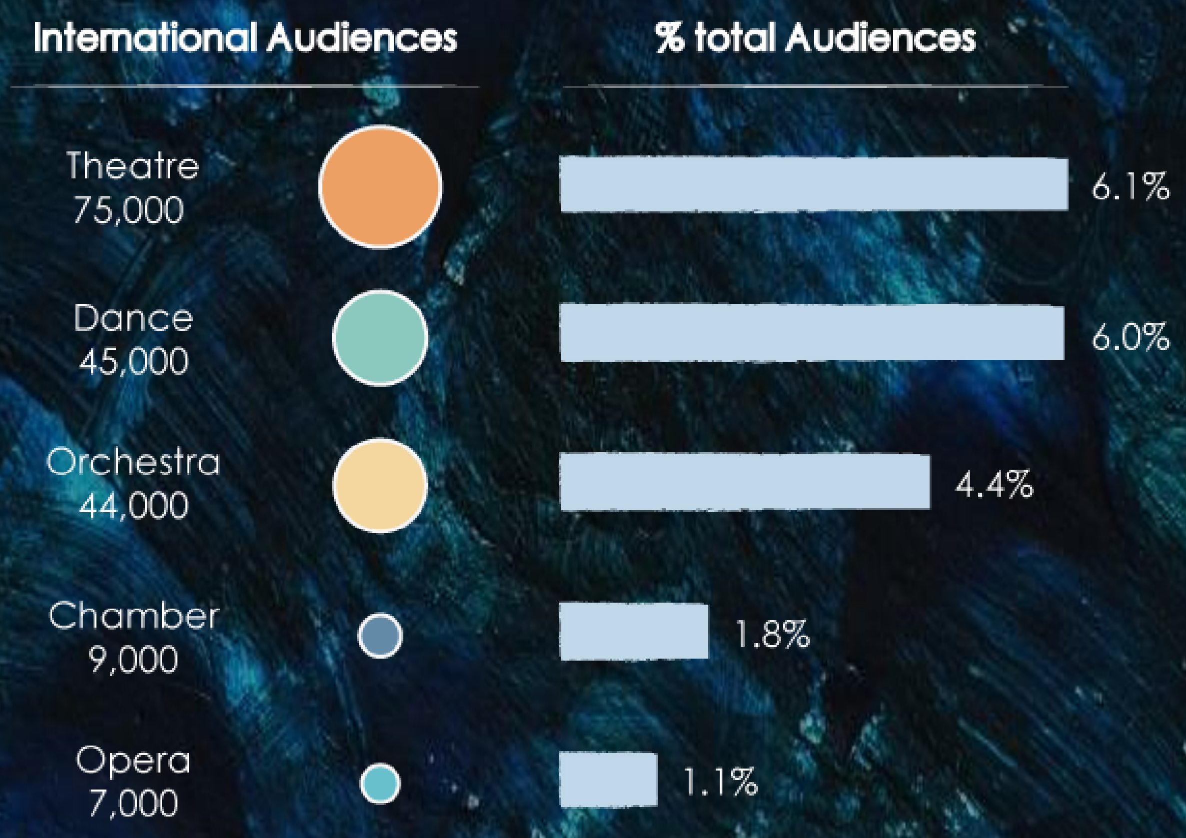
Indonesia
Singapore
Taiwan

In 2018, the Major Performing Arts companies toured their activities to 21 countries across the world, attracting a total of 180,000 international audiences to their performances and education programs in opera, ballet, symphonic and chamber music, contemporary dance and theatre.

International audiences were particularly significant for the practices of Dance, Theatre and Orchestra, each one reaching between 44.000 and 56,000 attendances (representing between 4% to 6% of their total audiences).

Compared to other artforms, Chamber music and Opera Major Performing Arts recorded a relatively lower reach of international audiences (9,000 and 7,000) and at a lower proportion relative to their total audiences (less than 2%).

