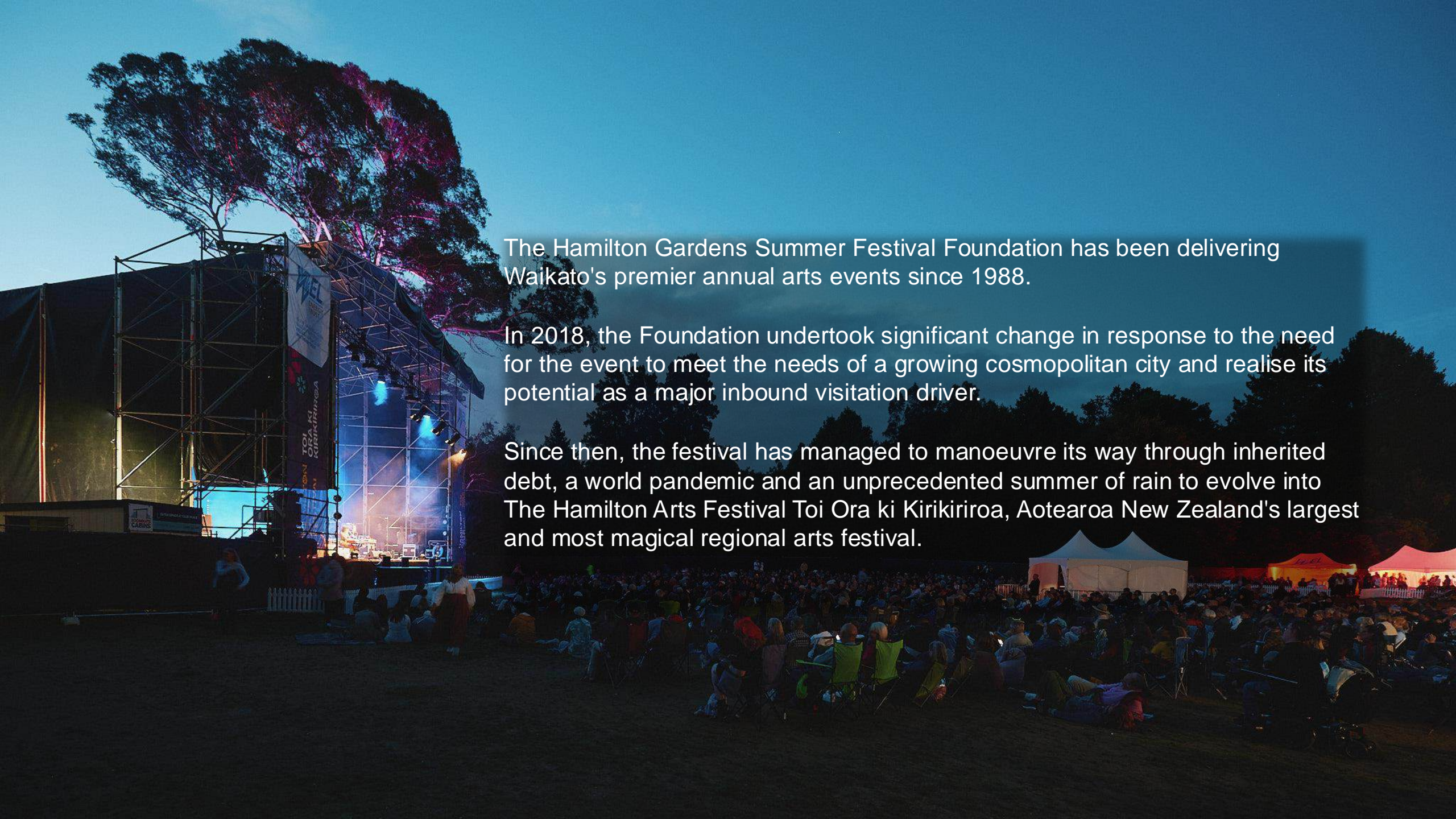


A promotional image for the Hamilton Arts Festival 2025. The scene is set at dusk in a garden-like venue. In the center, a stage with a classical architectural facade is illuminated with warm yellow and orange lights. A performer is visible on stage. The stage is flanked by long, covered walkways with blue roofs and light blue columns. People are seated on these walkways, watching the performance. In the foreground, a long, narrow water channel with a small waterfall flows through the garden. A camera on a tripod is positioned in the water channel, capturing the scene. The sky is a soft twilight blue.

