

From Andrew Ford,
composer, writer and broadcaster
Robertson, NSW

Dear Mr Burke,

Let me preface my few remarks by saying how good it feels to be heard, and how encouraging it is that this nation's government should consult its artists.

As a composer, I aim to be heard – at least to have my music heard. There's not much point to art without listeners, readers and spectators. When we talk about arts funding, we usually think of the artists who receive the money. But that isn't the point of it. Arts funding is a public good. The money itself might go to put food on the tables of those who make the art, but the need for the funding is that which any nation has for the challenge, consolation and nourishment of art.

In terms of how it might be better achieved, the short answer is that we need much more of it. But you already know that.

However, there are also things that can be done better. From the artist's point of view, consistency of funding is important. I know from personal experience that my best work has been achieved when I've had a year or two or more of reliable funding, when I haven't had to put out the begging bowl from project to project. That's time consuming and can be soul destroying.

Another aspect of this consistency is that funding opportunities continue. We often think of funding as something due to young artists, but many senior artists find it impossible to continue their work for lack of funds and give up at the height of their creative powers. Paul Keating's Creative Fellowships recognised this dilemma and aimed to rectify it, at least in a few cases.

The 'Keatings' recognised something else, too. Painters, writers, dancers, composers and the rest, can't work like public servants. We're no good at box-ticking. In particular, when we are asked to fill out forms in which we explain how our art will benefit society, how its outcomes will impact audiences and even how the work itself will turn out, we are at best guessing and more likely lying. Artists don't know what they're doing until they've done it. Art is always an act of faith and so is arts funding.

I thank you, again, for your faith in us.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Ford

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