



Arts & Culture

SPECIAL REPORT





IDEAL: Helen Hristofski says 2017 was a very successful year for Barking Gecko. Photo: Gabriel Oliveira

Getting creative on firm funds footing

The financial performance of WA's major arts organisations has fluctuated widely over the past year, research by *Business News* has found.



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4-PAGE FEATURE

SECURING ongoing funding streams is a challenge faced by all arts and culture organisations, particularly in a

state such as Western Australia with its often-wild economic fluctuations.

So with the state economy making tentative steps towards recovery after several years in the doldrums, it's perhaps encouraging to see the latest revenue data compiled by *Business News*, which suggests the major arts bodies have largely managed to maintain revenue and in some cases grow.

The BNiQ Search Engine's arts and culture list shows the annual combined revenue of the top 10 arts organisations has increased by \$1 million, to \$169 million,

compared with the previous reported figures for those same organisations.

Growth

Screenwest, which last year transitioned from a government entity to an independent not-for-profit organisation, experienced the largest revenue rise of the top 10 arts and culture organisations on the BNiQ list.

Its total revenue increased 50.3 per cent to \$21.7 million in the 2016-17 financial year.

Screenwest told *Business News* the growth was predominately

attributable to the \$16 million Western Australian Regional Film Fund introduced on July 1 2016, which would be distributed to Screenwest across four years through the Royalties for Regions program.

Funding from the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries remained in line with previous years at \$7.5 million.

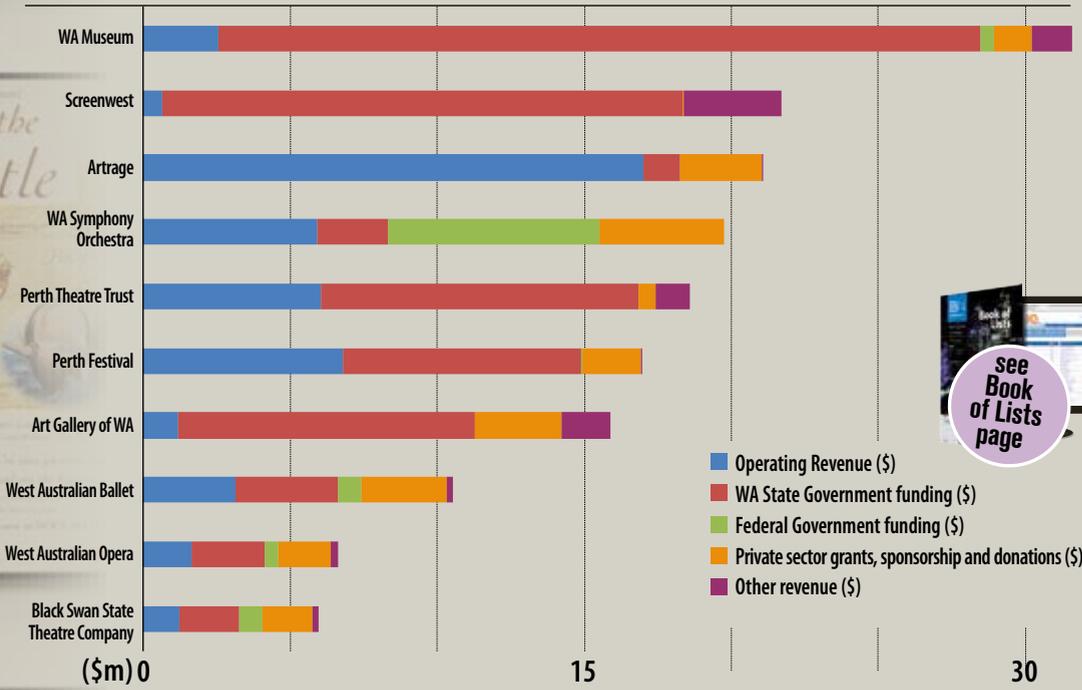
Chair Jannelle Marr said Screenwest was the first screen organisation in Australia to move from a government entity to an independent organisation.

"The new structure of Screenwest provides an unprecedented opportunity to venture into business development and provides agility for new partnerships," she said.

"Screenwest has already picked up additional funding from new sources and partnerships, including the management of content on the Yagan Square and Digital Towers and LED Canopies in the heart of Perth."

