



DARWIN
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025 - 2028



WELCOME

On behalf of the Darwin Symphony Orchestra (DSO) Board, I am proud to share this exciting new chapter in our history with you. As an orchestra deeply rooted in our community, this strategy honours our heritage and acknowledges the pivotal point we have reached in our development.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our major partners, Creative Australia and Arts NT, our University Partner Charles Darwin University, Darwin Entertainment Centre where we are a proud Resident Company, and all of our dedicated Partners. Without their support, the NT community would simply not have access to the cultural activities that DSO offers. A special thank you to the Darwin Symphony Orchestra musicians. Our orchestra has been built on the passion and commitment of these many wonderful musicians, and their continued contribution is fundamental to our future success. I express gratitude to all musicians, partners, patrons, and community members who contributed valuable input and guidance in shaping our strategic direction. Your support has been critical in the development of this plan.

Looking forward, we are excited about the path ahead and we encourage ongoing engagement and support from all stakeholders and our deeply valued audiences as we continue our purpose to reach people of all ages and enrich communities across the NT.

Claire Kilgariff | Darwin Symphony Orchestra Chair

BACKGROUND

Darwin Symphony Orchestra (DSO) stands at a pivotal moment in its journey, as it embarks on a new strategic direction for 2025-2028.

Development of this strategy requires contemplation to reshape the way in which DSO operates against a backdrop of growth and opportunity, primarily driven by an increase in Federal funding that enables all Principal positions in the orchestra to be paid for the first time and supports organisational sustainability.

This investment presents both opportunities and operational challenges, allowing DSO to deepen its artistic quality, enhance its professional profile, and sustain a vibrant music culture across the Northern Territory (NT).

A key factor prompting the development of this strategy is the evolving funding landscape. While the additional funding enables DSO to build capacity and increase its reach, there is a need to diversify income sources and ensure long-term sustainability. This plan places a strong focus on developing strategic partnerships, philanthropy, and self-generated income streams to secure DSO's financial health and reduce reliance on any single funding source.

DSO's commitment to embracing what is "uniquely NT" is at the heart of this strategy. By reflecting the Territory's cultural diversity and identity in its programming and performances, DSO aims to distinguish itself

from other orchestras around Australia. This includes long-term collaborations with local artists, and performances in both urban and remote areas. Embracing the NT's unique cultural life will continue to shape DSO's artistic vision and foster deeper connections with communities.

Accessibility and inclusivity are also central pillars. DSO is committed to creating opportunities for all Territorians to engage with music, regardless of their age, background, or location. Outreach across the NT will increase access to music experiences and encourage community participation, with an emphasis on developing pathways for young musicians to grow within DSO and beyond. Nurturing local talent and providing opportunities for NT musicians remains a key priority for DSO.

Sustainability is an important theme running through all aspects of the strategy, covering financial health, operational efficiency, and administrative capacity to support DSO's growth. With the increase in paid positions and expanded programs, it is crucial for DSO to balance its artistic ambitions with robust organisational structures to ensure continued excellence.

This strategy sets out a clear path for DSO to build on its strengths, adapt to the changing environment, and ensure that music continues to enrich lives across the Northern Territory.



PURPOSE

To perform inspiring orchestral music

VISION

Bringing people together through music that celebrates the unique cultural life of the Northern Territory

VALUES

COLLABORATION	Connecting with our communities and partnering with other arts organisations.
DIVERSITY	Celebrating the Territory's multicultural and First Nations communities, and honouring our rich history.
INNOVATION	Finding new ways to create engaging performances and reach audiences.
EXCELLENCE	Striving for individual and collective excellence in everything we do.
RESPECT	Communicating and leading with care, transparency and integrity.

GOALS

INSPIRING MUSIC	Present an artistic program of innovative work that engages and inspires musicians and audiences.
ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT	Support and encourage artistic growth and development.
COMMUNITY CONNECTION	Create pathways for participation and ensure access to music at every stage of life.
PUBLIC RECOGNITION	Be valued and recognised for our unique approach and high standard of delivery.
SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONS	Strengthen sustainable and ethical partnerships and practices for enduring operational excellence.



INSPIRING MUSIC

GOAL Present an artistic program of innovative work that engages and inspires musicians and audiences.

2025

Commission New Works: Commission a uniquely NT-focused piece that engages both musicians and audiences.

First Nations Collaboration: Increase opportunities for First Nations artists to participate in major performances that bring the NT's unique culture to life.

Collaborative Relationships: Embed a framework to develop long-lasting collaborative relationships with artists, focusing on the creation and continuation of unique NT works.

Full Orchestra Tour: Deliver a full orchestra tour across the NT, showcasing a distinct NT flair through unique programming and local collaborations.

Plan for Composer in Residence Expansion: Initiate planning for national recruitment and resource needs.