**HAMILT*
ARTS
FESTIVAL**

**TOI
ORA KI
KIRIKIRIR*
A**

2025



The Hamilton Gardens Summer Festival Foundation has been delivering Waikato's premier annual arts events since 1988.

In 2018, the Foundation undertook significant change in response to the need for the event to meet the needs of a growing cosmopolitan city and realise its potential as a major inbound visitation driver.

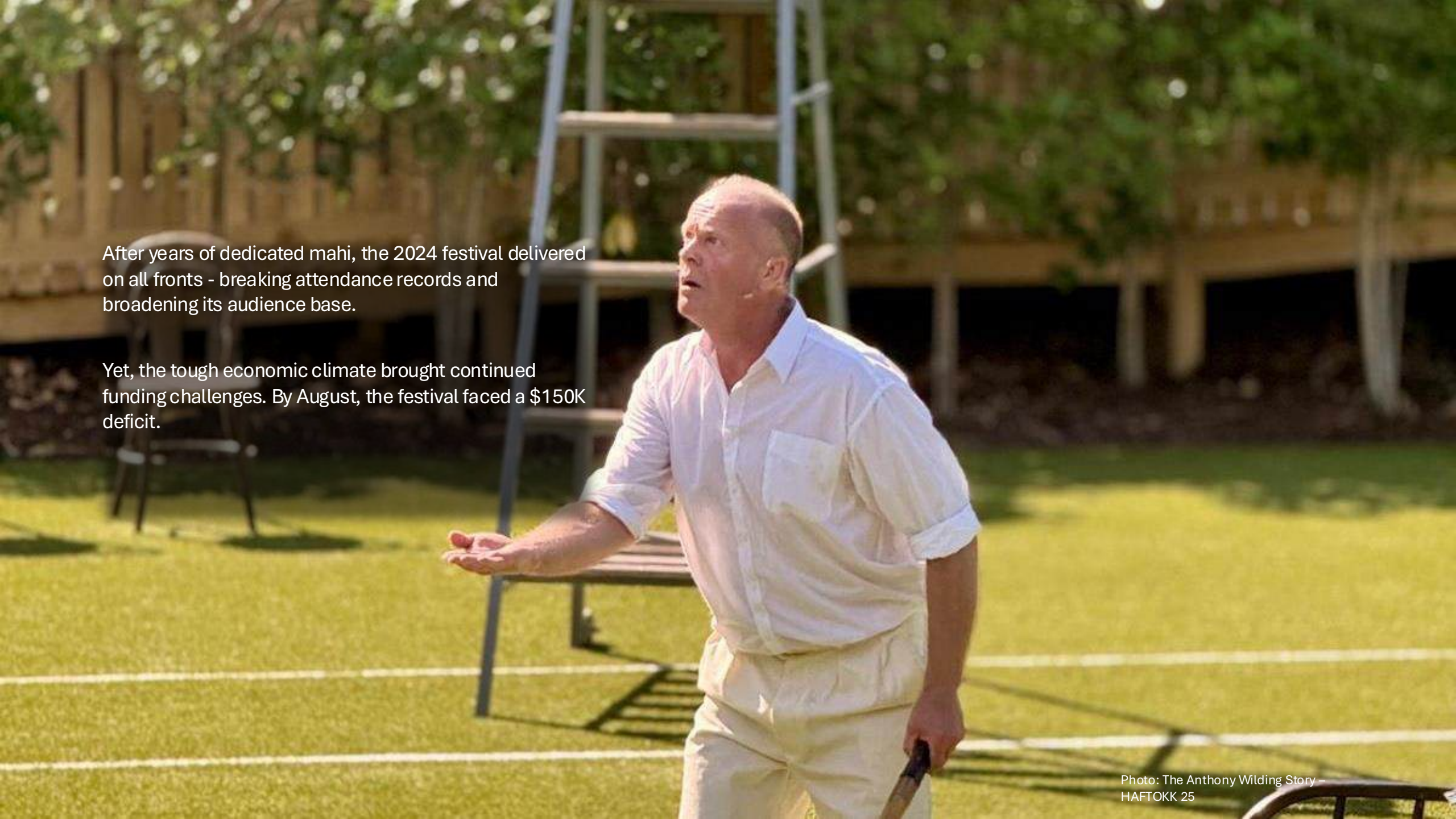
Since then, the festival has managed to manoeuvre its way through inherited debt, a world pandemic and an unprecedented summer of rain to evolve into The Hamilton Arts Festival Toi Ora ki Kirikiriroa, Aotearoa New Zealand's largest and most magical regional arts festival.

