

# PHILLIP ADAMS BALLETLAB

14 July, 2015

**To the Committee Secretary, Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,**

Phillip Adams BalletLab is a contemporary dance company, based in Melbourne. Established in 1998 by internationally renowned choreographer and artist Phillip Adams, BalletLab has fostered Australian dance culture through the creation and presentation of 17 major works, contributing to the Australian arts landscape through teaching, mentoring, touring nationally and internationally, and through external commissions and residencies. Adams is a powerful force and true provocateur of contemporary dance in the Australian arts ecology. Our approach has no boundaries, creating art without compromise, questioning convention, inspiring experimentation and innovation. Dance is now only a starting point for Phillip Adams BalletLab. We collaborate with leading practitioners from sound, visual arts, fashion, architecture and design to make works created for theatres, festivals, galleries and other modes of encounter. We provide a point of difference and are the company who people attend to explore the unexpected - the 'what's next' of dance, performance and art-making.

Phillip Adams BalletLab thanks the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee (Committee) for the opportunity to make a submission to its Inquiry into the Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget Decisions on the Arts and what we would like to see as outcomes of this process.

We are very concerned about the changes to arts funding in Australia, and the resulting cuts to the Australia Council for the Arts, which are having overwhelmingly negative impacts on independent artists and small arts organisations such as our own. This impact is magnified post 2016 once the Australia Council's final year of Key Organisation support is completed, with no future stable support clearly identified, the major arts organisations' funding quarantined, and the cuts taking full effect on the remainder of the Australian arts ecology. These changes to national arts funding are very divisive and position smaller scale participants and individuals against the major entities, whose funding remains secure at this time.

We remain hopeful that our collective voice – of the small to medium scale arts businesses of Australia, the larger players and our audiences who contribute through this Senate Inquiry - will enable new forms of funding for what we do. We want to be able to continue to contribute vital inspiration and stimulus to contemporary society and the ecology of Australian arts and culture, building our cultural capital as a nation.

The Australian arts ecology is vibrant and diverse, servicing rural, regional and metropolitan audiences. The cuts sacrifice the small to medium organisations and independent artists, who are critical parts of the ecology. This sector provides opportunities for artists to experiment, innovate and refresh their practice as well as pathways into professional work for emerging practitioners, with the benefits flowing through into the major organisations and often, out of Australia to international partnerships and larger markets. The Australian small to medium sector and independent artists are active, highly regarded and revered internationally.

**We would like to see arts investment returned and increased to the Australia Council in order to ensure sustainability for the entire arts and cultural ecology in the immediate and long term future.**

**We would like to see that new money is provided to fund programs such as the new 'National Program for Excellence in the Arts', rather than sacrificing the small to medium organisations and independent artists, who are critical parts of the ecology because it is to be funded by cuts to the Australia Council.**

### **Comment from Artistic Director, Phillip Adams**

“The small to medium arts sector is facing collapse in light of these changes to arts funding. These cuts to arts funding will result in many job losses, reaching widely into the art industries and the extended community. The experience of creating and performing for me is a fundamental part of learning how to be a professional artist, part of the cultural livelihood of Australia. Some of our greatest Australian artists and living legends achieved their success through a process of support at early stages in their careers: Barry Kosky, Robin Archer, John Bell, Stephen Page and Rachel Griffiths to name a few. All of these brilliant artists are a product of many years hard work at the grass-roots level.

Without a middle ground for our creative arts industry to learn and flourish within, the future of our developing artist is under threat and we cannot produce new talent. We need pathways in and succession planning as an arts industry. We require more than ever a model of Government support that understands this, upholds our highly respected international reputation and does not let it fade under these funding cuts. As an artist I have devoted my entire life to the creative wealth of Australian arts and culture, from early education to forming my company (Phillip Adams BalletLab) and now requiring a new performance space to enrich the arts and importantly - create more employment opportunities for next generation artists as my next challenge. I take great pride in my job and along with the many arts managers and administration teams that work alongside artists - we are now facing much uncertainty and have no job security. This is considerable expertise and networks that will be lost.

