



24 May 2026

Re: Gamelan DanAnda submission into the public consultation for the new National Cultural Policy

Dear Expert Panels and Advisory Group,

We are pleased to make our submission for the public consultation into Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

Gamelan DanAnda (GDA) is a Balinese gamelan percussion community orchestra based in Darebin, Naarm/Melbourne. We mostly perform in the traditional Gong Kebyar style, which features shimmering cascades of metallic sound, virtuosic rhythms and breathtaking crescendos.

We have a strong and growing professional practice: we regularly perform at Australia's leading festivals, and we create our own major events, which function as sector-convening gatherings for the Indonesian traditional arts sector in Victoria.

Alongside our traditional practice, we also create new work rooted in the traditions of Balinese gamelan and associated Indonesian music in genres as diverse as jazz fusion, hip-hop and electronic music. Please refer to Appendix 1 for more background information about GDA and our work.



Members of GDA, Sanggar Lestari and Widya Luvtari performers at the 2025 Gathering of the Gamelans, hosted by Gamelan DanAnda. Cred. Adelista Widjaya



GDA fusion ensemble Ready New Gang featuring Scott Owen (The Living End) on bass and Dave Williams (Augie March) on drum kit perform at the launch of GDA's jazz fusion record Anglayang in 2025 with visiting master Balinese artist Yande King's. Cred. Adelista Widjaya

Our submission is informed by 14 years of experience in building a sustainable, community-focused, and professional multicultural arts practice in Australia. It speaks primarily to Pillar 2 (A Place for Every Story) and Pillar 3 (Centrality of the Artist), with observations relevant to Pillar 4 (Strong Cultural Infrastructure). While Revive made important progress, multicultural and community-engaged art forms remain underserved. The next policy has a real opportunity to change this.

1. Multicultural and community engaged artists face systemic barriers to participation in Australia's cultural life

Specifically:

1.1. Multicultural and community-engaged art forms are misunderstood and undervalued by the music and broader arts industry

1.1.1. We find ourselves in competition with other multicultural arts practitioners for the one performance slot, which gives artists the strong impression that festival organisers are only interested in fulfilling the minimum diversity requirement.

Festival organisers and programmers have a narrow view about the audience appeal of multicultural and community engaged art, so typically there is only one such act in a festival, and we are programmed at less desirable times. This directly undermines Pillar 2's goal of reflecting the breadth of Australian stories and the contribution of all Australians as creators of culture.

1.1.2. Festivals and events lack the knowledge to present our work effectively

Mainstream festivals are usually not set up to accommodate acts that are out of the norm. Our instruments are large, heavy and have specific cultural safety requirements; sound engineering for gamelan is a distinct skill; and thoughtful stage scheduling is essential to avoid sonic clashes with adjacent performances.

While our experience allows us to advocate effectively for our needs, this knowledge gap represents a structural barrier that limits the quality of presentation of multicultural art forms more broadly, and places an unreasonable burden on practitioners. Addressing this through targeted industry education and clearer presenter guidelines would directly support Pillar 2's goal of recognising diverse forms of cultural expression, and Pillar 4's ambition for cultural infrastructure that is genuinely fit for purpose.

1.1.3. There is an assumption that multicultural and community-engaged work is of low quality and that, as a result, our performers do not need to be paid like professionals.

Our artists are highly skilled and deserve to be valued as such. Festival bookers and even funders (see section 1.2.1) wrongly perceive "community orchestras" as being less professional and less skilled. This is simply not the case. We regularly receive requests to perform for free, or in exchange for lunch or a nominal fee. While Pillar 3 recognises the artist as worker, this recognition must extend to multicultural and community-engaged artists.

1.1.4. Accessing suitable rehearsal spaces for our practice is expensive

Our particular instruments are very loud, large, heavy, cumbersome to move, and have a range of cultural safety requirements. These factors together make it impractical to rent a shared space by the hour as many community choirs and orchestras do.

