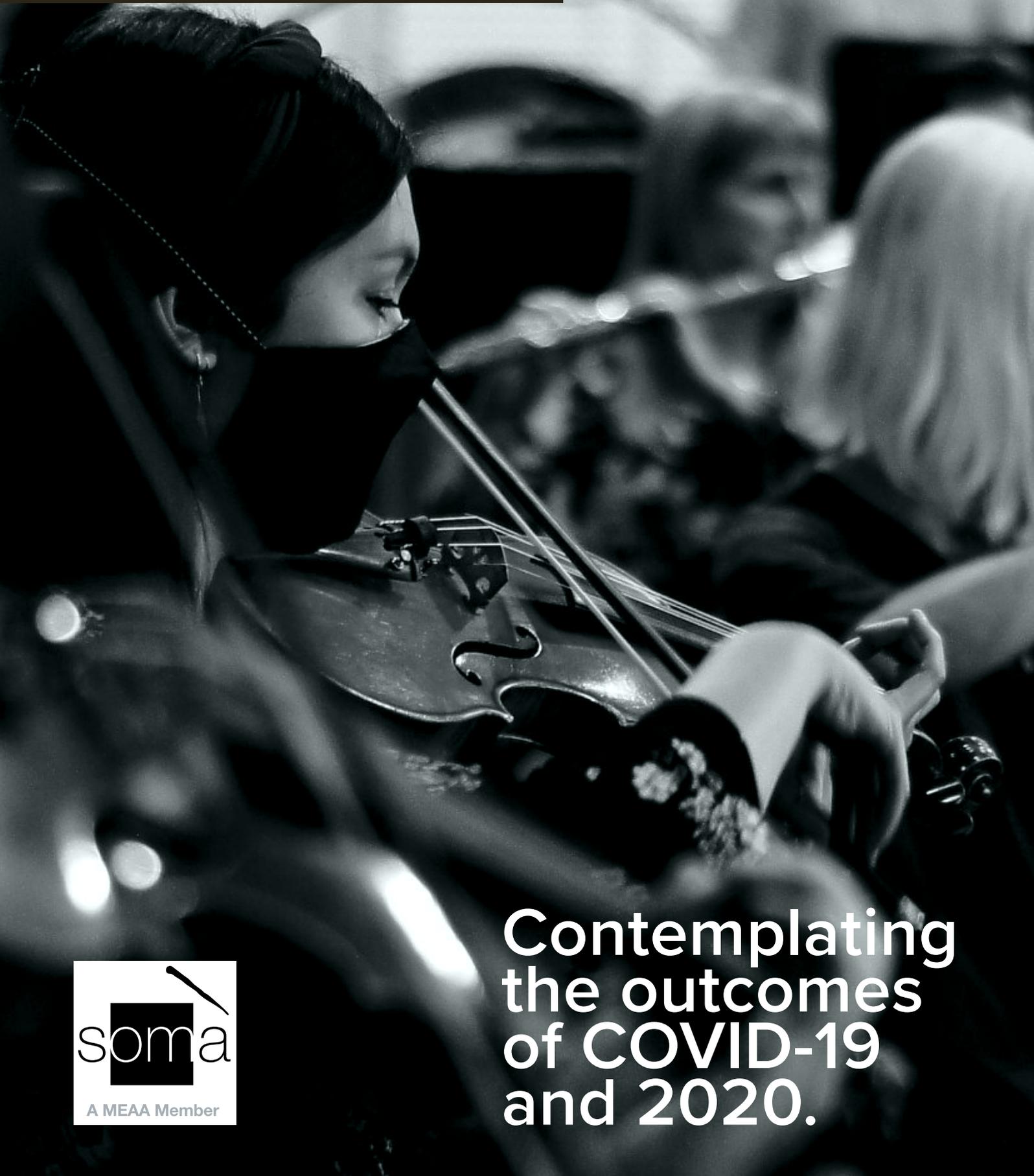


Senza Sord

MAY 2021



Contemplating
the outcomes
of COVID-19
and 2020.





Senza Sord

MAY 2021

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Cover: Orchestra Victoria rehearsing for the concert with Mo'Ju at the Sydney Myer Music Bowl.
Photo: James Grim

Left: Virtual Concert Hall ASO.
Photo Lachlan Bramble



Overture

Tania Hardy Smith

Orchestra Victoria

Hi everyone

This issue of *Senza Sord* is a record of how our orchestras fared during 2020. As many of you know, it is a broad and diverse picture of great initiative, unsurprising creativity and remarkable collaborations for many, but with distressing outcomes for others. In so many ways, it is a reassuring picture of what we all know the orchestra to be – a valuable and incredibly committed group of musicians who take very seriously their responsibility as skillful purveyors of joy, education and great artistic beauty. Not only do we feel deeply within ourselves about the importance of making music, but we also find immense value in gifting our abilities to our communities, our regions and our audiences wherever they are.

Many orchestras worked hard with their managements to keep the musicians in touch with the public, mostly through online and digital creations. I would like to say a massive thankyou to all the people behind the scenes who helped the orchestras maintain their relevance to so many in our communities. We all know that the symbiotic relationship between an orchestra and their audiences is bountiful for all of us. During 2020 there were so many pivots to different platforms (as opposed to the usual one...), meaning we could give a massively expanded version of ourselves to thousands of people who were searching for an alternative to the live performances they were missing so much. In this endeavour, players revealed dimensions of themselves that delighted our online visitors, and boosted morale for many of us who felt so diminished because we weren't playing and performing together.

