

# Meeting notes Music Council of Australia Melbourne Focus Group

## Performers, Managers, Marketers

Monday 24 May, 2010

Office of Professor Gary McPherson, Victorian College of the Arts

### In attendance:

Nicole Canham, facilitator

Philip Sametz, Marketing MSO

Alastair McKean, Librarian MSO

David Griffiths, Performer, Ensemble Liaison and Head of Woodwind, Monash University

Peter Burch, VIC Concerts Manager, Musica Viva Australia

Ben Woodroffe, General Manager, Chamber Music Australia

Peter Tregear, Conductor, Singer, Academic

2pm – 2.20pm Introduction and welcome

2.20pm Discussion

3.45pm Break

4pm Discussion and development of recommendations

We commenced with an initial question about ways in which we might move classical music into the mainstream consciousness in Australia. The first response to this was to look at the area of education. Discussion centred around the following:

challenges in education and training – that at a tertiary level training is not rigorous enough (Chamber Music Australia experience indicates that we are not regularly producing world class chamber ensembles); education and its connection with marketing, and how to get as many children as possible engaged with classical music;

the challenge for orchestras where change takes time and moving a culture forward or in a different direction is not simple;

the challenge of catering for children of different age groups with diverse needs, and finding ways to provide training and professional development opportunities for classroom teachers.

Other challenges identified were as follows:

Salaried musicians in professional orchestras in Australia are not obliged to take part in education activities. There was some discussion of other models, in particular the UK, where musicians choose to participate because they get paid per call and are consequently more engaged.

Changes in higher education in Asia and significant investment in world class facilities increases the pressure here to address weaknesses to Australian higher education courses on offer in order to remain attractive to students. One potential consequence if we fail to do this is that our most talented students choose to leave Australia to undertake their studies in Asia.

Leadership: the need to find ways to get leadership interested in the fate of the industry – we currently have major problems within our sector going undiscussed. Discussion also explored ways in which industry and the tertiary sector might be better linked.

There was also a lengthy discussion concerning the importance of constructive discussion and debate at the highest levels and why this did not always seem possible. This fed into a conversation about a lack of genuine criticism and debate about our sector and what is on offer within it, including discussion about the nature and purpose of the critic and reviews. We spoke about the need to have public intellectuals for music: we have them in the areas of literature and the visual arts, but not, it would seem, for classical music.

There was some discussion about the level of ‘water cooler’ conversation that focussed on the arts and ways in which we might encourage and facilitate this. The group also explored the idea of how to garner vocal grass roots support so that large arts companies were not always in the media in a position of having to defend themselves and to justify their existence. This led into some discussion about the kinds of arguments that are put up when criticising government funding for the arts i.e ‘we need more hospital beds not more concerts’ kind of mentality, and how this might be turned around.

## **Recommendations**

The group made recommendations under four key headings – Visibility, Engagement, Education and Ideas

### **Visibility**

- That the state Premier, PM and Arts Ministers go to concerts as a recognition of the value of classical music and its place in our society
- Is there anything to be learned from the ‘sports-person-as-role-model’ approach?
- Maintaining a close association with media/leader writers of newspapers/bloggers
- Public intellectuals and people who are well known who are prepared to spontaneously communicate about the value of/place of/ their love of classical music. Eg. Heads of Institutions, Ron Barassi, Peter Cundall, Julian Burnside.

### **Engagement**

- Opportunities to make music for University students (who have been studying at High School but do not pursue their musical studies at tertiary level) are available and visible. We need to create avenues to reinforce a lifelong participation in and connection with music.

- The way we present things makes a big difference to the perceived accessibility of classical music. There is a big appetite for 'adult education' for example.
- Creating and offering new contexts in which to experience music – experiential, community context rather than an 'arts precinct' concept that ghettoises classical music. Considering everything else that happens in a space: audiences are not always invited to spend more time there than is necessary, yet they need a fantastic pre- and post- concert experience. [Issues that may impact this include venue hire cost.]

## **Education**

- Excellence, discipline, and rigour is fundamental to classical music making
- The solution is not just more money. We need to present/offer solutions.
- Valuing partnerships
- Adult education – interactive programs, demystifying the experience
- What is the role of the musician? Beyond simply playing the notes, musicians need to be articulate and literate. It is all part of the performance.
- A co-ordinated, mandated national curriculum with the centrality of musical literacy.

## **Ideas**

- Self-responsibility. We need to own our own condition and our own future.
- Philanthropists are interested in supporting, not rescuing.
- We need to be tough and be prepared to be courageous.
- Leadership: recommendations will go nowhere unless the right person is there to implement them.