A highlight for Screenwest in terms of film operations has been Tim Winton's *Breath*, directed by Simon Baker, which completed its run around Australia with

WA ARTS COMPANIES FUNDING MIX



TOTAL REVENUE MOST RECENT FINANCIAL YEAR (\$m)



30% PROPORTION OF BARKING GECKO TURNOVER MATCHED BY COMPANY RESERVES

approximately \$4.4 million in box office sales.

Artrage, which produces Perth's Fringe World festival, came in at number three on the list, lifting operating revenue from \$16.1 million to \$17 million in the period to June 2018.

The not-for-profit organisation is headed by chief executive Marcus Canning and has 12 staff in WA.

Arts organisation **FORM** was the only player to fall from the top 10 since last year, having dropped from ninth to 11th place, with **West Australian Opera** directly exchanging places on the list.

FORM's revenue for the year to December 2017 dropped by 36 per cent to \$5.8 million against 2016 figures, largely due to a decline in private grants, sponsorships and donations.

Executive director Lynda Dorrington said FORM's *modus operandi* was to: take on large projects that involved concept development; raise funding; and work to deliver the outcome – a process that resulted in an ebb and flow of funding.

"Silos in the regions, Field of Light in Albany or the delivery of a new festival in the metropolitan

area all have different demands; it's the nature of our programming," she said.

Museum influence

In a direct comparison of figures for the 2017 and 2018 top 10 organisations on the *Business News* list, the collective revenue is down by 1.8 per cent against that of the previous year's top 10, with operating revenue down by 1.5 per cent.

The WA Museum accounted for some of that overall decline, having been closed due to constructions as it builds towards the 2020 New Museum.

Its total revenue was down by 15.7 per cent to \$31.7 million (year to June 2017). Of this, \$5.8 million was generated by the museum from commercial activity and from public, private and charitable sources – a decrease of 36.3 per cent on last year's figure of \$9.1 million.

In addition to the temporary closure of the Perth site, the WA Museum said visitor numbers to the Maritime Museum were below expectations, while there was a cut to its research grant revenue as resources were diverted to the New Museum project.

Aiming high

The revenue picture changes somewhat when viewed across the top 20 arts and culture organisations on the BNiQ list, with total revenue declining 1.1 per cent to \$2 billion while operating revenue essentially remained the same.

Barking Gecko Theatre was top performer in terms of total revenue, climbing from 24th on the list in the previous period to 17th with a 27.4 per cent increase to \$1.6 million.

Chief executive Helen Hristofski told *Business News* 2017 was a very successful year for Barking Gecko, with company reserves reaching 30 per cent of its turnover for the first time.

"We've been adept at implementing nimble and innovative business approaches to deliver our theatre productions and new creative learning programs," Ms Hristofski told *Business News*.

"This, in turn, saw modest increases in state and federal funding, sponsorship and philanthropic support, box office and children's workshop participation, and the on-selling of productions to national and international presenters after their world premiere seasons at the State Theatre Centre of Western Australia.

"BGT has been successful in securing some additional grants to enable us to build and rehearse new productions, and we collaborate beautifully with the Perth Festival on a regular basis."

Ms Hristofski said its development partner Woodside Petroleum was key to its growth, having provided an investment in Barking Gecko that had allowed it to develop a long-term strategy.

"For example, in October this year we will premiere our next significant theatre work, which has taken three years to realise," she said.

Barking Gecko has won five prestigious Helpmann Awards over the past five years, including Best Children's Presentation for *Bambert's Book of Lost Stories*, awarded in 2016.

Perth Symphony Orchestra has climbed several places on the BNiQ list, from 25th to 22nd place.

PSO has performed 68 times during the past year with just three full-time staff and a fourth joining in March this year; of those performances, all contemporary music concerts sold out.

Executive director Bourby Webster told *Business News* PSO's biggest show brought in about \$100,000 and much effort and strategising was needed to keep costs down.

"There have been some really meaningful projects, particularly the one we did for the Western Australian of the Year Awards, where we brought together classical musicians with musicians from around the world that call WA home – Aboriginal, Irish, Iranian, Indian, Malaysian, Chinese, Australian, English – it was simply magical," Ms Webster said.

PSO's operational income was about \$1 million for the 2017-18 financial year with turnover just above \$1.4 million, making it the top arts company without government funding on the BNiQ list, and the top company when ranked by operational income as a percentage of turnover.

International reach

Theatre group **The Last Great Hunt** is in its fifth year of operations and steadily increasing its reach across Australia and overseas.