But there were also very unfortunate events that saw players in the Opera Australia Orchestra lose their jobs through redundancy. Our own

SOMA President, Mark Bruwel, was one of these players. Personally, I find it deeply distressing that such a solution was enacted, when from so many other accounts, there are examples of ways in which the orchestra and players were considered a treasure to be mined, despite the harsh and unpredictable conditions. We are all aware of the importance of fiscal responsibility, but the orchestra is a massively important resource that has deep value and worth. This is an already-known, but starkly highlighted realization coming out of the pandemic, and one we must keep prosecuting.

I want to personally thank Mark for his efforts as President, and to reiterate my sadness for all the OAO players who were made to feel redundant, in a professional and personal sense. I wish you all the very best for the future, and know that most of you will keep playing. Our livelihood is not just a job. And this outcome must spur all of us on to work hard at keeping our orchestras intact and indispensable.

I also want to welcome Anthony Pope and Lachlan Bramble to the Presidency and Vice-Presidency. We are in good hands with these two players who have years of experience as player representatives in Orchestra Victoria and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra respectively.

As an adjunct to Paul Davies' piece in this edition, the Executive has been asked to collect from their managements statistics related to all activities undertaken by the orchestras during 2020. This includes type, platform and audience numbers, in order to build a picture of the success of diversification while live performance was prohibited. Several orchestras have been very quick to respond with figures, so I will be constructing an outline of this information for the next issue of *Senza Sord*.

All the very best to everyone for the rest of 2021.

Tania

SOME WORDS FROM OUR INCOMING SOMA PRESIDENT

Anthony Pope

Trumpet, Orchestra Victoria

As incoming President, I would very much like to acknowledge my predecessor Mark Bruwel for his wonderful contribution to SOMA as President for the last six years and part of the Executive two years prior to that. It is a very sad and traumatic circumstance that has seen him most unfortunately step aside from SOMA and OAO. On behalf of the SOMA Executive I wish him all the very best for his future.

Looking towards the future, I am excited to be afforded the opportunity to represent my colleagues across Australia and am very pleased to welcome Lachlan Bramble (ASO) as the first ever Vice President of the SOMA Executive team. His experience within SOMA is extensive and invaluable.

As we orchestral musicians continue to see casualisation within our orchestras, SOMA representation is increasingly important.

The continued lack of funding indexation in some states and stagnant government funding across the board means that SOMA needs to be on the front foot in working with both managements and government bodies at all levels to support artistic integrity within our industry.

Also throughout 2021, I very much look forward to working with Paul Davies and the Executive to review our SOMA strategic plan including SOMA's relationship with Musicians Australia.

Orchestras in Australia are in challenging times, however it is also the time for wise minds and strong hearts!! I encourage anyone with thoughts, ideas or suggestions to reach out to me or your local SOMA rep.

If anyone reading this is not a SOMA member, please join and support us to support you!!

Anthony Pope



WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR MUSICIANS AND COMPANIES FOLLOWING COVID-19 AND 2020?

THE ROLE OF SOMA AND MEAA AS DEFENDERS OF OUR MUSIC CULTURE

Paul Davies

Director, Musicians
MEAA

By definition a crisis tends to clarify things, reminding us of what matters and helping us identify fault lines. What does it take for musicians and their companies to survive, let alone prosper? What are the forces at work, who are the decision makers and what are their priorities? With whom can we ally? What can we learn about ourselves?

With the sudden onset of COVID in March 2020, the scramble of responses and adaptations tended to expose priorities. Starkly, the question was: what matters most? Is it maintaining musicians and therefore the work they produce, and at the standard they produce it, or is it something else? If the answer to the question is: “the musicians matter most because we have nothing without them”, then we can move on to the next set of critical questions, such as: What will it take to support them? What do we need? Who will work with us?

If the answer to the question is: “What matters most is the ‘institution’, the company, the brand, the audience, or the ‘stakeholders’ etc” then we’ll probably see radically different behaviour.



TSO Livestream control booth



One of the most encouraging things I heard at the height of the COVID scramble in mid-2020 was an Orchestra CEO saying, without hesitation, that what mattered most is “the talent”, the musicians. The clarity was what I had hoped for from that person, who was obviously a leader, but more importantly it confirmed what I knew about the character of the musicians who had built and established this respect and recognition.

That’s the character of SOMA. Leadership, professionalism, commitment to their peers and their community.

In contrast, what does it say about an organisation when they decide that what’s needed in this crisis is to sack 25% of the staff, including musicians and other artists?

Obviously the detail of their situation matters, but if other similarly situated organisations decided to respond to the same crisis by adjusting everything else first in order to make job cuts the last option, and if Government decision makers are actively and substantially supporting this approach with employment assistance funding, such as with JobKeeper, what does such a decision say about the priorities of that company? What matters most to them? What does it say when the first thing that company does is to stand down its musicians, ahead of other employees, with next to no warning, discussion or consultation? What does it say when the most experienced and respected musicians in the orchestra are sacked without credible explanation? What does it say when the same company is in receipt of funding covering the full company of musicians for years in advance, where relief funding is provided and where asset sales bring in another 45 million dollars? What does it say when that company resumes performing just months after the sackings, replacing players with casual musicians? What are the priorities of such a company?

If an institution fails us because it seems more interested in things other than the needs of musicians, where can we look for assistance? What of the regulations, the law and other bulwarks?

Another lesson we learnt from the Opera Australia debacle, and perhaps not for the first time, was that the law will not save us. In this case it appears to permit musicians to be (purportedly) made redundant one month and have their roles replaced the next. How can a principal musician’s role be redundant? In what sense is an Orchestra able to operate, performing repertoire, with 25% fewer members? How can permanent musicians be overtly replaced with casuals? How can this be done overnight, by forcing permanent musicians to leave their employment? What does permanency mean? Surely these actions subvert the legal and common sense meaning of ‘redundancy’? Surely there is a legal remedy?

