

INQUIRY INTO THE MUSIC AND ARTS ECONOMY IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Australian Brandenburg Orchestra

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AUSTRALIAN BRANDENBURG ORCHESTRA

Legislative Council Portfolio No. 6 – Planning and Environment
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

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Dear Committee Members

Submission to the music and arts economy in NSW inquiry

As one of Australia's leading performing arts groups based in New South Wales, the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra (ABO) welcomes the opportunity to add our voice to the discussion on our home state's music and arts economy.

We support the Committee in its inquiry and commitment to supporting a diverse and vibrant music and arts culture across NSW. A thriving music and arts scene supported by the Government is vital to NSW – it is what makes good communities great, it boosts the liveability of our cities and regions, it attracts domestic and international tourism and investment, it adds volumes to our quality of life, it challenges and inspires future generations, it is a testament to our free and democratic society and it is an important expression of our Australian identity.

A strong and growing NSW economy allows the state to lift its investment in music, arts and cultural programmes – and importantly – further invest in the establishment and sustainability of the venues and infrastructure needed to support it.

In this submission we further introduce the ABO, our visions for arts and culture funding arrangements and our goals and ambitions for the future.

Our Story

Almost thirty years ago the NSW government took the brave initiative to back the idea of supporting the creation of Australia's first baroque orchestra to enhance the cultural life of Sydney. This core decision and the continuing support of the NSW Government have enabled the ABO to grow and educate its audiences in the exciting world of baroque and early Classical music. The ABO has had a large influence in introducing early classical music to Australian audiences and as a result it has become a major part of the classical repertoire.

The NSW Government can be proud that the policies, frameworks and financial support of the arts and culture sector has allowed the ABO to build a strong reputation in Sydney, nationally and internationally.

The ABO has received five ARIA awards for Best Classical Album (1998, 2001, 2005, 2009 and 2010). In 2015 the ABO was the recipient of the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Group Award and in 2016 the Helpmann Award for Best Chamber Concert. The ABO has collaborated with some of the world's leading talents and performed more than 1,000 concerts nationwide. It performs annually before a live audience of almost 54,000 people and reaches hundreds of thousands more through national broadcasts on ABC Classic FM and Foxtel. Since 2003, the ABO has had the honour to be part of Australia's Major Performing Arts Group. Together with government and corporate partners, the ABO works to extend performing arts from our base in Sydney, to regional NSW and throughout Australia.

Our Music

The ABO's music includes work from well-known composers such as Handel, Bach, Vivaldi and Mozart mixed with some lesser known but equally as fascinating musicians as Zelenka, Corrette and Merula. With instruments from the period and talents from today, the ABO breathes fresh life and vitality into baroque and classical music – giving audiences a high-quality performance they don't forget.

Under the charismatic leadership of Artistic Director and Co-founder Paul Dyer, the ABO features leading specialists in historically informed performance practice from around Australia. From its first concert in the Sydney Opera House to a sold-out London BBC Proms performance that had 'everyone roaring for more', the ABO continues to achieve artistic excellence at the highest level.

Each year the ABO invites some of the most spectacular artists working on the international stage today to help bring to life the music of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Guest artists from around the globe have shared the Brandenburg stage, from South America, Portugal, Italy, Germany, the USA, France, Canada, Russia, the UK, Switzerland and Japan, to name a few.

The ABO was recognised as one of Australia's leading music companies in 'Create in NSW' Arts and Cultural Policy Framework.

Eighty per cent of ABO core work is performed in NSW

The ABO is committed to bringing the unique Brandenburg sound of Baroque and early Classical music to audiences around Australia. Although this world class ensemble reaches hundreds of thousands of people through broadcasts of its concerts on ABC Classic FM and Foxtel, the ABO also realises the value of bringing its unique brand of live performances on period instruments to regional areas of NSW and Australia.

Our ensemble of Brandenburg soloists, primarily made up of the Orchestra's talented, specialist section leaders, is ideal for regional touring and enables the ABO to present a high level of Baroque and Classical music performance in flexible and intimate settings. In addition to presenting subscription seasons in both Sydney and Melbourne, and regular touring seasons in Brisbane, the ABO has engaged in regional touring to Armidale, Ballina, Bateau Bay, Bathurst, Berry, Bunbury, Bundanoon, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Goulburn, Griffith, Kalgoorlie, Lismore, Milton, Newcastle, Orange, Parramatta, Port Macquarie, Springwood, Tamworth, Taree, Townsville, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong and Young.

The ABO wants to grow its regional programme and engagement for its 2018 season and beyond. Unfortunately, due to year on year reducing availability of government support, the ABO has not been able to develop its key regional programme goals beyond the required KPI commitment. We hope that soon our funding arrangements will be reviewed so that we can say ‘yes’ to the many requests we have from performing arts centres in regional Australia to perform with them, for their regional communities and enhance our educational contribution to growing the skills and experience of regionally based students.

Major Performing Arts Group (MPAG) Funding

Australia’s major performing arts sector comprises 28 leading performing arts companies in the fields of dance, theatre, circus, opera, and orchestral and chamber music – eleven of the MPA companies are based in NSW.

The MPA companies play a vital role in the development of artists and audiences, as well as being a large employer of artists and arts professionals in Australia. Over 1.3 million people in NSW attend performances by the major companies each year, with close to 450,000 students and children being engaged in educational activities.

Create NSW supports its MPA companies in partnership with the Commonwealth.

