

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Organisation

Musicaltheatre.au

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission towards the next National Cultural Policy. Musicaltheatre.au is an online review platform covering theatre, musical theatre, opera and concerts across Sydney and broader NSW.

As identified in the Revive Report, more than half of Australian residents were either born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas. Ensuring that Australian stories reflect the nation's multicultural heritage is therefore essential to expressing a "modern, inclusive national identity" while also contributing to the continued strengthening of social cohesion.

In recent years, Australia has hosted an increasing number of theatre productions in which diversity has been a central focus or where casting has prioritised traditionally underrepresented communities. These productions have included both locally commissioned and developed works, as well as established productions originating from Broadway and the West End. There has been a significant shift in programming across the nation towards works that engage broader demographics and more accurately reflect the contemporary Australian identity.

It is therefore imperative that this progress is supported across the entire creative pipeline through the National Cultural Policy. This could include practical and financial support for drama and musical theatre institutions to attract creatives from underrepresented communities and assist them in developing their skills. Sustaining such a pipeline is essential to ensuring that Australian productions, including international touring productions, are able to continue casting locally. Consideration could also be given to targeted funding streams designed to encourage culturally diverse creatives to continue contributing to Australia's theatrical landscape. Importantly, such support should be recognised as central to the future vitality, relevance and impact of the theatre sector rather than as an ancillary or aspirational goal. While considerable progress has already been made in this area, continued support for works that reflect modern Australia remains essential.

Further, in terms of providing strong cultural infrastructure to sustain our arts, culture and heritage as well as ensuring that stories connect with people at home and abroad, it is important that arts criticism is recognised and supported within the National Cultural Policy. Sustaining an independent arts criticism platform in Australia requires considerable time, effort and commitment and several websites have ceased operations due to these demands. Many independent theatre review websites are volunteer-run, with contributors publishing reviews outside of their full-time employment.

Independent criticism performs an important function within the broader arts ecosystem. Reviews provide valuable publicity and posterity for creatives, while also fostering greater public engagement with the arts. We believe it is important that the National Cultural Policy formally recognises and supports the contribution of arts criticism to the Australian theatre landscape so that independent review platforms may continue to operate sustainably. Additionally, just as diversity within the performance pipeline remains important, diversity within the arts criticism sector should also be recognised to ensure that reviewers and critical perspectives reflect the breadth of stories being presented on Australian stages.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.