This is not the place to go into a thorough discussion of the law but suffice to say, that under careful and expert scrutiny, including with the assistance of tribunals and courts, we have found no effective legal remedy. Employee musicians can be made redundant and essential permanent roles can be converted to casual roles. All the employer needs to do is cover it with a pay-out. Clearly the law needs to be fixed, but this fact is probably a symptom of bigger problems.

While Government provided the welcome assistance of JobKeeper, this didn’t save jobs and many of our claims and calls for assistance, including through direct petitioning of the relevant Minister, fell on deaf ears. The sector, and the plight of musicians, was clearly not a priority for them.

We had more support from the general public, audiences and media and it is possible this helped steer the company away from the



Production for Adelaide Symphony Orchestra's Virtual Concert Hall was an in-house affair with all the audio and video know-how coming from within the organisation.

even more draconian course it seemed intent on, when, after the sackings it threatened to terminate all union agreements. Thankfully, we turned this threat away in late 2020. For now. But we didn't win back the jobs of those who were dismissed in September.

If we can take heart from public support and the interest of public minded journalists, what else can we look to in order to rebuild? How do we make sure that those in orchestral leadership positions understand that it's in their interests to put musicians first? How do we ensure that practices that damage orchestral careers and undermine our culture remain truly marginal?

Clearly the answers to these questions go to our values, to the purpose of SOMA/MEAA and to our role as defenders and custodians of our music culture. The recognition and respect that has been built by musicians over generations, built on expertise, fair process and collegiality, can't be trusted with all decision makers. We must not rely on this or take it for granted. The things that hold must be practiced, reviewed and renewed.

If I can make a couple of specific points, they are:

- Formally induct every new musician you meet and play with into our community.
- Enforce our Agreements and make sure they include all the practices that musicians have developed to build and maintain musicianship and our orchestras.
- Develop our public voice and don't be afraid to speak up for the public interest and value of your work. Let's not leave advocacy for our sector up to CEOs and Boards.
- Support and encourage all the other workers supporting us: the administrative, technical and production staff.

2021 will be a year for rebuilding and will also see the introduction of a new funding model for major performing arts companies. It's also the lead up to a federal election. Let's make our voice heard and take very opportunity to include all musicians in our efforts to build and maintain a vibrant and healthy music culture. It's not something that can be taken for granted.

COVID A YEAR ON...

Rosemary Curtin

Viola

President, Sydney Symphony Orchestra Musicians' Association

Last week, as the first anniversary of COVID and the Australian lockdown came around, I spent quite some time reflecting on those events as I am sure did many of you.

In early March 2020, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra had just commenced the first of two seasons out of the Sydney Opera House while the Concert Hall undergoes renovations. My colleagues and I were excited to be returning for this renovation period to the Orchestra's historic home, the Sydney Town Hall. There was a level of optimism and excitement in the air as we enjoyed the acoustics of this grand old building and looked forward to rehearsals with Maestro Donald Runnicles and a line-up of international opera stars for Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with the Sydney Philharmonia Choir in the coming weeks.

On the afternoon of Friday March 13, as I drove home between a morning *Tea and Symphony* and an evening performance, I received a phone call from our CEO, Emma Dunch, in my capacity as SSO Musicians' Association President. "Come in to the office, the Prime Minister is on television, about to make an announcement about gatherings of 500 people or more".

From the very beginning of this crisis, Emma and our Board's leadership can be considered nothing short of exemplary as they took the "One SSO" approach which has got us all successfully to the other side. In this spirit, Emma invited me and musician board member and Principal Double Bass Kees Boersma to attend daily meetings during the first six weeks of lockdown with our management's executive – first at the



Members of the Corona Cabinet (minus Euan Harvey) Zooming in our 'new normal' meeting space.

Rocks' Clocktower office and then over the now-ubiquitous Zoom.

