

National Cultural Policy Submission

Adam Simmons

Submitted: On behalf of a for-profit arts business, as an artist, as an individual

I am writing this as someone who has been professionally involved in the arts over 30 years with a raft of achievements across music, arts, dance and theatre. Yet, after lifetime of engagement with arts, I find myself slowly withdrawing from the industry due to a mix of exhaustion and disillusionment.

Some of this is due to the impact of COVID – I had three months of international touring with my trio and guests in 2020 to China, Turkey, India and Europe that was cancelled. But some of it is the fact that so little has changed in 30 years, or has actually gone backwards. One of my first-ever professional gigs in 1986 paid \$150, while in 2021 I was offered \$165 as a featured artist for a gig run by a funded organisation. But its not just on a personal level, it is also coming to understand the lack of resources and capacity of many of our major organisations at state and federal levels, and the lack of communication between various stakeholders.

I have been advocating strongly over the past couple of years for my community to engage with and be listened to by the government. Research I presented for the Senate Inquiry into the impact of the governments response to COVID-19 showed a huge disconnect both ways. But I have been inspired by the potential of a National Culture Policy and am excited that the recommendation of the recent Parliamentary Inquiry will be actioned by the incoming Labor Government and the prospect of what that might mean for Australia at such a crucial time for the nation.

Though I am tired, exhausted and in some ways defeated. So, I am pivoting with a bunch of creative and business skills developed in my arts practice into data analytics/consultancy, where even as an entry-level worker, the respect and value shown for my contribution is making me question why I didn't do something like this sooner.

Despite my withdrawal from the creative industries, at my core I shall remain an artist. Some of my earliest memories are of staring into the bell of a saxophone, Saturday mornings spent playing games under the record racks at Oregon Records (Ballarat), regular visits to the NGV and staring up at Leonard French's ceiling or watching the fountains in the long-gone courtyards, having raspberries at the pub while watching my father's bands, making origami figures for stalls and more. I think

I started playing piano before I could read, I began recorder a year before everyone else did, just because I wanted to, and since the age of eight I started on clarinet which has led to mastering most of the woodwind family, including the Japanese shakuhachi. And that's only a glimpse of my journey.

All of this and more has made my life meaningful in many ways and will continue to do so. My hope for a new National Cultural Policy is that it will help encourage a broad and fundamental understanding of the value of art and culture in our everyday lives, made/created/told by Australians for Australians in all our diversity, as well as sharing and exchanging with others. If it can actually lead to the valuing and sustaining our creators, makers and practitioners, that would be incredible.

Finally – I have contributed something as I have learnt it is important and necessary to engage and contribute. But many will not – I implore you to find ways to reach those voices that you are not hearing from as I assure you, they are out there, contributing in all sorts of interesting ways.

For further documents, my aforementioned submissions and research are available via <http://www.tuoa.com.au/blog>