

Dear Senators,

I am writing to express my concern about Senator Brandis' recent appropriation of a significant fraction of the arts budget to a special department of his own.

Rather than attempt to deal with figures and accusations of skulduggery, which others will no doubt do, sometimes erroneously and sometimes, no doubt, correctly, I would simply like to give you my short story and show how this personal appropriation by Minister Brandis has affected my life and plans as an actor.

In 2014 I was part of a highly successful production of *Hello, Goodbye and Happy Birthday*, devised by Roslyn Oades and produced by The Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne. This show was part of The Melbourne International Arts Festival. *Hello, Goodbye* is, it is generally agreed, a fine example of headphone verbatim theatre by Roslyn Oades, an Australian, who, in her uncompromising approach to the new medium, is acknowledged as the world leader in this type of theatre.

This particular piece was based on interviews made by Roslyn with 18 and 80 year olds from various parts of our Australian community and was focussed on celebratory activity and reflection on those ages by the participants. It is a deeply warm, insightful work. Roslyn's work was virtually full-time work for two years, for some of which she had development funding, at other times an unfunded pursuit, as is often the 'fate' of artists.

The preparation and rehearsals process was comparatively long, because of the technique of reproducing exactly what is heard (the real interviewee's voices) through headphones. For myself, I played an 18 year-old girl giving a birthday party speech (I'm actually 70), an Aussie bloke around 80 from Mary McKillop nursing homes, an Italian gentleman of 80 at McKillop, and an 18 year old girl on Schoolies on The Gold Coast. 18 characters were played by a cast of six, myself, Evelyn Krape, Roger Oakley, veterans all, and three young, emerging artists, including Hai Ha Lee who recently was in a production of *Murdoch* taken to New York from Australia.

The production was highly lauded by critics and enthusiastically received by a Melbourne crowd over the short, two-week season. Plans were well under way for a national tour, with a significant number of presenters on board, that is, managements of theatres around the country who would be prepared to pay for, take on and promote the show in their areas. Part of the tour plans included presentation of the work at a market of international producers in Brisbane, with a view to

securing overseas touring, possibly to Europe.

The reason for the cancellation of the tour appears to be Senator Brandis' taking to himself of around \$100m, for his favoured forms of art, it has been alleged. A direct effect of this subtraction is a very significant fall in the budget of Playing Australia, a body associated with The Australia Council which pays artists' transport and accommodation around the country. Consequently, Playing Australia found itself in a position of not being able to fund what it had been willing and ready to do.

Like our film industry, the theatre industry is comparatively small in Australia. There are few touring theatre companies in this country, despite the impression that the case might be otherwise. To have the high possibility of a tour for a production of great worth be pushed aside in any way is a great shame. Two and a half years of great work, of great worth, has been tipped down the drain, in the face of exhortations by Government to bring our products to the world.

I urge the Senate to enact provisions which will, at the very least, restore funding to a position where Playing Australia will be able to continue to support work of significant merit, of small and mainstream companies alike.

Jim Daly