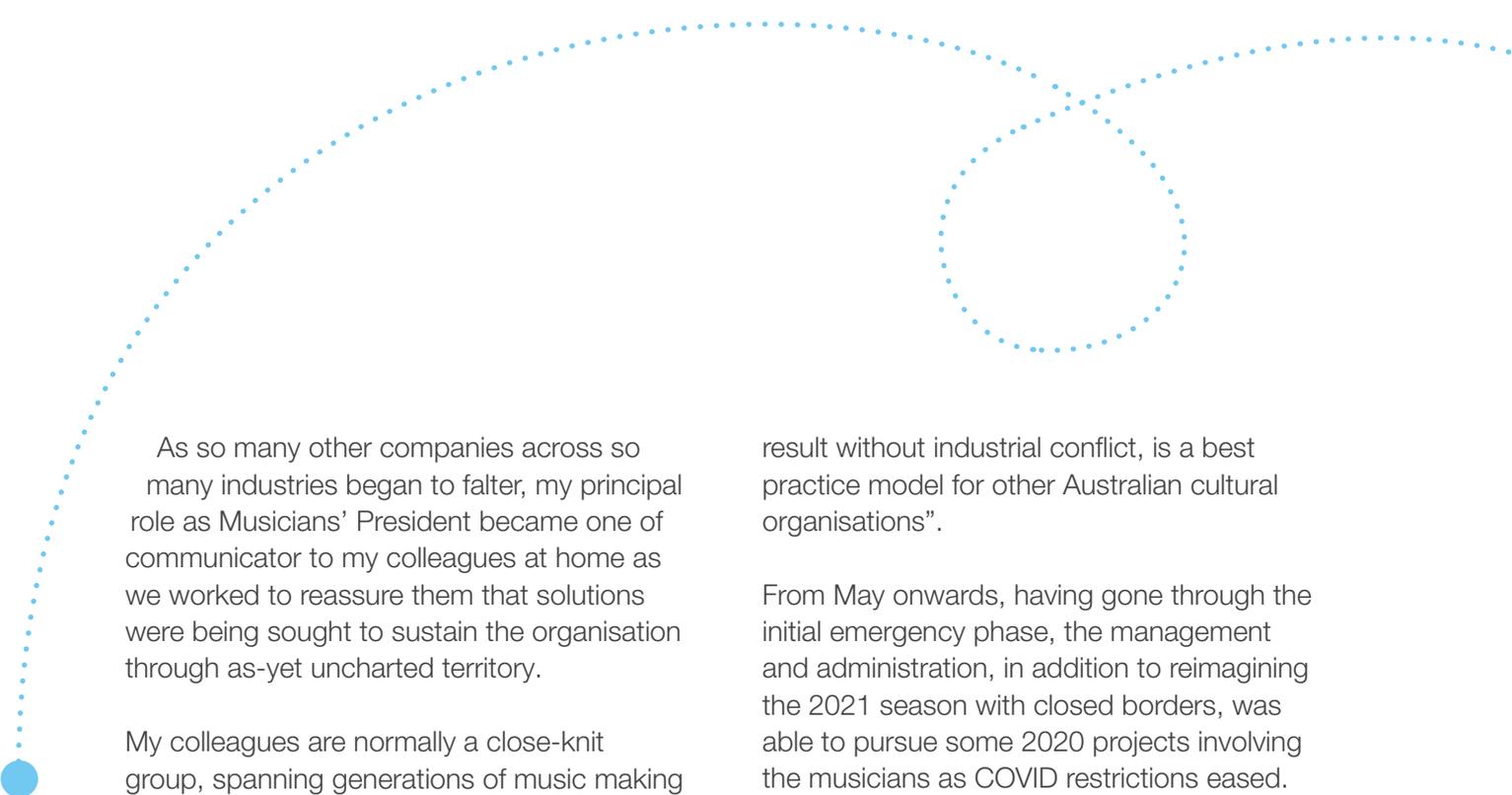
Kees and I had thought we had a pretty good idea about how orchestras are run. As musicians, it is easy to believe we are the centre of all things, revelling in the limelight and receiving applause just for turning up to work every evening. How wrong we were!

Over the next few weeks, we were witness to much of the incredible triaging of our organisation undertaken by our wonderful administration team. From cancelling venues and ensuring refunds from those venues, finding flights to return soloists and conductors to Europe, contacting patrons, updating our website with the latest information, organising ticket refunds and donation options, organising thank you

letters to donors, connecting with other arts organisations and making a case for government assistance, determining our employees' eligibility for JobKeeper, packing away all our production equipment into long term storage, shutting down the office, and organising appropriate IT solutions to enable the admin staff and box office to work remotely – Kees and I got to hear all about our management's efforts.

For those six weeks, my viola didn't see the light of day as I sat glued instead to my computer.

However, if I thought my situation was tough, in many ways it was even harder for my musician colleagues who had been told that all concerts were cancelled for an indefinite period and to remain home until further notice.



As so many other companies across so many industries began to falter, my principal role as Musicians' President became one of communicator to my colleagues at home as we worked to reassure them that solutions were being sought to sustain the organisation through as-yet uncharted territory.

My colleagues are normally a close-knit group, spanning generations of music making together. Modern technology is not normally the domain of classical orchestral musicians, but we got the whole orchestra up and running on Zoom and we all stayed in touch through the formation of WhatsApp groups across the different sections of the Orchestra.

I formed a small group of committee musicians: Emily Long, Sophie Cole, Sandro Costantino, Chris Tingay and Euan Harvey, known as the "Corona Cabinet", and we got to work with SOMA's Paul Davies to ensure as smooth a negotiation on behalf of the musicians as possible.

It was certainly not an easy message to deliver via Zoom to my 100 colleagues one evening in April, but thanks to the collective and open vision of getting through this period, we were able to reach an agreement by Easter and a smooth transition through the Fair Work Commission.

This was widely reported in the press, with the musicians and administrative staff agreeing "to reduce the company's salary bill by 25 per cent with pay cuts up to 30% and reduced working hours"... "The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's collaborative approach, which delivered a very constructive