The 146 currently funded small to medium arts organisations invested in through the Australia Council for the Arts are the backbone of Australian arts culture. I see our role as equal to the major arts organisations that also had to begin somewhere. The small to medium arts sector are a highly respected collective of organisations and we are as passionate as anyone can get. We take immense pride in creating and giving back through education and other means, adding to the wealth and diversity of Australian culture. It's about creating more job opportunities for the thousands of graduating artists from our leading universities and institutions each year through diverse artistic enterprise. The new funding program, The National Program For Excellence In The Arts, is not encouraging jobs and employment and in many respects, is sending the wrong message to young Australians that will be seeking a career in the arts. It is funded by the attrition from the Australia Council programs that support such artists and organisations that employ them at the critical formative stages of their careers. The arts ecology in Australia thrives as an inter-related creative system. You take away the middle part of the ecology and the system is due for collapse.”

### **Bi-partisan arms length funding and initial response to the new National Program for Excellence in the Arts**

We are committed supporters of bi-partisan arms length funding as the most fair and equitable system for governments to invest in arts, culture, innovation and excellence for the benefit of society.

We ask you to ensure that the small to medium sector of the Australian arts ecology is recognised and supported with federal government investment, either through the Australia Council for the Arts (by providing appropriate levels of funding through return of the \$110 million cuts) or directly through the Ministry for the Arts with programs appropriate to our needs for stability and growth.

The 2015 Budget decision to establish a new ‘National Program for Excellence in the Arts’ impacts the principle of ‘arms-length’ funding and poses a raft of other concerns. Its establishment using funding previously allocated towards the Australia Council is detrimental to the whole ecology. With release of the Draft Guidelines, we can see that small to medium scale businesses will face problems articulating how they will deliver ‘national outcomes’, impacting negatively on their ability to compete for funding of their projects, and conflicting with the nature of the creation of new work – where outcomes and whether they are nationally significant is unknown and untried. Independent, individual artists are ineligible. Small to medium companies will have to compete with much larger companies and a greater number of applicants. There is no definition of the terms excellence in relation to the arts, or quality which is an assessment criteria. The assessment process is not transparent including who will assess and if they are qualified. These are just some of our concerns about the draft guidelines for this new program and how it does not replace nor succeed the Australia Council’s programs fairly and effectively to benefit the whole of the Australian arts ecology. It is unclear how it works to support the national ecology.

### **How these funding cuts are impacting on Phillip Adams BalletLab along with a little bit of our history:**

We provide the following insight into Australia Council for the Arts support to date, and how these funding cuts are impacting with some practical examples from Phillip Adams BalletLab.

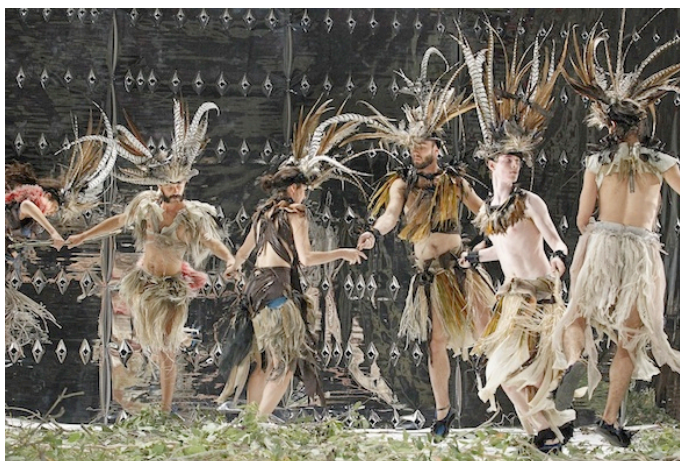
Phillip is a graduate from the Victorian College of the Arts and established his company on his return from a successful decade long period working as a dancer internationally, primarily in the USA. He launched BalletLab in 1999 with a work called *Amplification*, a work about the body in chaos, specifically from car-crashes. This was enabled through funding from the Australia Council for the Arts, as well as state funding. It is still being performed today and has been presented multiple times both in Australia and overseas, most recently in 2014 in the USA. With the support of the Australia Council for the Arts and other funding bodies he has made 16 works since—a significant creative portfolio. We have received numerous awards for excellence over this time, and can provide the Senate Inquiry with a full list on request.



*Amplification* (1999) Original press image by Jeff Busby.

