

**The list of outcomes from just three years' part-time work by the Regional Arts NSW Audience Development Specialist only points to the enormous potential for regional and rural arts organisations of a sustained**

**program of audience**

**development activity.**

by RACHAEL VINCENT

**\$150,000 WORTH OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH WITH OVER THIRTY partners; four pilot regional audience development projects – including asset mapping, database development and an arts ambassador project; a series of four one-day, tailored, professional development workshops for fifty regional arts workers; three national forums on the 'value' of the arts; a new international network on cultural industry development in regional and remote areas; 1,000 DVDs; 700 three-CD sets; two ABC radio broadcasts; a book of essays; and a roundtable of peak state and national arts, creative industries and development organisations: these are just the highlights of the three year project managed by Audience Development Specialist, Lisa Andersen at Regional Arts NSW from 2003 to 2006.**

The raft of these – and other – outcomes was the result of a diverse program of activities developed by Lisa in response to the top four audience development needs identified in a survey of the sector at the start of the project in 2003. They were:

1. The need for ways to measure the impacts of arts activities in regional and rural areas; to develop knowledge and produce advocacy tools on the 'value' of the arts to facilitate the development of new partnerships on a regional and local level.
2. The need to build capacity both to conduct audience research and to use the outcomes in planning (including the need to devise ongoing ways to collect audience research data).
3. The need to build partnerships for marketing the arts and to support arts development with education, tourism,

economic development, local government and others at a state, regional and local level.

4. The need to build capacity to undertake audience and market development activity.

In different ways, the project successfully addressed all four of these needs, but it is perhaps in the last – the development of local capacity – that the project shows its greatest potential worth.

The much publicised one day forums on the social, cultural and economic impacts of arts activities at the Byron Bay Writers Festival in 2004 and 2005 – and the resources produced in association with these: the DVDs, the CD-sets, the annotated bibliographies of existing research and the forthcoming book (all of which were designed to address the need to demonstrate the 'value' of the arts) – may have 'pulled focus' in many people's minds from the many other activities also undertaken as part of the Audience Development Project.

# The show

## The Regional Arts NSW



*Lisa presenting the pilot Audience Development Workshop at Kendall earlier this year.*

One of Lisa's key achievements in her three years at Regional Arts NSW was to broker a range of projects that used research as a starting point to build partnerships and deliver practical, local outcomes for regional arts organisations. The project's audience research, partnership building and capacity building activities have been substantial.

In a partnership with Canberra Arts Marketing, the University of Technology, Sydney, (UTS) Museums and Galleries NSW and Co-Opera, the project piloted audience research with diverse regional arts organisations at twenty events in 2004 and 2005. Lisa produced research reports and held workshops with the four

## September

22 September – 3 October

 Goulburn Art Award Presenting works by artists and craftspeople of the region. **GOULBURN** Regional Art Gallery Tel 02 4823 4443

23 September

 Camden Jazz in the Vineyard fine wine and good music in the Kirrkham Estate Winery **CAMDEN** Tel 02 4655 1914

23 September

 Regional Writer's Forum Speakers, presentations and discussion forum. West Port Bowling Club, **PORT MACQUARIE** Tel 02 6658 9400

23 – 24 September

 Ulmarra Festival of the River Cultural and historical festival celebrating life in the riverside town. **ULMARRA** Tel 02 6644 8201

groups who produced useable data sets from the survey, including Bathurst's Lieder Theatre Company which went on to develop a successful arts ambassador program (now in Stage 2), with Lisa's assistance, as a direct result of this work. (There's a report on this project in the Winter 2005 edition of *ArtReach*).

