

PERCUSSION AUSTRALIA

Percussion Australia is home to Synergy Percussion (established 1974) and Taikoz (established 1997). Both ensembles are globally recognised as leaders in the percussive arts, and as important creators and commissioners of new work from Australian composers, musicians, and choreographers. We run Australia's leading taiko training facility the 'Australian Taiko Academy' and are producers of Australia's newest international music festival 'Boom! International Festival of Percussion'. We will also be introducing new streams over the next five years including an Afro-Latin School of percussion and a pre-professional Training Academy for percussionists.

The Centrality of the Artist

The artist is at the core of Percussion Australia. Both ensembles were founded by artists. The artistic direction of the company is decided by artists. The board and administration team exists to support the artists that create and perform the work. Each ensemble's longevity and dynamism is sustained by collaboration with external artists. Percussion Australia exists because of the artists it serves.

Artists don't drop out of the sky, fully formed. All artists take years, decades of dedication, training and practice to become excellent at what they do. Yet one of the principal challenges of establishing a career in the arts in Australia is butting up against the common perception that being an artist isn't real work, and is therefore not deserving of a livable wage; artists have a "fun" job, and therefore payment for the work is the "fun" they have doing their job.

The result is burn out. Artists regularly either leave the industry or move overseas to other countries that have more robust cultural industries. This has been happening for so long now that it's considered a normal thing for Australian artists to do, rather than being recognised for what it is, which is a huge loss of domestic product, not to mention the cultural vacuum this leaves behind.

Artists are like everyone else in society. They have bills to pay, they want to own their own homes, to establish a family. They pay their taxes. And yet there is no federally mandated minimum wage for salaried artists, or a minimum "gig" fee for freelance artists. Musicians Australia has been campaigning on a state level for this to change, but we believe leadership for this issue (and other challenges for the cultural industries) must come from the federal level.

We therefore urge the government to consider:

- examining the Greens' proposal to establish an Artists Wage of \$772.60 per week, funded by the government
- mandating a national minimum "gig" fee for freelance artists being paid with government grants, be they local, state or federal grants. This would establish a culture of artists being paid correctly and give artists leverage when negotiating payment privately.



Strengthening Institutions

Generally, we at Percussion Australia believe that one of the simplest ways to strengthen artistic institutions, especially those in the small to medium sector, is to acknowledge and address the severe shortage of both rehearsal and performance spaces available in metropolitan areas.

Our organisation's single biggest challenge is finding and affording a suitable home to rehearse in, hold classes in and store our precious collection of instruments. Another key challenge is accessing affordable, appropriately sized theatre / concert spaces to perform in.

Unsurprisingly, one of the main forms of music to come from Percussion Australia is drumming. And drums, generally, are loud. We, along with many other music arts organisations, require soundproof rehearsal space, but these spaces are extremely difficult to find and are generally too expensive to use on a regular basis. Furthermore, individual musicians often find they have nowhere to practice, as they can't practice at home due to noise complaints and cannot afford to hire soundproof spaces because they're uncommon and expensive.

The spaces do not need to be lavish, just accessible, soundproofed, and affordable, and spread across metropolitan areas.

Furthermore, performance spaces have been shutting down across metropolitan areas over the past decades, meaning there are very few small to medium performance venues available to arts organisations, especially ones that are affordable whilst also being professionally equipped. An organisation like ours requires a venue of 300-400 seats to affordably produce concerts, but in Sydney, where we're based, venues of this size are rare. Arts organisations of all stripes would benefit from a concerted effort on the federal government to fund venues of this size dotted around metropolitan areas.

Reaching the audience

Cultural organisations and producers gain their strength from their audiences: without audiences, there is no art. And Australia has an arguably unique problem in reaching audiences, in that it is a really, really big place and everyone is spread out.

Percussion Australia is a music-based arts organisation, and percussion instruments are big. When we tour, one of our biggest expenses is freighting instruments. Within the metropolitan area this is manageable, but as soon as we start planning to tour to regional areas or interstate, the costs quickly skyrocket.

With the current scarcity of funding, it is frankly prohibitively expensive for us to organise any substantial tour outside the Sydney metropolitan area without the generous support of co-presenting venues, and even then, this often simply is not enough.

This creates a big imbalance as to which Australians are able to enjoy the work of arts organisations that enjoy the support of the federal government. Once upon a time, for example, Taikoz would regularly tour the entire country, and was a household name as a proudly Australian cultural producer. These days Taikoz has trouble finding funds to tour beyond the greater Sydney metropolitan area.

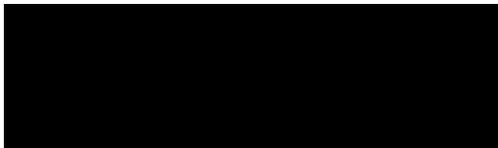
Any federal cultural policy must have at its heart an acknowledgement that all Australians deserve access to our great cultural producers, and therefore there must be a substantial increase in funding specifically to facilitate touring, including freight costs, and travel and accommodation for artists. Such funding would not only allow a freer exchange of cultural ideas around the country, strengthening our cultural ties, it would substantially lower ticket costs, meaning more Australians are able to access the art that they love, therefore increasing audiences and sustainability of the industry in general.

A Federally Funded Ad Campaign

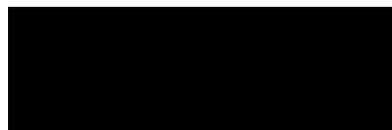
As a final note, we believe that whatever policies are introduced by the federal government around our cultural institutions, they must be accompanied by a national ad campaign positioning the arts as being a professional industry as important to Australian society as Health and Education.

To paraphrase Arts Minister Tony Burke, the years of neglect from the previous government have taken their toll, and it will not take much for the naysayers to whip up a frenzy of artists being “entitled nobodies” who contribute nothing. A concerted effort from the federal government to preemptively counteract this message would be ideal.

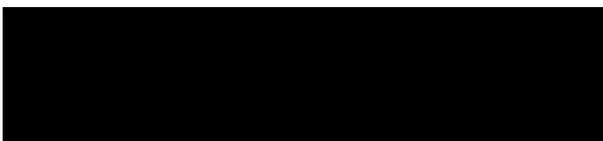
Artists cannot do this on their own. Like any maligned demographic, they require allies to tell their side of the story, and so whatever policy decisions are made by the government about our industry, one of the most powerful things that can be done is to establish a new message around the Arts, that they are important, meaningful, and for all Australians.



Ian Cleworth
Artistic Director



Lee McIver
General Manager | Producer



Tim Hansen
Program Manager



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