

# NELSON ARTS FESTIVAL

2021  
REPORT

Supported by:



[nelsonartsfestival.nz](https://nelsonartsfestival.nz)

## Meet the Nelson Arts Festival

As the longest running regional arts festival and with its geographical position at the top of Te Waipounamu South Island, the Nelson Arts Festival plays an important role in the national festival and touring circuit for Aotearoa artists and companies.

Within our modest resource base, we commission new work that will especially resonate with our local community, and support our artists in developing their practice. Within our festival network, we support seasons of new and touring works being presented and we provide high quality production support for artists and touring companies.

We partner with other springtime festivals including Tauranga, Te Tairāwhiti, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki, and collaborate with the larger festivals including Aotearoa NZ Festival of the Arts and the Auckland Arts Festival, as well as companies and independent artists from around the motu. These connections help enable us to bring the best Aotearoa (and, where possible, international) works to our audience.



# 2021 OVERVIEW

## Presenting a Festival During an International Pandemic

In 2020, the festival was drastically scaled back due to the devastating impact of COVID-19. As we transitioned out of that year apart, we imagined 2021 as the year of connection and togetherness. Taking all we had learned from the 'new normal' of a COVID-19 environment, 2021 presented an extraordinary chance to re-envision the festival. We seized the opportunity to review, reshape, and reconnect our event into the Whakatū community (and beyond) through unmissable arts experiences and meaningful community engagement.

Alongside our key community events like the Mask Carnivale, the 2021 Festival programme was designed to showcase a plethora of cross-artform Aotearoa artistic talents and touring productions, as well as to engage collaboratively with artists to create works which are unique to Whakatū and the region's diverse communities.

In line with our vision to present a festival model that is innovative, enticing and unique, the Trust engaged a new leadership collective in January 2021: Lydia Zanetti, Rose Campbell and Shanine Hermesen took on the Festival reigns to create an outstanding programme and to connect both Whakatū and Aotearoa at large. Placing the festival in the heart of Nelson CBD, we moved not only the majority of our programme into the central city but also shifted our festival offices into a fresh new pop-up space in Morrison Square (thanks to our friends at Make/Shift Spaces).

**The 27th Nelson Arts Festival was set to 'take over' central Whakatū from 21–31 October 2021 with an enticing programme and new festival locations.**



# 2021 OVERVIEW

## Nelson Festivals Trust Board

The Trust Board was refreshed in 2021 and our current membership is diverse, committed and engaged, with a wide range of experiences and including two trustees adding youth voices to the conversation:

**Zoe Palmer** is involved in many Nelson community initiatives and plays an instrumental role in advocating for accessible mental health services for young people. She interacts with many community groups and projects through organisations such as Whanake Youth, and the Nelson Youth Council. Currently, Zoe works for a supported employment agency, helping people with physical or intellectual disabilities to find sustainable employment.

The most recent appointment to the BoT, **Johannah Kātene-Burge**, has brought another new perspective to the table. Johannah is young and hugely experienced in strategy, HR and economic leadership, and brings her connections with several iwi in the Whakatū region to her role on the board. Holding space and providing a voice for manawhenua at a governance level, her appointment signals the direction the Trust is heading in their journey towards forming meaningful connections and collaboration with our local iwi and Māori-led organisations.

Zoe and Johanna share the Trust's governance with **Ali Boswijk**, **Cynthia Greep**, **Gemma Laing**, **Sarah Yarrow** and Board Chair **Brent Thawley**.



# 2021 OVERVIEW

## KAUPAPA: Nelson Festival Trust's Strategic Objectives

In 2021, we focused on the realisation of Nelson Festival Trust's strategic plan through both the Festival and the organisation year-round.

For our year of CONNECTION, this focus manifested in a variety of ways, including:

### CONNECTION & QUALITY

Bringing folx together to be surprised, overjoyed, taken aback and moved. Making space for robust discussion before, within and after these experiences.

- We are committed to (and invested in) new artistic experiences which are specifically of and with Whakatū and the community
- We created a programme which reflected some of the highest quality arts experiences that Aotearoa can offer

### CONNECTION & PARTNERSHIP

Working towards relationships for life, not just this year. Through listening, we will take on a leadership role within the arts sector of Whakatū Nelson- sharing our resources, knowledge and connections, and empowering others through our collective strength.