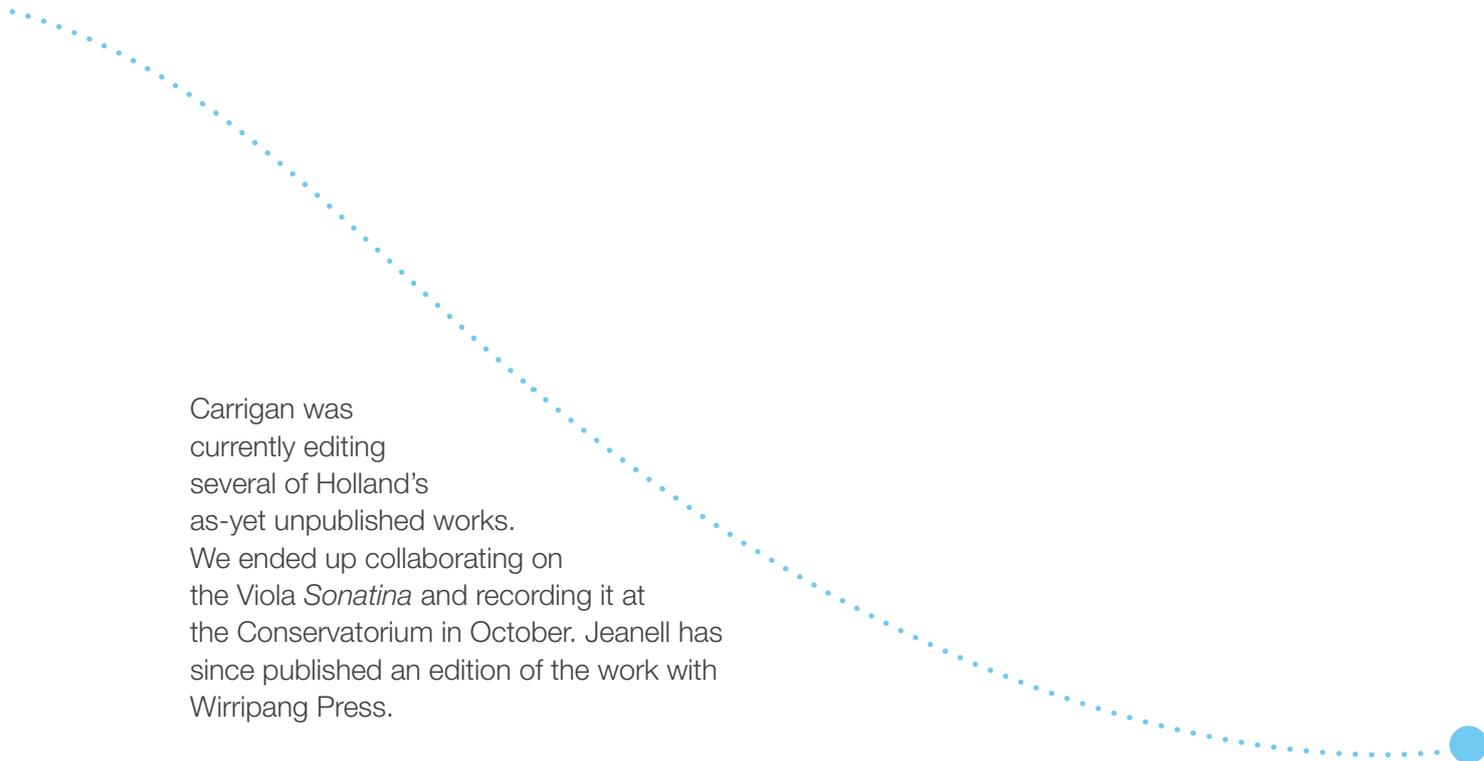
result without industrial conflict, is a best practice model for other Australian cultural organisations".

From May onwards, having gone through the initial emergency phase, the management and administration, in addition to reimagining the 2021 season with closed borders, was able to pursue some 2020 projects involving the musicians as COVID restrictions eased. These included some beautiful recordings with our Chief Conductor Designate, Simone Young, at the Sydney Town Hall and individual home recordings produced to accompany popular artists, Casey Donovan, Tim Minchin, Kate Miller-Heidke and other singers, in a digital concert to raise funds for Support Act, the Actor's Benevolent Fund and other charities.

In addition, many of us enjoyed producing some smaller-scale chamber music productions from our own homes for use on the SSO's social media platforms. Several of us used the time for other creative pursuits including composition, conducting and extensive private practice.

I finally had the time to research and write an article about the original owner of my instrument, one of the first women and very first members of the SSO. Coincidentally, her name, like mine, was Rosie.

In the course of my research, I discovered that while still a student at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in the 1930s, she had commissioned fellow student Dulcie Holland to compose a piece for her. Serendipitously, I discovered that Conservatorium Pianist Dr. Jeanell



Carrigan was currently editing several of Holland's as-yet unpublished works. We ended up collaborating on the *Viola Sonatina* and recording it at the Conservatorium in October. Jeanell has since published an edition of the work with Wirripang Press.

If you are interested in reading more about Rosy Gumpertz, you can still find my article on our Sydney Symphony Orchestra website under our *Backstage News* section.

There were some other silver linings during COVID. As we realised the potential of Zoom, we started using it not just for meetings, but for performances. In this manner, we were able to continue delivering our *Music4Health* program, broadcasting small chamber concerts into several locations at once for the Starlight Foundation into Westmead and Randwick Children's Hospitals, in addition to other disability service providers. As a result, last year we had a far greater reach with our *Music4Health* audiences than with live performances in single venues previously.

The most important lesson, however, for all of us, has been never again to take live music for granted. In the last couple of weeks, as we've commenced our 2021 season, I've had appreciative patrons speak to me with tears in their eyes, so important is the return to performances for them. The same feeling has been palpable from our audiences inside the concert halls, with their enthusiastic applause and smiles visible even from behind face masks.

It has certainly been an emotional return to work for all of us over the last month and all in all, I think we've come through it in pretty good shape.

Clearly, we are not experiencing a regular Sydney Symphony Orchestra season, with a dazzling array of international conductors and soloists, and we are reminded daily with the continued COVID-Safe requirements that things remain far from normal.

However, after the tumultuous year that we've had with COVID, we remain incredibly appreciative of what we do have in the meantime, especially compared to our international colleagues. We look to the future with a renewed sense of the importance of what we do, our very special community role as Sydney's own symphony orchestra, and the value placed upon it by our audiences and supporters.

ADELAIDE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LOCKED DOWN AT ASO

Lachlan Bramble

Associate Principal 2nd Violin

Adelaide Festival 2020. Judging by our experience in March last year, COVID-19 represents quite an occupational hazard for conductors. After completing performances of a staged version of Mozart's *Requiem* under the growing storm clouds of the pandemic,

Brett Dean's travel to South Australia via Taipei resulted in him being one of the state's first confirmed COVID cases. His good-humoured video message from the infectious diseases ward at the Royal Adelaide Hospital was warmly welcomed by the audiences of



So what does an orchestra do when the ability to meet, rehearse and perform suddenly disappears?

