

Please find below our responses to the follow up questions you have asked.

1. What supports for circus have you encountered overseas which would assist the sector here?

The biggest single factor is affordable (free) access to circus specific spaces for creation, rehearsal and training. Circus cities or communities gravitate to areas where these spaces are available and this is evidenced in Australia by the congregation of the sector in Brisbane and Melbourne (although the Melbourne sector is diminishing due to this exact factor with people relocating to Adelaide and to regional centres where space is available). Creation spaces are numerous across Europe and in Quebec. These creation spaces are not only fit for purpose for Circus rehearsal but have technical capability to support lighting and sound design alongside the circus choreography.

Such space is, by its very nature, expensive - it has a large footprint, significant height, truss or other engineering support to enable people to hang safely from the ceiling, is equipped with safety, rigging and discipline-specific equipment and requires specialist expertise to operate and maintain. Market cost of such a space is understandably high, and most of these spaces overseas are subsidised by government or philanthropic support.

The provision of accessible space attracts artists, coaches and creatives to the area to live and work. This attracts students of the circus arts who wish to train with professionals for a fee, providing income to professionals when they are not engaged in performing. It also nurtures the sector providing professional pathways, support and a thriving creative ecosystem. Many of these creation/rehearsal spaces are opened for local performance evenings which engages the local community with the art form, provides access to world class performance not usually available and increases engagement and awareness (not to mention helping local economy).

2. You stated that you cannot afford touring without financial support. What are the key factors contributing to this challenge?

Presenters and venues have a big interest in presenting Circus companies. Although, most of them do not have the capacity to cover full costs of travel which include cast, crew, and sometimes special equipment and on top of that, cover the presentation expenses which include venue fees, ticketing fees, venue staffing fees, marketing costs and some others. Most offers from presenters or venues consist of a fixed presentation fee for the company, and the company covers its own travelling costs. These costs are the ones that need financial support and can be split into different locations when tours are longer.

We sell our work to presenters who purchase a show for a fee, then sell tickets to their audiences. Regional presenters do not have the budgets available to pay for the show and also the travel, accommodation, freight and per diems of the touring party.

We cannot bypass presenters, hire a theatre and sell our work directly to audiences via ticket sales, simply for the fact that we do not have the financial reserves or operating turnover to support the financial risk this entails (as it involves the hire of the venue, staff, marketing and media campaign, and the staffing to support this on top of the running costs of the production itself)

Major arts centres and festivals do have the means to support touring without government subsidy, however there are only a small number of these compared to the number of artistic companies, and many of them will only program one circus company a year, and not want to do

'the same things as last year' so these engagements cannot be seen as a sustainable source of income.

Many international presenters in Europe, USA, China and Canada have larger budgets available and this, combined with the exchange rate of the Australian dollar, means international touring is more viable. The caveat here is that since the onset of Covid 19, international flights and freight have trebled in cost, meaning that there is still appetite overseas to present Australian work, but not always the funds to get us there. This has been recognised by Creative Australia with the introduction of the international travel fund and touring support.

3. What are the biggest challenges you're facing from show creation to a sustainable touring product?

Affording the specific needs of time periods for Circus shows . A Circus show requires a development period of time that allows artists to physically achieve the act/skill followed by a rehearsal period where the show is assembled. Costs restrict these two phases. At the same time, shows that are created with touring in mind, are usually restricted by the costs that touring would represent, so smaller scale shows are more common.

The lead time between creation and programming is significant. It can easily take a year from planning to preview for a new creative work, and many presenters will not program a work without seeing it first. Then they are often programming 1-2 years ahead, meaning between first preview and having the show tour can be at least a year.

Companies like Circus Oz and Circa have strong reputation upon which to rely, which can encourage presenters to program their work without seeing it first, but this is still not always the case.

It is expensive to make work, and whilst there can be support for its presentation, it is harder and harder to find resources to create outside of the current grant system, which can only support around 10% of applications. Many companies become very good at 'bootstrapping' but then cannot create works of scale or ambition as the risk and resources are too great.

When Australian companies are given the resources to make ambitious work, in most cases it does enjoy a long touring life and is able to support the company to undertake further artistic activity.

Regards,
Regina

Chairperson - Regina Hill
Circus Oz
2 May 2024

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we live and work and thank them for the care and concern they have shown for this place and all of its peoples over time. We are committed to truth telling, we recognise First Nations sovereignty and support the Victorian Treaty process and the Uluru Statement from the Heart.