We currently rent a studio on the private rental market, which consumes all of the teaching fees we charge students plus a portion of our earnings from performances and management fees we are able to apportion from grants we raise. This is a Pillar 4 issue. Cultural infrastructure must be fit for purpose for all art forms, not just those with established institutional homes.

1.2. Multicultural and community-engaged art forms are misunderstood and undervalued by funding bodies

1.2.1. "We fund professional artists, not community practice"

The above is a direct quote from a feedback meeting with a major public funding body after another unsuccessful grant application. It raises the question as to how our highly-skilled community artists are expected to develop a professional practice without the funding opportunities provided to other artists. Indeed, professional practice in Balinese gamelan does not look like a jazz or a classical ensemble, with which the administrator would presumably be more familiar. Funders prefer we fit ourselves into their narrow idea of what professional arts practice looks like, rather than accommodate multicultural forms of arts practice that operate at the same, if not higher, level of professionalism and skill.

In the same meeting, we were also informed that our practice was "a bit niche". Indeed, not everyone has heard of gamelan, despite the fact that it has over 1000

years of documented history, is a major art form indigenous to our largest neighbour Indonesia, has hundreds of forms and a wide pool of virtuoso artists, and over a century of history influencing western artists from Debussy, to Steve Reich, to Wendy Carlos to Aphex Twin.

Not everyone listens to western opera music, yet funding bodies funnel millions of dollars of public funding towards supporting it every year around Australia. Opera and other art forms appear to be seen as inherently worthy, while we need to constantly justify our existence and the value of our practice. This is a failure of both Pillar 2 and Pillar 3. Diverse forms of cultural expression cannot flourish without funding models that recognise them.

1.2.2. Culturally specific arts organisations need direct funding pathways, not just representation through peak bodies.

Pillar 2 aspires to reflect "the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture". In practice, however, funding models tend to channel support for multicultural arts through broad sectoral organisations rather than directly to organisations with deep expertise in a specific tradition.

Bodies like Multicultural Arts Victoria, Contemporary Asian Australian Performance, Nexus Arts, and The Boite are critical enablers and we value them. But they cannot substitute for direct investment in the organisations that actually carry, practise and transmit specific cultural forms.

An organisation with 14 years of specialist expertise in Balinese gamelan is no less worthy of sustained funding than a classical ensemble or contemporary dance company. Pillar 3 recognises the artist as worker. Pillar 4 calls for cultural infrastructure that is resilient and sustainable. Neither goal is achievable for culturally specific organisations while funding models continue to treat them as a subset of broader multicultural arts rather than as distinct art forms in their own right.

We would like to see the next National Cultural Policy establish dedicated funding pathways for organisations rooted in specific multicultural arts traditions. These organisations are primary carriers of living cultural heritage. They should be funded accordingly.



Javanese ensemble Gamelan Laras Nusantara perform at the 2025 Gathering of the Gamelans organised by GDA. Cred. Adellista Widjaya

2. The value of multicultural and community-engaged arts

Organisations like ours that are rooted in multicultural and community practice:

2.1. Create pathways for new people to engage in Australia's arts and cultural life.

A unique aspect of gamelan music is its ability to engage a diverse community. If you want to count to eight and play the big gong on the eight, there is a spot for you; if you want to play at blazing tempos and show your mastery, there is a spot for you too, with many intermediate steps. Unlike in western music, all of these people play at the same time in the same ensemble.

Our diverse community orchestra includes members aged 4 to over 80, many members of the Balinese and Indonesian diaspora and those with no Indonesian heritage, many professional musicians and people who play no other music, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, and more.



GDA perform a fusion set with Balinese-Australian neo-soul singer/producer Komang at the sold-out Library Up-Late event at Now or Never Festival 2025. Cred. Matteo Lucas.

While around a third of our members have an alternative music practice, around a third study other music but don't otherwise have opportunities to play with other people, and the final third don't play other music at all. We create a space for all these people to come together every week, and even to perform together everywhere from Balinese community gatherings to major festivals and events.

Through our professional practice, we create a platform for a wide range of highly-skilled multicultural artists to be paid for their work.