- The Board and staff strongly demonstrated values-based leadership in 2021
- We continued to build on our partnership with Nelson City Council and look forward to working closely together with them long-term

### CONNECTION & INCLUSIVITY

Opportunities for our culturally and socially diverse community to not only engage but feel seen throughout the festival.

- We include Māori and Rangatahi voices on the Board, and are looking to increase their representation within our staff as well
- The tamariki and rangatahi programme expanded and was equally valued alongside the rest of the programme
- We diversify our artist collaborators, and are building towards diversifying our audiences, staff and Board further ongoing

### CONNECTION & MANAAKITANGA

We connect with our audiences, artists, staff and volunteers with mutual respect and care; we uplift and inspire, listen and hold space for one another.

- We are increasing our investment in our people by continually reevaluating structures and compensation, towards a wellbeing orientated organisation
- We are committed to engaging in development outwardly and internally towards a more sustainable organisation to carry us into the future
- We have been leading both locally and nationally in regard to our COVID-19 response and our support for artists, staff, venues, funders, sponsors and audiences (including financially supporting artists and contractors through cancellations)

### CONNECTION & MANA TOI

Connecting our community directly to artists through intimate artistic experiences. We will reach out to Tāngata Whenua - and towards a new space which is about listening / reflecting / sharing.

- We will be process-focused, because it's in this space that we will develop the deep trust and whanaungatanga

These and other elements show how the strategy and values are embedded in our organisation at all levels - from board, to operations, to programme, to communications. It is our vision that through empathy, respect and listening, the Nelson Arts Festival will find new ways to connect the Whakatū community (and beyond) through unmissable arts experiences.

View our full strategy document on our website.

Waiho i te toipoto, kaua i te toiroa  
*Let us keep close together, not wide apart*

2020 was a year a part.  
For the health of folx at large,  
we kept away, closed our doors,  
stepped back.

We held others by staying  
distant, two metres away,  
touching them through  
cables and cellphone  
towers and closely  
held memories.

We watched as  
countries split open,  
frustration rooted in years worth of  
oppression swirling to the surface.  
A divide at the polls,  
on the streets, in hearts.

We came together as  
a team of individuals,  
mindfully checking in  
with neighbours and  
strangers alike.

We connected, but we missed connection.  
We missed sharing breath, sharing kai,  
sharing space.

And because we missed,  
we now can hold hands, hold hearts, hold together.

Creativity was,  
and always will be,  
The cable  
The cellphone tower  
The generator of connection.

The space between each other is where  
creativity lies, connecting us, engaging empathy,  
leading us towards new thought.

Culturally & socio-economically & theoretically  
& with humour & friendship & empathy.

Our intention for 2021 is to  
connect through creativity.

# CONNECTION

## Our theme for 2021

The skilfully curated programme offered locals and visitors an enticing and diverse array of arts events and activities to choose from.

Opening the Festival would have been a ceremonial performance as part of our special commission work **Ko Te Ākau** by Charles Koroneho at the Refinery ArtSpace, as well as the unveiling of our collaboration with Track Zero, **Through the Eye of Whakatū**, at the Nelson Provincial Museum and, rolling out into the central city streets with a series of activations, our visual arts celebration event **Night Vision** which would see all local galleries opening their doors to the public until late.

Across the first weekend, our **Pukapuka Talks** literary events were set to run at the Suter Theatre, while our main stage shows would take over the Theatre Royal and the NCMA for the duration of the Festival, and The Boathouse would host our comedy events. Some of these events include the Te Waipounamu premiere of **The Haka Party Incident**, the return of **Tami Neilson** in The F Word, **Paul Bosauder's** world-class flamenco guitar, a special commission of **Flavio Villani** playing Nils Frahm, Blenheim-based Pasifika maestros **Fua Creative**, international works held by locals in **Walking:Holding**, Rutene Spooner's hilarious **Thoroughly Modern Māui**, and much more.

Performances and activities were to continue through the week across the venues, including a series of music gigs at our new festival hub space at East Street Café & Bar, while our **Mask Carnivale** and the traditional outdoor concert at Neudorf Vineyards featuring **The Beths** would have closed off the final weekend.