2018 International Audiences – by Artform



Research Notes – International Comparisons

The international comparison of audience reach from major arts companies represents a cornerstone in the study of global artistic engagement. Being able to determine the structures and drivers behind the delivery of international work provides with strong comparative ground in assessing the impact of a country's presence in the international scene. Particularly given the high costs generally involved with organising international tours, the evaluation of the funding structures that support the delivery of international work can provide strong foundations on the development of public policy surrounding the promotion of a country's cultural landscape.

As a starting point, a generalised analysis could involve countries with similar funding frameworks to determine how resident arts organisations develop their international programs and the general appetite from public administrations to showcase national artistic work. From the companies' perspective, a global network of touring schedules and programs could also inform on where opportunities exist for the presentation and development of their work, expanding their market of activity and allowing artists to engage with new communities.

Engagement

Artistic work is fundamental to a nation's identity and drives the understanding of its history, social composition and cultural values. Ensuring the appropriate opportunities for different segments of the population to engage with artistic work becomes vital in the development of creative networks within and between national communities.

The notion of artistic engagement encompasses a broad range of fundamental aspects related to the scope of artistic activities. In a general sense, engagement is understood as the range of audiences reached by an artistic organisation and the extent to which its activities expand into different segments of the population. In Australia, the specific situation of the Major Performing Arts as government funded organisations gives a particular importance to this dimension. The companies have the vocation to deliver artistic activity across the whole population, engaging audiences from all groups, backgrounds and locations.

The difficulty with measuring artistic engagement comes from its inherent nature of being conceived based on the specific vision of an artistic company. For example, a resident theatre possessing its own venue might consider its engagement as the way it manages to attract younger demographics to its performances, or in how it draws audiences who are accustomed to a traditional repertoire in attending contemporary works. In contrast, for a company involved in significant touring activities, engagement can be perceived as the ways in which new geographical markets are reached and the appeal of their work to a wide range of communities.

Quite often, developing artistic engagement comes at significant financial costs, with for example the presentation of an experimental artwork that has less appeal to wider audiences yielding lower box office returns than one from a more traditional repertoire. Similarly, presenting performances in remote and less established venues can bring more difficulties in attracting audiences than presenting in more central locations. To face these financial costs, artistic companies generally organise their programs and business structures to allow commercially focused presentations to carry the costs of events geared towards expanding their engagement.

Finally, artistic engagement is rarely conceived as a static notion. Attracting different demographics is often measured relative to what a specific company achieved in previous years or in comparison with other companies that share similar visions to their work. In this sense, engagement cannot be solely equated with the absolute number of audiences a certain company attracts. Reflecting on broader ways in which engagement can be measured becomes a key aspect of arts audience analysis in helping companies and funding bodies to ensure a sustained development of the national artistic space.

In this section, we propose a generalised approach to introduce the engagement of Australia's Major Performing Arts by relating their total audiences to the population of each state where activity was presented[8]. While we recognise the limitations of such approach in representing the complex nature of engagement, we specify further directions of research in the sections below.

[8] Population data obtained from the Australian National Bureau of Statistics

Research Notes – Measuring Engagement

A potential avenue in the construction of a standardised methodology in the measure of artistic engagement could involve the design of an indexed metric that would encompass different axioms of engagement. These could include the ratio of traditional repertoire to original compositions, the extent of geographical areas covered (in km) and the socio-economic diversity of audiences (measured for example by average income per neighbourhood where activity is presented). By pooling data for a large enough group of artistic companies, this approach could self-assign organisations based on how they rate across the different indices, and provide with a holistic picture of engagement in a specific sector.

In the chart below, we present total population for each Australian state along with resident Major Performing Arts audiences reached in 2018. In addition, we display for each state the geographical coverage rate of the sector, which we define as the equivalent proportion of audiences to the total resident population, allowing a state by state comparison of the magnitude of Major Performing Arts activities relative to the size of their resident market.