In 2024/25 we created 82 paid artist engagements, over two-thirds of which were from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Many of these people do not have other pathways to get paid for their work. We see our role as 1) educating broader Australia about Indonesian traditional arts, 2) creating demand for those arts, and 3) enabling and encouraging a pipeline of professionals that can meet that demand.

2.2. Make art that is engaging and relevant

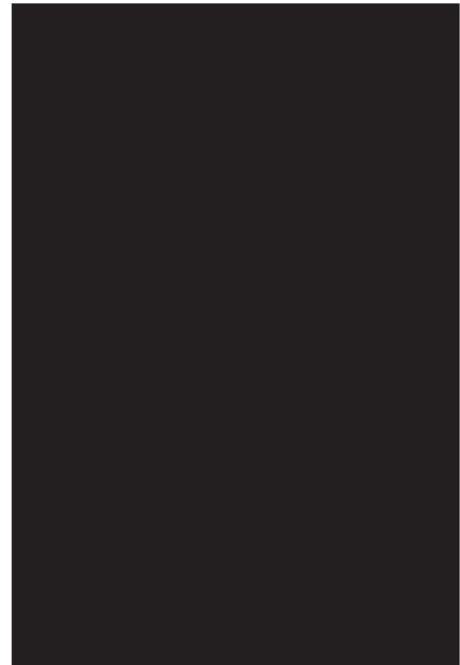
We perform our music in a wide range of settings from traditional festivals, to hip-hop shows, to folk festivals to jazz clubs and we have found that an incredibly diverse range of Australians enjoy our performances.

2.3. Create spaces for intercultural collaboration.

At this time when we are seeing increasing division and polarisation in Australian society, we create a space for anyone who is interested to walk through a door and engage meaningfully as a performer, an audience member and often both!

Our practice enables members of the Balinese and broader Indonesian diaspora to genuinely collaborate and form deep and lasting friendships with the broader Australian community, and to share their culture in a respectful and authentic manner.

Our practice also allows the broader community to engage deeply with Balinese arts. Several of our members who—prior to their connection with us—had no particular connection to Indonesia, are currently studying Indonesian language ahead of our planned intensive in Bali this winter. This speaks directly to Pillar 2 and Pillar 5.



Anna Gordon from Firetail plays saxophone at the album launch for Anglayang, GDA's jazz fusion album. Cred. Adelista Widjaya.

2.4. Create spaces for intergenerational collaboration rarely seen in broader Australian society.

We run a weekly Kids and Parents gamelan class that we feel represents a radical space for intergenerational collaboration in contemporary Australia.

Gamelan is particularly well-suited to engage learners of different levels of ability, whether they are coming to music for the first time, or are already skilled musicians in other genres. Each member of the ensemble can find a level where they are engaged, challenged, learning and genuinely collaborating with their family members and other members of the intergenerational ensemble.



Two young members of GDA watch the advanced ensemble perform with dance from Sanggar Lestari at a council festival. Cred. Gamelan DanAnda

Many parents in the ensemble have remarked to us that they are not aware of other spaces like this that allow them to genuinely collaborate with their child in a way where both parties are engaged, learning and—most importantly—having fun! This is Pillar 2 in action.

2.5. Are innovative even (and especially) when we are engaging in traditional practice!

Arts policy-makers and funders naturally seek new ideas, which often leads grant programs to focus exclusively on "new work" and "new approaches." This overlooks the immense cultural innovation and centuries of wisdom embedded in traditional art forms that are new to mainstream Australia.

We see in the crucial and needed "First Nations First" pillar of the National Cultural Policy the understanding that cultural value is not solely measured by novelty. This should be applied to multicultural and community practice more broadly.

New work is indeed important, and we create it regularly, however, it is not obvious to us that it necessarily enriches the cultural life of Australia more than our traditional practice. Whenever we perform fusion work, we include at least one traditional tune in the set, or play a fully traditional set at the event or festival. We regularly get similarly effusive praise for the traditional and the contemporary elements.



