

CAREER VIEW

THEATRE

Theatre tells stories that touch the core of universal human experience or, as Hamlet said the purpose of playing is to “hold the mirror up to nature.” New Zealand theatre has grown and evolved over the past 160 years, entertaining audiences and helping our society understand itself better. Innovative playwrights, performers and directors continue to push the boundaries with original works that reflect our changing world, both within the Pacific and on the global stage.

WHAT IS THEATRE?

“Theatre is the first human invention.”
– Augusto Boal

There is both “theatre,” and “The Theatre.” “Theatre” constructs itself around us in every direction, as we live and participate in our lives, twenty four hours a day. Theatre is expressed in all our institutions of work, leisure, worship and trade; in the languages and gestures we use; in the clothes we wear to display our status, function and sex appeal; in the ways we make and show allegiances, express agreements and conflicts; and in how we shift between our sense of ourselves as families, groups, tribes, nations and individuals. Theatre exists both socially outside, and psychologically inside, our heads.

“The Theatre,” on the other hand, describes certain highly ritualised social ceremonies and performances, often in special locations or buildings, particular to a culture or civilisation. In each place and time in which it arises, “The Theatre” evolves special conventions and stylisations, requiring particular education and training for both performers and spectators. These conventions examine human behaviours by enlarging or exaggerating them, intensifying them, and speeding them up or slowing them down. Human movements can always be seen as “dance,” human speech and languages as “songs,” the human face as a “mask,” and human actions as a struggle between Destiny and Free Will, with powerful moral and ethical implications.

How these things are shown and demonstrated depends on where, when and why they arise: Māori and Pasifika cultures have voices, motions and beliefs that are distinctively different from Japanese Kabuki

or Bunraku, and Hindu dance drama reflects different priorities than European naturalism, to take a few examples.

Theatre is always with us, as daily experience and as cultural event, although the absolute distinction between the two might not always be so obvious.

WHY STUDY THEATRE?

“Theatre is the place people come to see the truth about life...it is the social X-ray of its time.”
– Stella Adler

In New Zealand, Theatre began to be established as a University subject about forty years ago, evolving out of the study of Classics and Literatures. Today, the subject is studied alongside an awareness of the many more recent technical developments of Performance such as film, TV, radio, and interactive and social media. Theatre as a subject is bound up with questions of what is present and what is absent; with the illusion of reality, and the reality of an illusion.

At University Theatre is studied and experienced not as a training for professionalised entertainment industries (though it can provide a very important foundation for individuals who have these ambitions) but as an approach to a more holistic education in the subject, for its own sake.

Topical coverage of career related issues brought to you by Victoria University Career Development and Employment.

Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene. Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.

Studying Theatre means not just learning things but learning how to *do things*; the immediacy of learning through doing, whether this is writing original scripts, or designing visuals or sounds and music, or submitting to a physical training discipline, or learning improvisational skills, or mastering a combination of technologies. Although students learn to conduct enquiry and research in the form of conventional methods such as reading, critical writing and analysis of texts, the essence of learning is physical, sensory, imaginative and emotional. On an individual level, the study of Theatre encourages an experimental attitude to oneself and a pursuit of self-reliance and resourcefulness.

Theatre emphasises teamwork, collaboration and leadership. Everything in Theatre is accomplished through collaboration; students learn skills required for working with others, and dealing with the complexity of communications to achieve this. Theatre offers a unique take on understanding how human beings interact and interrelate, but always as a kind of play, as playing, through plays. At the same time, presenting performance in front of audiences provides distance and critique, judgement and objectivity, and a grounding sense of social reality.

These qualities and skills have wide implications and applications – in understanding the motives and the psychological strategies of others, and in supplying motivations and strategies oneself – to whatever walk of life or professional field.

WHAT SKILLS DO THEATRE GRADUATES DEVELOP?

Communication

Theatre emphasises working on your feet, working to time limits, and working with others who have their own agendas and tasks. Students develop skills in self-expression, in public rhetorics, in silent and subtle suggestion. There is the issue of knowing how to wait for one's cue, of knowing one's lines or role, of providing cuts or re-writes, not just in terms of specific theatre terminology and practice, but also as a way of being productive and creative with others.