Manager Sian Roberts told *Business News* international touring made up 40 per cent of The Last Great Hunt's income, and it had grown its revenue by 46 per cent since 2015.

"Internationally, our most successful box office event last year was *Bruce* at Edinburgh Fringe," Ms Roberts said.

"*Bruce* is a talking sponge, he's a brilliant character. It's the perfect Fringe show. The sellout crowds poured in for 27 performances, it was a lot of fun," she said.

"The most suitable work has the opportunity to go out to arts markets, and potentially to tour regionally, nationally, or internationally."

Canning keeps the culture coming

The opening of a new heritage-listed live entertainment space in Northbridge later this year is the latest example of Marcus Canning's cultural impact on WA.

CHARACTER: Marcus Canning says cultural occupation of long-term empty buildings has been a part of every program he's been involved with over the past 20 years. **Photo:** Luke Carter Wilton

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WITH a knack for creating innovative arts experiences in unique settings, Fringe World chief executive Marcus Canning is a key driver behind the project to turn the heritage-listed Rechabite Hall in Northbridge into a live entertainment venue.

Mr Canning and property developer Adrian Fini formed a new partnership, Happy Heart, to oversee the \$3 million refurbishment, which was granted approval in late 2016 by the Barnett government and is set for an October 2018 opening.

The building was erected in 1925 by English society the Independent Order of Rechabites, before custodianship was vested to the Perth Theatre Trust.

Ironically, while the Rechabites promoted complete abstinence from alcohol, Mr Canning plans for the venue to provide fresh, creative life within Perth city.

"The Rechabite will be brought back to life as a multi-level palace of surprise and delight that will house all sorts of live performance from bands to cabaret to

comedy to circus in very novel settings," Mr Canning told *Business News*.

"We're taking an approach that's more akin to occupying the ruin than restoring to former glory.

"The special patina and texture of old buildings speaks to their history and it's a special kind of energy that continues to exude – it just doesn't exist in new buildings."

Mr Canning said Mr Fini's youngest son, Christian, was spearheading the development with architect Michael Patroni and his company Spaceagency, working with them to design the four levels of the complex.

"Each of the four levels will have its own identity and feel and program, a bit like Curtin House in Melbourne," he said.

"There will definitely be lashings of Fringe in the programming, but also a greater emphasis on live music programming.

"From the basement club to the hall, The Rechabite will become a home for a real diversity of talent from across the world and a place where local artists are also launched and discovered."

“Dormant space is dead space and local economies and communities need life to thrive and survive” - Marcus Canning

Mr Canning said any long-term empty space, whether it was heritage or not, offered great opportunity for activation.

"Dormant space is dead space and local economies and communities need life to thrive and survive," he said.

"When done well, the conversion of long-empty heritage fabric can totally transform a precinct and the commercial potential as well as the culture of a place.

"The State Buildings development is a good example."

Mr Canning said cultural occupation of long-term empty buildings had been a part of every program he was involved with over the past 20 years.

"When I was in my early 20s I was interested in really underground culture and didn't care if it was experienced by many people," he said.

first initiative last month – the Girls Schools Cinema.

"There's an amazing hub at Edinburgh Fringe called Summerhall that's housed in a sprawling old Victorian veterinary college and hospital; The Old Perth Girls School building reminds me of it a lot," Mr Canning said.

"Summerhall is a year-round centre where very interesting work gets developed and then shown during the Edinburgh Fringe.

"Our aspirations for the Girls School Creative Precinct are a bit similar, but also more diverse.

"We're interested in how a building can house different types of creative industry throughout the year, not just traditional artistic practices, and how this might lead to interesting collaborations and a richer local scene for people who are creating here."

The remaining Girls School Creative Precinct plans would be announced from September this year.

