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To the attn.

Hon Tony Burke MP

National Cultural Policy

Office for the Arts

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I am an embedded researcher, musician, and community musician working in the disaster and post-disaster space. I practice an ongoing form of community cultural engagement, as a sharer, as a maker, and as adapted to regional Australian settings and to disaster and post disaster circumstance. My PhD research and thesis, “Meanings on Music in post NYE Mallacoota Firestorm, 2019,” is an autoethnographic and longitudinal study, (2015-2025) and looks at the socio-cultural rearrangement of a small town during and after the Black Summer Fires. I argue that Australia’s disaster systems response in the social and cultural realms is a second form of disruption. As our town and others, work their way out of climate disaster contexts, we are unexpectedly inhibited and impacted by an over excited socio-cultural field, with attendant concepts of *recovery*, *social design*, *community*, *well-being*, *resilience*, *social cohesion*, and more.

My response to your inquiry, with a focus on music.

Longevity

Pathways and courses out of disaster (recovery) in the socio-cultural domain are slow. Periodicity of Arts support might reflect that reality.

“Strong Cultural Infrastructure” (re. your inquiry pillar)

I submit that I am the artist of which you speak. I suggest that the “Centrality of the Artist” may compete with “Strong Cultural Infrastructure.” What I am meaning by *strong cultural infrastructure*, however, are my current technical needs in the field; equipment, a space to work, expanded, regular access to a greater variety of resources, including personnel.

Managerial countenance

Insights and findings from my research in the disaster space suggest that the gut response of Arts management is a kind of enlivened managerial countenance rather than a receding. If “Revive” was meant to bring light to ideas of “Centrality of the Artist,” then the trigger disaster response in the socio-cultural realm that I experienced was instead intrusive and overmanaged. This has incited one of my strongest insights or advice; to *clear the field*.

I will expound a little further on this. In 2020, Susannah Keebler and I published our first edition of the Arts Responder Check List. (Newsome and Keebler 2020, 3-4) I quote,

“When relating to COMMUNITY:

- *Autonomy: self-design*
- *Agency and respect*
- *What’s past? what’s next?*
- *Skill based delivery.*
- *Looking and waiting for requests and ideas that come from outside,¹ creating easier routes forward: what I call “attending energies.”*
- *Pause before inventing the creative space.*
- *Pause before entering the creative space.*
- *Pause before creating a space or place and inviting others into it.”*

These attitudes might appear stringent. However, from my own experience in post-disaster contexts, increased engagement with music suggests that communities value not only the music itself, but also its social and expressive capacities as important forms of cultural and communal capital. This speaks to primary citizen post-disaster needs: autonomy, agency, and sociality. Therefore, we might need to nurture open spaces, unfilled with our senses of cultural excellence, our senses of cultural identity, and with a diminished sense of empowered managerialism and the easy know-how of professional performers, in the community cultural space.

What can I do, if I’m the energetic music lover manager?

I present a rich foray forward, i.e., resource provision. I cite an example of a needful resource.

The Town Hall, the Community Center, the Youth Centre, the Community Hall.

These are primary social and cultural infrastructural needs. Here are some questions about this resource.

- Who is using the building? What are their needs?
- What is the level of health and safety? Is it clean? Are the toilets accessible to all? Is the building safe for all? Who cleans, who pays?
- What is the manner of curation, upkeep? How are decisions made?

¹ By “outside,” I mean, not me.

- Is the space affordable and accessible to all?
- Who is not using the building and would like to?
- What is the current level of liability protections - easing entry.
- Youth and child capabilities. Do they exist? Are there extant personnel, e.g., youth workers?
- Elderly citizens: what is the level of access, comfort, cleanliness, and appropriate activities?
- Disability and access and inclusion. Is this an active and engaged profile?

“Engaging the audience” (re. your inquiry pillar)

I think a broader language for me here might be *connectivity* as this stands as part of a mature endemic community cultural vision: i.e., People with people. People with people making music. (Art)

Linguistic Discourse Analysis

I have found that linguistic discourse analysis, the words we use, when, how, and why, is a potent socio-cultural tool. An artist or arts worker self-defines with a broad set of developed ethics of engagement and ideas of outcomes as appropriate to their interface and community. Language used to inspire or coerce perhaps, e.g. “recovery,” “well-being,” “resilience,” *etc.*, may stymie our work, and here again my refrain; clear the field.

The future of our disasters.

I notice a lack of focus on the future of our disasters. There is much to be learnt from work in recovery. I suggest that a re-focus on disaster thinking may assist in understanding and unpacking Australia’s broader culture of Arts delivery. An artist can be central to this research.

Thank you for your consideration.

Padma Newsome 24/5/26