

President's Report 2025–2026

Theatre New Zealand Inc.

This has been an important and formative year for Theatre New Zealand, with considerable progress made in strengthening our national programme, developing international connections and continuing to explore how we can better serve community theatre throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

TheatreFest 2025 was again at the heart of our year, with just under 60 participating teams from around the country. For the first time, we brought our national ShowCase and Awards evening to Hamilton, an important step in connecting more strongly with our northern regions and demonstrating that our national activities can and should move around the country.

This year also introduced the TANZ rubric for adjudication. The first year produced encouraging results and strong support. The next stage is to build on that foundation through training, workshops and greater awareness of how the rubric can assist not only our adjudicators but, importantly, our participating companies, directors and performers. Adjudication should be part of the learning and development process, helping people understand and strengthen the craft of theatre-making.

Our international connections have continued to grow. Dargaville Little Theatre represented New Zealand at the Mondial du Théâtre in Monaco, taking New Zealand community theatre onto an international stage. Theatre New Zealand was also selected to participate in the World Festival of Youth Theatre in Antwerp, where the Experimental Theatre Collective, directed by **Blaise Barham**, presented the new New Zealand work *The Ground Remembers Us*.

The production explored the consequences of intergenerational trauma arising from the First World War and the experiences surrounding Passchendaele. Following Antwerp, the company had the extraordinary opportunity to perform the work in Ypres, taking a New Zealand story back to the landscape from which so much of it emerged, the Ypres Salient and the events of October 1917. The response to the production was deeply encouraging and demonstrated what can happen when young New Zealand theatre-makers are allowed to tell our stories internationally.

While we did not hold our traditional Summer School in 2026, this has also created an opportunity to reconsider how Theatre New Zealand approaches training and development. The Executive is enthusiastic about new structures that can provide more accessible learning opportunities, practical workshops, mentoring, and resources throughout the country. Rather than concentrating everything in one event, we can develop learning pathways that reach more of our community.

While our membership figures remained generally static during the year, we can draw strength from this as we develop strategies for better engagement going forward. Maintaining our membership in a challenging environment, but gives us a solid base to

move forward and reminds us that we need new ways to reach people and show the value of belonging to Theatre New Zealand.

This means looking more closely at how we engage with our existing societies and individual members, while also reaching those companies, schools, young people and practitioners who are not currently connected with us. Growth should not simply be measured by increasing membership numbers. It should also be measured by the strength of the relationships we build, the opportunities we create and whether our members see genuine value in being part of a national theatre community.

At a time when the arts in New Zealand continue to face significant economic pressure, organisations such as Theatre New Zealand become even more important. Community theatre cannot simply wait for someone else to provide the opportunities, training, connections and pathways it needs. Theatre New Zealand has a responsibility to help fill that gap: supporting our societies, encouraging our young people, developing practitioners, championing new New Zealand work and ensuring that community theatre remains viable, achievable and, above all, enjoyable.

I take this opportunity to thank the members of the Theatre New Zealand Executive for their continuing commitment and support. Much of what Theatre New Zealand achieves happens because people voluntarily give enormous amounts of their time, knowledge and energy. I also acknowledge our Regional Representatives, adjudicators, volunteers, member societies, schools, individual members and everyone who continues to contribute to Theatre New Zealand.

We have made some tremendous strides forward. There is now a strong base of ideas, initiatives and relationships on which Theatre New Zealand can continue to build. The challenge is to maintain that momentum, remain open to change and continue asking how a national organisation can best serve the people who actually make community theatre happen.

There is still much to do, but there is also much to be proud of. I believe Theatre New Zealand has an important future, and I hope the momentum we have created together will carry forward in the years ahead.

Paul Percy
President
Theatre New Zealand Inc.