From the results presented in the figure below, the following can be noted:

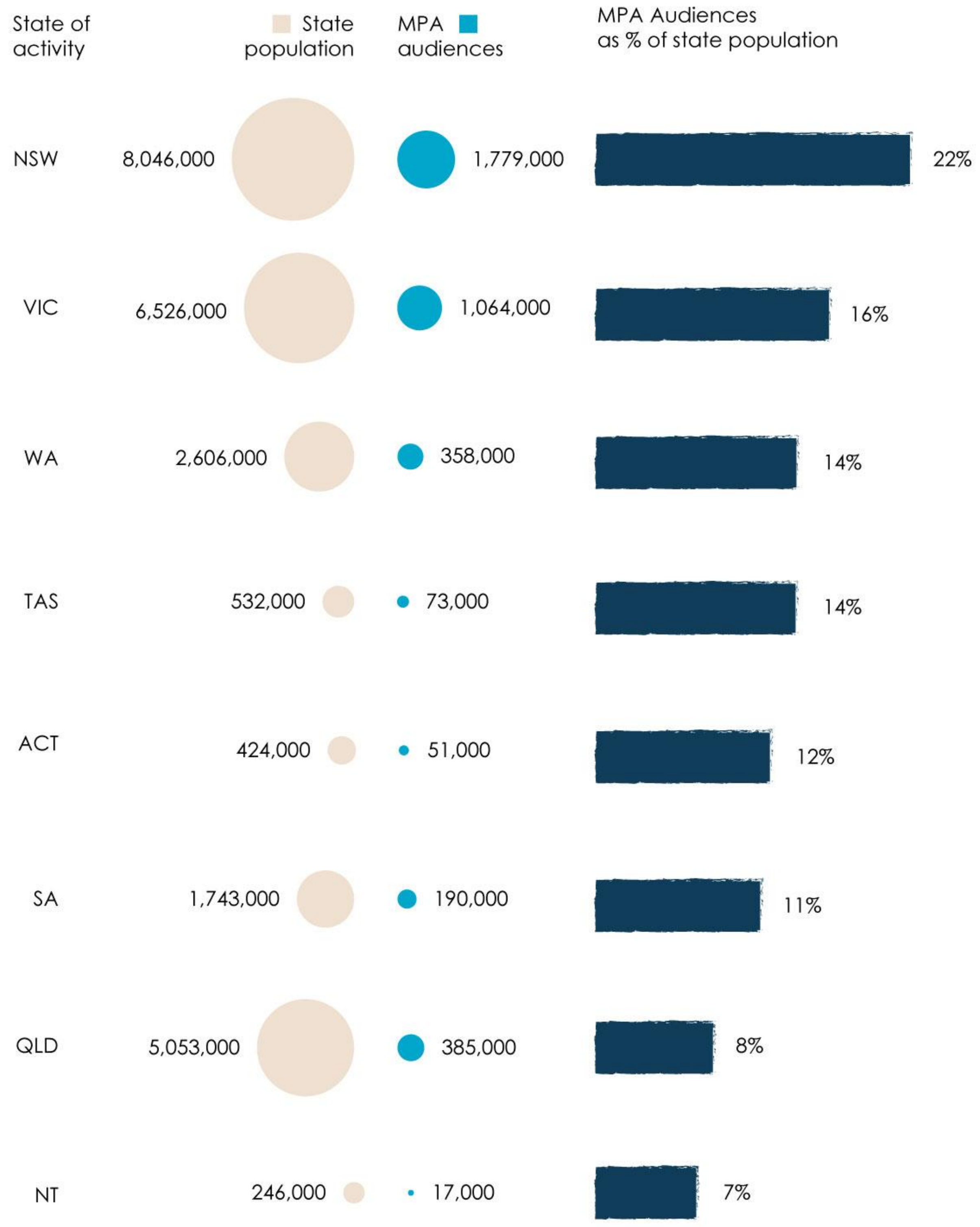
- Major Performing Arts audience represents an equivalent of 13% of total resident population on median across all states, with a relatively homogeneous distribution for the states of Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania, Capital Territory and South Australia (where Major Performing Arts audiences represented between 11% and 16% of total population in these states).

- The coverage rate is significantly higher for New South Wales (22%) which is resident to the largest group of organisations. At the other end of the spectrum, Queensland and the Northern Territory record relatively lower rates (8% and 7%), an indication of lower resident engagement to Major Performing Arts activity for these states. This result is particularly noteworthy for the state of Queensland, the third largest populated state in Australia and resident to three Major Performing Arts companies. On the other hand, the Northern Territory is not resident to any Major Performing Arts company and records the lowest resident population, whose engagement is entirely reliant on interstate touring programs from other states.

