

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Peter Hislop



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My name is Peter Hislop. I currently work as a concert photographer, with responsibility for photographic performance documentation dating back to 1976. I am seeking establishment of an organisation whose function it is to promote and archive the performing arts industry in the manner that the network of national, state and regional galleries undertakes for the creators of visual art. Addressing this inequality between performing and visual art will raise awareness, understanding and value of what is often an ephemeral experience, but one most Australians interact with daily.

We are all familiar with Australian paintings and painters through the work of major institutions collecting and promoting visual art at all levels and many locations - from the NGA in Canberra, state capitals, and regional centres. No parallel institutions document and promote the performing arts – music, drama and dance. These art forms explore the same cultural stories, emotions and subjects as the visual arts, in ways that reach our ears, screens and performance spaces every day.

Many towns promote themselves as the birthplace of sports stars, racehorses, and even painters, but very few can recall their district's connections or contributions to the performing arts.

A national institution could collect, interpret and promote knowledge of the performances, lives and artefacts of our performers, composers, playwrights and choreographers. And not forgetting the supporting professionals and organisations whose work and skills help bring these works to the public – educators, producers, costumiers, designers, arts companies, festivals and eisteddfods, etc.

While it's too late to collect historical artefacts like Sidney Noland's stage sets, we have examples of innovative instrument making including AE Smith's stringed instruments, Greg Smallman's guitars, Wayne Stuart's pianos, access to records of careers of such luminaries as Neil Armfield and Jim Sharman, and award-winning costume designers.

Artefacts representing some of Australia's performing arts history fall into the collection guidelines of existing organisations – particularly the Australian Performing Arts Collection, National Library and the National Film and Sound Archives, but much is lost through gaps between collections or obscured through arbitrary siloing. By way of illustration, is NIDA's story one of stage or screen? Screen is collected, stage is not. A unified single collection would allow cohesive overview of currently disbursed stories - pub bands to Les Girls, Indigenous performance from pre-settlement to Bangarra, and classical music from Nellie Melba to Musica Viva.

 has highlighted the randomness in the National Film and Sound Archive's collection being a consequence of having no strategic, funded and proactive collection policy. Many of that organisation's acquisitions depend on unsolicited donations. A unified collection organisation might be better positioned to address these issues.

My own collection of music performance photographs is only partly relevant to the NFSA's core collection area of recording and broadcast. More documentation is precariously stored in the garages, drawers and hard drives of private individuals, or arts organisations whose resourcing priority is mounting future performances.

I hope this proposal can be acted on before important records and memories are lost.