Critical thinking

Students learn to evaluate and analyse texts and performances, styles of interpretation and direction, different types of acting, the diverse ways of designing spaces, and relationships between different forms of artistic expression. In a broader sense, students are encouraged to ask questions of human struggle, conflict, ideology, technological and social transformation, power and politics.

Research

As Stella Adler suggests, the theory and practice of Theatre is itself a research methodology with its own particular laboratories, workshops, experiments and techniques. Any subject can be investigated in this way; formulating questions, gathering information as facts or concepts, testing these out and demonstrating results to a public in a variety of presentational forms.

Creativity

Creativity is an open form of investigation which doesn't need to provide final answers or results to questions. Theatre encourages and cultivates lateral thinking, originality and innovation, and seeks new ways to connect bodies to ideas to stories to light and movement to sound – and to other people.

Leadership and teamwork

The intensive collaborative nature of Theatre trains students how to operate within a productive group, and how to steer that group. There are many leadership roles available to be studied and developed as specialisations: scriptwriting, directing, designing (sets, lighting, sound), producing, publicising, acting, stage managing, as well as in the publication of criticism and theory. The ability to lead cultural practice is integral to the range of public arts and cultural life in society as a whole.

WHERE DO THEATRE GRADUATES WORK?

Theatre study has been a starting point for graduate careers in film, television and radio, as well as theatre itself, and these contexts can supply further inroads into media and print journalism, arts management and administration, school teaching or academic careers, commercial and corporate scriptwriting, advertising, publicity and public relations, or events management. Allied to other technical skills or trades (e.g. electrician, carpentry and construction, visual and media design, audio engineering), or to another degree track such as public policy, law, commerce, marketing, management or tourism, Theatre can provide a particular kind of animation and organisation to a wide range of professions. The word 'performance' is arguably a contemporary paradigm; everyone, from scientists to politicians, athletes to small business operators, perceive the virtue in being able to make good public presentations that attract, entertain and convince.

Many people in the arts, however, define and identify themselves through their talent by working as self-employed and freelance: as directors, producers, actors, writers, scenographers/designers, entertainers, motivational speakers, entertainment industry technicians. This can lead to rich and varied careers, and work in different cultures in different parts of the world.

Public Sector

Government departments, ministries and government agencies may employ graduates with Arts degrees to entry level positions such as: assistant policy analyst, policy advisor, ministerial writer, administration officer or assistant, communications officer or advisor, research assistant and library assistant. Some areas have graduate development programmes, depending on their recruitment needs and the economic climate.

The person specification for a *graduate entry level position* may ask for: excellent, proven analytical skills; high-level oral and written communication skills; strong people skills; self-confidence and the ability to relate and work with a diverse range of others; a good postgraduate degree – Honours degree or higher, or a conjoint degree including either law, economics or science; an interest in issues relating to the work of the ministry, government agency or department.

Ministry for Culture and Heritage advises the government on arts, culture, heritage, sport and recreation, and broadcasting. The Ministry employs policy analysts and advisors, and administration staff.

Creative New Zealand is the national arts development agency developing, investing in and advocating for the arts. The organisation aims "to help develop strong and dynamic New Zealand arts which are valued in Aotearoa and internationally." Arts advisors need skills in project planning and policy analysis as well as a strong interest and experience in the arts.

NZ on Air is a government broadcast funding agency that "invests in a range of local television, radio, music and new media content to extend choices for New Zealand audiences." Advisory roles draw on backgrounds in the arts including theatre.

Capital E is a Wellington based not-for profit organisation that gives children access to a wide range of creative technology, live performance and community events. The organisation has links with tertiary institutions and looks out for emerging talent in writing, direction, acting, stage design and production. In its role as National Theatre for Children, Capital E tours productions both nationally and internationally; cast and crew are contracted per production and tours can last from a couple of weeks to several months. As well as exceptional talent in their chosen field, the abilities to be flexible and to get on with others are key requirements. Capital E National Theatre for Children is a development company which invests in a commissioning, development and production process of between 2 – 5 years from concept to stage presentation.