High-Quality Recordings: Begin producing high-quality recordings of key commissioned works and collaborations for promotion and archival purposes.

Engagement Survey: Conduct a survey to gather feedback from musicians and audiences, focusing on future programming. This includes reviewing the repertoire.

2026

Commission NT-Focused Works: Continue commissioning works with a uniquely NT focus, ensuring a balance of culturally relevant and traditional orchestral pieces.

Partnerships: Explore collaborations with key orchestras and ensembles to provide enhanced learning and performance opportunities.

New Performance Opportunities: Seek additional opportunities to collaborate with commercial partners and expand DSO's reach through diverse performances, ensuring alignment with NT's cultural identity while increasing income streams.

Continued Expansion of Composer in Residence Role: Implement the expanded role, with the Composer mentoring local talent and contributing new works.

High-Quality Recordings: Expand DSO's technological capacity and expertise to support the production of high-quality recordings.

2027-2028

Strengthen NT-Themed Repertoire: Build a lasting repertoire of NT-focused works, premiering these pieces as central to DSO's programming and artistic identity.

Expand Performance Opportunities: Broaden collaborations and explore national and international performances, continuing to showcase NT's cultural identity while growing DSO's reach and revenue.

Continued Expansion Composer in Residence Role: Further develop the role, focusing on new NT-themed works and collaborations that highlight NT's cultural diversity.

High-Quality Recordings: Maintain high-quality recordings of key works and collaborations to enhance DSO's regional and national profile.



ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

GOAL Support and encourage artistic growth and development.

2025

Clear Pathways for Young Musicians: Create transparent pathways for young musicians to join the orchestra, both internally and externally.

Expand Principal and Associate Roles: Increase the number of paid Principal positions to include 13 roles, and establish Associate Principal positions. This initiative will enhance the artistic integrity of the orchestra, providing leadership and mentorship to musicians.

Paid Performance Opportunities: Aim to introduce paid performance opportunities each year for both ensemble musicians and full orchestra performances.

First Nations Musician Pathways: Foster ongoing collaboration with First Nations musicians, co-developing pathways for professional growth and opportunities within the broader music sector.

Rehearsal Reform: Explore different rehearsal formats, trialling various blends of duration and intensity to identify the most effective approach for DSO.

Guest Conductors: Continue the annual practice of inviting guest conductors to provide mentorship and enhance artistic leadership, ensuring diverse perspectives and artistic variety for both musicians and audiences.

2026

Young Artists Program: Expand the Young Artists Program (YAP) into a full youth orchestra, providing a clear progression path for emerging talent.

Professional Education Opportunities: Develop a series of ongoing professional development opportunities for musicians including workshops and mentorship to further artistic growth.

Expand Paid Performance Opportunities: Increase the range and frequency of paid performance opportunities for both ensemble and full orchestra.

Implement Rehearsal Reform: Gradually adopt the most effective rehearsal formats identified through trials, balancing artistic standards with flexibility.

2027-2028

Youth Orchestra Development: Continue expanding the YAP into a comprehensive youth orchestra, increasing opportunities for participation and performance.

Paid Associate Principals: Transition Associate Principals into paid positions to elevate the overall artistic excellence of the orchestra, enhancing leadership and fostering higher musical standards among all musicians.

Conductor Development Program: Establish a conductor development program in partnership with other institutions to support the growth of emerging conductors.



COMMUNITY CONNECTION

GOAL Create pathways for participation and ensure access to music at every stage of life.

2025

Youth Participation Program: Develop youth driven music activities that provide professional development opportunities, develop our audience, and lay a foundation for a pathway into YAP.

Engage Stakeholders for Youth Participation Programs: Identify and connect with key stakeholders (schools, community groups, funders) to support youth participation and lay the foundation for future music development.

Community Outreach Performances: Introduce small ensemble performances in regional areas such as Palmerston, Katherine, and Batchelor to build meaningful connections with local communities and increase audience engagement.

Full Orchestra NT Tour: Deliver a full orchestra tour across the Northern Territory, providing wide audience exposure and fostering connections with regional communities.

Inclusive Programming: Continue family-friendly performances and programs that are accessible to all age groups, fostering community participation.

2026

Expand Youth Participation: Strengthen the youth participation program, creating clearer pathways for young people into more formal development opportunities such as the Youth Orchestra.

First Nations Engagement Advisor: Appoint a First Nations Engagement Advisor to guide outreach efforts and ensure genuine engagement with Indigenous communities in the NT.

Extend Community Reach: Expand community performances to Top End communities.

Plan Ensemble NT Tour: Begin detailed planning for an ensemble tour across the NT. This will involve identifying key regional areas for performance, engaging local partners, and ensuring logistical feasibility to maintain consistent engagement with diverse communities.

Accessibility and Inclusive Engagement: Develop accessible platforms that enable people with disabilities and older adults to participate in DSO's music programs. Focus on making DSO more inclusive and accessible.

