

Case Study: Developing Audience Diversity through the Mix It Up Project Multicultural Arts Victoria and the Arts Centre

Introduction

You can imagine living in Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria, where the population is one of the most diverse of Australia's states. Over 40 percent of Victorians have either been born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas (ABS 2000). Victoria is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse societies. However, many arts audiences are predominantly Anglo-Saxon in make up and do not therefore reflect the community in which we live.

The Arts Centre and Multicultural Arts Victoria: A Unique Partnership

You can further imagine the largest, premier performing arts venue in Victoria, the Arts Centre, working in partnership with Multicultural Arts Victoria, a small, flexible and innovative peak state arts body.

The Arts Centre is located in the cultural precinct of St Kilda Road, Melbourne. The Arts Centre Revenue is around \$42.4 million per year including recurrent grants (2005/2006 annual report). Approximately 20% of this revenue comes from government grants. In 2005-2006 The Arts Centre housed 1,341 performances including non-ticketed and free events and 5,662 public programs including a variety of activities from business seminars to school speech nights and food and beverage functions. The Arts Centre includes six major spaces: Black Box, Fairfax Studio, Hamer Hall, Playhouse, Sidney Myer Music Bowl and the State Theatre.

Multicultural Arts Victoria is a small to medium sized arts organisation in Victoria. It is a peak body for multicultural arts in the state. Its revenue is around \$500,000 per annum and growing. It is a dynamic and changing organisation which seeks to auspice programs and projects to develop new and diverse audiences through innovative measures, including providing links to local diverse communities, new repertoire, new marketing approaches and new ways of working. MAV operates out of two rented rooms in inner-Melbourne Fitzroy Town Hall. Its staff are mostly project-based and part-time.

The Arts Centre has always had a significant part of its activity operate as a venue for hire. During the 1990s, there was a strong emphasis on this approach and a reduced emphasis on programming. In the 2000s, there has been an increased priority given to Arts Centre programming, with the introduction of programs such as Mix It Up. The partnership between the Arts Centre and MAV enabled both organisations to change their ways of working and extend their reach and provide added value to the communities they serve. This was done through the innovative Mix It Up project.

Funding and Awards

How did Mix It Up come about?

A project to develop new and diverse audiences, Mix It Up was a funded initiative of the State Government of Victoria. This initiative evolved from a proposal developed for Arts Victoria in 2005 *An Arts Centre For All The People*. The State Government provided a grant of \$850,000 to enable Mix It Up to take place. Mix It Up is therefore supported by the State Government through the State Government's arts funding and advisory body, Arts Victoria

As a result of the program, the Arts Centre received a top award from the Victorian Government for Excellence in Multicultural Affairs: Service Delivery to Multicultural Victoria—Arts. Further, the Arts

Centre received a Leadership Award from Arts Victoria for Excellence in Public Programs. These accolades point of the importance and the success of the project.

Australia Council and Audiences

Pivotal to the success of the Mix it Up program is the collaboration between MAV and the Arts Centre. MAV began the collaboration with the Arts Centre as part of the multicultural audience development project (MAMAS) several years ago. MAMAS is the Multicultural Arts Marketing Ambassadors Scheme, a program developed to expand culturally diverse audiences at mainstream events and supported by the Australia Council.

MAV has continued to work with the Arts Centre in relation to audience development, in ensuring the Arts Centre reaches its objectives of being for all people, reflecting the diversity of Victoria. MAV and the Arts Centre have had long ongoing consultations in relation to ways of engaging artists and linking audiences from the CALD community into the arts through collaboration. CALD stands for culturally linguistically diverse communities.

Key elements of this collaboration included design of the program structure, identification of local artists, delivery of programs, making connections with local communities and developing the potential to engage new markets and audiences.

This program enables the Arts Centre, through the partnership with Multicultural Arts Victoria to forge new opportunities both for visitors to the Arts Centre and the performing arts industry.

Audience Development with CALD communities is a long term process and commitment. It is about developing relationships. Multicultural Audience Development requires arts organisations to change the way they meet and invite CALD artists and communities to participate. It is crucial that organisations add new program content and new program delivery formats to meet the needs and interests of CALD communities and youth.