Local councils employ advisors in the arts, in community events and recreation. While teams are small, there are opportunities for experienced graduates to advise on performing arts and to work closely with the creative sector, or to transfer their skills into other areas within councils.

Private Sector

Event Management

Event management involves project managing events, festivals, conferences and productions. The work requires creativity and high organisational skills. Event managers usually work for a client, helping to identify the target audience and coming up with an event concept. They plan the logistics, source entertainment, coordinate publicity and the technical aspects, then administer the event.

Professional Theatre Companies

Professional theatre companies are small in number and size and are based in the main centres. They hire staff to run the theatre and pay a professional wage to production crew and cast. Some theatres pay a share of box office takings. There are a number of independent companies and a variety of remuneration arrangements. The operational side of theatre also requires skills in business, accountancy, management and marketing experience combined with an interest in and knowledge of theatre.

Advertising, Marketing, Public Relations, Communications

- **Advertising** is concerned with the promotion of goods and services through major mediums including television, radio, the internet, cinema, magazines, newspapers, video games, mobile phones and billboards. Roles in advertising agencies include: administrative positions; account managers who work with clients to plan campaigns and manage the production of advertisements; creatives who come up with ideas for advertisements; copywriters who write the ads; the media team that works out which media to use and buys the best value space to reach the target audience; art directors who are in charge of graphics.

- **Marketing and publicity professionals** plan and implement marketing campaigns. Excellent written communication and interpersonal skills are necessary. Some theatres employ a marketing and publicity manager.

- **Public relations (PR)** is the process by which organisations establish and maintain good will and understanding with stakeholders. PR is a two-way communication process that values feedback and seeks to manage public opinion by transmitting positive information to people the organisation wishes to influence.

- **Communications** is responsible for promoting an organisation's image and reputation to the public, as well as informing staff and clients about what is happening within the organisation. In some organisations communications and marketing roles are combined.

Education

Teaching in secondary schools is a rewarding career for graduates with a passion for the arts and the desire to work with young people. Theatre and drama are part of the curriculum and the extracurricular activities offered by many schools. Early childhood and primary teaching are options for those wanting to work with children to establish the foundations of

literacy and creativity. Students may do a four-year conjoint degree with a Bachelor of Teaching and double major or a one-year, Graduate Diploma of Teaching following graduation with a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Teaching at university level usually requires a PhD. Theatre students can advance their research and teaching skills by undertaking a Master's or PhD degree, and may have the opportunity to tutor undergraduate students part time. Many students also go overseas to study. Other roles in tertiary institutions include academic advisors, career consultants or administrators.

Journalism

Graduates intending to work as permanent editorial staff (reporters, sub-editors, editors) in the media usually require a Diploma in Journalism. It is possible to write freelance for niche publications without an industry qualification. Some journalists specialise in arts and entertainment or write theatre reviews for newspapers. Others work for magazines and write in depth critical analyses, relating theatre to social context. Opportunities for this kind of work are few and generally found overseas.

Professional Writing

Few playwrights make a living full time and that is usually in television. Many supplement their income by doing other kinds of writing such as copy writing for advertising, or for museum and art gallery exhibitions. Technical and instructional writing is another option – writing manuals and instructional information for appliances and other technology, or health and safety procedures for companies. Writing for the internet is a growing area as more material goes online.

Portfolio Careers

Theatre productions run for a limited season. People who work in theatre often have several income streams either within the theatre and creative arts world or allied industries such as museums and galleries, in writing, event management, tutoring and other areas of expertise.

Self-Employment/Freelance Work

Talented people may set up their own business as freelance directors, producers, actors, entertainers, motivational speakers and theatre technicians.

GRADUATE PROFILES

Industry Bodies

Playmarket is an organisation that helps develop and support playwrights throughout New Zealand. Playmarket coordinates resources, services and opportunities for playwrights and advocates for the continued growth of New Zealand theatre. Playmarket's Auckland office runs a development programme for Māori and Pasifika playwrights and acts as an advisory service, as well as managing a number of projects in partnership with local bodies. Membership is open to everyone.