A second phase of research was conducted this year including:

- An analysis of audiences and marketing for festivals and events in the Northern Rivers, with Arts Northern Rivers and eighteen local festival organisers (story on p. 15);
- Research on gallery audiences with Arts OutWest, Arts North West, Cowra Art Gallery, Bathurst Regional Arts Gallery, Orange Regional Gallery, Manning Regional Gallery, New England Regional Arts Museum (NERAM) and UTS. (The research on the Archibald Prize Exhibition in Cowra was reported in the Autumn 2006 issue of *ArtReach*).

importantly, the engagement of an experienced, professional arts marketer and audience development specialist has meant that regional arts organisations have been assisted in interpreting the research and devising innovative, appropriate and achievable responses to it – generating new opportunities to develop both their audiences and their own ways of operating: strategic, 'grass-roots' intervention at its very best.

There isn't room here to list all the other achievements of the Audience Development Project but they include:

- An arts sector consultation and asset mapping project developed in partnership with West Darling Arts, the Far West Regional Development Board, the Department of State and Regional Development, Adelaide University and the UTS, to inform market, tourism and arts network development projects (still underway).
- An 'Arts Welcome Basket' pilot concept for marketing local arts to new residents and visitors to Wingecarribee and Goulburn, developed in partnership with local arts councils, arts organisations, STARTS and Canberra Arts Marketing.
- An international network on cultural industry development in rural and remote regions, with participants from Maine (USA), Montana (USA), the Scottish Highlands, Cornwall (UK) and New Zealand (which in 2005 undertook research with the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies.)
- A roundtable on partnerships for building creative regions which included Arts NSW, AbaF, the Australia Council, DoCITA, DOTARS, the NSW Department of State & Regional Development, the NSW FTO, Music NSW, NAVA, Screenworks, National Science Festival, SPAA, Tourism NSW and leading industry experts.

The Audience Development Project was made possible with a grant from Australia Council for the Arts. Unfortunately the funding will not be continued, but the Audience and Market Development Division of the Australia Council has acknowledged the benchmarks set the Regional Arts NSW project and is planning a national audience research skills development program that builds on the work done by Lisa as well as providing other resources such as an information clearing house.

Meanwhile, you can find out more about the Regional Arts NSW Audience Development project on the Projects pages of our website. ■

**Lisa Andersen and speakers from STARTS, West Darling Arts, Cowra Art Gallery and the Lieder Theatre Company present case studies from the Audience Development Project on Friday 15 September at the 2006 RAA National Conference, The Pacific Edge.**

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## must go on

### Audience Development Project



L-R Cath Henkel, Lisa Andersen, Sandy McCutcheon, Jeremy Sim and John C. Barsness at the 'How are we going? Directions for the arts in The Creative Age' forum, 2005.

- Audience research and marketing planning for community-run cinemas in the North West, with Arts North West and the University of New England.
- Audience research on two local festivals in the Central West: the Canowindra Springfest and the Catapult Youth Arts Festival, with Arts OutWest, Charles Sturt University and UTS.
- An audience survey of a touring theatre production by Orana Arts and Dubbo Artz to inform planning for a new venue.

The audience research aspect of the project is unprecedented in regional New South Wales, delivering new knowledge and insights into audience needs and expectations. But perhaps more

## September

23 – 24 September

👏 Mid North Coast Belly Dance Festival Workshops, concerts and Sahla celebrating the power and energy of women. **MANNING VALLEY, WINGHAM** and **TAREE**. Tel 02 6550 4586 Website [www.moonlightgypsies.elands.com/](http://www.moonlightgypsies.elands.com/)

23 September – 8 October

🎨 Escape ArtFest Showcase of artistic talent in the southern Shoalhaven district artists and their various media and techniques **ULLADULLA** Tel 02 4454 993

24 September – 31 January

👁️ Thursday Plantation East Coast Sculpture Show Contemporary works by Australian artists displayed throughout botanical gardens. Gallans Road, **BALLINA** Tel 02 6686 7273

Until 24 September

👁️ *Stories: Country, Spirit, Knowledge and Politics* A diverse collection of works by Indigenous artists from all parts of Australia. Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, **BOORAGUL** Tel 02 4965 8260

It's Friday night and  
 the theatre is filling  
 up with people; faces  
 glowing with energy  
 and excitement.  
 by NICOLE TALMACS

Not only can you see satisfied  
 audience members returning to  
 the theatre but you make out  
 new faces, proof that your  
 marketing as been effective and  
 the word-of-mouth is good.

