



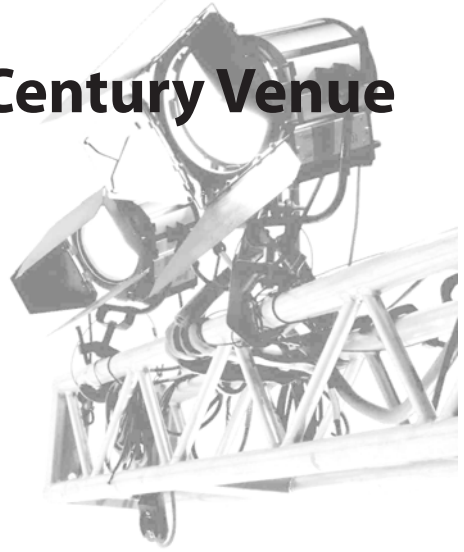
Key Issues in the Arts and Entertainment Industry

Edited by Ben Walmsley

7 The 21st Century Venue

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7 The 21st Century Venue



Douglas Brown

Introduction

A fundamental ingredient of presenting quality arts and entertainment experiences to contemporary audiences is the imaginative design, management and use of the places in which they happen: the venues. This chapter will continue to explore the changing relationship between audiences, producers and presenters of live arts and entertainment by looking at the design and use of physical spaces.

Whether we are talking about a large arena, a formal theatre space, a temporary performing space or a mobile cinema, many of the issues facing producers and managers are similar. This chapter will explore a number of issues affecting the design and use of spaces – large and small, formal and informal – and the current trends in venue design and management for presenting entertainment and the arts.

In the course of the chapter, we will consider topics such as the history of venue design and the justifications for different venues and building processes, as well as design issues including inclusivity, sustainability, flexibility and the use of technology. Trends including the move towards intimacy and transparency will be looked at in the context of how these issues relate to key values, such as equality, community, innovation and empowerment of the individual.

Public provision

Different countries offer alternative examples of the provision of performing arts and entertainment venues, depending on who controls and manages the buildings and how they are funded. Venues can be owned and managed by local governments, private trusts, voluntary bodies, universities and commercial enterprises. The public funding used to sustain and support buildings varies widely. The models and debates range from contributing full public funding and control to offering no public support whatsoever, which compels venues to run as commercial entities. In reality, most models fit somewhere in the middle of this spectrum (Strong, 2010).

Justification for public spending on buildings relies upon the following arguments. First is the **cultural** argument that having a performing arts venue protects and promotes cultural heritage, offering a place for the presentation of valued art forms, as well as preserving historic performance venues as important examples of architectural heritage. This perspective regards the buildings themselves as instruments to understand past cultural activities. Second are **economic** arguments, focused on economic impact reports, which promote the notion that venues can boost a local economy and bring money into its region, offering employment opportunities and stimulating business activity, both within and around the venue. Third is a **prestige** argument, that a venue can reinforce local identity, attract national and international attention and become an iconic symbol for the place itself, boosting cultural tourism. The most notable international example here is the Sydney Opera House, but more contemporary examples include London's O2 Arena, the Sage in Gateshead and the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff. Fourth is the **wellbeing** argument that people's quality of life is improved by venues offering complementary activities to work and home responsibilities, which enrich people's social and leisure time. Fifth, the argument that a venue can assist in the formation or rebuilding of a community or revitalising of a locality is about **regeneration**, which occurs by attracting visitors and stimulating tourism. Finally is the **educational** standpoint that venues offer learning and development opportunities by championing cultural engagement and encouraging active participation (Appleton, 1997).

Barriers to attendance

However, good design of public performing spaces must also address the challenges of increasing attendance and attracting new audiences. The planning and design must focus on combating the public's natural anxiety about

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