The Young and Hungry Arts Trust is a charitable organisation, founded in 1994, in association with BATS Theatre. Young and Hungry provides young people, aged 15-25 years, with mentorship and development opportunities in all facets of professional theatre including: acting, playwriting, stage management, costumes, set design, lighting, sound design and publicity. Many young people who started out at Young and Hungry – including many Victoria University Theatre alumni – have gone on to become accomplished theatre practitioners, playwrights and film professionals.

JOB TITLES

Following is a list of sample of job titles reported in graduate employment destination surveys. Some roles may require additional qualifications and training.

- Actor • Arts administrator • Arts advisor •
- Assistant director • Broadcaster • Casting assistant •
- Community arts worker • Critic/reviewer • Designer •
- Director • Drama coach • Events manager • Journalist
- Marketing assistant/manager • Playwright • Policy analyst • Publicist • Scenographer • Script editor •
- Scriptwriter • Stage manager • Story editor •
- Talent agent • Teacher • Theatre and media producer
- Theatre manager • Tourist guide



Mark Da Vanzo

*Manager Arts Investments
Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa*



I had been interested in theatre and film throughout my childhood and was keen to formalise my knowledge in this area at university. In the mid 1990's I initially took a conjoint degree, Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Arts (LLB/BA), but after two years realised that I wasn't really doing either of them justice given the time each one deserved. So, I made the choice to focus on my Theatre and Film degree.

I instantly warmed to the Theatre and Film department. It was a supportive environment where you felt free to experiment and take risks within the context of your studies. A new theatre had been installed at 77 Fairlie Terrace and we were one of the first years to get the benefit of this purpose-built space. Our lecturers were brilliant – Carnegie, Downie and Mann. Each had his own distinctive style and challenged us to explore theatre, using a practical method to shed light on our theoretical understandings. A memorable production for me was where we had to explore Wellington's taxi industry and devise our own piece based on our research. All of the taxi drivers we interviewed attended a performance one night and we were hoping like mad that they would think we had done them, and their profession, justice.

I think the most important thing I learnt during my time at the Theatre and Film department was that this was just the beginning. I'm a believer in life long education and my experiences at 77 Fairlie Terrace whet my appetite for further studies and for a collaborative approach to work. I have since acted, directed, worked in arts administration and even spent some time in major global corporations such as The Walt Disney Company.

The skills I learnt during both my degree and post-graduate studies have all been transferable to the workforce and I've been lucky to work for some great employers. What I've found to date is that employers tend to look for that point of difference in prospective employees. The creative approach, blended with academic discipline, has helped differentiate me from the crowd. To be honest I was really worried when I dropped Law that I was turning my back on an assured career path. My advice would be that no career path is assured. It's important to follow the

subject that you connect with the most, the one that lights your fire. In the future, people will see that connection and respond to your enthusiasm. For me, the Theatre and Film degree lit my fire and it is still burning bright today.

Eleanor Bishop

*Theatre Director and Producer
Freelance*



Growing up I had always loved performing and the stage, but in seventh form I directed a school production and got the directing bug. After school I decided to go to Victoria to get a taste of all aspects of theatre instead of attempting to audition for drama school and train as an actor.

I'm so glad I did. In the Theatre Programme, I enjoyed the diversity of study – making our own shows, studying classic plays, learning about modern practitioners. It all contributed to my understanding and knowledge of theatre, which I use every day as a theatre maker.

Studying the dramaturgy of other plays taught me how to structure and craft my own work. Exposure to a wide variety of theatre and styles continue to inspire me, and further study has built me a toolkit of forms and processes to use in my own work. Studying the critical theories of theatre helps me every day as I question in my own work – what do I want this to do for audience? Engage? Provoke? Delight? How can I make my work do that? Theatre encouraged us to make our own work – to understand who we were as people and artists. The Victoria Theatre Programme's ethos is that you are entering a legacy and history of theatre in this country. It's important to know this history in order to build upon it once you get out. I was equipped with the drive and courage to forge and create my own career path, and to carve a new spot for myself in the history of New Zealand theatre.