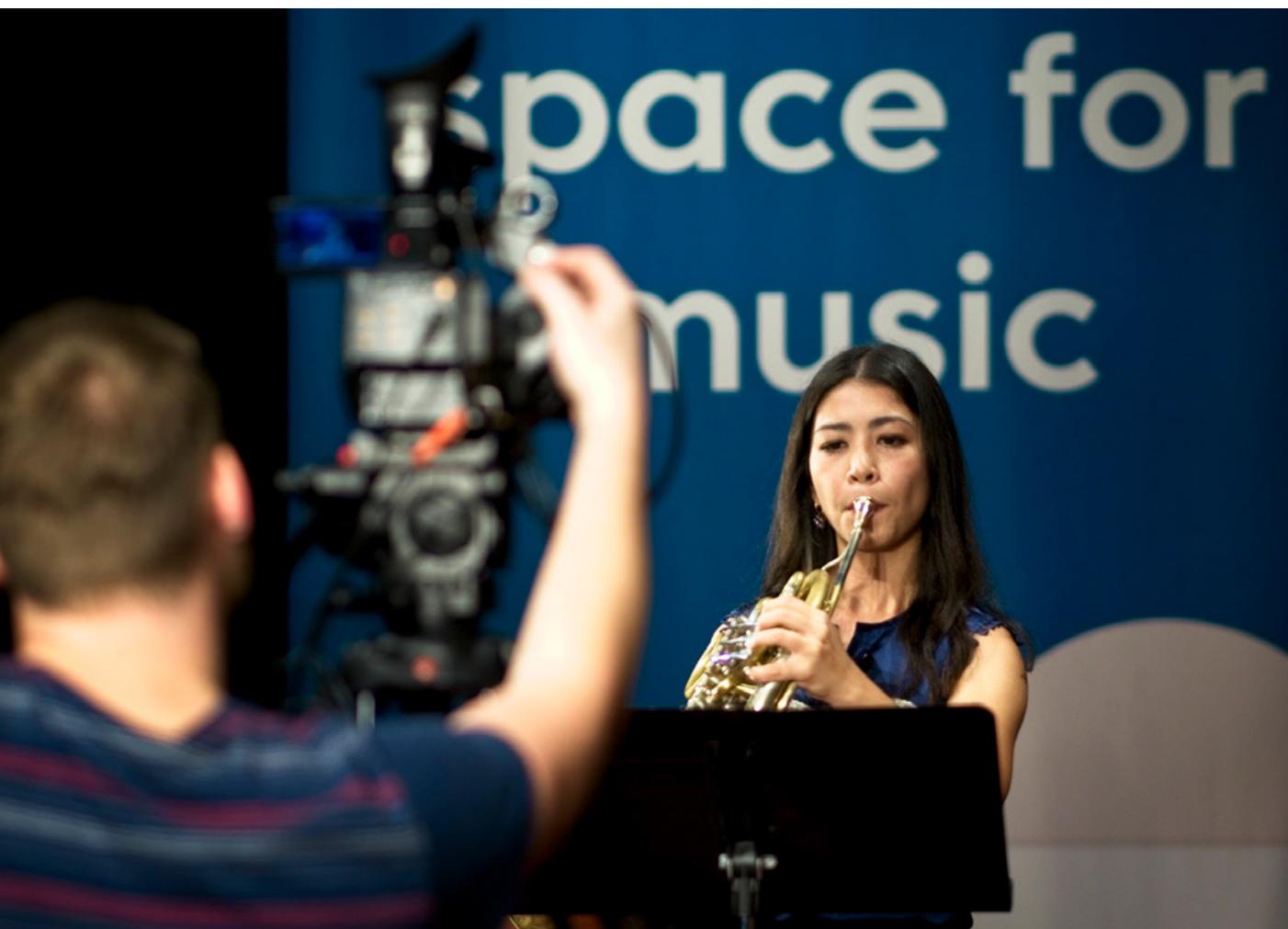
The Sound of History: Beethoven, Napoleon and Revolution which was conducted by Richard Mills at the last minute.

Days later the orchestra sat, ready for the final rehearsal of Adès and Mahler, only to find out that the evening performance would be cancelled because overnight our conductor Nicholas Carter was identified as a potential contact of a confirmed COVID patient.

The reaction of the orchestra was emotional. Many tears were shed on stage that morning as we knew that despite all the uncertainty of the pandemic, it would be a very long time before we could make music together again.

So what does an orchestra do when the ability to meet, rehearse and perform suddenly disappears? It was fascinating to see the variety of creativity from orchestras in Australia and all around the world. At ASO our variation of the online performance phenomenon was the creation of a Virtual Concert Hall in our studio, with content available on our website.

An appropriately distanced conga-line of musicians lined up over weeks and months to record solo pieces showcasing their instrument. Whilst we had plenty of Bach, there was also a Berio *Sequenza*, a baroque horn duet and a number of pieces written by orchestra members themselves.





Natsuko Yoshimoto



Morgan and Ewen Bramble

The presentations were very much aimed at our local supporter base and had a personal touch that was appreciated. Indeed, many of the performances were accompanied by a vlog (video log) sharing the details of domestic life in lockdown. They were heady times where caution around privacy was more often than not thrown to the wind!

Production for the Virtual Concert Hall was an in-house affair with all the audio and video know-how coming from within the organisation with equipment sourced by begging, borrowing and...

