



RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

1. SSA is submitting this submission on behalf of an arts peak body

About Symphony Services Australia

Symphony Services Australia (“SSA”) provides a range of services to its members, Australia’s six symphony orchestras (the Adelaide, Melbourne, Queensland, Sydney, Tasmanian and West Australian Symphony Orchestras). This submission is made by SSA on behalf of its members.

Australia’s symphony orchestras are complex organisations that are leaders in the arts sector. They are based in capital cities, reaching Australians throughout each state through a combination of concerts, workshops, touring, radio broadcasting and streaming. Ensuring the highest quality orchestral music is accessible to all Australians is a key goal.

The orchestras and SSA welcome the National Cultural Policy and are optimistic about its goals and supportive of the five outlined Pillars. We hope that a commitment to the Policy will guide the more comprehensive development of a ten-year National Cultural Plan, which will work across portfolios to leverage and invest in arts and cultural programs. The arts and culture are not just about entertainment, but are embedded in education, health, the economy and most particularly in the communities we serve.

Snapshot:

- Pre-COVID-19, the symphony orchestras reached more than one million Australians annually, touring nationally and internationally and performing over 200 events in regional/remote Australia. In 2019 the symphony orchestras performed over 1,300 education events to nearly 100,000 children and adults around the country.
- For every person who hears an orchestra in the concert hall, at least a further 20 were reached via digital means and radio broadcast.
- The six orchestras are major arts employers, providing jobs for nearly 1,600 Australians including over 1,100 musicians and artists in 2021.
- The symphony orchestras regularly commission new work, providing the opportunity for Australian artists to write music of scale that will be heard around the country and in some cases, the world. In 2021 over 110 works were commissioned from Australian composers to the value of more than \$430,000.
- Our businesses are transparent and accountable. The orchestras use government funds wisely and provide leadership and support to the entire arts ecology through collaborations, partnerships, mentorships, training programs and shared advocacy.

2. What challenges and opportunities do you see in the Pillar or Pillars most relevant to you?

1. First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories hold a special and unique place in Australia's cultural landscape. By listening to and learning from First Nations arts leaders we can contribute to diversity and equity both on stage and off. We encourage government to consider recommendations made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and organisations as they advocate for their own needs. We believe that self-determination is vital for First Nations people and we support mechanisms that recognise and respect the custodianship of 75,000 years of cultural knowledge. We endorse those processes that will ensure that appropriate rights and revenues flow back to the First Nations creators of works.

In line with submissions from peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts organisations, we support **self-determination** becoming an embedded principle in all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and initiatives. Adherence to cultural protocols, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) management and community consultation are key to successful collaborations, and we support their inclusion as requirements for project funding applications. We back the call for a **First Nations performance arts skills and workforce capacity building plan** which spans the next decade and beyond, as well as a commissioning fund for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing artists and organisations. We endorse the recommendation to provide pathways and resources to prepare emerging First Nations companies for multi-year funding.

2. A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture

Diversity in programming, employment and audiences brings vibrancy and relevance to our sector. We support the call to place First Nations artists, D/deaf and disabled artists and artists of colour at the centre of every Pillar and to involve these artists and the organisations that support them in decision-making that affects them.

We support Diversity Arts Australia's call for accountability mechanisms such as reporting against diversity data. We believe that research and language should be self-determined by people from diverse backgrounds, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) people and those living with disability as well as other historically marginalised groups. We value their experiences and engage in partnerships that reflect their stories on stage, as well as welcoming diverse audiences and employees.

'A Place for Every Story' should recognise the importance of children and young people, and provide opportunities for them to see themselves reflected in culture. We encourage support for programs, projects and organisations that prioritise youth arts, including the network of youth orchestras around the country. These youth orchestras provide early entry points for the pipeline that not only produces our world class professional musicians, but can also enhance a lifelong love of music and its associated audience development and donor capacity. We support the call for **investment in a Young People and Culture Framework**, which will see a cross-portfolio investment from arts, health, regional development, social services, emergency management and education.¹

¹ See submission from Theatre Network Australia for further detail

Australians believe that arts and culture are fundamental to the Australian way of life². They want local arts and culture to reflect this country's multiculturalism, telling diverse Australian stories that create a sense of national pride and identity. The creation of a new cultural policy is a key way in which government can guide and support the creative and cultural industries to tell Australian stories and reflect Australian culture in all its diversity.