Visiting Balinese dancer Putu Ayu Lestari dances Tari Margapati at Federation Square with GDA, featuring master musician Yande King's on kendang (hand drum). Cred. GDA.

Furthermore, our ability to create and perform new work rests on a strong technical and musical foundation built through our traditional practice in our community. Pillar 1 recognises that cultural value is not measured by novelty alone. This principle should apply equally to multicultural traditional practice.

3. Valuing multicultural and community-engaged art forms appropriately

Our recommendations to the Expert Panels and the Advisory Group are as follows:

3.1. Recognise the value of multicultural and community-engaged art forms (Pillars 2, 3 and 4)

Currently, the survival of these organisations relies heavily on the unpaid labour and sheer willpower of diaspora communities and passionate practitioners. Yet, these groups often engage more people annually than many major funded arts organisations, while simultaneously doing the heavy lifting of fostering deep intercultural understanding.

We must shift the paradigm so that culturally specific art forms are recognised not as a niche "add-on" to Australia's cultural landscape, but as a central, artistically vital pillar of it. Recognising this value formally in the National Cultural Policy is the first step to ensuring these practices are funded sustainably, rather than perpetually fighting for project-to-project survival.

3.2. Create a mentoring program for small arts organisations rooted in multicultural and community-engaged arts practice (Pillars 3 and 4)

The reality for most small, multicultural arts organisations is that they operate without the institutional safety nets or administrative infrastructure enjoyed by legacy arts companies. Because historically rooted funding models have favoured established Western forms, deeply embedded multicultural arts groups struggle to build sustainability. This systemic inequity places an immense administrative burden on a small number of key individuals, burning out potential future sector leaders who are forced to be producers, grant writers, administrators, and funders on top of their artistic practice.

To arrest this burnout and build a resilient sector, the government should establish a dedicated peer mentoring program tailored for small, multicultural arts organisations. By pairing emerging culturally diverse arts leaders with

established industry professionals, this program could provide crucial guidance in governance, strategic planning, audience development, and sustainable funding models. Investing in the administrative capacity of these grassroots organisations



A Barong dances at Kebyar Fest 2023 accompanied by GDA and Mahindra Ball. Cred. Ferné Millen.

is an investment in the very foundation of Australia's multicultural arts sector, ensuring they can survive and thrive well into the future.

3.3. Create programs to enable reciprocal Australian-overseas artist residencies (Pillars 2, 3 and 5)

Deep, meaningful intercultural art is not created in a vacuum; it requires genuine exchange, immersion, and collaboration. At GDA we have been immeasurably enriched by residencies from visiting artists from Bali.

To ensure Australia's multicultural arts sector remains dynamic and globally connected, the National Cultural Policy should lay the groundwork for targeted funding programs that enable reciprocal residencies between Australian artists and master practitioners overseas similar to the New Colombo Plan for undergraduate students, or Asialink's now-defunct program of artist exchanges to Asia.

Bringing master artists to Australia provides vital skills development for local communities, injecting traditional rigour and contemporary innovation into our local ensembles. Conversely, funding Australian practitioners to spend extended time creating and studying in the cultural homelands of their art forms builds deep people-to-people links and positions Australian artists as active participants in the global cultural dialogue.

These reciprocal exchanges provide the necessary catalyst for building strong traditional practices in Australia, and creating bold, contemporary fusion works. This combination can authentically reflect Australia's place in the world, while simultaneously serving as a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy.



GDA perform Saudara Sound System at Brunswick Music Festival 2024 melding live gamelan and dance with hip-hop and electronic sounds featuring visiting artists from Bali and Darwin. Cred. Simon Fazio.


3.4. Continue supporting major festivals with a focus on multicultural arts (Pillars 2 and 5)

Major arts and cultural festivals with focus on multicultural arts like WOMADelaide, OzAsia Festival, AsiaTOPA, and other festivals that program such work are critical to the ecosystem in Australia. They serve two vital functions: first, they provide a high-profile, professional platform that elevates

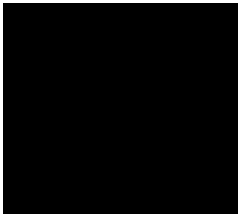
culturally specific art forms out of localised community silos and presents them to large-scale, diverse public audiences. This visibility is essential for breaking down cultural barriers and proving the commercial and artistic viability of multicultural work.