Research Notes – Where the Market Lies

The large deviations from median coverage rates observed for the states of New South Wales, Queensland and Northern Territory invite further enquiry as to the structural determinants behind the results. While an examination of these factors are outside the scope of this paper, further research should be targeted at uncovering the ability of artistic companies to target and develop their activities in order to appeal to resident audiences, in conjunction with the propensity to invest in artistic activity from both government and private sector sources in a specific state. A comparative study of audience and financial results, combining for example the amount of funding received for each audience member reached, could also provide an intuitive opening to the discussion of national activity coverage and the determinants behind variations in artistic activity engagement across different geographical areas.

Audiences by State of Delivery (% total state population)



Note: Coverage rates are defined as Major Performing Arts audiences within a certain state equivalent to that state's total population

Given the distribution of Major Performing Arts companies across Australia, the coverage results presented above are inherently driven by the number of organisations resident in each state. In order to overcome this difficulty, we propose to examine the population coverage relative to the number of companies in residence for each state.

To achieve this, we restrict activity to resident audiences, and relate it to total state population for each individual company which, in essence, examines what equivalent proportion of its total resident population each Major Performing Arts company attracts.

From the presentation of the results, the following can be noted:

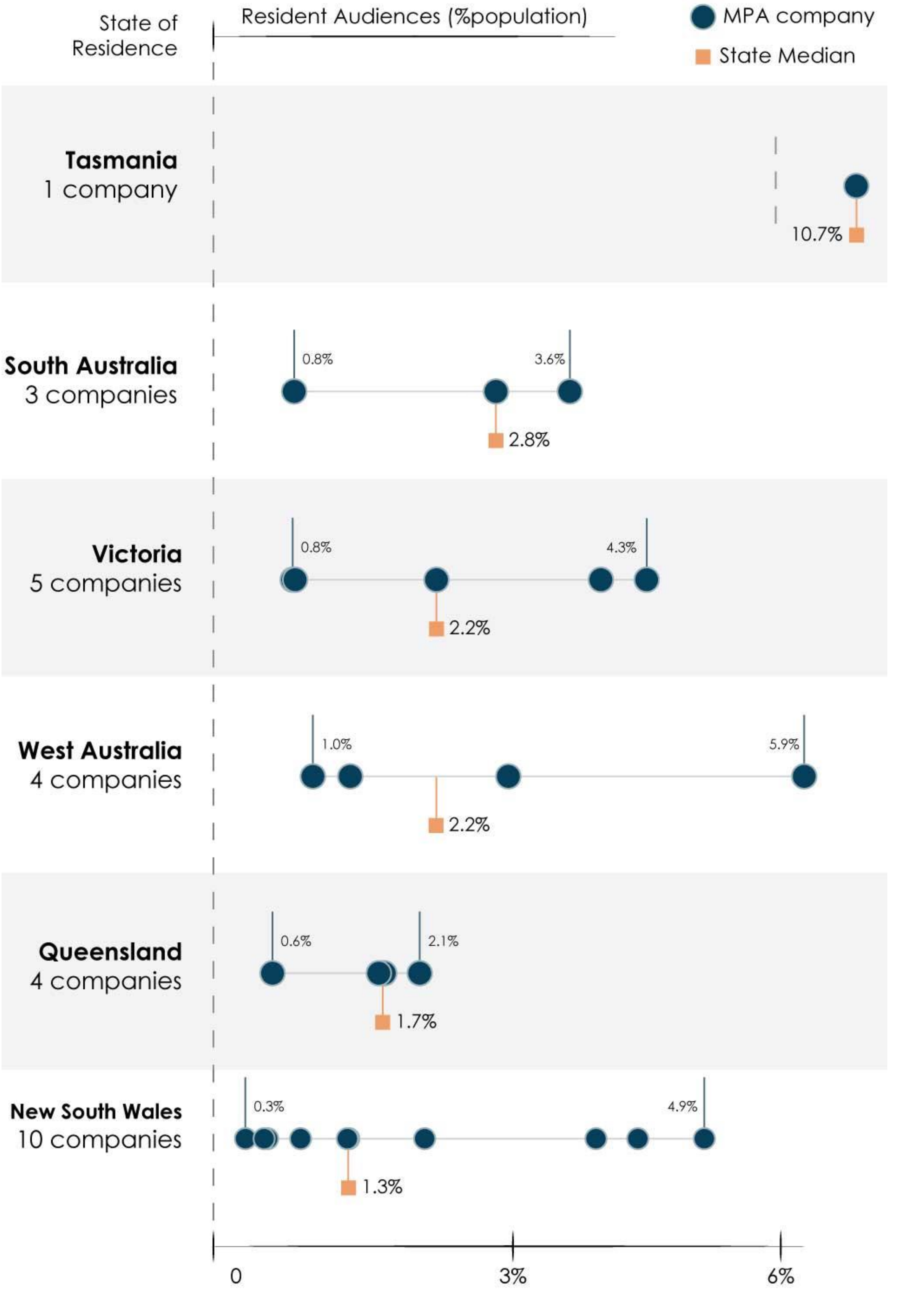
- Overall, presenting individual company audiences relative to their resident population displays relatively lower levels of dispersion than with our other methodologies, with a 1.5% spread between the lowest and highest median state results (excluding Tasmania). This results points towards a relatively homogeneous desire of the Australian population to engage in the artistic activity delivered by their resident Major Performing Arts organisation, regardless of the state in which they reside.

