

The Future of Classical Music and the need to Engage with Local Government

Any discussion about a whole of government approach towards Australian arts development in general and classical music in particular should include the third tier of government, local government. In the context of classical music, this is an area of public support that is hardly present in discussions about strategic arts development. Or if there is a presence within the debate, it focuses on how the Australian major city municipalities such as the City of Sydney or City of Melbourne can support the presentation of music.

Classical music in Australia must consider local government in any debate about its future. Suburban Australia is the heart of future audiences for classical music. Some 75% of the Australian population livesⁱ in suburban Australia. Suburban Australia is home to a significantly higher proportion of young and aspirational communities. It is the training ground at a primarily and secondary level for future musicians and future audiences and appreciators. Local government governs suburban Australia. Where is the voice of the classical music sector in planning for the cultural needs of suburban Australians?

In over twelve years working for or with local government, I have rarely, if ever, heard the voices of the classical music sector in the cultural planning and policy process, even in Western Sydney. Advocacy for classical music within these walls of government is largely absent.

Why is there a disjunction between planning for the future of classical music and planning for culture at a local government level? While the reasons for this situation beg much further research, some introductory areas of discussion are worth considering.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007/8 total government funding for cultural activities was \$6.3 billion with local governments providing \$1,000.3m (15.8%) of this. While the lesser of the three tiers of government in funding terms, local government nevertheless provides a level of support to arts and culture that should not be ignored.

How the classical music sector itself defines music at a community level

The way in which the classical music sector defines music at a grass roots level is through the lens of 'community music' and 'music education'. Through this historical framing, the responsibility for music having a role in civic engagement is completely negated. It is seen as the responsibility of schools and community bands, orchestras, music societies or multicultural groups. Unless there is a re-framing of definitions of music at a community level outside of these historical parameters, music will not be seen by local government as having the right to have a voice in the broader debate about civic engagement and public policy.

Training of arts administrators

On only one occasion have I met another trained classical musician/ musicologist working in cultural development/ planning in the Australian local government sector. Such positions are largely filled by people who have completed arts management or arts administration courses through visual arts (UNSW COFA) or community theatre (QIT) focused programs. It is no fluke that arts development in local government primarily is defined through museums and galleries/visual arts and community festivals. Where are the tertiary music courses that engage with the strategic development of the arts through government policy, and in particular state and local government?

Perceptions of elitism and thinking beyond the inner city

Recent informal discussions that I have heard about the need to lobby for rehearsal space for the small to medium scale classical and new music sector have mentioned the need to work with local government ie the City of Sydney. Does the classical music sector play into its own perceptions of elitism due to a geographical thinking that rarely extends, as Robert Loveⁱⁱ would say, 'past the Ultimo line'?

There are 152 other local governments in NSW. Many are located within 20-30mins travel to the Sydney CBD. Many own properties which are vacant due to property consolidation programs. There are untapped opportunities for securing 2-3 year leases on spaces that would meet the short to medium term needs of the classical/new music sector for rehearsal and development space.

The classical music sector needs to think beyond the inner city boundaries and engage through residency programs or similar arrangements with the local government areas that extend out from city CBDs. There are good examples of this locally.

For example, in 2005 as Chair of Ausdance NSW I lobbied Parramatta Council and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Lord Mayor of Parramatta to pursue a partnership between the dance sector and Parramatta Council for the development of dance rehearsal space in Parramatta. The Connect Studios was the outcome of this advocacy. Connect Studios now receives 3 year funding from Arts NSW and provides a venue for dance development and rehearsal. There has also been an extension of the program into classical music through the ACO. Underpinning the advocacy was a report that I authored to Arts NSW making clear how the needs and issues surrounding the lack of space for dance development was impacting significantly on the future of contemporary dance in this state. Also underpinning the outcome was Parramatta's property consolidation program. Dance, like music, is rarely a voice in cultural policy or planning at a local government level. The securing of the Connect Studios was a major achievement for the dance sector in NSW. It can be done.ⁱⁱⁱ

Lack of understanding within the classical music sector about the role that local government has in the development of cultural infrastructure

By seeing the responsibility of music at a community level as being that of education providers and community bands and orchestras, does the classical music sector have a good understanding of the broader, strategic role that local government has in arts development? The visual arts community certainly does, and lobbies hard.

Not only does local government provide 15.8% of the total of Australian government arts funding, it legislates for land use planning. Part of the planning legislation involves allocating developer contributions towards cultural and community infrastructure or incentivizing for developers to include cultural infrastructure. Best known models of this are the percentage for arts schemes, where developments over a certain amount are required to allocated 0.5-1% towards art. Public art is generally the great recipient of these schemes. Lesser known are voluntary planning agreements where developers and councils trade off additional floor space for getting a development accepted. Such floor space can easily accommodate arts facilities.

Some schemes require that an art or cultural 'space' be built into a new or refurbished development. For example, a physical space be set aside for use by local artists for painting, dance rehearsals or music composition. Creative spaces allow for the dynamic development of art by allowing the space to be used on an ongoing basis, subject to upkeep and maintenance costs. The reusable nature of an appropriate creative space can help support art and cultural development for years and, in this respect, there is a significant higher return on the investment when compared with a one-off commission. Further, one-off purchases of artwork generally favour the visual arts sector at the expense of their performing arts counterparts. To this end, developing cultural spaces may go some lengths to ensuring there is a fair balance in the support for both visual and performing arts.^{iv}

NSW alone is home to 152 local governments. A very likely scenario is that future responsibility for delivering arts and cultural programs will be increasingly devolved from state to local government. It is critical that the classical music sector engages with local government to optimize the opportunities that exist for its future in terms of new audiences, cultural infrastructure and cultural policy.

ⁱ Randolph B. & Freestone R. *Problems and Prospects for Suburban Renewal: An Australian Perspective*, City Futures Research Centre, 2008, p2

ⁱⁱ Conversation with Robert Love, Director Riverside Theatres, Parramatta.

ⁱⁱⁱ Other models include Renew Newcastle, led by Marcus Westbury. It is considered to be an Australian benchmark for the city revitalisation/ Creative Enterprise Hubs projects. A cursory visit to the Renew Newcastle website indicates that the overwhelming majority of projects are visual arts and design. Out of the current 32 projects, three have music elements that form at a minimum, secondary or tertiary component of a gallery/design/visual arts project.

^{iv} NSW Parliament Legislative Assembly; Standing Committee on Public Works, *Report on The Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure Outside the Sydney CBD*, June 2010, p40