# OUR 2021 PROGRAMME IN NUMBERS

200 artists, 50 works, 11 days of unmissable arts experiences

## ENGAGEMENT

2,887 participants engaged with our 3 digital Pukapuka Talks  
2,752 tickets sold before our cancellation of most events  
10% growth across our social media platforms  
71% found programme diverse and engaging  
86% have attended the Festival before (returning audience)  
94% said that they will attend future festival events  
95% said that the Festival is a vital part of the Whakatū events calendar  
Our programme stood out as offering 'diverse', 'unique' and 'high-quality' arts experiences  
90% rated our communications as timely and effective, and 75% found the communications about our decision making process around COVID-19 transparent and helpful

## PROGRAMMING

7 special commissions  
17 community-led events (a third of the programme!)  
13 Aotearoa premieres (not including Pukapuka Talks)  
4 international works - connecting Aotearoa to the world  
8 works especially programmed for tamariki and rangatahi

## DIVERSITY

48% of the programme was led by people of colour  
38% were led by Māori  
53.5% were led by female artists, and  
3.5% by non-binary or transgender folx  
5% of our artists identify as disabled  
12% are part of the LGBTIQ+ community

## ACCESSIBILITY

17 free or koha events throughout our Festival programme, including 3 digital Pukapuka Talks  
Aotearoa first for literary accessibility: all digital sessions were supported by NZSL interpreters or caption  
Socio-economic factors: for almost 30% of our survey respondents, cost of tickets formed a barrier to accessing the Festival

# COMMUNITY EVENTS

The Nelson Arts Festival has a long history of community participation, especially with its unique flagship event, the newly renamed **Mask Carnivale**. Featuring the mask parade taking over central Nelson streets for late afternoon and evening festivities, this eagerly anticipated community event has a firm place in the hearts of Nelsonians. Attracting up to 30,000 spectators and participants, it showcases the creative identity of Whakatū through an incredible range of entrants each year, including many schools and community groups.

The parade is a drawcard for children and their whānau - to make the parade even more accessible for young children and for disabled people, one of our key changes in 2021 was to shorten the parade route. We also added choreography workshops to our pre-festival offering as another way to engage and build excitement for the big event. These new elements and adaptations to our iconic event will continue into 2022 to enable as many in our community as possible to participate.

Our second large-scale free community event was **Night Vision**, the visual arts extravaganza opening the festival on the first night. Based on the European 'White Night' concept, Night Vision was set to draw our community into the CBD for a night of gallery shows and interactive street performances and activations. After the success of the inaugural event in 2020, we were excited by the response from local galleries who were poised to open their doors to the public for the night.

As we could sadly not go ahead in 2021, we look forward to bringing back and further developing our community-focused events in 2022.

## TAMARIKI & RANGATAHI

Young ones are close to our hearts. We developed an imaginative programme for pre-school, primary and secondary schools, including opportunities to attend shows and to participate hands-on in workshops, all designed to complement their festival experience overall. Schools were offered reduced ticket prices to increase accessibility, and the programme specifically included works that appealed to a variety of ages, from preschool aged tamariki to rangatahi.

Our intention was to spark conversations with young people, helping them feel seen and their voices valued on our stages and throughout our events. The enthusiastic uptake for this programme confirms its importance in our future planning.



# COVID-19 IMPACT AND DECISION MAKING

Our 2021 programme launched on 5 August to incredible response from our audience: we saw a record number of bookings in the history of the Festival over the first 2 weeks of ticket sales.

## Key Decisions in Response to the Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak

On 17 August, the government announced that Aotearoa New Zealand would go into a level 4 lockdown from 18 August. Despite working optimistically throughout the lockdown period towards delivery of our 2021 offering, the ongoing lockdown and alert level restrictions created a situation where we had to assess not only what was possible, but what was the right thing to do by our community, our artists and our people at this time.

It was with immense disappointment and sadness that Nelson Festivals Trust made the decision to announce on 17 September that we had no choice but to cancel most of our 2021 shows and events due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Festival's kaupapa is focused on caring for our community - and we made our decision with this care in mind. Looking out for the health and wellbeing of all those attending, performing and working at the Nelson Arts Festival, as well as our wider community, had to be our utmost priority.