Festival Mission



With the festival now firmly established on both the local and national cultural calendars, the revised mission statement established in 2018 stays true:

1. Drive solidarity and connectivity through a vibrant celebration of New Zealand arts, culture, and entertainment. The festival remains committed to accessibility by offering many free or low-cost experiences that showcase the region's unique identity, its people, and what it means to be "Kiwi."
2. Establish national significance, evolving the festival into a premier cultural event that is recognised as a "must-do" experience on New Zealand's annual cultural tourism calendar.
3. Enhance Waikato's liveability by enriching the region's cultural life and fostering creative, connected community.

A man in a white short-sleeved button-down shirt and white trousers is standing on a green lawn tennis court. He is looking upwards and to his left with an open mouth and an open right hand, as if he is in the middle of a conversation or reacting to something. He is holding a tennis racket in his left hand. In the background, there are metal bleachers and a wooden fence with trees behind it. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

After years of dedicated mahi, the 2024 festival delivered on all fronts - breaking attendance records and broadening its audience base.

Yet, the tough economic climate brought continued funding challenges. By August, the festival faced a \$150K deficit.


Patron Scheme



In response, the community rallied with overwhelming support.

Introduced in 2024, the Patron Scheme - cheekily titled Friends with Benefits - welcomed donations from individuals, families, and small businesses.

In its first year, it raised \$23,100. This, alongside our visionary funders/sponsors already generous commitments, reduced the shortfall, giving the Foundation the confidence to proceed.



This year's festival not only went ahead, but surpassed expectations.

Ticketed event attendance again broke records, up over 40% compared to pre-2024.

The festival now stands as Aotearoa's largest regional arts celebration, reflecting its rising national profile and deepening local pride.

The Numbers

- 10 days, 49 shows, 103 performances
- 203 entertainment hours
- 10,678 ticketed attendees
- 36,100 free/koha attendees
- 5,500 at Sunset Symphony
- 20 free or koha events
- 12 sold-out shows
- 22 venues

The Numbers

Exposure & promotion for the city

- 47,000: Total attendance
 - 53.3% Hamilton Residents
 - 6%: Wider Waikato Residents
 - 30.2%: Outside of Waikato
 - 10.5%: Unknow
- 76% of non-local visitors came specifically for the festival
- 2.5: Average number of festival days attended
- 1.5: Average number of nights spent in accommodation



The Numbers

Economic Benefit to Hamilton City

- \$14.1 million injected into the Hamilton economy.

Value of Social & Wellbeing benefit to Hamilton City:

- \$7.2 million in social impact value (conservative)

Formulated using the Live Performance Value Economic & Wellbeing Calculator 2024- Massey University - funded by Manatū Taonga/The Ministry for Culture & Heritage.

The Team

- 60: Number of volunteers
- 1,086: Volunteer hours
- 1.5: Permanent FTE's
- 6: Short-Term Heads of Departments
- 25: Crew
- 8: Volunteer Trustees



Festival Artists

Consisting of award-winning drama, dance, comedy, music, and even fashion, this year's programme was a diverse celebration of Aotearoa New Zealand stories.

- **Over 800 artists employed**
- **75%+ based in the Waikato**
- **\$325,350 paid to artists**

Over 75% of all artists engaged were Waikato-based, reinforcing the festival's role as the region's largest employer of local artists and a vital contributor to our cultural economy.



The festival showcased the rich tapestry of toi Maaori, alongside contemporary and classical performances.

