

Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts,
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
By email to cultural policy@arts.gov.au

Monday 22 August 2022

Dear Minister Burke,

As a not-for-profit arts organisation, a leader in Tasmania's musical ecosystem since 1965, a vital connecting thread for youth orchestral practice, pathways and performance in Tasmania and a committed research and collaborative partner with a strong focus on the development of a strong and sustainable arts sector, Tasmanian Youth Orchestras (TYO) writes in response to the call for submissions to the National Cultural Policy. We appreciate the opportunity to submit and warmly welcome the Government's commitment to opening this conversation to include Youth Arts Organisations.

It is noted that TYO is also a signatory – with MYO, SYO, AdYO, WAYO, QYO and Music for Canberra – to a joint submission by the State Youth Orchestras of Australia. We ask you to ensure that funding for youth orchestras is a priority of the Cultural Plan in the context of Youth Participation and Engagement, and TYO offers these responses within the feedback template.

1. What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

In this submission, TYO speaks to the pillar of **strong institutions** as the most relevant to TYO's practice. We submit that the strength of TYO's experience as a cultural education, development and performance institution – and our longstanding commitment to our community and our sector – inform and underpin our demonstrated capacity to innovate in our practice; and speak to the ongoing relevance and importance of the youth orchestra model to a diverse, vibrant and sustainable arts sector.

Excellence and heritage inform relevance and innovation

Since 1965, a vibrant music community for young people aged five to 25. A place where musical skills are developed and nurtured; and enduring friendships formed. A vital development organisation within Tasmania's creative ecosystem, a valued collaborative partner in performance and research; and a year-round contributor of inspiring live and digital performances, with increasingly broad audience reach. This is TYO.

Throughout the pandemic, TYO has grown – in capacity, reach, participation, financial strength, quality and impact. From the outset of disruption in early 2020, TYO's response has been agile, effective and informed by our concern for our large team of artistic and production specialists, the ongoing viability of our sector and of course for Tasmania's young musicians and singers. Through determined leadership, underpinned by robust strategic planning and highly capable management, TYO made an early and intentional decision to play on. From online delivery to in-person delivery with robust COVIDSafe measures in place, we have adapted, evolved and continued to extend opportunities, despite pandemic challenges.

In doing so TYO has demonstrated depths of capacity, resilience and creativity which are to the benefit of our sector, our wider TYO family and Tasmanian communities. TYO has unequivocally made the transition from its beginnings as a volunteer-led organisation to a professional arts entity: our performance during the pandemic is testament to the robustness of our approach and processes and our capacity to consult, plan, respond and deliver to a high standard in the most challenging of circumstances. Our experience as an institution and our commitment to our community are our strengths.

Evidencing the ‘why’

We submit that TYO has endured throughout the pandemic and as a Tasmanian institution because what we do fundamentally and deeply *matters* to our community and our sector; and we know from our connection with our TYO family and from research that the skills and connections young people develop within TYO have far-reaching benefits that extend far beyond their time with us.

Music is part of the fabric of community life. It brings joy, hope and vibrancy. A thriving youth music culture is beneficial for all; and research consistently shows that musical involvement provides multiple benefits for our young people, including leadership development, improved educational outcomes, skills development, social connectedness, wellbeing and belonging. Some ‘TYOers’ will become professional musicians; and many more will become lifelong participants, supporters, advocates and audiences of the arts.

The recently completed [Music and Resilience](#) research project, a two-year collaborative undertaking involving Tasmanian Youth Orchestras and the University of Tasmania, shows us that musical involvement builds resilience in young people by fostering key skills including empathy, influence, teamwork, curiosity, focus, and ‘grit’ – the latter defined as ‘the capacity to pursue challenges and display determination and perseverance in the face of challenges’. These skills are both individually invaluable and highly transferable to a modern environment characterised by fluidity, rapid change, technological development and constant challenge.

TYO participates actively in research opportunities as part of our deep commitment to sector development: we believe strongly in the value of an arts ‘ecosystem’, where organisations and people work together to understand the ‘why’ of what we do and evidence its value. This recent TYO/UTAS research, together with the sector resources that have been developed as a project outcome, expand the knowledge base needed for a well-informed and sustainable arts sector in Tasmania and beyond. TYO can only participate in important projects like this because of our long experience, our expertise, our credibility and our organisational capacity to support involvement.