Second, these festivals act as indispensable, sector-convening gatherings. For practitioners of specific cultural forms spread across the country, a major festival is often the only opportunity to gather, share practice, collaborate, and envision new works. Continuing to support—and expanding—funding for major festivals that prioritise diverse programming ensures that there is a sustainable, ambitious pipeline for the new works being incubated in community halls and local studios across Australia.

We applaud the Government for developing a consecutive National Cultural Policy, building on the strong foundation laid by *Revive*, and for taking the time to renew the approach through this consultation.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission. For any clarifications, please reach out to us at 

Sincerely,



John Cheong-Holdaway
Creative Producer
Gamelan DanAnda

Appendix 1: About Gamelan DanAnda

Open to public membership, GDA is dedicated to increasing awareness of the unique features of Balinese Gamelan music, for audiences to enjoy, performers to understand, and composers to be inspired.

Modelled on a Balinese organisation style known as a *Sanggar* and with a community orchestra at our core, beginners and experienced players, students and professional performers come together to create a dynamic network of musical ensembles under one roof.

We regularly perform at Australia's leading festivals including OzAsia Festival, Brunswick Music Festival, AsiaTOPA, the National Folk Festival, Port Fairy Folk Festival and more. Beyond our traditional practice, we regularly create new music and perform radical cross-cultural fusion works. Some examples of our recent work include:

- [Gathering of the Gamelans \(2025\)](#) - Gamelan DanAnda organised the 2025 Gathering of the Gamelans featuring 11 Indonesian arts groups representing 7 traditions from 5 different regions of Indonesia. The event had 136 performers and over 1000 attendees and was supported by Creative Australia and the Victorian Department of Families Fairness and Housing.
- [Tari Puspa Banksia \(2025\)](#) - We commissioned master Balinese composer/musician Yande King and dancer/choreographer Putu Ayu Lestari to create a new gamelan and dance work for us and our partner dance organisation Sanggar Lestari supported by Creative Australia and the Indonesian Ministry of Culture.
- [Anqlayang - Gamelan DanAnda x Firetail \(2025\)](#) - Gamelan DanAnda created a collaborative album with Carnatic-jazz-fusion band Firetail produced by ARIA-award-winning producer Myles Mumford. The album has received airplay from Gilles Peterson on BBC Radio 6 Music, and on radio around Australia, and was made the Album of the Week on PBS. The album was supported by Creative Victoria, the Melbourne Recital Centre and The Boite and was dedicated to the late Zulya Kamalova.
- [Diets and Deities soundtrack by Kuya James and Tutup Mulut \(2024\)](#) - We collaborated with instrumental hip hop producers Kuya James (James Mangohig) and Liam Budalasia (Tutup Mulut) to compose and record gamelan for the soundtrack of Diets and Deities, a 2024 cooking rhythm game produced by NT-based video game studio Larrikin Interactive. The soundtrack won Best in Music at the Australian Game Developer Awards 2024.

Some of our projects currently underway include:

- [Ready New Gang album \(2026\)](#) - Our new fusion ensemble Ready New Gang has received a Music Works grant from Creative Victoria to make an EP with producer Dan Luscombe (The Drones, Courtney Barnett, Amyl and the Sniffers, and more), plus a few special guests. Ready New Gang presents traditional Balinese shadow-theatre gamelan music expanded beyond its five-tone origins with western drum-kit from David Williams (Augie March) and upright bass from Scott Owen (The Living End).

- [Ria Soemardjo Artist in Residency \(2026\)](#) - Javanese-Australian vocalist, percussionist, composer and theatre-maker Ria Soemardjo is our 2026 artist-in-residence supported by the City of Darebin. Ria is currently working with our Musical Director to create a new outdoor mass-participation work that will engage our full community orchestra and up to 200 additional audience members in making music inspired by the waterways around Darebin, the 7 seasons of the Kulin calendar, and Balinese rhythmic and melodic vocabulary. The work will be performed on hand-held wooden and bamboo instruments.