HamLit

Including the successful introduction of HamLit (Hamilton Literature), a two-day 'festival within a festival,' provided a dynamic space for literary exploration, discussions, and the exchange of ideas.

Community

A key feature of the 2025 programme was its strong emphasis on community-led events, with over 75% of participating artists based in the Waikato - performing alongside some of the best talent from across Aotearoa.

Significant artistic collaborations were a highlight, with local talent joining forces with major national companies to create unique experiences for both artists and audience - many of which were not seen elsewhere in the country.

Notable examples include:

- *Orchestra Central* partnering with *Tim Beveridge Productions* to present *The Music is Bond*
- *Opus Orchestra* collaborating with *NZ Opera* to stage *The Elixir of Love*

Of the six main stage performances on the Rhododendron Lawn, four featured Waikato-based artists - excluding the internationally acclaimed Hamilton-born group, *Katchafire*.

Opening with 120 of Waikato's finest musicians and choral singers performing the phenomenal *Carmina Burana*, this year's *Hamilton Arts Festival Toi Ora ki Kirikiriroa* launched into 10 days of some of the finest storytelling Aotearoa New Zealand has to offer.

Extraordinary Partnerships

A woman with glasses and curly hair is conducting an orchestra. She is wearing a dark jacket and has her arms raised, holding a baton. The background is dark with blue and purple stage lighting. In the foreground, there are blurred figures of musicians and a music stand with sheet music.

The festival plays a vital role in supporting other local not-for-profit organisations through unique collaborations that provide broader benefits to the community.

Examples include:

Orchestra Central: The annual iconic *Sunset Symphony* is a key performance indicator (KPI) as part of their operational grant with Trust Waikato.

Dragon Boat Racing/Waka Ama: Club volunteers provide back of house services to the festival in exchange for a substantial financial contribution to their organisation.

Waikato University Hockey Club: Inspired by the success of the Dragon Boat Racing arrangement, this new partnership provides essential security and bag-checking services.



Snapshot

Part of the festival's success stems from its growing reputation for presenting a quirky and highly accessible programme that resonates with the diversity of our community.



Our Audience

Audience feedback was captured through a combination of post-event online surveys, and face-to-face vox pops.

We received **707 responses**, up from **494 in 2024**.

Who Responded

- Median age: 56
- 11% under 35
- 37% over 65

(Note: The average age reflects survey respondents only and may not accurately represent the number of young people attending family-friendly events.)

Festival Experience

- 84% rated their overall festival experience as *phenomenal*
- 95% said they were likely or very likely to recommend the festival to others
- 35% were first-time festival attendees
- 46% agreed that they have regular access to arts events in Hamilton

Due to a data collection error, we were unable to capture audience ethnicity and/or gender information for this year.

Snapshot



The festival's commitment to accessibility ensured a diverse and inclusive experience, bringing our community together through free and koha-based events.



Conclusion & Future Prospects

A close-up photograph of a musician wearing a black hat and a black shirt, playing a saxophone. The musician is looking intently at the instrument. The background is a deep red color, and there are microphones visible on the stage.

The 2025 Hamilton Arts Festival Toi Ora ki Kirikiriroa has once again proven to be a cultural powerhouse, delivering an unforgettable celebration of arts, community, and creativity.

