

11 September 2020

The Hon Paul Fletcher MP
Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
paul.fletcher.mp@aph.gov.au

By email

Dear Mr Fletcher,

On the morning of 13 March 2020, the musicians of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (ASO) sat on the stage of the Adelaide Town Hall. It was the Dress Rehearsal for our final performances in the Adelaide Festival and the music of Thomas Adés and Gustav Mahler was on the stands. Minutes later it was announced that the evening performance would be cancelled, our conductor being identified overnight as a potential contact of a confirmed COVID patient. The reaction of the orchestra was understandably emotional and many tears were shed on stage that morning. In our hearts we knew that it would be a very long time before we could make music together and our audiences could experience the life affirming sound of a symphony orchestra.

As you are no doubt well aware, the performing arts was the first industry to be affected by the shutdown and will be the last to recover.

News from Opera Australia in the last week has given the musicians of the ASO urgent cause to correspond with you. The grim reality of large-scale redundancies at Australia's largest arts company shows the scale of the crisis our industry is facing.

In addition to the deep personal concern for the wellbeing of our colleagues in the Opera Australia Orchestra, we have grave concerns for our own future and that of the industry.

If our arts institutions fail, they cannot be rebuilt quickly, indeed they may never be rebuilt. The loss of corporate knowledge most profoundly affects arts practice. How to stage an opera, play the Yidaki, choreograph Swan Lake or lead an orchestra cannot be distilled in a text book and filed in a library. Artists are the custodians of this precious knowledge and without the institutions to support them, this knowledge will be irretrievably lost.

Given that Opera Australia gives upwards of 700 performances per year to more than 600 000 patrons and is proudly Australia's biggest arts employer with nearly 1500 singers, musicians, technicians and administrators on the payroll, it is simply too big to fail. That the Sydney Opera House, one of the world's most recognisable landmarks may soon be without an opera orchestra is unthinkable.

It is undisputable that the performing arts sector is massively damaged from COVID-19. Equally clear is that the industry is facing a catastrophic collapse that it will not recover from in our lifetimes. The Jobkeeper scheme has been a temporary lifeline for some arts organisations including our own but it is now painfully clear that this alone is not enough to safeguard the future of our most precious institutions.

The \$250m rescue package for the Arts sector that was announced in July is promising but it is our understanding that this money is yet to be spent.

In 2019, Opera Australia Chief Executive Rory Jeffes wrote:

'The arts give the heartbeat to the body of our community. It is part of what makes us know we are not simply alive – but living life.'

The heartbeat of Opera Australia and that of the entire industry is now imperceptibly faint and in need of immediate intervention. The musicians of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra urge the federal government to:

- Provide Opera Australia with a rescue and recovery package that ensures the survival of the organisation whilst protecting the livelihoods of its artists; and
- Expedite the \$250 million of funding announced in July, making it immediately available to support artists and arts organisations.

The musicians of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra look forward to welcoming you to a performance of the in the near future.

Yours sincerely,



Gemma Phillips

President, ASO Players Association