When it was able to, the ASO eased back into performing together with the air heavy with disinfectant. As the saying goes, you should never let a crisis go to waste and it was in that spirit the musicians of the orchestra presented a very successful series of chamber music concerts. This was a first for us and hopefully the start of a new stream of our programming.

Our concertmaster Natsuko Yoshimoto was the driver of this initiative and it was with great sadness that we farewelled her at the end of 2020. Natsuko had been with us for ten years and in that time made an enormous impact both onstage and behind the scenes.

She was a SOMA member from the outset and always had the interests of musicians at heart. Her performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto in our first major concert post lockdown will be remembered for a long time. We wish her much happiness in Queensland.

In other news, my brother Ewen Bramble (cello) managed to get married despite the lockdown. I was thrilled to be one of the two guests allowed at the ceremony and welcome Morgan to the family.

Of course, all of the aforementioned tribulations and triumphs happened against a very challenging industrial back drop.

There was no instruction manual for either orchestras or unions to guide us through a sudden lockdown. At ASO we were reached consensus relatively easily on a reduction in hours and pay. It is important to acknowledge the hardship this caused our musicians, but also the hardship experienced by musicians all around the world who were in a less fortunate position than ourselves.

I am extremely grateful to the support given to us by MEAA staff and the broader union movement.

OPERA AUSTRALIA ORCHESTRA

THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS

Sydney Braunfeld

Principal Horn

As we are all aware, many aspects of our society have been forever changed by the wide-reaching ramifications of a global pandemic. The arts and live performance industries were hit particularly hard. Here in Australia, public health officials have dealt with this crisis in a mature and systematic way, leading, in recent months, to the widespread reopening of opera and concert halls at 100% capacity, albeit with a new covid-safe look.

Despite all this good news, the Opera Australia Orchestra (OAO) has not fared well during the past 12 months. This article is a record of events that occurred during the most turbulent period in Opera Australia (OA) history. It is written not because I enjoy reliving painful memories, but rather to inform our industry, and perhaps to serve as a warning for others.

When Covid-19 became part of our lives in March of 2020, most arts organizations went into self-preservation mode, utilising various forms of austerity budgeting to stay afloat – OA was no exception. Overnight the remaining weeks of our summer opera season were abruptly cancelled and the massive floating opera stage that had just been completed for the famous *Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour* season, was deconstructed.

Within one day of performances crashing to a halt, OA announced that all 56 permanent players of the orchestra were to be stood-down

without pay, effective immediately. We were told that “useful employment” for us no longer existed, and OA invoked the relevant section of the Fair Work Act. The only concession offered to the players was that those who wanted one more pay cheque were given 24 hours to apply to bring forward their annual leave balance. But beyond that, no promises.

The date was March 17 – the JobKeeper scheme would not be announced until March 25th. Those nine days were torturous, it felt like freefall. JobKeeper eventually enabled OA to pay its employees 50% salaries, an offer that we accepted, as the alternative was no pay whatsoever.

In an attempt to keep music in the hearts and minds of the community during those dark days, OAO players formed a Creative Committee on March 21. Our intention was to work collaboratively with the Company to develop ideas for Covid-safe musical activities. Sadly though, OA refused to lend its name to any projects and forbade players from establishing an OAO social media presence. This struck at our sense of identity and artistic agency – our independence was being challenged for the first time since shedding our former name, the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra. The following four months were quiet, as they were for many in the Australian workforce. We collected our 50% salaries while continuing to ride out the pandemic in social and artistic isolation.

Throughout that time, we received semi-regular email updates from the Company, but nothing overtly worrisome. Continual reassurances were given that “we’re all in this together”. The promise to “mitigate the impact” on permanent musicians fell flat in an orchestra feeling increasingly abandoned and artistically undervalued. By July, company communications had begun to strike a more positive tone. We were informed that the short-term crisis was over, and we started seeing phrases like “light at the end of the tunnel” used, which felt reassuring.

Dates had been secured for the Brisbane production of The Ring Cycle in 2021, and ideas for various ways to return to music making were happily being floated by management. It was particularly thrilling to hear that arrangements for our stand-up position would soon be articulated! But before long we learned this optimism was premature.

On August 21, an organizational restructure of OA was announced, and we were advised that “major workforce changes must occur to facilitate the long-term viability and artistic ambitions of Opera Australia”.

Initially, we believed the orchestra and chorus would remain largely untouched, as OA had always expressed its commitment to preserving the artistic foundations of the company. Yet, to our horror, on September 1, we learned that at least one member of every section had been identified for forced redundancy. The list of positions to be cut included four violins, a violist, two cellists, the double bass and clarinet section leaders, and one player each from all woodwind and brass sections.

Principals and Tuttis alike, single mums, young fathers, and even a husband and wife from the same household were being forcibly removed from their jobs. In total, 16 musicians would

not be returning to the pit. No discernible strategy could be detected as to how those particular players were selected. Many had been with the orchestra for decades and were nearing the end of their careers, but others were nowhere near retirement age.

After everything we had been through that year, the familiar “we’re all in this together” trope had been unceremoniously dropped. OA executives explained their decision to restructure as being motivated solely by financial hardship. We were told the Company wanted to adopt a new operating model which would allow “ultimate flexibility” to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

As part of its proposed “One-Company” approach, OA sought to combine the Enterprise Agreements of all departments, and bargain for a single EA, underpinned by Live Performance Award conditions. The Company put forward a claim which was unanimously rejected by all delegates as utterly inappropriate for our operational needs. Instead, MEAA strongly advocated to that job-losses could be avoided if the Company were to consider alternative cost-cutting solutions.

The idea of temporary salary reductions was rejected, despite many other Australian orchestras having already agreed to such a move. Some players put up their hands for voluntary redundancy in an effort to save other colleagues’ jobs, but again, OA insisted this was not a viable solution.