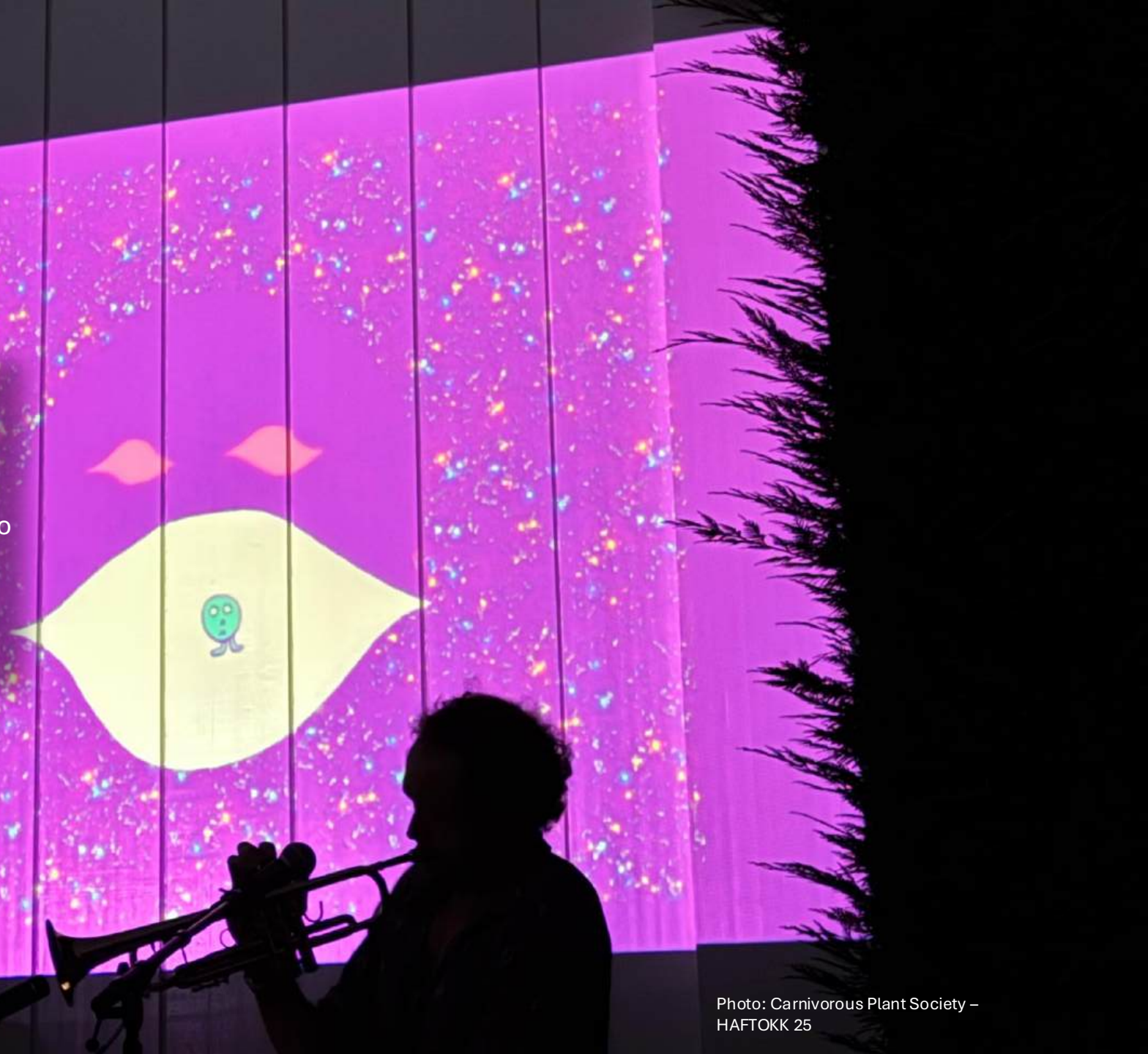
With record-breaking attendance, outstanding performances, and a growing national reputation, the festival continues to establish itself as Aotearoa New Zealand's most significant regional arts festival.

Conclusion & Future Prospects

However, despite its success, festival funding has remained static since 2016.

Rising infrastructure and compliance costs are no longer sustainable through cost-cutting alone.

Continued and increased investment is essential to secure the long-term future of Hamilton's most magical celebration of arts and culture.



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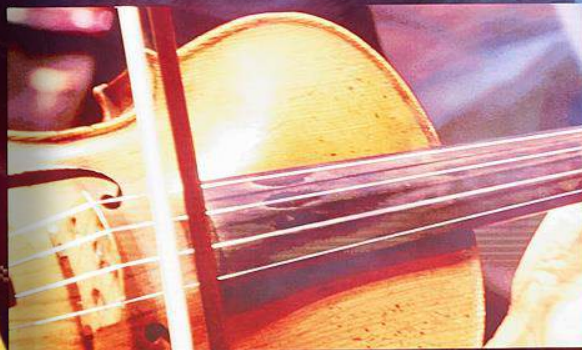
CLARENCE ST
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Next year's dates: 20 February – 1 March

