

Report of the Managers and Marketers Focus Group Meeting prior to the Music Council of Australia's Classical Music Summit 2010

Location: Sydney Symphony Board Room, Pitt Street, Sydney.

Date: 10 am 24 May 2010

Attendees:

Andrew Batt-Rawden	Chronology Arts
Tim Calnin	Australian Chamber Orchestra
Anna Cerneaz	Pinchgut Opera, Independent small-medium arts manager
Peter Czornyj	Sydney Symphony
John Davis	Australian Music Centre
Christine Douglas	Pacific Opera
Lynn Gailey	Music Council of Australia
Rory Jeffes	Sydney Symphony
Richard Letts	Music Council of Australia (chair)
Kate Lidbetter	Symphony Australia
Timothy Matthies	Musica Viva Australia
Kathryn Selby	Piano/Selby & Friends, Trioz
David Worrall	Music Council of Australia (for reporting)

Richard Letts opened the meeting by referring to the discussion documents distributed to attendees prior to the meeting. Before opening the meeting to a wide-ranging discussion of the issues that were of concern to attendees and the organisations they represent, he outlined the range and number of Focus Groups that were meeting across Australia. He noted that his interest in initiating this discussion was prompted by declines in audience numbers in the USA and some European countries and a report of dramatic decline in applications to study in some European conservatoires. While the situation in Australia is comparatively healthy, it is possible that these problems will visit us in future and pre-emptive action is desirable. In any case, why not try to ensure the best possible future for classical music here. He suggested the meeting might like to consider, but not be restricted to, the following issues for discussion:

- Audiences (especially young audiences)
- Presentation
- Repertoire
- Building audiences

The following is a chronological point-summary of the issues raised and discussed, including a reporting of what attendees have found to work and what not.

Mostly educational (and audience analysis):

- Given the rarity of this meeting of people who are ordinarily mostly concerned with achieving individual organisational goals, it would be good if the group could come to a consensus on what we are likely to be able to achieve if we synergised.
- Trying to plug the gaps in education, particularly of teachers, is a big problem.
- There was an agreement for the need to develop an on-going (3 year) projects, rather than on-off, to achieve deep-lasting impressions, because
- Individual snapshot exposure does not reinforce strongly enough to “cut through” the family *milieu* to create ongoing audience members.

- Such projects should try to access a broader range of students & teachers than current projects do, particularly focussing on those years when children cross institutional boundaries (e.g. primary-secondary, secondary-tertiary)
- Importance of post-college mentoring & artist development for potential professional musicians such as through youth orchestra involvement.
- It is necessary to maintain a distinction between general music education and artist development.
- There is a distinct lack of musically trained teachers in school. How can we as an industry support them and an increase in the confidence of existing teachers to engage with children through classical music when the average undergraduate music instruction in a primary school teacher's training is 17 hours?
- Some organisations are engaging with teachers directly – working with them to develop skills to help overcome fear-factors involved in presenting music when not adequately trained to do so. This was seen as a vitally important: influencing policy-making to accommodate the need for continual skill development.
- Others find it difficult to do this but aim first to increase teacher's positive personal experience of classical music as this will translate to positive 'carry-through' to students.
- The major performing arts organisations have made a proposal to the national curriculum authority to offer professional development in the arts to school teachers
- Repeatedly going to schools where there is known 'traction' is easier and safer but how does that expand the model by producing X new music lovers over Y years?
- Could emphasise the musical celebrity factor in fun events.
- Ways to engage teachers have been hit-and-miss so far. Independent schools tend to be more engaged. How do we extend this to public sector?
- San Francisco symphony did a study in five areas of the city with different demographics in how to make CM relevant in other areas of the school curriculum. e.g. musical journeys in the history programme. Used a specific three step process, including working with teachers on developing lesson plans.
- The tendency to present the experience of the arts as a 'grab-bag' of experiences was not in the long term educational interests of students generally, nor specifically of the study of CM, as the practise of CM is an elite activity. Need to encourage the understanding that, like elite sport, CM requires specialist skills and training to perform but this can enhance the quality of the spectator experience. This is at odds with the repackaging of the arts out of their traditional 'as practice' context.
- Need to find ways/contexts to express that CM music is not just educated music for the educated, such as different dress code (for performers and audiences), make ticket prices same as for seeing a band at a local pub.
- People *do* pay high prices to see pop stars, but these are considered one-off events, not an ongoing relationship.
- The audience for one-off large, free events (e.g. *Symphony Under The Stars*) to a very large degree does not convert to a paying audience for regular concerts. Don't know if this is the same for opera?
- Follow-up of symphonic concert in the Opera House of cartoon music found 79% had never been to the venue before.
- One positive idea is that of a “culture bank” for each school child, paid for by government, to attend (say 3) arts events (broadly defined) per year as part of an education “allowance”. This would emphasise “hearing the real thing” - live! This idea came from actual practice somewhere in the UK.
- Kids are interested in the “pointy end” of music which many parents may not be. Thus