This partnership between MAV and the Arts Centre has the potential to effect significant change for Arts in a Multicultural Australia. It highlights the Arts Centre's leadership role in program, audience and creative development and enables MAV to provide local CALD artists with connections and pathways into the mainstream arts community and validate their cultural practices and heritage.

Aims of the Mix It Up Program

What is Mix It Up? Mix It Up enhanced visual and performing arts opportunities for new and diverse audiences and diverse arts groups in the community. Some events were free and others were ticketed. Free events took place in the Arts Centre foyers and in its George Adams Gallery. Ticketed events took place in its various theatres in the Arts Centre and in Hamer Hall next door.

The aims of the Mix It Up program were to:

- *Enhance the programming capacity of the [Victorian Arts Centre] Trust and its leadership role within Victoria's performing arts sector*
- *Engage with, and reflect in appropriate ways, the cultural diversity of Victoria*

Mix It Up celebrates Victoria's cultural diversity with amazing local and overseas artists on show at the Arts Centre. People from all over the world make their home in Victoria. From fifth generation Australians to recent arrivals, all of us contribute to make Victoria such a diverse and unique place to live. Mix It Up is an initiative that celebrates our shared heritage.

The program comprised:

- Music Program – Specifically curated concerts in Hamer Hall featuring international and local artists that engage the local community. A feature is extensive free public programs that give all visitors to the Arts Centre the opportunity to experience the sights, sounds and tastes of different cultures.
- Theatre Program – Presentation of major international performing arts companies particularly featuring dance, physical theatre and circus. Extensive free public programs offer an insight into the creative processes of the artists and arts making.
- Exhibitions – Development of an exhibition Meeting Place Keeping Place that features the work of local culturally diverse artists exploring issues of identity and place.
- Creative Development projects – Providing access points for local artists from diverse cultural backgrounds through the commissioning of creative development projects. Artists working in a diverse range of performing arts genres will plant the seeds for the creation of new works. This project nurtures emerging artists which will encourage the development of a more diverse creative arts industry in Victoria.

Research Project

Due to the success of Mix It Up and the interest generated in it nationally, the Australia Council funded a research project to evaluate the program. The final report will be incorporated into a multicultural toolkit being developed by the Australia Council. The key findings of the study include five strategies for developing new and diverse audiences and seven strategies for working in new ways. While full discussion of them is available in the report Mix It Up Project Report: Developing New and Diverse Audiences available from the Australia Council, a summary of key headings is listed below:

Five Strategies for development of new and diverse audiences

- Creation of diversified audiences
- Marketing
- Barriers to Attendance
- Images & Perceptions
- Experience

Seven Strategies for working in new ways

- Organisational cultural change through champions for change
- Build relationships between communities and Arts Centre key players
- Create dialogues with communities through curators and programmers
- Appoint cultural ambassadors
- Empower marketing staff to act as facilitators with community marketers
- Provision of skills to artists to leverage benefits from engagement with arts centre
- Establish a multicultural peer network

Potential Outcomes of Mix It Up

The success of the Mix It Up model shows the importance that these types of collaborations and programs continue for the benefit of the Victorian community. To work in partnership with the CALD communities requires commitment to fostering long term relationships to reinforce the pathways for both artists and audience engagement with the mainstream arts community.

Mix It Up is multi layered and creates many entry points to the arts for artists and communities who are normally not engaged in the arts or who are disadvantaged.

All arts organisations funded by Government agencies should be encouraged to provide developmental opportunities for the production of culturally diverse artworks. The most significant out come of Mix It

Up is an increased understanding that the arts are for *all* Australians. To embrace diversity, we all must work flexibly to engage new artists, communities and audiences.

The arts play an important role in connecting communities and bringing people together. The arts provides us with a universal language that enables us to understand and empathise with each other in a time when there is much conflict and divide between cultures and people.

Continued support of this unique flagship partnership project in the arts in a multicultural Australia is vitally important so we can all benefit from, experience and interact artistically with the rich culturally diverse community we have in Australia.

This model has potential for application throughout Australia and the strategies contained within the model can be further developed and grown.