3. The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

Orchestras only exist because of the musicians that perform in them. Without these artists, who have honed their craft to an extraordinary degree, there is no orchestral tradition. Musicians are central to the organisational structure that supports them – the symphony orchestras. While many independent artists struggled during COVID, the orchestras maintained their status as the largest employers of tenured musicians in this country, and with the help of JobKeeper were able to sustain the livelihoods of over 400 full-time professional players and a substantial number of casual musicians through 2020 and 2021. Maintaining the centrality of the artist in this way was only possible due to the inherent strength of the organisations, which were able to withstand the pandemic with support from government.

In order to fully support our professional artists, we must invest in training and development. In addition to the support provided to composers through commissioning and artist-in-residence opportunities, the orchestras have also invested over \$2m in a national conductor training academy, and provide a range of side-by-side training opportunities, mentorships and fellowships for emerging professional instrumentalists. This investment makes good sense, as does working alongside youth orchestras and tertiary institutions to strengthen the pipeline for young musicians wishing to enter the profession. Government can support this pathway and **invest in meaningful industry training by appropriate institutions**, as well as recognising the investment made by organisations such as the orchestras in this area.

4. Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

The arts sector is an ecosystem with every level playing an important role. Large companies such as the orchestras are vital to the overall health of the arts sector. Collaborations with the small-to-medium and independent sectors benefit both parties, and the orchestras frequently provide training and mentorship opportunities for talented young Australian musicians entering the profession. Through supporting career pathways (often from tertiary training right through to retirement), artform development through the commissioning of new works, community outreach, school and other education programs, substantial intrastate touring and ongoing audience development, the orchestras make a meaningful contribution to their local communities, their state and collectively across the country.

A strengthened Australia Council should be empowered to support organisations of all sizes, and assist in rebuilding the crucial infrastructure of the arts and cultural industry which has been eroded by COVID-19. We support a pathway for young professional companies displaying artistic excellence to rise through the four-year funding cohort and for appropriate and sustainable entry to the National Performing Arts Partnerships framework. **Additional funding to the Australia Council** will be required to provide these pathways and to support a diverse range of companies receiving recurrent funding at various levels. Consideration should be given to a national portfolio approach to organisational funding of all sizes, recognising this would reduce administration and assessment costs, and contribute to sector unity.

² Australian Academy of the Humanities: A New Approach, Insight Report 3, <https://www.humanities.org.au/new-approach/report3/>

The orchestras are major contributors to critical social outcomes through their education, community outreach and regional touring programs, improving civic cohesion and health and wellbeing as well as enhancing creative benefits for participants. However, these programs are generally not sustainably funded by government. There is a need to start a conversation about arts funding models that reflect the increased expectations of government to provide social outcomes in addition to core artistic benefits. Consistency of government expectations across arts organisations will also assist in providing realistic, achievable programs with successful outcomes.

Recognising the inherent risks associated with large-scale performances such as those given by symphony orchestras most nights of the week, we ask that the government establish, in partnership with states and territories, a **Live Entertainment Events Insurance Scheme** to increase industry confidence to reactivate live performances and events. Live Performance Australia has called for this scheme for some time and has costed plans that can quickly be activated and could be temporary.

We further ask for a **Reserves Incentive scheme** in which government matches funds raised by arts organisations towards their reserves or endowments. There are many overseas models that have successfully provided incentives for donor matching and other reserve-building activities³. Alongside consistent and stable core funding, strong reserves are a foundation that allow large companies to continue operating through unexpected crises, to take advantage of opportunities that arise from time to time and to potentially invest in long-term projects and partnerships that create capacity for realising artistic expression by supporting their long-term stability.