Reviews

“A new—and thoroughly beguiling—musical language”, “wooden hammers dancing in perfect unison or forging intricate, interlocking patterns on shimmering metallophones, bamboo xylophones, gongs and double-headed drums”. *Four star review from Jessica Nicholas, The Age.*

“A mind-boggling polyrhythmic avalanche of shifting pulses...This was a music fusion like no other...I cannot recommend this show highly enough.” *BroadwayWorld review of Saudara Sound System at OzAsia Festival.*

Praise

I believe audiences of all ages and backgrounds are hungry for music that weaves the ancient and the futuristic and GDA are proponents of this at the highest artistic level whilst simultaneously operating at a grassroots community level. I also believe that, given their members' facility with Indonesian language and their deep knowledge and expertise in both western and Balinese musical forms, they are uniquely placed to facilitate authentic and respectful cross-cultural collaborations. *Joel Ma (Joelistics) - Independent artist and producer, 2021 Artist in Residence, participant in Saudara Sound System at OzAsia Festival 2023 and Brunswick Music Festival 2024, and more*

What sets GDA apart is their ability to present a refreshing and culturally immersive experience, transcending cultural boundaries and captivating listeners. Gamelan DanAnda actively engages in outreach programs, educational workshops, and collaborations with local artists, schools, and community organizations. Their dedication to fostering cultural exchange and enriching the artistic fabric of our community is invaluable. They have consistently demonstrated their commitment to promoting inclusivity, diversity, and cross-cultural understanding through their music. *Zulya Kamalova, Former Director, The Boite*

Our collaborations with Gamelan DanAnda have represented a profound opportunity for us to connect simultaneously with our peers in Australia and Indonesia, and have allowed us to build upon the core of collaboration so integral to JIWA's artistry. We have seen the ability of John and Gamelan DanAnda to create spaces for Indonesian-Australian artists like us, and see them as a great platform to build greater engagement between Australia and Indonesia. The skills we have acquired through our collaborations with Gamelan DanAnda have allowed us to continue to develop and share our practice of working with Indonesian arts and artists. *Liam I Made*

Budalasia and Jocelyn Tribe, Independent artists and frequent collaborators with Gamelan DanAnda

Gamelan DanAnda's aspirations to develop capacity in creating works that explore new contemporary composition build upon the space of community activity that intersects with their currently high-quality public performances... The diverse membership of the community orchestra demonstrates that Gamelan DanAnda already provides a one-of-a-kind opportunity for all Australians to engage deeply with Indonesian culture. *Antony Hamilton, GDA Member, and Artistic Director and Co-CEO of Chunky Move*

The inspiring aspect of Gamelan DanAnda's projects is that they explore beyond the classical aspect of Balinese Gamelan and endeavour to collaborate the music with other musical genres to achieve amazing new music... It is commendable what has already been achieved by Gamelan DanAnda with very little funding. *Eka Poedijono, GDA Board Member, and member of local Melbourne Balinese community*

I feel so privileged to be able to gain from the knowledge and experience of Gamelan DanAnda through being part of this beautiful sharing of music. At its core Balinese music is communal and inclusive to all and these values are felt among the organisation. It's been a truly rich and rewarding endeavour for me and I look forward to what's to come. *Scott Owen, GDA Member and double-bassist in The Living End*

As a performer and researcher, I can attest to Gamelan DanAnda's exceptional cultural value. It offers something genuinely rare: a space where people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities make music together as equals. Gamelan DanAnda embodies Pillar 2's vision of diverse cultural expression and inclusive participation. It demonstrates how traditional art forms from our region can foster authentic intercultural exchange in contemporary Australia, and represents exactly the kind of culturally specific community practice that the next National Cultural Policy should recognise and sustain. *Associate Professor Shelley Brunt, GDA Board Member, and ethnomusicologist at RMIT University*