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Public supports increased funding for Australia's orchestras

Symphony orchestras are valued as an important part of our culture, and most Australians would support maintaining or increasing government funding for them, according to a new national survey commissioned by the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

The online survey of 800 people found strong backing for public funding of orchestras with 83% of people saying funding should either stay at current levels of \$2.50 per person per annum or be significantly increased. Only 11% would defund Australia's state orchestras.

But the research also shows how the arts and live entertainment industry face significant problems getting people 'off the couch' with the majority of Australians reporting no attendance of a live entertainment event in the last 12 months.

There is huge potential to tap into the social and economic benefits of live music, including orchestral music, with 70% of Australians saying that they would like to attend more concerts.

While cost is a significant inhibitor to concert attendance, 48% of respondents identify orchestral music as an important part of Australia's culture, with 70% agreeing that orchestras are an important part of the economy, providing jobs and opportunities for musicians.

Forty-eight per cent of respondents think the government should provide funding to orchestras "to ensure they are available to the public" with over 50% agreeing that it is important for school children to learn classical music.

The director of MEAA's Musicians section, Paul Davies, said the research backed the view that orchestras and opera and ballet companies were public and cultural assets which were worthy of government support.

"These companies are expensive to run, but the public understands and accepts the need to improve government funding," he said.

"The benefits of orchestral music are wide and deep; it feeds and develops Australian culture and social development and is an important economic activity in its own right.

"These companies are public assets and governments must ensure strong and stable funding models for efficient and productive investment; and they must lift arts funding so that artists, musicians, actors, technicians and producers can provide entertainment, education and inspiration to all Australian communities.

"The Australian public appreciates it and they want more government support for the arts."

Mr Davies said the research also identified the challenges to increasing audiences for the arts, including expensive ticket prices. But there were also other ways in which governments could do more to encourage people to participate in the arts.

"We know that planning and regulatory problems and poor public transport are major obstacles to people going out to attend a concert or live entertainment," he said.

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“Governments generally must do more to fix this. People want to go out, they want to attend, but too often infrastructure constraints are making it harder for people to make that choice.

“Government must do more to encourage existing venues and the development of new performance spaces and precincts, located where people live and work.”

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