We support the call from Live Performance Australia for **traineeships to address critical skills shortages across the Australian arts, culture and entertainment industry**. Shortages in the technical and production skills area are now at critical levels. Without these key skills, concerts and events are jeopardised and long-term under-investment, combined with COVID, have caused significant shortages of available employees. As major employers in the sector, this has hit the orchestras hard. Well-funded traineeships will slowly improve the situation while increasing the number of opportunities available for young people wishing to enter the sector. In addition, LPA notes that a **grant program that companies can access for short retraining and re-skilling programs for established technicians** would be relatively inexpensive yet impactful.

5. Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

One of the silver linings of COVID has been the urgency with which the sector has had to engage with the digital presentation of art in order to connect and maintain audiences. For the orchestras, this required an unexpected investment in equipment and training, and the need to re-think programming to create digital performances, recorded to a high standard and made available to audiences around the world, usually for free. It cannot be overstated what a revolution this has been for all involved.

Support from government to companies who have begun this digital journey could include **investment** in equipment, training opportunities for staff and technical/production crew, guidance around legal/IP/copyright issues, and assistance in development of national and international marketing plans. Investment in **upgrading the NBN** and other provision of technical and internet facilities to regional and remote areas, particularly in schools, will benefit audiences who have an appetite for orchestral music but cannot participate easily due to poor connectivity.

³ For instance the Canada Cultural Investment Fund Endowment Incentives program sees Government matching philanthropic donations to the endowment funds of arts organisations. This successful program has assisted Canadian arts organisations in weathering several recessions. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/cultural-investment-fund.html>

As our audiences and their ticket-buying and concert-going habits change, any support the government can provide to organisations in learning about these changes and adapting would be welcome.

For audiences that want to hear music in the traditional concert hall and have the opportunity to attend, it is vital that these spaces are **accessible and are culturally safe** for those that work in them, as well as those that visit. Investment in upgrades and policies that are practical and enforceable will result in safer spaces for making and enjoying music.

The orchestras have always undertaken regular regional touring, understanding that the state orchestra should be available and accessible to all people, not just those that live in capital cities. Our ongoing partnership with the ABC partially ensures that all Australians can experience live concerts, but our regional touring programs go one step further. When an orchestra or ensemble visits a regional area, it engages with students through workshops and mentorships, participates in the community via outreach activities in hospitals, aged care facilities, prisons and schools and presents highest quality concerts to discerning audiences. This investment in a geographic area may be one-off, or might lead to an ongoing relationship over many years.

We support the call for a **regional strategic framework**⁴ that supports investment and innovation in regional Australia. Additional funding for Playing Australia, and support to organisations that regularly take their artistic offerings to remote and rural Australia, would be welcomed.

3. Please tell us how each of the 5 Pillars are important to you and your practice and why.

1. **First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.**

Australia's symphony orchestras strive to forge strong partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and companies. Collaborations such as the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra's 2022 *Silos & Symphonies* project demonstrate how a symphony orchestra can blend traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture with contemporary music-making to create an entirely new experience for participants and audience alike. First Nations creative Robert Taylor shared with regional South Australian school students the dreaming story of his great warrior ancestor Ngurunderi, the creator of the River Murray. Together, the students, composers and orchestra built "a show of modern-day trade and sharing of cultures"⁵ which showcased connection to place and affirmed the power of the orchestra as a bridge between cultures. We acknowledge that **cultural processes cost money**, and we support the call for appropriate funding for these costs, including for non-First Nations companies that are building relationships for partnerships and collaborations which will contribute to bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture to a wide audience.