**AND YOU HAVE IT WELL DOCUMENTED: THEIR NAMES, THEIR addresses for your mailouts and e-bulletins and some details about them that will keep your sponsors and funders happy.**

**"How?" you ask. Simple: Do some audience research.**

Misconceptions about audience research that I heard during my year as an audience researcher with Regional Arts NSW included, "It scares people off," and, "It's only for those who wish to increase their audience." But listening to your audience is always worthwhile and your audiences want to be heard. They want to tell you their thoughts about their experience and in some cases – for example sitting in a theatre during intermission with noisy children – have been thankful for the distraction!

Audience research provides feedback to assist you to improve or grow an event, can measure whether your marketing spend has worked and, best of all, can provide clear evidence of the value of your arts activity for the local community to use in your advocacy and lobbying.

So how are people doing it?

The Audience Development Project, led by Lisa Andersen, Audience Development Specialist at Regional Arts NSW, has highlighted existing relationships between universities and TAFEs throughout NSW. These partnerships provide arts organisers with some expertise and resources to undertake audience research.

So – gather your team of volunteer students or willing community members and use some of these good practice tips and tricks for collecting information that we have come across in regional NSW.

- Distribute and collect surveys when your audience are sitting down with refreshments or, like Bob Craven did with **Canowindra SpringFest Street Parade**, make cardboard clipboards for them to lean on as they write.

- Collect postcodes or place of residence and age when people book a ticket (and also write down gender)... you may be surprised at how much these three pieces of information will tell you.
- Don't let them get away! Collect their contact details when they fill in a survey to build your database
- For people in a rush who do not have the time to complete a survey, ask for a telephone number like they do at Coolangatta-Tweed's **Wintersun Carnival**. Call them with your survey in the days following the event.
- If you are having problems counting the crowd on the day, take some crowd photos so you can figure it out later and even discover demographic information on who was there (gender, age, local faces/new faces).
- If you can't do a survey with statistical analysis, choose the three most important questions and survey your audience

Don't let them  
 get away!  
 or How to really 'capture'  
 your audience

as they pass by with simple tally marks on clipboards and use your own eyes to estimate age and gender. This simple but effective method does not need a team of statisticians and was used by **ArtsCape** at the Byron Bay Lighthouse in 2005.

- Ask your volunteers to listen carefully to and remember what people were saying and then get their feedback after the event, like they do at the **Byron Bay Writers Festival**.
- Be curious and ask questions. Learn from those already doing audience research.

Surveying your audience should, above all, be fun. Take any criticisms or suggestions in the right spirit and act on the experience. Use imagination to not only write the questions that will collect the information you need but work out how and when you can realistically get it and then do the analysis. And, however you gather the information, use the advice from your audience wisely. After all, these are the most important people in the room.

So, how well do you know your audience? ■

## September

25 – 30 September

🏠 Mystical Arts of Tibet A week of Divinations, morning and afternoon meditations, sand mandalas and talks. A & I Hall, **BANGALOW**. Tel 02 6684 7921

27 September – 1 October

🏠 *Sakura Matsuri* – Japanese cultural events and workshops celebrating the Cherry Blossom season. **COWRA** Japanese Garden Tel 02 6341 2233 Website [www.cowratourism.com.au](http://www.cowratourism.com.au)

28 –30 September

🏠 *Holy Day* by Andrew Bovell A gripping thriller with some truly horrifying moments. BATHURST Memorial Entertainment Centre Tel 02 6333 6161

28 September – 7 October

🏠 *Who Will Come To The Rescue?* New production by Fling Physical Theatre. **BEGA** Showground Pavilion. Bookings 1300 667 176

**BOASTING ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST IDYLIC COASTLINES AND a booming population, the Northern Rivers region is also host to numerous festivals and cultural events, ranging from visual and fringe arts festivals; a writers festival; classical, blues & roots and contemporary music festivals; to the Lismore Lantern Parade, film festivals and countless other festivals with creative components.**

When Lois Randall started as Regional Arts Development Officer for the region, one of her key strategies was to facilitate the formation of Arts Northern Rivers Cultural Festival and Events Network and hold a series of forums for event organisers with the aim of nurturing the local industry through the sharing of professional development expertise and networking.

