

Don't let curtain fall on us

Paul Nicolaou



The sudden cancellation of two major theatre productions — *Waitress* and *Beetlejuice* — sent shockwaves through Sydney's live performance industry.

Their loss should also send a message to the federal and state governments that they must support live theatre in a targeted way.

Sydney had become accustomed to every stage in our city hosting a magnificent range of world class live productions. Live theatre has until now defied gravity at a time of major challenges for the performing arts and many other parts of the economy.

The cost-of-living crisis is hitting businesses hard across hospitality, retail, tourism and entertainment. The cancellation of *Waitress* and *Beetlejuice* — both due to open later this year

— highlighted economic pressures confronting the live performance industry.

The impact extends far beyond the theatres where these blockbusters were due to play.

When theatres go dark, it means fewer visitors, lower consumer spending and fewer shifts for workers.

Live Performance Australia President Richard Evans says the industry has reached a “tipping point” with rising production costs, inflation and weaker consumer confidence.

Foundation Theatres CEO Graeme Kearns says these cancellations will have big consequences for performers, technicians, hospitality workers and businesses.

We still have a solid base of outstanding productions and the potential for more shows. But we

must keep the live theatre channel flowing.

Comparable countries such as the UK offer tax incentives to reduce financial risk for producers and encourage investment in new productions.

We should consider similar measures with federal and state governments working with Live Performance Australia and others to ensure the sector thrives. A strong arts sector brings our city to life at night, it attracts visitors, supports thousands of jobs and reinforces our standing as a global city.

Let's keep our theatre lights on.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney