

DE QUINCEY CO

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

16 July 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

CREDENTIALS

De Quincey Co is Australia's only professional dance performance company based in the practice of BodyWeather, that is a synthesis of Eastern and Western practice and thought founded in Japan and part of a global network. The company sustains high standards around this comprehensive and rigorous practice and leads a vibrant ensemble of artists with a reputation for excellence. As an artistic hub, it provides BodyWeather training for a growing community of practitioners, whilst developing a family of independent performance makers through its producing program The Weather Exchange.

The not-for-profit company was founded in 2000 by Artistic Director Tess de Quincey who introduced the BodyWeather practice into Australia in 1989 bringing her expertise from dance training in the UK and working professionally in performance since 1977 in Denmark and Japan. Since then the practice has had considerable impact on the development of performing arts both in Australia and overseas and Tess is an honorary research associate at the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at The University of Sydney.

The company produces an annual program of work made up of performances, dance installations, research and development periods, training programs, mentoring and professional development opportunities, alongside art-form development initiatives. A powerful ensemble of dancers works in different combinations with an eclectic group of actors, musicians, filmmakers, philosophers, composers, architects, visual artists, scientists and writers, who all engender a rich collaborative process of interdisciplinary and often cross-cultural exchange.

Our performance productions, training and research processes have been presented in major Australian cities, regional NSW and in the outback, including long processes of time at Lake Mungo and in the Central Desert. We represented Australia at the Biennale de Danse in Paris in 2002 and have performed and led workshops throughout Europe, in India and Brazil.

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OUR SPONSORS

Despite being a tiny company operating on the edge of impossibility, we have nevertheless managed to attract more than 6500 audiences for company works and an additional 4000 audiences for The Weather Exchange works, a total of more than 10,000 audiences over a year. Added to this, our students and workshop participant numbers are generally 600 over a year.

Since incorporation the company has received annual and then triennial funding from Arts NSW and has received sporadic support from the Australia Council for the Arts both through annual program and project funding.

We have also a strong history of philanthropic support and private donations although this has proven to be more difficult to attract since the global financial crisis.

Our capacity to make work also relies on substantial in-kind support from a range of universities, organizations and individuals.

For details please see: <http://dequinceyco.net/our-sponsors/>

CONCERNS FOR THE FIELD

The small to medium arts sector has been recognized over a number of independent reviews over the last decade as being the 'engine room' of artistic expression in our nation. It has a vital function and is a source of continual inspiration to the field and is entwined both with independent artists and the more resilient major companies. It is therefore critical that this highly creative sector has a sustainable future.

The small to medium arts sector is a fragile ecosystem. It exists in a parallel economy to that of mainstream Australia, as a system within which there is very little money. It survives against all odds on the basis of extremely low wages and extensive in-kind support. Its value is reflected in the extraordinary commitment of energy and resources provided by great numbers of individual volunteers and organisations.

This sector is at the coalface. We initiate. We make new work. We energise the hearts, minds and souls of our audiences and participants. We provide inspiration and meaning in the lives of a great many people – for which we have copious examples of direct feedback and documentation of the experience of great value as experienced by our audiences – available on request. This is of immense value to our society.

It is also vital to bear in mind that this sector generates many millions of dollars indirectly for the countless contractors that are involved in realizing the initiative-rich projects generated by the sector. This involves a wide range of consultants and trades, from bankers, engineers, architects,

management and marketing experts, website designers to air conditioning firms, fabric manufacturers and hazers, lighting and laser manufacturers. These sectors of the economy make money from our initiatives and actions.

THE IMPACT OF CHANGED ARTS FUNDING

We estimate that through the loss of \$104m to the Australia Council funding over four years, and the resultant changes in funding including the suspension of 6-Year Funding Program, the sector has lost much more than \$1m in working hours and resources spent on preparations of programs in connection with these grant applications. This is not a sector that can afford these kinds of losses on any level.

Furthermore it is the small to medium sector and independent artists – the most vulnerable part of the ecosystem - that will bear the brunt of the loss of funding to the Australia Council.

The establishment of the National Program for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA) was done without consultation with the arts community and there has been widespread expression of concern about its function.

At the Arts Sector meeting at Parliament House 18 June, the following key points were raised with which we concur:

- 1. Arts funding arrangements should be decided on within the context of evidence based policy, devised through broad and thorough consultation and research.*
- 2. We support the Australia Council as an independent arms length statutory body free from political influence.*
- 3. We reject the establishment of the National Program for Excellence in the Arts and its narrow concept of 'excellence'.*
- 4. We assert the great social and public value of the arts, which influences and engages people across all layers of society.*
- 5. The proposed disruption to the current funding model will have a profound and long-lasting affect on the arts as an integrated and inter-connected culturally diverse industry.*

OUR WORK IS UNDER THREAT

We have an exciting program of works prepared for the next 6 years which include the following highlights: *METADATA* – a piece about new physics and cosmology involving audiences in an art-science exchange in 2016; a major site-specific work *WILD* at Botanic Gardens in Sydney,

Melbourne and Adelaide in 2017; *LOVE & WAR* – an event that brings together many cultural communities to celebrate 100th anniversary of Armistice in Wagga Wagga 2018; and video-installation *HAMLET* featuring Deb Mailman and Stephen Sewell for presentation in 2019.

Because of its collaborative processes and emphasis on people, the making of new work in the performing arts is costly. Nevertheless we have consistently managed to generate new works on minimal budgets and be at the forefront of cross artform development since 1989 - but because we are pioneering new forms we have only been able to sustain this with the support of funding.

As a result of Minister Brandis's announcements we have spent considerable time and resources on downscaling our productions. This scaling down means that De Quincey Co will hire less dancers, less actors, less musicians, less filmmakers, less composers, less visual artists and less writers in 2016-18, which means less collaborative processes and less cross-cultural exchanges.

Despite always endeavouring to increase donations to the company and find potential corporate sponsorship and other means of ensuring that our work can continue, the playing field is now greatly more competitive – to the extent of being pie in the sky. Our capacity to deliver our program is further substantially under threat because of the dramatically increased competition for project funding from the Australia Council. All our effort is now directed to strategising survival as opposed to making the work for which we are renowned.

If our activities are dictated by market economics, potentially a few small-scale solo performances may see the light of day but large group productions will be rare, if any at all. Research will be non-existent. Our skills will be relegated to teaching large numbers of students without requisite talent, commitment and discipline to ensure the BodyWeather will continue to develop as a practice of excellence.

As a consequence of the current funding dilemma, De Quincey Co is now in great doubt as to the viability of its survival.

IN SUMMATION

Ever since the Medici's, the need to fund the arts has been clearly understood. Without subsidy there will be no excellence. But importantly without support, the survival of the small to medium sector, the engine room of the cultural field, will be compromised and significantly impact the creativity of Australia's culture. The NPEA is a threat to this sector.

As a tiny dance-performance company that already struggles to survive, our ability to continue the work for which we are celebrated is massively compromised by the changes in Federal Arts funding. Competition will now be even higher than ever before and endanger our capacity to

attract subsidy to projects. The capacity of our whole environment, including our partner organizations and producers, will be drastically reduced on every level of output.

Without the assistance of funding, the investment that has been made in this company over twenty-five years by a great many individuals, organisations from all fields as well as funding bodies and philanthropists, our training, research and performance programs will be decimated. This will endanger the livelihood of countless artists whilst taking away health and wellbeing benefits from participants in our workshops and denying our audiences stimulating and challenging experiences.

This will not only have a large negative financial impact on the company and the industry in general, but on the very fabric of Australia's arts and cultural identity.

Culture IS continuity. Without culture any society has deep problems.

We urge the Senate to reverse the devastating decision to establish the NPEA and reinstate the originally confirmed funding to the Australia Council.

Yours faithfully

Tess de Quincey
Artistic Director
De Quincey Co