success of Prom Concert series playing a lot of new music (including Australian compositions) in the '60's and '70s.

- Angel Place short concerts (40 min.) \$10 + lunchtime (listen and eat) successful, particularly for “top end” school kids—knowledge seekers—but also possible for 40+ year-olds.
- Maybe possible to use such events to “fill the 30/35-50 year old (mortgage & kids) gap somewhat.
- Actively use social media (U-tube etc.). Perhaps we can undertake a concerted effort to learn how to use it better. Kids knowing more than the teachers increases fear factor for teachers.
- National curriculum development has stalled more experimental approaches to teaching until it is released, but we know that new initiatives should touch national priorities, including indigenous and environmental concerns.
- Most teachers, (including non-music) could benefit from conducting workshops. Those run so far have been very positive.

Audiences:

- (Very young) kids with parents: informal, \$low tickets, matinees, \$kids prices
- Multimedia / music with visuals: good marketing results in good attendance, but again, limited cross-over.
- Same result for (very physical) drumming workshop.
- US research showed that symphony orchestras' children's concerts did not create ticket buyers in later life but early participation in the act of making music does do so. But participants believe local programs for children are effective.

Venues:

- Sydney specifically – cost is prohibitive for many potential audience members—especially when parking and babysitting is taken into account. Audiences are good considering this. Anecdotal response is that people come “despite the experience”. Sydney having the Opera House was not all positive.
- The development a \$small–\$medium audience market requires different, easier to get to venues.
- There are problems with school venues but use of facilities built under current government stimulus package would be seen as a positive community return.
- Need to discover and coordinate the use of various venues around Sydney.

Repertoire

- New work (e.g. by John Adams & various Australian composers) can be a positive audience experience and there was a lot of agreement that it was important to expose audiences to new music, even to challenge audience expectations. SSO is integrating such new works into concerts with otherwise standard repertoire, and this is successful with audiences. It does not favour separate concerts with new music repertoire because the audience is routinely very small.
- Audiences are more receptive to new work in contemporary music festivals but it is important not to restrict new music to them.
- Chamber music audiences are often most unwilling to accept new music, despite attempts to 'sandwich' and 'bury' them between more familiar repertoire.

Dissemination (venues?)

- A new internet-based broadcast hub (live streaming + downloads), operated by young people for CM was seen as a very positive initiative.
- The inclusiveness and interconnectedness of MCA, as evidenced by being the vehicle for this gathering, was seen as a natural organisation to spearhead the push to develop such a hub; institutions were in-principle willing to contribute expertise, training and access to facilities for the development of an active and cooperative on-line presence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There was agreement on the merit of cooperating to develop school teacher materials and professional training.

There was support for the media/broadcast hub concept and participants were open to the idea of contributing.

The meeting concluded at approximately 12.30pm.

drw 2010.06.02 rev. 06.03