- Although Tasmania houses only one company, the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra attracts an equivalent of 10.7% of the total population of the state. This result is the highest of any individual company across the cohort and a strong indication of the engagement of the Tasmania population with the activity of their resident Major Performing Arts company.

- Results are comparably distributed across South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia with companies in these states attracting on median around 2% of their population. We note that excluding Tasmania, Western Australia houses the Major Performing Arts organisation with the largest resident audiences relative to total state population (5.9%).

- Although it attracts the majority of audiences across the country, the state of New South Wales records the lowest median of the group, with each company attracting (on median) around 1.3% of the state's population. This result indicates higher levels of competition in attracting audiences, given the large presence of creative industries within the state.

Resident Audiences by State of Delivery (% state population)



Note: Each dot represents resident audience as an equivalent of total state population for a single company, with median, minimum and maximum values displayed for each state of residence.

Research Notes – Broader Markets

Each Major Performing Art company attracts and equivalent of 2% of its local state population on median across the whole sector. While numerous organisations engage with their resident audience at higher rates (up to 11% for Tasmania and 6% for Western Australia), there remains a strong potential for performing arts companies to expand into unexplored segments. A thorough evaluation of market segmentation by practice could offer key perspectives in understanding different artistic preferences across the country and bring potential for future development.

To uncover growing markets, a historical analysis of audience activity within each state would provide perspectives on where audiences have grown the most relative to their local markets, indicating an increasing appetite for artistic delivery within those locations. Activity could extend to audiences across other creative industries outside the Major Performing Arts cohort, which would provide a better understanding of where target markets lie for specific areas of practice and where there exist opportunities to expand the distribution of artistic delivery.

Education

In parallel to their box office activities, performing arts companies engage in a wide range of education events that provide significant contributions to the development of creative practices across the country.