*"Thank you for the detailed explanation of why you guys made the decision. I completely understand and I feel awful for you guys and the other acts." - Artist*

The timing of this decision took into consideration the need for clarity and support for those most affected by these cancellations: our artists, technicians, producers and partners working and creating for the Festival. Nelson Festivals Trust was also keen to sustain support for artists, staff, venues and our community long term. Not being able to share all the incredible shows we had planned for this year's Festival was a huge disappointment, however at this point we still hoped to deliver a scaled back programme focused on our core intention for 2021: CONNECTION.

With the hope that Whakatū would return to alert level 1 by early October, we are worked towards a locally-focused programme of events, including Mask Carnivale, Night Vision and Pukapuka Talks, our collaborative project, Through the Eye of Whakatū, Couch Stories, PechaKucha, and most of our visual arts offering.

Given the continuing risks and implications of the outbreak, the Trust announced on 7 October to cancel further events that we were not able to deliver safely for our community.

*"Ka aroha koutou! Kia kaha, kia maia, kia manawanui. You have done the right thing by our community, ngā mihi nunui to you all ♥" - Audience member*

## Scaled Back Programme

As a gift to our community, we proceeded with a scaled back programme of digital offerings from our Pukapuka Talks literary programme (including the digital commission Writing Home) as well as our visual arts offering at the Refinery ArtSpace and the Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū, Through The Eye of Whakatū at the Nelson Provincial Museum created in collaboration with Nelson Intermediate School, and Silver. Stone. Wood. Bone at the NCMA, as well as a couple of socially distanced in-person events with a limited number of attendees (Ruby Solly's writing workshop; Nelson City Centre ArtWalk Tours).

While we were greatly disappointed to not be able to deliver the programme we envisioned, we are proud of what we were able to present and share with our community.

*"It's still amazing you've got an offering considering everything, credit to you guys for the breadth of your programme. Who writes your newsletters? ...the tone is great, spot on." - Industry leader*

# WHERE TO FROM HERE

*Kia tū he hui ahurei e haumako ai ngā tāngata huri i te motu.*

A festival of unmissable arts that enriches the people of our region.

We believe that this is a Festival's role within its community, region and country to inspire and challenge, listen and respond, collaborate and connect, learn and investigate. As a leadership organisation, we are committed to walking the talk through manaakitanga, celebrating otherness, quality and partnership.

As an organisation dedicated to championing mana toi, we believe that by supporting artists to develop further in themselves, grow work over longer time periods and with more resources for both development AND presentation, we are helping to build the artist's sustainability long term.

To build connection and inclusivity, we know that relationships are everything and are committed to fostering these for our own growth and wairua with Tangata Whenua, artistic collaborators, colleagues and community - locally, nationally and internationally.

We are creating a festival for, and with, our community. We love Whakatū, the surrounding regions and its people, and with love we want to meet, chat, challenge, collaborate and boogie. We are advocates for Whakatū and its artists, and will rant on about how great they are to anyone who will listen!

## Looking Ahead to our 2022 Festival

Looking forward has become an extremely fickle pastime in recent years. We have planned and unplanned, done and undone, and after all these challenges we find that creativity (and the chaos and flexibility required to be creative) put us in the strongest stead to ride this choppy sea. With that in mind, this is our intention for the 2022 Festival and year: In 2021, we searched for connection, being seen, heard, held, together.

But where can we go from here? As we continue to live in a global pandemic? What to do with the challenges of the climate crisis? What can we learn? Who can we trust? And what can we say, for certain, will come?

Throughout the last year we've heard everyone from arm-chair scientists to politicians, celebrities to (no-doubt) ourselves stating certainties. But what is certain?

**Whakapapa / Night follows day / Death / Chaos / Change / Ageing / Destruction / Loss / Mistakes / Need for shelter, food, water & bathroom / Need for community / Body / Difference / Now / Nothing / Uncertainty**

**E hoki ki ō maunga kia purea ai koe e ngā hau o Tawhirimātea**

Return to your mountains so that you can be cleansed by the winds of Tāwhirimātea

How do we sit with this moment (and not just look forward to a "return to normal")? How does art sit with this moment? How does our place, our Whakatū?

Moving with the wind, sitting with the chaos, playing with our absolutes, celebrating our most basic needs, being present to now.

Nelson Arts Festival 2022.

A Festival which

moves / sits / plays / destabilises

certainty.



**Find out more:**  
[Nelsonartsfestival.nz](http://Nelsonartsfestival.nz)

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