Government investment in the small to medium art sector is essential for the development and presentation of new work. Generally it takes at least two years from conception to presentation of a dance work. This requires intensive research and development in the studio to realise a final piece. In every project that Phillip Adams BalletLab has presented over the last 17 years there has been artistic collaboration—between choreographers, dancers with photographers, visual artists, composers, set and lighting designers, milliners, costume designers and architects. This development process is critical for the development of quality works and employs many artists.

Another key work, *Aviary* (2011) (pictured left and below) premiered in the Melbourne Festival; headlined the 2012 MONA Festival of Music and Art in Tasmania, and in 2014 was presented in Germany. *Aviary* came about through dialogue with Mr David McAllister AM, Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet, commencing in 2006 when Phillip was commissioned by David to make a work for their Body Torque (Emerging Choreographer) program. In 2008, we jointly submitted an application to the Australia Council for the Arts for \$30,000 through the renowned Interconnections program, designed to encourage the Major Performing Arts companies to work with and commission smaller producers, which facilitated our first development of this work.



*Aviary*, production image by Jeff Busby (2011)

We - Phillip Adams BalletLab, then single handedly raised further funds – from philanthropic trusts and foundations, private donors, from the Australia Council for the Arts and from Arts Victoria over the next two years to fund a further four blocks of studio development with six elite dancers, to commission the full costumes, sound and staging designs. This enabled us to premiere *Aviary* for the Melbourne Festival. We commissioned artists at the leading edge of their field – fashion designer Toni Maticevski, milliner Richard Nylon, artist Gavin Brown, architect Dr Matthew Bird, lighting designer Benjamin Cisterne and sound designer David Franzke. In total, this investment was more than \$250,000 - to pay these dancers and artists, a process of 20 weeks over two years, along with venue, marketing and other staging costs – investment in each of these small businesses and people.



*Aviary*, production image by Jeff Busby (2011)

The work is unique and highly innovative. The costumes and millinery, by two leading, internationally regarded fashion identities won the Helpmann Award for Best Costume in 2012 and subsequently were included in the National Gallery of Victoria's *Ballet and Fashion* exhibition in 2012/13 alongside world renowned designers Valentino, La Croix, Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons, Akira



Isagowa, Ralph Rucci and Viktor&Rolf.

The level of excellence and artistic innovation is an example unmatched by many other companies of this scale in our view. The opportunity to work on *Aviary* was unparalleled for all dancers and the creative team involved, and has led to higher achievement for all in subsequent projects as result of the development and profile gained from this project. This example is replicated across the history of the company and its projects. If you consider the resumes of many of Australia's leading choreographers, performers, artists and designers today, you will find the name of Phillip Adams BalletLab within their history. We have been an important employer of many artists at a critical time in their careers, as well as shaping perspectives about creation and artistic practice through the experience of working with us.

To appreciate the extent of this achievement it is important to have insight to the operating context during the making of *Aviary* (alongside other projects). Our staff during this time (2009-2011) constituted two people both working between 0.6 and 0.8 EFT and being paid a rate of \$50,000 p.a. pro-rata, working as hard as possible to secure the future of the company through design and delivery of the artist projects, raising investment and managing the organisation. We created work and employment for other artists – dancers, designers, production companies – valued at approximately \$700,000, and other costs of \$200,000 (production and administration). Over this 3-year period, investment from the Australia Council for the Arts was \$240,000. We received core funding of \$50,000 p.a. from Arts Victoria in 2010 and 2011 to pay for essential staff and administration costs. This was highly stressful in terms of income and professional security for Phillip and his colleague, and we hope we never have to return to such working conditions. Yet without even the most basic funding of this nature and project funding from the Australia Council for the Arts, this beautiful and celebrated work would never have seen the light of day.

We secured triennial funding as a key organisation in 2012 from the Australia Council for the Arts of \$125,000 p.a and with the changes to Arts Victoria, now Creative Victoria, we also secured triennial funding from them in 2014 of \$95,000 p.a. With this increased stability and a longer-term perspective for the company, we have been able to expand the kind of work and form of artistic practice we undertake, to maintain growth across multiple dimensions. It allowed us to explore how we can engage more deeply with the community, making an important work, *LIVE WITH IT, We All Have HIV* in partnership with the Positive Living Centre and the Victorian AIDS Council. This was presented at the World AIDS



Conference in Melbourne in 2014, which attracted over 16,000 international delegates. Importantly this project provided a voice and artistic experience for a community of HIV positive people who suffer stigma that otherwise would not be given such opportunity. We were also able to commission four emerging choreographers to make work with us, resulting in two premieres (2013 and 2015) in Melbourne. We are now looking to tour these works.