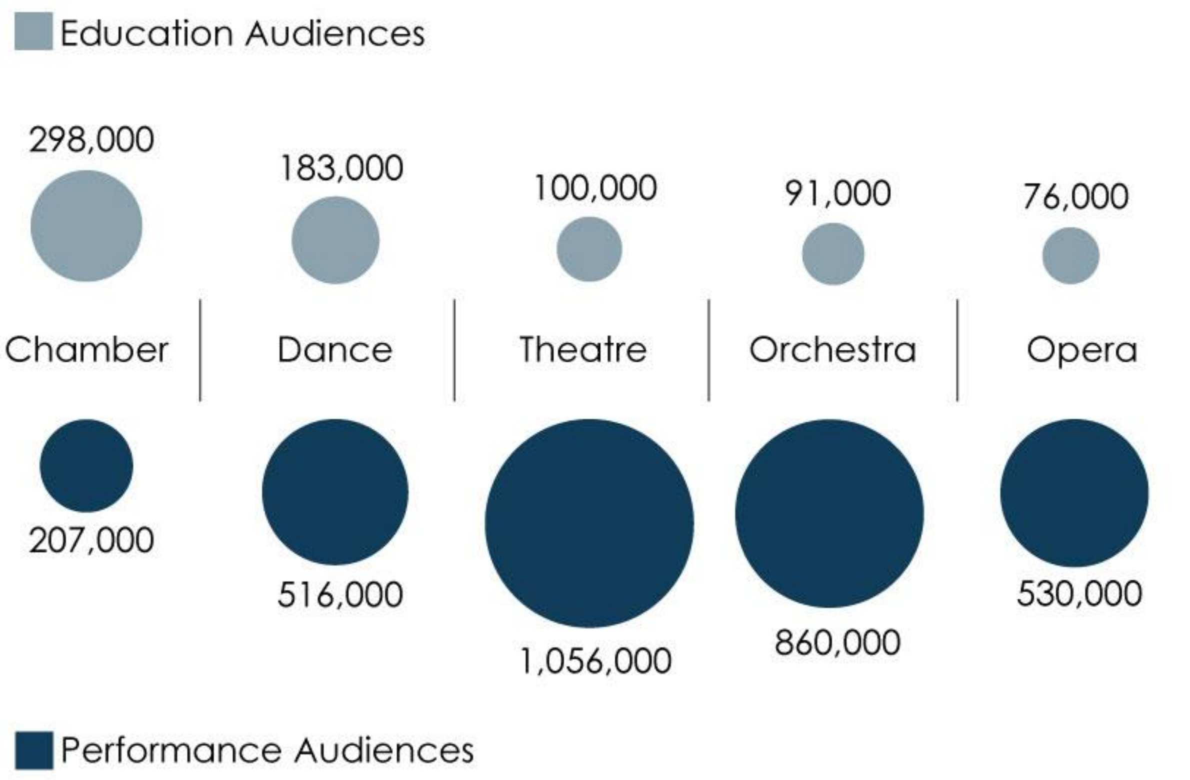
Education programs consist of live performances presented at school, offering children opportunities to experience and engage with artistic presentations from an early age as well as supporting the professional development of school teachers. Events also include professional classes and workshops in public learning environments, reaching communities to engage with the arts, share their experience and impart creative knowledge. For more establishes artists, professional development opportunities are also offered, including specialised training, mentoring and leadership initiatives connecting aspiring artists with their audiences and leading industry professionals.

For the purpose of our analysis, we aggregated audiences to performances and education events, as both are considered an integral part of the activity delivered by performing arts. In the section, we explore audience results for education events only to form more detailed insights on their reach.

In 2018, Major Performing Arts reached 748,000 audiences to their education events, representing close to 20% of their total national activity. Most of the companies presented some form of educational programs, reaching audiences across the country and across different areas of practice.

In the figure below, we present total 2018 Major Performing Arts audiences by Artform, separating activity by education and performance presentations.