Overall, Victoria is practical. You may not be acting every day, but if you get amongst it, you can live and breathe theatre for three years. I loved going down to BATS, Circa, Downstage, Te Whaea every week, seeing new shows and discussing them with my tutors and lecturers. I enjoyed being able to study other subjects alongside my Theatre degree, such as English, Film, Media Studies, Gender Studies, Classics and Economics. To be an artist, you do need to understand

your craft, but you also need to understand and be curious about the world, other people and art forms. That's why you shouldn't study theatre by itself!

Victoria equipped me with a set of skills and processes. I learnt how to make productions – everything from devising, writing, working collaboratively, stage management, publicity, lighting and sound. Victoria taught me initiative. How to direct your own projects, build your vision and bring others into that vision. Whilst studying, my friends and I started a theatre company (The PlayGround Collective). Eli Kent and Robin Kerr both went on to study at Victoria, Eli on the Master's (MA) Scriptwriting course, and Robin on the Master in Theatre Arts (MTA) in Directing which is co-taught with Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School. I'd had success producing one of Eli's plays whilst studying. Once I finished my Honours, continuing to work together was the most natural thing in the world. Three months later, I directed *The Intricate Art of Actually Caring*, a play performed in Eli's bedroom, employing all that I'd learnt at Victoria. It won Best Theatre in the Fringe, Most Original Production at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards, and three years later is still touring around New Zealand. It's been uphill from there.

The main advice I would give to students wanting to study theatre is to absorb everything. Study other things alongside your Theatre – History, Philosophy, English. Soak up everything that Theatre has to offer. And then use it in your own work.

Steph Walker

*General Manager
Christchurch Arts Festival*



I actually started my degree off in Christchurch, my hometown, but I had heard great things about the Theatre department at Victoria and the time was ripe for a move to Wellington – such an exciting city. It was the best move I could have made. The practical nature of the Theatre course has meant that I have a grasp of all aspects of theatre production – from creating a character to rigging a light. The smaller class sizes meant that we created a tight team, and many of these people have become trusted collaborators.

Studio 77 was a fantastic place to learn. In hindsight, we were amazingly lucky to have the use of a fully

functioning theatre to experiment with. The Green Room became a hang out space between classes, and we felt pretty smug we had a building all to ourselves.

We were encouraged from the outset to sample the works the three professional theatres in Wellington were presenting, and I started volunteering at BATS Theatre to get in to shows there for free, then worked as Front of House Manager. I also produced a few shows there, working with people I had met through my Theatre major.

A couple of years after I finished my degree I went to London and did my Master's in Arts Management, and since then I have been the Programme Manager at BATS theatre, and now the General Manager at the Christchurch Arts Festival. My degree set me up with a broad appreciation of theatre and all its forms, and how to make it. This has been invaluable for understanding the craft needed to present top-notch shows that audiences will appreciate.

I think I entered the degree with delusions of being a professional actor, but the degree showed me how many more options there were available to me in the theatre and performing arts industry. I got to dabble in sound and lighting design, directing, publicity, producing and many other things besides, and I got to work with committed teams of fellow students to make works I am still proud of.

A Theatre major can take you just about anywhere you like, as I have seen by the range of jobs my year group have gone in to. As with anything, the key to making the most of the Theatre major is to get stuck in to the huge amounts of opportunities that come your way in the department, to get out and see all the theatre that Wellington has to offer, and to keep an open mind as to what aspects of theatre you'd like to get involved with.

Fiona McNamara

*Director, Producer, Devisor and Dramaturg
Binge Culture Collective*



I chose to study Theatre at Victoria because of the combined practical and scholarly approach, the options of cross-disciplinary study and the cultural opportunities the city has to offer. I also majored in German, through which I gained access to another culture and literature. I took papers in Art History, Political Science, Gender

Studies, Film and International Relations. All of these courses influence the work I make now. Currently, I am completing a Master's in the School of Languages and Cultures, combining German and Theatre, while making my own productions in the Wellington theatre industry.

