

I am Neil Thompson, a full-time freelance professional musician based in Sydney. Though the benefits of music are enormously beneficial for myself I do it largely because of the immediate impact I see it have on the people, community and society around me that I'm bringing the music to.

Opera Australia has been my bread and butter for the last 5+ years but not my only source - as principal viola of the Omega Ensemble, music director and chief conductor of the Ku RingGai Youth Orchestra and founder/artistic director of The Nano Symphony my career is broad-ranging and broad-reaching with an emphasis on music-education and music-outreach on par with artistic excellence.

The majority of the projects I have over-looked or have been a part of have proved to be a great asset to the injecting of meaningful employment to creative professionals, stage-hands and peripheral professions like solicitors and accountants. Fascinatingly, I've noticed a great spike in the hunger for such creative events from audience members in recent years - the need for human conceived expression and story that may be augmented by live means (such as technology, lighting or special venue etc.) but always with an emphasis on the 'done-live by humans' aspect. After all, one needn't leave the house to watch Netflix. They want to enter a portal to another place and experience something outside their everyday life - this is what motivates them to buy tickets to then leave the comfort of their own home and share an immersive, live experience with other humans who are also experiencing their own personal triumph and tragedy - which music, done live, is unmatched at helping humans to process.

There is no coincidence that most of every ancient civilization's surviving artifacts are in fact of a creative, expressive and culturally-identifying nature - in short, the arts are what makes us, 'us' and have always been an innate part of how we cope with confronting our dealings of existence. It has been proven time and time again that the economic benefits are in the overwhelming positive.

In summary, a) revenue generated by the arts in Australia alone is in the many billions of dollars and supersedes that of airline travel many times over; b) the non-economic benefits are overwhelmingly beneficial for the well-being of any society - we have an innate, undeniable need for it after-all.

So what we need to be able to properly administer an arts presence in our (or any given) nation is to think about it as our 'cultural infrastructure'. As a counter-part to transport infrastructure, utilities infrastructure etc. cultural infrastructure starts with people aged 0, continues through the whole education process, outside of the education system and well and truly beyond. The 'soil' of cultural infrastructure can be fertile or virtually sterile, but for society to truly advance we have to acknowledge and agree that this 'cultural infrastructure' must be cultivated. It needs ample funding and it needs to be respected for what it is - the enabler for humans to be the best kind of humans, the meaningful kind. Such a comprehensive national policy would ignite a perpetual stimulation of the supply-demand chain ensuring professionals gain and retain meaningful jobs, their output is highly desired, the creative output is highly valued and sought after making for an ever-increasingly desirable country of highly desirable creative output and experience.

One obvious side-effect is greatly increasing the indigenous Australian's output in being sought after domestically and worldwide, not least, being the oldest known surviving peoples in the world, but also therefore having some of the most insightful experiences to share in a most uniquely traditional way.

I personally come from rural South Australia and was lucky enough to be exposed to the powerful possibilities of the arts, but I know there are some others who also came from my town who are flourishing in their art's fields also. I feel it imperative that access and inclusion to 'cultural infrastructure' in rural regions is paramount to this country's future - as high speed transport increasingly de-centralises city centers enabling people a wider choice for quality of life, keeping all regions of Australia connected not only by utilities and transport infrastructure but also by cultural infrastructure would make this nation truly a nation to be envied.

Cultural infrastructure of course must encompass everything from events of a larger commercial nature to interface-ability at smaller more localised level. The emphasis must be clear however that the goal is to ever increase the participation, the output and the exposure to all spectra of cultural infrastructure. This can only be achieved through education.

As I mentioned earlier, starting at age 0 is where it begins, where cultural infrastructure is evidently accessible at home, the library, shopping centres, public places. Throughout their schooling there will be professionally trained and experienced music teachers and dance teachers in every single school in Australia. Every single child learns and participates in singing as a part of school. By age 6 they have the option to choose to learn an instrument of their choosing, included in their schooling. Likewise with dance and sports and so forth.

Conservatories dedicated to Dance, Music, Media and Arts are not part of a given university as mass-class teaching of such a unique and high skill-set is irrelevant and impossible (a model demanded by the modern, American-ised university corporate system geared purely for maximising alleged profit). These institutions are in place all over the country and are well-funded. It is imperative to note that these institutions are not all about a 'classical' training - eg. the dance schools would have a huge component dedicated purely to indigenous dance arts of both ancient and contemporary disciplines. Likewise with painting and music where modern production techniques and skills required by today's artists are crafted, invented and perfected.

Conversely, well funded promotions-houses would run big budgeted entities like large orchestras, tour large productions like famous bands and artists, stage opera and ballet productions, sporting events like AFL and so forth - but it must be emphasised that these individual artistic entities are also well funded yet self-run. The point here is that the thinking behind the running of these widely varied events must have a parallel scope vision: these big budget events have to be widely sought-after, resonating with the people and highly effective at being affecting.

Local, smaller promotions-houses (who are also well funded!) would power the activities and events of more community-sized ventures, stoking the creative life of entire communities, enriching the lives of every single family in Australia and getting them involved in meaningful activities as part of everyday life - sport is absolutely a part of this.

These promotions-house sizes will be proportionate to the population of course but every single town, suburb and city must have them to administer, to power and enable the Cultural Infrastructure. Now, if every single population of Australia has access to this type of cultural infrastructure like they do to utilities and transport infrastructure, it is not hard to imagine Australia truly being the world leader in quality of life in every way imaginable. Sure, a monumental shift in financial priority is going to be required, but as sure as this is the case, the drag on our health care,

social welfare, law enforcement and society at large will monumentally dissipate. If the envy of our country is nothing but our (finite) natural resources, then that speaks very little of us as a people - but this is not entirely true; we do show glimpses here and there of how enriching human beings really can live and achieve. But now we just need to perfect the art of cultivating and living this.

Neil Thompson

16/09/2020