We have been able to invest more than \$1,000,000 directly in artists' employment and works (2012-2014) as a result of receiving core funding from the Australia Council for the Arts of \$125,000 p.a. since 2012 – a good return on the government's investment and for the benefit of society. In 2012-14, we performed to over 8000 people in 3 countries; engaged 130,000+ visitors at NGV's Ballet+Fashion exhibition; contracted 49 artists, and received over 33,000 website and over 80,000 Vimeo views. A new major patron 'Ken' has provided over \$100,000 towards new works and set a leading philanthropic example.

With triennial support, our board and the company have been able to undertake extensive strategic planning and envisage a new direction that would allow us to support both increased levels of artistic works and artists – by opening our own studio space in Melbourne, as the next phase of our existence. Over the past 17 years, we have developed extensive networks in Australia and internationally. Phillip has taught contemporary dance at Victorian College of the Arts and been commissioned annually to choreograph works for the students. With our own space, we can continue to create, employ, present works and artists and mentor the next generation within and beyond tertiary training. We had applied for six year funding from the Australia Council for the Arts to allow us to take this next logical and critical step. We are now revising our outlook and assessing what is achievable given the unknowns and instability of future government investment, and the suspension of this program.

In addition, we are looking to commence another new project, this time working with the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra and partnering with Ausdance (Vic) to collaborate on a new dance and music work/evening program, with an education program to be offered when the work is completed and toured (2017/18). We were intending to apply for project funding to seed and support this from the Australia Council for the Arts in the June round and to fully establish this project, including pitching to future tour partners. Both of these funding programs have been withdrawn as a result of the Government's funding cuts to the Australia Council for the Arts. Without organisational investment over at least a three year period we are now considering our future with great anxiety, noting that the Australia Council for the Arts cuts are equivalent to the amount allocated to Projects and Key Organisations Triennial programs.

Earned income can only be generated by staff undertaking business development of various kinds to secure opportunities but the level of income to be achieved or that is available from presenters never equates to the real investment needed to pay artists and collaborators in its entirety. Government investment is always a necessity in our form of cultural enterprise and the small amounts – for us – allow us to generate more than five times that amount in leveraged funds. Our spend/expenditure goes straight back into our society as a whole, providing numerous artistic and other flow-on benefits – economic, social and cultural. This is a considerable return on government investment.

While we have been successful in raising additional funds through philanthropy – the amount we are able to raise is insufficient for our needs and we don't have the resources and networks to generate higher levels. This year, we have successfully raised more than \$60,000 but this is not a stable or ongoing proposition, contingent on individual good will and capacity. As a small organisation, led by one artist with one core administrator, we cannot compete with the large teams employed by major companies to reach Australia's wealthy individuals and corporations.

We make a vitally important contribution to both Australian and international cultural ecologies and economies as do many of our peers. We are a dynamic company whose works stimulate and excite audiences, especially those who seek out the artistically innovative and the new for their artistic experience. What we have created is cultural legacy. Our future development must be seen in these terms. Support of our company, alongside our peer art businesses — is fundamental to enrich and enable our whole cultural sector, through the creation of new Australian work and content, providing experience and opportunity for Australian performers, designers and audiences.

**In conclusion:**

The Budget cuts of 2014 and 2015 hit the Australian arts ecology in a devastating, unexpected way. We strongly urge the Senate Inquiry to specifically consider the value and contribution of the small to medium sector including independent artists and work with us to ensure government funding takes into account how it may support all artists and the artistic ecology of Australia overall. The creative economy is valued at \$32billion AUD according to the report *Valuing Australia's Creative Industries* (Creative Industries Innovation Centre, 2014) and its ecology is deeply complex. We urge you to ensure that funding for this sector is not reduced and does not disappear from the remit of the Ministry or the Australia Council for the Arts.

**Thank you.**