After completing my Bachelor of Arts, I was awarded a scholarship to study Theatre at the Freie Universität Berlin. Studying and living in the artistic metropolis of Berlin has had a strong influence on my postgraduate research and artistic endeavours since returning to New Zealand. Inspired by Shakespearean adaptations and the visual aesthetics of work I saw in Germany, I adapted Shakespeare's poem "The Rape of Lucrece" into a performance for my Honours research project. I am currently developing it into a performative art installation, which has been programmed at Toi Poneke Gallery in 2012. At first I took every opportunity to be involved in the professional theatre industry. I volunteered at the BATS Theatre Candy Bar and worked as an assistant producer. Through this, I met people who asked me to work with them again. Soon I was stage managing, producing and publicising, and finally producing and directing my own works. Studying at Victoria means that I am not trained for just one job, which is essential in the arts industry, where we constantly move between projects. As a director and producer it is important to understand all areas of production, and through practical course work I tried a bit of lighting, costume, set design and acting. The chance to stage manage and direct university productions helped me to develop key life skills in leadership, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving that are transferable to any workplace.

In practical courses I met like-minded people with whom I formed a theatre company called Binge Culture Collective. We performed our first two public works the summer we graduated. Since then we have toured New Zealand to Auckland, Dunedin and Takaka. We're currently working on a commission for BATS's STAB season, and have been working on several projects in partnership with Downstage Theatre.

THEATRE AT VICTORIA

The Theatre Programme is part of the School of English, Film, Theatre, and Media Studies at Victoria University. The four disciplines share a common focus on the creation, production and interpretation of texts whether written, spoken, theatrical, cinematic, televised or electronic. A Bachelor of Arts (BA) major in Theatre aims at an understanding of art forms that both affirm and question the most fundamental values of individuals and societies. Within a university context of teaching and research, practical creative work is integrated with literary, critical and historical study in the belief that experience of the craft is an essential ingredient in understanding the art. Acting, technical work, directing and public performance form an important part of the Programme's approach to the study of Theatre although we do not aim to provide vocational training.

To ensure that you meet your future academic and employment aspirations, it is important to plan your degree programme carefully. This may mean completing courses in other subjects and possibly a second major. A double major with English or Film is a popular combination. Students majoring in other disciplines find that Theatre courses are a valuable complement to studies in areas such as Art History, Classical Studies, Cultural Anthropology, Design, History, Law, Linguistics, Media Studies, Music and Sociology.

Theatre can also be pursued at the postgraduate level and qualifications include:

- Graduate Diploma in Arts
- Postgraduate Diploma in Arts
- Bachelor of Arts with Honours
- Master of Arts
- PhD
- Master of Theatre Arts

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The Master of Theatre Arts (MTA) in Directing is an applied Master's degree taught jointly by the Theatre Programme and Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School, which is the country's foremost training school for theatre professionals. Through a two-year full-time programme combining practical and theoretical studies, students will develop the necessary skills to direct and initiate projects in the professional theatre and related areas.

A wide range of student theatrical productions is presented to a wider public, mainly in the well-equipped and highly adaptable theatre, Studio 77. From time to time Studio 77 also hosts productions from other university departments, and from visiting professional productions and groups. There is a continuing professional relationship with people working in theatre, so that students have opportunities to talk with, listen to, and work with playwrights, directors, designers, actors, technicians and critics from throughout this country, and from overseas.

Research

In their research Theatre Programme academic staff engage the productive interplay between theory and practice. All academic staff are themselves theatre makers so that in addition to standard academic articles and books, their research projects include productions at professional theatres in Wellington, across New Zealand and overseas. Staff members have collaborated in major works shown at the New Zealand International Arts Festival and have involved students in a production of the world premiere of a 'lost' Shakespeare play, *The History of Cardenio*. Specific areas of creative and research expertise include: directing, scriptwriting, scenography, dramaturging, acting, New Zealand theatre, Early Modern theatre, Contemporary British theatre and film, sustainable scenography, critical theory, German theatre, Stage Adaptation, Asian performance, physical theatre and theatre pedagogy.