

A proposal for a

Dendro Theatre for the City of Adelaide Parklands

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Proposal

A proposal has been submitted to the Adelaide City Council to create an exciting new cultural facility in the Adelaide Parklands. It is a Dendro Theatre, an outdoor public performance and meeting space that is formed by the land's topography and living plant material. In essence it is an afforested amphitheatre where the plantings and landform are designed to provide the necessary infrastructure of a theatre but with the natural features and ambience of a park setting.

What is a Dendro Theatre?

A Dendro Theatre is a form of Dendro Sculpture, the concept of which has evolved out of my concern to make public art that is environmentally positive, enhances our understanding and relationship with the non-human or 'natural' bio-physical world and enhances our community's quality of life.

Dendro Sculpture utilises living plant material as the sculptural medium to:

- . Promote an environmentally positive art form
- . Provide public 'sculpture' that makes a positive environmental and aesthetic contribution
- . Develop symbolism and challenge perceptions through the sculptural form and species selection

Dendro Sculpture draws its name from two words, 'dendrology', the natural history and study of trees and 'dendrolatry', the worship of trees.

Why a Dendro Theatre?

Various outdoor events are staged in Adelaide to take advantage of our climate and the aesthetics and ambience of the sites. Recent examples are Womadelaide held in Botanic Park, the Open Roof in Elder Park and Writer's Week in the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden. Events such as these impose a large amount of wear and tear on the sites. A considerable resource is required to set up the temporary venues in terms of the erection and dismantling of infrastructure facilities.

Difficulties and compromises can be encountered in terms of the siting of existing plantings, orientation of the performance space, inconveniently sited or inadequate hard landscape features and inadequate protection and shading in spaces such as Elder Park. The Dendro Theatre seeks to address these difficulties by providing a venue designed to satisfy the requirements of a performance space, our ecological concerns and our growing affection for outdoor living and entertainment. The concept is highly appropriate for Adelaide's Mediterranean climate.

The Dendro Theatre would be an ecologically positive space that can avoid the high capital input, and operating costs of indoor theatres in terms of physical, economic and energy resources. It will provide visual and tactile stimulation and an opportunity to demonstrate an alternative and environmentally educative and sustainable way to pursue community cultural activities. It will add to and reinforce Adelaide's cultural reputation and prominence as the Festival State and provide an exciting and stimulating venue for a wide variety of community and cultural events.