In addition to creative collaborations on stage, the orchestras are committed to embedding First Nations people and culture at the heart of what they do through undertaking Reconciliation Action Plans (WASO, ASO, TSO, MSO), a First Nations Engagement Strategy developed with First Nations Creative Chair, Deborah Cheetham AO (MSO) and other long-term strategies for inclusion of First Australians in the orchestral realm. When the orchestras undertake collaborations of this kind they adhere to cultural protocols and are guided by First Nations people themselves. Our partnerships embrace a willingness to learn and acknowledge that the traditional orchestral artform is young and new, compared to the ancient traditions and music of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

⁴ As detailed by Regional Arts Australia

⁵ Robert Taylor, composer ASO *Silos & Symphonies* project, <https://www.aso.com.au/2022/05/27/aso-silos-symphonies/>

2. **A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture**

Australia's orchestras are working to forge partnerships and links with organisations and individuals who can help us share music and stories with those who have not previously felt welcomed. Projects such as the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's annual *East Meets West* program allow people from diverse backgrounds to hear music from their cultural heritage and to see their traditions and cultures celebrated and shared. They also teach us about diversity of culture, ability, gender, and age through questioning the status quo. The orchestras work with partners and communities to create meaningful and culturally authentic musical experiences, as well as to develop opportunities for networking and collaboration amongst industry.

Education programs, particularly those presented in metropolitan Australia, enable young people to engage with classical music and to learn more about the world around them. West Australian Symphony Orchestra's *Crescendo* program⁶ is a long-term commitment to two schools in a low socio-economic suburb south of Perth; North Parmelia and Medina Primary Schools. The singing and instrumental-based program provides the opportunity for children to receive a music education, instrument lessons, and to interact with leading WASO, national and international musicians. The program improves self-esteem, increases confidence, enhances physical, emotional and academic development as well as providing a platform for improving creativity and culture awareness through exposure to various cultures and languages, including an emphasis on First Nations.

Providing a place for every story also means engaging with different means of delivering musical experiences, beyond the urban concert hall. For decades, the orchestras have travelled to remote and regional Australia to provide concerts and music education activities to adults and children living across all parts of the country. In 2019 before the pandemic hit, the orchestras engaged in 208 regional events and reached over a million people in cities and regional/remote centres. Their ability to travel was severely curtailed in 2020 and 2021, but they pivoted to use digital technology to ensure that no audiences missed out. Thanks to streaming, radio broadcasts and digital presentations, well over 20 people are reached for every individual who attends a concert in person. This reach now extends around the globe.

3. **The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.**

Orchestras are part of an ecology that extends well beyond their own employees. Despite the pandemic, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra alone employed 100 Australian creatives in 2021, including singers, instrumentalists, presenters, puppeteers, conductors and actors. And of course the engagement of every one of these artists leads to the creation of multiple other jobs – technical and production crews, marketing, fundraising, payroll and finance, artist development, artistic planning, venue and box office, caterers, cleaners and even carpenters, builders and electricians. The ecology is wide-ranging and it all begins with the centrality of the artist, sitting on stage creating beautiful music.

Other creators are regularly supported through the orchestras' programs and infrastructure. In 2021, more than \$430,000 was invested by the six symphony orchestras in the commissioning of new works for orchestra and ensembles. This investment provided an income to over 110 Australian composers, and added to the collection of repertoire from living creators who rely on commissions for their livelihood. This has been done without the need for quotas or mandates and is sustainable within our existing funding arrangements. We support Live Performance Australia's call for a **seed fund for the development of new Australian work**.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRUI8376b0I>

4. Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

The symphony orchestras are major employers in the arts sector, in 2019 providing jobs for over 2,600 Australians including more than 2,000 musicians and artists. Despite COVID, they were all able to preserve the jobs of their full-time permanent musicians (over 400 individuals) and maintain a total headcount of over 1,500 personnel in 2021. Many casual employees were also retained and supported with the help of JobKeeper. The orchestras' major investment in Australian music and musicians provides stable employment for highly trained musicians, in many cases from early career until retirement. In addition, orchestras provide permanent employment to hundreds of skilled administrative, managerial, technical and production crew who contribute to the success of each performance.