Education and Performance Audiences – by Artform



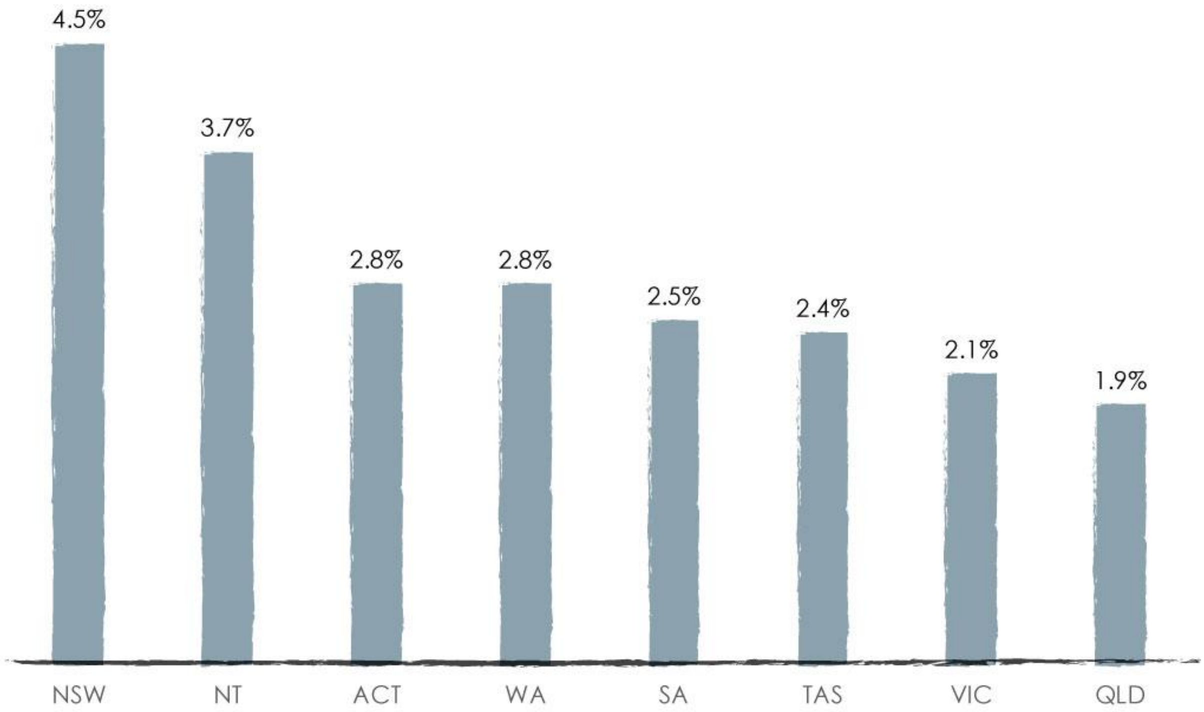
- Chamber Music concentrates the majority of education reach across the group, with 298,000 attendances recorded to Chamber music learning programs in 2018. This result is primarily driven by Musica Viva, one of Australia's leading professional arts organisation, which accounted for close to 40% of all education reach across the Major Performing Arts group. The company's primary focus on education also drives an important result for the artform, where close to 60% of all audience is from education events.

- Following Music, the share of education audiences is the largest for Dance, where 26% of total audience was reached through learning programs in 2018. The lowest relative reach in education was for the Theatre sector, where Performances represent the large majority of all activity and education only accounts for 9% of total audiences.

As we raised when analysing total activity, the geographical distribution of education events forms a significant aspect in understanding how learning programs are distributed across the country.

In the chart below, we present education audiences by state of delivery, relative to the state's total population, to form an understanding of the national distribution of learning programs.

Education Audiences (% state population)



- As was the case with total activity, New South Wales concentrates the majority of education audiences, representing an equivalent of 4.5% of the state's population in 2018. The share is also relatively higher for the Northern Territory (3.7% of the population) which paired with the lower result for this state's total activity, indicates a higher engagement in learning programs as opposed to performance events in the Northern Territory.

- For other states, the reach of education programs is relatively evenly distributed, representing between 1.9% and 2.8% of each state's respective population. We note that Queensland is one of the states representing the lower reach, as was the case with total activity, a further indication of lower relative engagement of Queensland audiences with Major Performing Arts activity. In addition, we note the state of Victoria has a relatively lower reach (2.1% of total population), even though it is the second largest state by population in the country.

Conclusions

This paper has served as a narrative analytical presentation of the 2018 audience results of the Major Performing Arts, Australia's largest group of government funded performing arts organisations. Our analysis has explored the distributions of audiences based on different areas of practice, geographical locations and touring networks, presenting performing arts activity through an analytical lens in order to uncover audience clusters, geographical structures and cross-sectional trends. In doing so, we hope to have provided an intuitive presentation on the use of standard art sector metrics, their composition and the methodologies behind performing arts analysis.