BNIQ SEARCH Fringe World Festival



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Current rank	Previous rank	Name	Senior executive and title	Year est. in WA	Total staff in WA	Total patrons most recent financial year	Balance date	Total Revenue (\$m) a) most recent financial year b) previous financial year	Operating Revenue (\$m) a) most recent financial year b) previous financial year	WA State Government funding (\$m)	Federal Government funding (\$m)	Private sector grants, sponsorship and donations (\$m)	Other revenue (\$m)	Total Assets (\$m)
1	—	WA Museum	Mr Alec Coles Chief executive	1891	216	472,746	30-Jun-17	a) 31.7 b) 37.6	a) 2.6 b) 3.2	25.9	0.5	1.3	1.4	464.0
2	↑	Screenwest	Mr Seph McKenna Chief executive	1992	N/A	N/A	30-Jun-17	a) 21.7 b) 14.4	a) 0.6 b) 0.5	17.7	-	0.1	3.3	14.1
3	—	Artrage	Mr Marcus Canning Chief executive	1983	12	931,109	30-Jun-18	a) 21.1 b) 19.7	a) 17.0 b) 16.1	1.3	-	2.8	0.0	2.3
4	—	WA Symphony Orchestra	Mr Craig Whitehead Chief executive	1928	115	204,019	31-Dec-17	a) 19.7 b) 19.7	a) 5.9 b) 5.7	2.4	7.2	4.2	-	10.1
5	↓	Perth Theatre Trust	Mr Duncan Ord General manager	1979	205	508,216	30-Jun-17	a) 18.6 b) 21.3	a) 6.1 b) 5.0	10.8	-	0.6	1.1	134.8
6	↓	Art Gallery of WA	Mr Stefano Carboni Director	1895	65	307,781	30-Jun-17	a) 15.9 b) 16.1	a) 1.2 b) 1.2	10.1	-	2.9	1.7	337.9
7	↓	Perth Festival	Mr Nathan Bennett Executive director	1953	22	360,000	30-Jun-17	a) 15.7 b) 17.0	a) 4.3 b) 6.8	8.0	0.0	3.4	0.0	NFP
8	—	West Australian Ballet	Ms Jessica Machin Executive director	1952	70	70,913	31-Dec-17	a) 10.5 b) 10.5	a) 3.1 b) 3.5	3.5	0.8	2.9	0.2	14.0
9	↑	West Australian Opera	Ms Carolyn Chard General manager	1967		54,763	31-Dec-17	a) 6.6 b) 5.3	a) 1.6 b) 1.1	2.5	0.5	1.8	0.2	4.6
10	—	Black Swan State Theatre Company	Ms Clare Watson Artistic Director	1991	171	38,061	31-Dec-17	a) 5.9 b) 6.1	a) 1.2 b) 1.9	2.0	0.8	1.7	0.2	3.2
11	↓	FORM	Ms Lynda Dorrington Executive director	1968	36	N/A	31-Dec-17	a) 5.8 b) 9.1	a) 2.4 b) 2.4	0.8	0.5	1.9	0.2	3.5
12	—	Country Arts WA	Mr Paul MacPhail Executive director	1994	16	N/A	31-Dec-17	a) 5.1 b) 5.0	a) 0.3 b) 0.3	3.8	0.9	0.0	0.0	2.8
13	—	Broome Aboriginal Media Association	Mr Stephen Albert Chairperson	1991	17	N/A	30-Jun-17	a) 3.8 b) 3.7	a) 1.5 b) 1.5	0.0	2.1	0.1	0.0	5.3
14	—	Fremantle Arts Centre	Mr Jim Cathcart Director	1973	N/A	139,302	30-Jun-16	a) NFP b) 3.3	a) NFP b) 2.3	0.9	-	0.0	-	-
15	↑	Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts	Ms Amy Barrett-Lennard Chief executive	1987	50	298,702	31-Dec-17	a) 2.3 b) 2.2	a) 0.3 b) 0.3	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.0	1.2
16	↓	DADAA	Mr David Doyle Executive director	1994	65	11,151	30-Jun-17	a) 2.2 b) 2.4	a) 0.3 b) 0.3	1.8	-	0.0	0.0	1.7
17	↑	Barking Gecko Theatre	Ms Helen Hristofski Chief executive & executive producer	1989	50	16,030	31-Dec-17	a) 1.7 b) 1.3	a) 0.4 b) 0.3	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.8
18	↑	The Literature Centre	Ms Lesley Reece Director	1992	9	N/A	31-Dec-17	a) 1.6 b) 1.6	a) 0.6 b) 0.6	0.5	-	0.5	0.0	0.9
19	↓	Awesome Arts Australia	Ms Jenny Simpson Chief executive and artistic director	1996	5	170,000	31-Dec-17	a) NFP b) NFP	a) NFP b) NFP	0.7	-	0.6	0.0	NFP
20	↑	Spare Parts Puppet Theatre	Mr Philip Mitchell Artistic director	1981	57	81,000	31-Dec-17	a) 1.6 b) 1.4	a) 0.6 b) 0.6	0.9	-	0.0	0.0	1.3



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