We are committed to the core values of the Australia Council's funding framework such as contestability and accountability. However it is also crucially important that large organisations like the orchestras, which are major employers and significant commissioners of new work, have the stability of long-term, indexed core funding. In 2021 the orchestras' combined box office income had reduced by 83% on pre-COVID (2019) figures. Collectively, where box office once made up over 27% of revenue, in 2021 it was only 14% and that drop is entirely attributable to the pandemic. Although audiences are starting to return, their patterns of ticket-buying have changed, perhaps forever. We are grateful for the pandemic support provided during 2020 and 2021, but note that **stability in ongoing core government support is more vital than ever.**

5. Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

Reaching the audience has become more difficult as lockdowns and cancellations have left ticket-buyers nervous. The sector has seen substantially reduced box office and in particular, a move from subscription-model purchasing to single-ticket buying. Overall ticket sales among the six symphony orchestras dropped by more than \$39m between 2019 and 2021, with subscription bookings decreasing by around 85%. This demonstrates the magnitude of the hesitancy felt by audiences, even when government restrictions have eased and concerts are being presented. It costs no less to mount a concert with a half-empty hall than one that is full – yet the revenue generated is heavily impacted.

As ticket sales have fallen, demand for online and streamed concerts has grown rapidly. This 'digital revolution' has required swift responses from the orchestras, including the creation of new subscription models. For instance, the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra offered their 2021 patrons digital access to concerts being presented at Hobart's Federation Concert Hall. 26 concerts were live streamed throughout the year and half of those were made available to subscribers as Video on Demand, which allowed for unlimited views over a four-week period. The TSO invested substantially in equipment and personnel to make the live streams possible, allowing audiences to experience concerts in real time. Thus, in 2021, TSO was able to bring a full orchestra to Tasmanian towns and villages which otherwise would have been unable to host them. The social and community experience of attending a concert was further delivered to all corners of the state with groups of TSO enthusiasts gathered in live-stream hubs in nine regional areas of Tasmania.

Despite the return to the concert hall, the orchestras are working to retain the best aspects of digital presentation. Our newly developed skills in this area mean the orchestras are more accessible than ever – particularly to those who may have been excluded due to geographical or financial constraints or physical access limitations. Each orchestra now has the capacity to reach the entire breadth of their state and beyond, to a nearly limitless audience. Another successful example of digital engagement is the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, which launched MSO.LIVE in late 2020 to offer high-quality, world-class digital musical experiences. This digital opportunity removed geographical barriers to participation and increased the orchestra's overall reach and impact with over 30,000 views in 58 countries, encompassing 79 programs and special features via live streams, broadcasts, online performances, panel discussions and learning events.

6. Are there any other things you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

Australia's creative sector stimulates consumer confidence and industries such as tourism, hospitality, transport and retail, and contributes directly to child development and education outcomes. The arts are critical in maintaining social cohesion, mental health and wellbeing. They inspire and energise creativity, lateral thinking and Australian identity. They reflect our stories and culture – past, present and into the future. We are pleased that the government is fostering a discussion among the sector and beyond, so that all Australians have the opportunity to contribute to a National Cultural Policy.

We support the Australia Council's comments that cooperation, communication and collaboration between all three levels of government will be positive for the sector, as would be the reintroduction of a Meeting of Cultural Ministers. Enshrining these meetings in the Cultural Policy would ensure their significance for all levels of government.

We see the combination of portfolios under the current Minister, Tony Burke, as an opportunity to improve the outcomes from government investment in the sector. As Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations in addition to the Arts portfolio, Tony Burke has a unique opportunity to consider issues of industrial relations and employment as they affect arts organisations of all sizes, but particularly major employers responding to the needs of their communities as modern organisations should.

We ask that government use the responses of the sector through this consultation process to guide a comprehensive development of a ten-year National Cultural Plan. Such a Plan, working across portfolios to leverage and invest in arts and cultural programs, will truly serve the sector and the community and has had proven success in other sectors such as sport.

7. We may use some of your words as part of the National Cultural Policy Report. If we do, how would you like us to attribute your words?

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