Challenges

The two most significant challenges facing TYO – and by extension the young people whose musical development we foster – are the impacts of the lack of established funding streams for key youth arts institutions; and the impact of the systematic defunding of music tuition within the school system.

Over the past 15 years, including pre-pandemic, music education programs in schools have declined. While research shows that [access to music education varies by state](#), an overall reduction in music education has been a nationwide trend; and access to tuition in orchestral instruments has been particularly affected. The impact of defunding of training for music teachers and the subsequent reduction of music education in schools was well documented in the [National Music Review 2005](#) conducted by The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP, the former Minister for Education, Science and Training, and more recently reviewed by Dr Anita Collins in a report commissioned by the Tony Foundation in 2020, [Music Education a Sound Investment](#).

While Tasmania’s heritage of robust band programs and the strength of TYO’s own development programs provided some bulwark in the larger cities of Launceston and Hobart, the numbers of young instrumentalists in the state have been in steady decline for at least a decade and are now critical – particularly in areas outside the two largest cities.

Within this context, TYO is increasingly being asked to ‘fill the gaps’ and deliver more; but without any core funding in place to support *either* core delivery or the extension of programs to those who will otherwise miss out on the opportunity for instrumental training. In the service of addressing the decreasing musical opportunities available to young Tasmanians, TYO is implementing pathways tuitions programs for young people in lower-SES communities; and has already established ‘endangered instrument’ scholarships for young musicians from government schools. We also continue to contribute actively to sector research, develop and provide opportunities to both

emerging and established sector practitioners and composers; and we have taken a lead in the move to a performance program which combines digital and live performance outcomes.

All of these activities could, with consistent funding, be expanded and extended for wider benefit and a more vibrant, sustainable sector – but like other state youth orchestras, we currently do all this with no assured core funding.

Federal funding for music education at an elite, tertiary level through organisations such as ANAM and AYO has remained stable over this time, while little to no federal funding has been allocated to the feeder programs (the State Youth Orchestras) that underpin musicians' development providing the years of sustained engagement required to reach the level to access these institutions.

The National Music Review found it is unlikely that a child would start learning an instrument at all if they have not started playing by the age of 11. This age group is currently supported by all State Youth Orchestras but not by any federally funded institutions or ongoing arts funding.

There is an exciting opportunity to embed the arts in the lives of all young Australians by making Youth Engagement and Participation a priority of the National Cultural Policy. There is also an opportunity to review how education and arts funding can intersect creating equitable and focused support to create better pathways for young Australians to access the benefits of the arts and arts training. There is also an opportunity to directly and urgently address the decline in arts education in schools – and music education specifically – now, before the impacts become irreversible.

TYO's submission to the Cultural Plan

TYO, with the other state youth orchestras, has called in a joint submission on the federal Government to recognise the vital role, reach, capacity and demonstrated ability to innovate of all state youth orchestras; and the urgent need to prioritise youth engagement and participation in the National Cultural Plan. The five key strategies for achieving this outcome are outlined in the joint submission.

TYO further calls on the federal Government to **urgently and directly address the 15-year decline in music education within schools**, through dedicated funding for music programs, the re-establishment of specialist music teacher positions in government schools and formal recognition that arts involvement is an integral and essential component of education and wellbeing.

As noted in the National Cultural Policy, creativity is essential to Australia's economic and social success – and TYO submits that as a nation we need to invest early and well in nurturing that creativity. Strong, experienced institutions like TYO, with a focus on our young people, have a pivotal part to play in a vibrant cultural future.

We are happy for this submission to be made public, and our contact person for this submission will be Kyna Hart, General Manager of Tasmanian Youth Orchestras, 0474 316 608 or gm@tyo.org.au.

Thank you for your focus on Australia's cultural wellbeing; and for the opportunity to submit to this important consultation.

Best wishes,



Kyna Hart
General Manager
Tasmanian Youth Orchestras