The MPAG companies are funded through a mix of Commonwealth and State grants, as well as box-office earnings and philanthropic donations. Under the National Framework for Governments’ Support of the Major Performing Arts Sector (the MPA Framework), the Australia Council administers funding to the 28 MPA companies on behalf of the Australian Government and state governments, at levels they set and agree to. The MPA companies receive funding to develop and present excellent artistic works and foster a vibrant and sustainable performing arts sector.

Commonwealth Government base funding for the MPAGs has reduced as a percentage of turnover by almost 5 per cent in five years.¹ Base funding from the NSW Government has remained the same since 2012. During this time the ABO earned income has grown steadily. It has the highest box office earnings of all small MPAG companies and the lowest level of government support of any of the 28 MPAG companies.

Despite strong delivery against every KPI, including steadily growing box office earnings, the level of support for the ABO appears to be increasingly delinked from demonstrable performance, capacity and capability to further contribute to a diverse and vibrant music and arts culture across NSW.

The ABO has presented its funding case to both the Commonwealth and NSW Governments.

Of note, is that the MPA companies were reviewed in the 1999 Nugent Report in response to demographic, technology and globalisation trends placing great strain on the sector. The report noted that the deterioration in the companies’ financial performance had adversely impacted their vibrancy and accessibility to the point where the viability and the survival of many companies was threatened.

The history around the MPA companies and the impact they have on the overall arts and music culture in Australia should not be forgotten during the current considerations.

¹ See: http://www.ampag.com.au/images/uploads/3144283_19_AMPAG%20sector%202015%20snapshot.pdf

The Report also argued that the major performing arts companies made ‘an enormous artistic and financial contribution to Australian life’ and that change was needed to ‘stabilise’ and ‘reposition’ the sector, thereby securing ‘artistic vitality, accessibility and financial viability’.

The sentiment in the Nugent Report is as relevant today – the entire arts and music industry is best supported with a strong core of high performing arts and music companies to create a sustaining scaffolding from which to establish benchmarks and motivators for excellence.

The importance of cultural infrastructure

In New South Wales, nine out of 10 residents take part in the music, arts and cultural events every year. With such high levels of public participation infrastructure, including open air public spaces, community halls, theatres, museums, galleries, archives, libraries and digital platforms is critical.

To maximise the public enjoyment and participation, cultural infrastructure must not only be accessible, it must be contemporary and fit for purpose. The Government has a stated commitment to raise New South Wales’ cultural infrastructure to world class standards, ensuring that the state maintains and expands its arts infrastructure on a sound and long-term basis.

The NSW Government has acknowledged that Infrastructure NSW’s (INSW) Cultural Infrastructure Strategy 2016 made a compelling case for additional investment in cultural infrastructure to nurture communities, support innovation, facilitate economic development (particularly through tourism) and play a part in urban renewal and activation of precincts. In this light, cultural infrastructure can be seen as an investment which pays itself off through multiple streams. One of the key themes of INSW’s advice was to leverage opportunities and build on NSW’s competitive strengths in music and the arts with new investments to allow NSW to take up emerging opportunities.

ABO can see great community opportunity and well-being being created if more purpose-built spaces that offer a space to teach, learn, rehearse, research, collaborate and welcome the wider family of audiences and visitors to NSW can be built. Such public facilities are of benefit to the people of NSW and also attract international attention and visitation. They can also be utilised to establish an environment where young musicians and performing arts groups from regional NSW and around the world can learn and grow.

The future

Funding for the NSW arts and music industry that is better aligned to performance, capacity and capability will best support the goals and ambitions for our State. As an example, increased funding for the ABO would support a number of important changes.

It will allow us to further represent NSW as a leader in performing arts by allowing the ABO to create and develop a perennial NSW program will enhance its reputation and enable collaboration with other arts organisations nationally and internationally as demonstrated by past alliances with national festivals and groups such as Circa (QLD) and L’Arpeggiata (France).

It will ensure the ABO can more deeply engage with and establish a regular presence in Western Sydney and can regularly tour in regional NSW centres. Our program reflects and responds to the areas diverse cultural community profile. Further, we do not want to continue to be a fly-in/fly-out orchestra but become part of the fabric of the regional NSW communities with regular performances

as well as workshops and masterclasses with local conservatoria and musical groups. This combined performance/education program will give younger musicians the opportunity to understand and develop their skills in the wonderful world of early Classical music.

It will help the ABO develop and deliver a new approach to music education in NSW. We are developing a new way of connecting with younger audiences that is more immersive and with a goal of growing and developing our audiences of the future. We have already begun a pilot scheme under the working title of 'Brandenburg Young Voices' where we have engaged 28 NSW schools with children from diverse backgrounds in a professional concert series. This resulted in a number of concerts that provided the children, their parents and grandparents with a complete immersive experience and understanding of the discipline of live performance. This is an ambitious project that we want to extend to include both choral and instrumental programs to engage with younger and wider audiences on a larger state scale.

The ABO have an unprecedented potential to grow and contribute more – more to the arts in NSW and Australia – city and regional, more to the community, more to education and more to the general well-being of the people of our home state NSW. As we approach our 30th Anniversary in 2019, and in response to feedback from our closest and most dedicated supporters, we believe it is the right time to review and reconsider our contribution to cultural life in NSW. We are dreaming big for the future.

Like many of our counterpart companies, the ABO's success has been defined by the mutually reinforcing ambitions of Excellence, Access and Strength, which are mirrored in the NSW Government's own arts policy framework.

The outcomes have great potential to be strengthened with support and investment from the NSW Government being allocated and aligned according to performance, capacity and capability of the State's many diverse arts and music organisations in NSW.

The ABO welcomes the opportunity to continue its engagement with the NSW Government. We would like to be part of the Committee's ongoing deliberations should the opportunity arise.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Applebaum
Managing Director