The first forum took place in November 2004 as part of a general regional consultation process and the second forum took place in November 2005. A recommendation of the second forum was to undertake research in conjunction with the Regional Arts NSW Audience Development Project to examine existing audiences

The large number of repeat inter-regional, interstate and international visitors to some of the large, established festivals demonstrates the importance of these events in place-making for tourism and lifestyle migration."

The research identified the information gaps and professional development needs of organisers within the network and some opportunities for the network as a whole:

- to investigate a cooperative marketing model for festivals and events in the region;
- to pilot an event managers mentoring scheme (which will now be happening in a partnership between Regional Arts NSW and Arts Northern Rivers in early 2007);
- to set up more formal processes for volunteer recruitment and training for the network;
- to identify additional research that needs to be undertaken; and
- to set up a more formal structure for the network so it can build partnerships at peak levels for the benefit of all members.

# Strength in numbers

## The Northern Rivers Festival & Events Network

by NICOLE TALMACS



*The East Coast Blues & Roots Festival has an audience of around 70,000. Photo: Kate Bell*

for events in the region. Eighteen festivals participated to produce the report, from signature events such as the East Coast Blues and Roots Festival – with an audience of 70,000 – to smaller events such as FEHVA, Forty Eight Hours of Visual Arts – with an audience of 500.

The draft report found, not surprisingly, that festival culture is well established in region: "The high numbers of local visitors regularly attending these events suggest that they are important catalysts for community pride, spirit and cultural identity.

The research also identified the abundance of experience already existing amongst the network and the mission of the ongoing forums has become to develop opportunities to use the existing knowledge base in the region for professional development.

The first such opportunity was taken at the July 2006 forum. Jyllie Jackson, Artistic Director of the Lismore Lantern Parade, gave a presentation about the risk assessment and risk management her production team has undertaken in the last few years. This was followed by a presentation by John Bancroft, Events Coordinator for Lismore City Council, who dispelled some myths about local government approval processes, clarified the risk management requirements that Council is obliged to comply with and emphasised the benefits of involving local government in festival planning.

Collaborative ventures such as the Arts Northern Rivers Cultural Festival and Events Network highlight the importance of developing partnerships in regional areas. The wisdom and experience you need may be just around the corner. ■

**For more information about the Arts Northern Rivers Cultural Festival and Events Network contact Lois Randall, RADO  
Tel 02 6628 8120 Email [info@artsnorthernrivers.com.au](mailto:info@artsnorthernrivers.com.au)**

**A copy of the report is available from Lisa Andersen, Audience Development Specialist Email [lisa@regionalartsnsw.com.au](mailto:lisa@regionalartsnsw.com.au)**

## September – October

Until 29 September

👁️ *What's Your Cup of Tea?* Exhibition of 200 cups and saucers. **WAGGA WAGGA** Art Gallery Tel 02 6926 9660  
Website [www.waggaartgallery.org](http://www.waggaartgallery.org)

29 – 30 September

🎪 Deni Play on the Plains Festival & World Record Ute Muster Celebrating Australian rural culture. Madison Square **DENILQUIN** Tel 03 5881 3388 Website [www.deniutemuster.com.au](http://www.deniutemuster.com.au)

29 September – 1 October

🎪 Festival of Dance – Square dancing, Old Time and New Vogue across **COROWA** Tel 1800 814 054  
Website [www.corowa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.corowa.nsw.gov.au)

29 September – 1 October

🎪 Telstra Country Wide Great Southern Blues & Rockabilly Festival Artists from around the world. Smyth Oval, **NAROOMA** Tel 02 4476 2550  
Website [www.bluesfestival.tv](http://www.bluesfestival.tv)