

Committee Secretary  
Senate Committee on Australia's Creative and cultural industries and institutions  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

## **Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions**

Dear Committee Chair and Members,

I write this submission in order to demonstrate how funding and institutions are failing to deliver to one of the nation's most important stakeholders. That stakeholder is children.

There will be many submissions demonstrating the need for greater investment in the arts, so this submission will not cover that. What it will cover is the need for equity, whatever the level of that investment.

One of the matters that is raised often, is the financial impact of creative industries, and numbers are quoted between 60 and 113 billion. However, many of those reporting their economic impact are performing arts organisations and performing arts delivers \$1.749 billion according to the *Cultural and creative activity in Australia* report from the department in 2018. It's important that the performing arts part of the sector is realistic about its economic impact (as opposed to industries like fashion and broadcasting), but more importantly it needs to look at if it is providing equitable and far reaching impacts with the budget it will ask the government to consider.

If you stop someone in the street and ask what performing arts means (excluding unfunded commercial popular music and commercial musical theatre), many will describe the arts, a ballerina on a giant stage, and orchestra in full flight, and opera singer belting out Wagner. Many you stop will also say, that this performing art is "not for people like us". The current funding seems to focus on inner-metro-centric, adult focussed, art-for-art-sake experiences. Numbers of attendees are deceptive because for major performing arts the same customers go time and time again.

That is the topics I believe the Senate Committee needs to consider – what do the majority of Australians really want from arts investment and how are arts institutions shaping the entire community telling uniquely Australian stories that inspire the next generation?

Arts funding is currently much more aimed at an opera singer or an orchestra playing to a besuited audience.

In every town across the country and outer arts is the boy in the park who dreams of being a ballet dancer, it's your neighbour's child who is really good on the saxophone, and that girl from the school with the magnificent voice in the Christmas choir. The difference between their dreams and the dreams of the children playing footy is that for most of them, they may as well not dream. There is very little for them to dream about in funded arts programs and performances. They best become better at sport or try harder at maths because funded art is mostly a tax return for the middle class in the major cities.

It becomes even harder if that child is First Nations and wants to perform in her language, with tradition music, because there are even less opportunities for her.

Arts funding is too often a subsidy for the middle class to see classical performing arts and new investment needs to consider serious community impacts beyond subsidising what happens at the Sydney Opera House.

Equitable arts funding should be about every child's right to have a dream to dance, sing, act, play an instrument and rise to be the best they can be. This means having stages to learn on, artists to come to towns and suburbs and help them and brilliant art on hundreds of stages to inspire our children to dream.

Funding needs to consider the kids who could never catch a ball or shoot a goal - but man could they play a guitar - because that is an enormous number of kids. Too often, we push all the children through sport because of all the great benefits it provides, but then some kids are simply not interested. Was any of the committee one of the kids who could not catch - or maybe did not want to?

Currently most kids in Australia may as well not dream about being in the arts because there is none available to the vast majority. Maybe some will do painting at school or be one of the few in the school band, but overall inspiring experiences that make someone's little dancer become famous on an Australian stage don't exist for most. The companies that might just inspire them are on a shoestring and can't make it past the outskirts of Sydney and Melbourne, whilst the big companies only play for a privileged few over and over.

This biggest issue for letting all of these kids not be inspired and not dream of life in art, is far more pernicious than disappointing children. What do we do as Australians to pass time and make us happy (besides sport)? Research suggests we read books, listen to music and more than ever, we watch the TV. So what happens in 20 years when we provide none of these kids with no dreams and no career paths so these past times? The current end game looks like a lack of musicians, writers and actors as funding spirals down and that child gives up on the saxophone because he has no inspiration and takes up mountain biking.

What will Australia look like if it continues to provide a vacuum for children's arts dreams? Do we really think artists will just happen without being inspired and led? The government is behind right now with so much creative content coming from other countries, and if there is not investment in the dreams of tomorrow's artists, Australia readers, watchers and listeners better get used to USA content because Australia is risking a huge decline in tomorrow's artists.

Job losses from COVID and the switch to new roles, has shown so many artists that actually they can eat every day and that new shoes are not just for Christmas. Many are not coming back because the landscape is rather empty. In 2021, there will be even fewer artists to inspire that child, in that town to dance.

Australia compliments itself on being about a 'fair go'. If there is a fair go for all the kids whose great love is catching a ball, then how about a fair go for that kids who can sing in their language. If there is a great footy player picture on the wall in Halls Creek inspiring the under 12 full back, can there be a great Australian pianist on the wall of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade artsy kid in Esperance? Would that not be a fair go?

This submission is not about making wild claims about the arts and over other industries. It is about equity for the whole community wherever they are, and all of their dreams. It is about Australia being the creative leader it should be. Most of all it is about every child having value to us and arts leaders valuing the whole community across the entire community over a privileged few on major centres.

I hope that this review might consider, at least, the children in the 375 cities in Australia between 10,000 and 100,000 people or more than 1,700 towns and look at a shift in arts policy to subsidise the dreams of children across these cities and towns to their artistic dreams. Even if you do this for no other reason than to ensure that in 20 years' time, Australians are not starved of Australian art because we dropped the ball and subsidised wealthy opera fans over rural kids with dreams of being the next Jack Davis.

Most of the arts fans who are currently having their tickets subsidised by the huge percentage of money that goes classical arts in capital cities right now, are not the artists of the future. It's unlikely many will provide the music, reading material or watching binges Australians will be seeking from its government in the future.

I ask that the committee considers the future of arts funding as investment. Are we investing in the future of Australian artists or are we investing in subsidising tickets for those who can afford to pay more? Arts seems to be the only welfare program for the wealthy. How much of it is city/middle class centric? Will the majority of the money will go to people who can afford to pay more for their tickets to see arts experiences? How many young Australians will really be given an opportunity to enjoy experiences from the current model? The attendance looks amazing until you look hard at how many people go time and time again at the taxpayer's expense, and these subsidies mean children in the outer, get very little.

The road to success would be shifting more funding to diverse, accessible art, stage performances and artists touring across all genres around Australia, inspiring and

teaching with performances and skill sharing to make every little dancer, dream of the Sydney Opera House – every little guitarist, plan to headline at Falls Festival.

I wish you luck in your inquiry.

Sam Lynch