2027-2028

Extended Youth Engagement: Deepen youth engagement by building long-term participation pathways that seamlessly connect community programs to professional opportunities, such as the Youth Orchestra and full orchestra.

Strengthen First Nations Engagement: Expand the role of the First Nations Engagement Advisor to deepen partnerships with Indigenous communities across the NT.

Extend Community Outreach: Further expand music programs to additional remote communities, including Barkly and Central Australia regions, ensuring all regions across the NT are represented in community outreach

Deliver Ensemble Tour and Plan Next Full Orchestra Tour: Execute the ensemble tour, bringing smaller, more intimate performances to NT communities. Concurrently, commence planning for the next full orchestra tour, alternating between full orchestra and ensemble tours every two years.

Scholarships and Access Programs: Develop scholarships and financial support for disadvantaged youth and families, ensuring that all have the opportunity to participate in music-making activities.

PUBLIC RECOGNITION

GOAL Be valued and recognised for our unique approach and high standard of delivery.

2025	2026	2027-2028
Cultural Collaborations: Partner with NT-based organisations to offer performances that resonate with diverse audiences and broaden DSO’s appeal.		
National Partnerships: Build associations with premier national arts organisations to increase visibility and credibility.		Rebrand as Territory Orchestra: Consider a rebranding initiative to position DSO as NT’s orchestra, enhancing national recognition.
Targeted Media Outreach: Create a media strategy focusing on local and national outlets (traditional and digital), tailored to specific audience segments.	Increase Marketing Capacity: Expand DSO’s marketing capabilities to lead strategic promotional efforts and enhance audience engagement.	International Outreach: Explore opportunities for international performances, especially in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, leveraging DSO’s professional reputation.
Performance Spotlight: Highlight unique aspects of each performance (e.g., collaborations, premieres) to engage media and boost visibility.	Performance Evaluation: Conduct an evaluation to assess and improve performance impact and audience engagement strategies.	Implement Performance Improvements: Apply the insights from the performance evaluation to refine and enhance audience engagement strategies.
Digital Marketing: Strengthen social media and digital marketing efforts to grow DSO’s audience and improve engagement, using data-driven strategies.		
Consistent Brand Marketing: Establish clear guidelines to ensure all DSO-branded messaging is consistent and aligns with the organisation’s core values and strategic direction.	Strengthen Brand Consistency: Regularly review and refine brand guidelines to ensure messaging remains cohesive across all platforms and aligns with evolving strategic priorities.	



SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONS

GOAL Strengthen sustainable and ethical partnerships and practices for enduring operational excellence.

2025

Strategic Funding and Partnership Review: Reassess the philanthropy, sponsorship, and overall funding strategies. Reassess the philanthropy, sponsorship, and overall funding strategies, to identify targeted opportunities.

Strengthen Player Reference Group (PRG): Strengthen the PRG with updated terms of reference and a clear function to ensure effective communication between management and orchestra members.

Strengthen Key Partnerships: Initiate discussions with existing and potential partners to secure ongoing support for DSO’s growth. This includes exploring strategic alliances with educational, arts, government, and corporate organisations to enhance funding and operational sustainability.

HR Planning and Resource Alignment: Assess current and future organisational needs, matching resources to the increased capacity of the orchestra.

Strategic HR Expansion: Convert one part-time administrative role into a full-time position to increase organisation capacity to focus on business development.

2026

Balance Artistic and Geographic Focus: Ensure the artistic direction and geographic reach of performances align with sustainable funding and operational resources.

Commercial Income Opportunities: Actively pursue revenue-generating performances, including commercial hires and strategic partnerships that reduce dependence on traditional funding sources.

National and Corporate Partnerships: Build associations with key national and corporate partners, elevating DSO’s profile and expanding its network of support.

Succession Planning: Implement a succession framework to identify and develop internal and external talent.

Support Organisational Growth: Expand administrative capacity to meet the growing needs of the organisation, including the increase of paid positions within the orchestra.

Explore Placemaking Opportunities: Build partnerships to position DSO as a key part of community placemaking through iconic events that enhance the local and tourism visitor experience.

2027-2028

Align Resources with Opportunities: Ensure organisational resources match the increased opportunities generated through the expansion of paid positions within the orchestra.

Broaden Self-Generated Income: Focus on increasing self-generated income through commercial performances, partnerships, and merchandise sales, reducing reliance on external funding.

International Partnerships: Develop partnerships with arts, educational, and cultural organisations, focusing on Southeast Asia and the Pacific, to expand DSO’s global reach, support international touring, and enhance its reputation and sustainability.

Staff Development: Implement a structured staff development program that includes leadership training, mentorship opportunities, and continuous professional development.



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Other Worlds, 2023 | Photo: Hannah Herbert