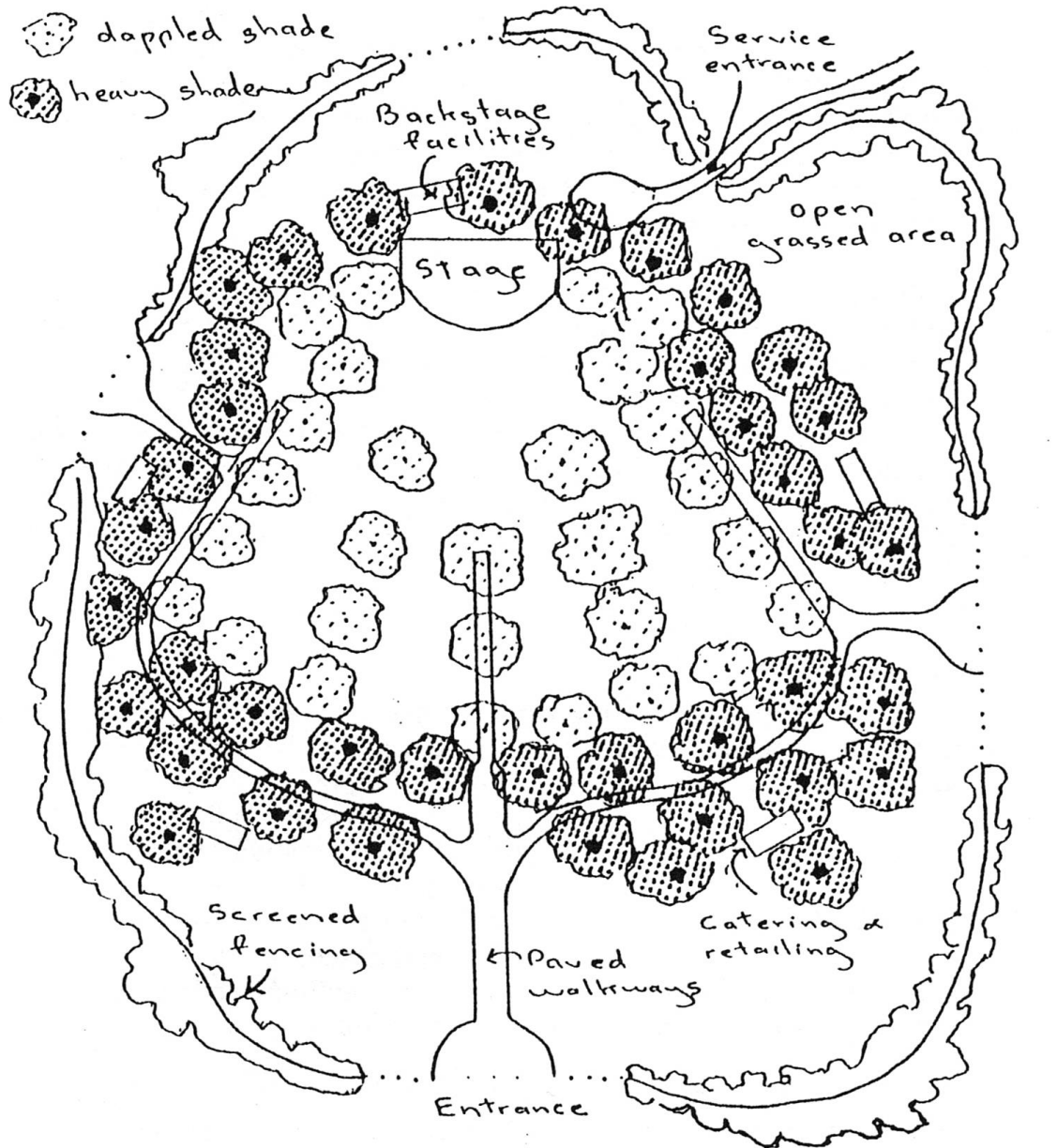
Design

A concept design has been prepared but the final plan would be site specific. In summary the space will comprise and be formed as follows:

- . Auditorium - single trunk, tall dappled shade trees on a grassed gradient
- . Stage - raised or flat area with hard surface protected by shade trees
- . Retreat and relaxation area - heavy to medium shade trees and open space
- . Catering and retailing - heavy to medium shade trees
- . Outer perimeter enclosure - screen plantings

The selection and placement of plant species is integral not only to provide the necessary physical amenity but also to present the necessary cultural symbolism and other layers of meaning (for instance, an aerial view may give a particular reading). Any necessary hard landscape, patron amenities, technical facilities and security will be accommodated in the design.

DENDRO THEATRE concept plan



side elevation

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There are many other cultural and environmental factors that require consideration in the design such as:

- . A representative collection of species indigenous to the Adelaide Plains
- . The attachment and attitudes of the Kaurna people to this land
- . Our society's relationship with nature, stewardship of the planet and ecological concerns
- . The cultural use of plant species

The proposal will readily provide for public art, particularly that which has an ecological concern. Features such as seating, paving, entrances, etc. lend themselves to being public sculpture. Artists can also co-tribute to the design of other infrastructure facilities to integrate artistic sensibilities into all aspects of the project.

Siting

The logical siting for the Dendro Theatre in terms of a central location, easy access and open space is in the Adelaide Parklands. A survey has been undertaken to identify several potential sites ranging from the small scale, with a capacity of a few hundred people, to those that can accommodate several thousand people.

My own preference has narrowed down to three sites:

- . Behind Veale Gardens in the South Parklands
- . Torrens Parade Ground
- . West of the Morphett St Bridge, opposite the Lion Arts Centre (between the River Torrens and the railway tracks)

This last site is ideal in terms of its juxtaposition with the cultural, civic and industrial landscape of the city. It is also highly accessible by public transport, an important factor in ecological sustainability. The Torrens Linear Park bike track runs adjacent. Although now an abandoned industrial/railway site used for car parking, the potential of this riverside location is exciting.

Implementation of Concept

Further development of the Dendro Theatre from concept to realisation would best be achieved by a collaborative and co-operative public process. Input from parties that would have an interest in terms of utilisation, design, funding, management, cultural heritage and as audience would contribute to developing the best possible option.

As a growing, living entity the Dendro Theatre, depending on site and existing plantings, may take many years to realise its full potential but it would still be attractive and functional in its juvenile form. Our present day activities should represent a positive contribution to the future, not just short term satisfaction of our own needs.