The evaluation of audience activity is the first step in the larger scope of assessing performing arts companies and uncovering the role of their contribution to the national landscape. This paper has raised various potential paths of research in attendance reach, including inquiries into artistic programming, box office risk, market structures and methodologies to measure engagement. The scope for additional research in the arts provides a promising perspective on analytical enquires for artistic companies to sustain their development and reach broader audiences. In addition, arts analysis research offers policy makers the analytical tools and sectoral context to facilitate a better understanding of the impact of government funding to the art sector and the public as a whole.

Our next prospective direction of research is the analysis of the financial elements within the sector and providing a holistic view of how activity is funded and developed. In particular for arts companies, whose business structures can be compared to the non for profit sector, the evaluation of funding sources becomes a critical aspect of analysis in understanding how businesses are formed and how their development is maintained. This aspect is particularly significant for the Australian arts sector, given the unique situation of government funding through the Major Performing Arts Framework and other multi-year funding arrangements. In this sense, the examination of government funding and its relation to other sources of income becomes a major aspect of enquiry in the development of policy frameworks aimed at an optimised distribution of public funding. In parallel, the analysis of financial structures and the different costs involved across artistic practices offers significant context in the operational aspects of individual companies, exploring the dynamics behind the creation of artistic work, program development and geographical reach. Finally, the combined examination of both financial aspects and audience engagement through the development of robust analytical methodologies presents a fundamental objective for arts sector analysis in developing standardised metrics geared towards sector-wide and international comparisons.

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Appendix A – Data

The audience data in this paper was collected from individual Major Performing Art company annual reports of activities.

Population data and Geographical SA3 locations are sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), available at https://www.abs.gov.au.

The full list of companies is presented below, grouped by area of practice (as defined by the Major Performing Arts Networks) and state of residence.

Artform	Residence	Organisation
Chamber	New South Wales	Australian Brandenburg Australian Chamber Orchestra Musica Viva
Dance	New South Wales	Bangarra Sydney Dance
	Queensland	Queensland Ballet
	Victoria	The Australian Ballet
	Western Australia	West Australian Ballet
Opera	New South Wales	Opera Australia
	Queensland	Opera Queensland
	South Australia	State Opera of South Australia
	Western Australia	West Australian Opera
Orchestra	New South Wales	Sydney Symphony
	Queensland	Queensland Symphony
	South Australia	Adelaide Symphony
	Tasmania	Tasmanian Symphony
	Victoria	Melbourne Symphony
	Western Australia	West Australian Symphony
Theatre	New South Wales	Bell Shakespeare Belvoir Sydney Theatre
	Queensland	Queensland Theatre
	South Australia	State Theatre South Australia
	Victoria	Circus Oz Malthouse Melbourne Theatre
	Western Australia	Black Swan

Appendix B – Definitions

Major Performing Art (MPA)
Australian Performing arts organisation funded under the Major Performing Arts framework, which dictates public funding allocation from Commonwealth and federal sources.

Audience
Audiences in this paper refer to physical attendances recorded to the presentation of performance or education events, as defined below. This includes paid tickets (single and subscriptions), complementary tickets as well as unpaid attendances to public events.

Audiences do not include the sales of media (Audio, Video and physical publications) or engagement with digital forms of delivery (event streaming or digital resources).

Performance events
Performance events are defined by the presentation of an artistic work. These include:

- Self-Presented events: organised and staged by a single company which undertakes all box office risk.
- Contract Fees events: organised by a party external to the presenting company who undertakes all box office risk.
- Co-Production events: where artistic input involving the creation of the work presented comes from multiple companies who share the associated box office risk. In this case audiences are counted separately for each company involved in the presentation of the work.

Education Events
Events whose primary purpose is on learning and developing artistic and creative skill. These include school performances, professional and casual classes, workshops and public facing community events.

State of Residence
The state where a company is official registered in to operate its business.

State of Activity
The state where artistic activity is presented in, regardless of the original residence of the organisation presenting it.

About the Authors

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About Novalis

Novalis is an independent centre of research specialised in performing arts trends and policies. Novalis Research helps artistic companies, policymakers, advocates, and the public in understanding the composition of the arts sector, its place in the modern economy and the scopes for its development.

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