On September 21, MEAA took our case to the Fair Work Commission. Veteran players facing redundancy bravely stood up and argued the senselessness of this course of action. In the end however, the Commission determined that OA had done nothing illegal and was free to conduct its business however they saw fit.



On Friday September 25, 2020, the group of 16 were summoned to attend their final meeting as OA employees. Each with a support person at their side, the musicians sat at a long table opposite the Artistic Director, the Chief Operating Officer, and the acting head of the HR department. One by one they stated their cases, speaking passionately of their value as long-standing members of this organisation.

But even the most eloquent words could not change OA's decision. That day, the contracts of all 16 musicians were terminated.

In early October, another blow was delivered. OA made the decision to formally dismiss all casual players, thereby cutting off their access to JobKeeper payments. Every freelancer who had worked with OAO in the year 2020 received a letter thanking them for their "valuable contributions".

Many of the affected casual players had initially qualified for JobKeeper through other institutions such as the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. They soon discovered that ATO regulations prohibit anyone from switching employers once enrolled. OA cited high administrative costs as explanation for



this decision, however a few short months later, dozens of those same freelancers were “re-onboarded” for the 2021 opera season and placed back on JobKeeper. This bizarre chain of events is still baffling and incomprehensible.

In late November, OA gradually began to increase the salaries of the 40 remaining permanent musicians from 50% to 75%, then finally by mid-December to 100%. Performances in front of live audiences resumed in January 2021, but the joy we had hoped to feel on opening night was tainted by a profound sense of loss.

Looking around the pit, I could not help but envision empty chairs where 16 treasured colleagues should have sat.

I remember being overwhelmed by sadness thinking of those who were deliberately excluded from our close-knit workplace. Some of the 16 redundant players have chosen to accept casual work with our orchestra, which must be unimaginably difficult. Even now, months later, a heaviness continues to hang in the air at work. This restructure process has ripped through our playing group and left us traumatized and

profoundly uneasy about our future. The wounds are deep and likely will not heal themselves. To date, OA has made no public recognition or formal acknowledgement of the outstanding artistry, commitment, and professionalism of our former colleagues.

Moving forward, it is unclear if the OAO positions made redundant will ever be reinstated or auditioned again as tenured jobs. An assurance of no further forced redundancies has been sought by MEAA, but none has been forthcoming.

On a personal note, I did not anticipate how incredibly difficult it would be to pen this article. I had always imagined that my first writing for *Senza Sord* would closely resemble many articles I had enjoyed reading over the years. It has been particularly painful to revisit correspondence that circulated on the day the redundancies were finalized. Unable to safely gather in-person, desperate colleagues poured their hearts out to each other via email. Emotional goodbyes were exchanged, and sincere gratitude was expressed for all the decades of music-making together. The grace and humility of my colleagues is inspiring, and I am proud to have shared the pit with so many talented artists and beautiful humans.

TASMANIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

COLLABORATIVE AND RESPECTFUL DECISION-MAKING

Mitch Nissen

Principal Bass Trombone



I would like to keep this article short and sweet, so I will put my headline take-aways right up front. Of all the SOMA delegates, I firmly believe that during 2020 I had the most straightforward job.

2020 was a very productive year for the management and players of the TSO in terms of working together to find a path forward through the unknown.

Collaborative and respectful decision-making meant that the players and management had clarity about what could be done to keep moving. The TSO musicians stayed on full pay throughout 2020 and we came to an understanding which allowed musicians to be deployed in useful ways outside of the terms of our agreement. The only way the TSO could act in such good faith was because of our security of funding. Our government grants largely cover the TSO's

operational costs – between 2/3 and 3/4 of our operating costs are covered by government funding. This is the strongest argument we have as a group for increased government funding for all SOMA orchestras.

The TSO met its core remit of providing high-quality music to all Tasmanians because we had the funds to keep working throughout the pandemic.

We could take entrepreneurial risks to push into digital content creation because we had the resources to do so.

If we were more reliant on ticket sales as our primary funding source for our operational costs, we could not have served the music-loving community of Tasmania and Australia as well as we did. So the take away from the year is this – increased funding, with greater security of funding, creates the conditions that allow for organisational risk-taking that can lead to creative and positive outcomes for the communities we serve.

2019 brought TSO a new CEO and with that a more open and transparent management model. Right at the beginning of the emerging COVID-19 crisis, I popped my head into the CEO's office, and I said, "If there's anything you need from us, just let me know". Shortly after that I was called into a joint meeting of our senior managers to represent the TSO players in the room where the decisions were made.

We sat and watched Scott Morrison's bizarre press conference on that Friday where he stressed the need for us to be wary of this virus, to shut down, and to flatten the curve. But only from Monday after we've gone to the footy.

After that press conference, the decision was made that TSO would not perform the following night – Saturday night – to a live audience. Instead, we would record audiovisuals to broadcast to our subscribers.



CEO Caroline Sharpen addresses the orchestra

Less than 24 hours later, we performed Brahms' *Eine Deutsches Requiem* to an empty hall, bar from a slew of cameramen. Within a week, TSO had started an online YouTube feature the *TSO Daily Dose*.

What we didn't know at the time was that this feature would run for 180 days straight.

The *TSO Daily Dose* began presenting content that we performed before full-orchestral activities had to shut down. But it quickly transformed into another beast altogether. We leveraged all the TSO's assets – from the past and present – to present musical offerings to our community every day.

At one point, the *Daily Dose* even became a chat show where we could talk to everyone from subscribers, musicians, prominent Tasmanians, the Premier, and even the Governor. But above all, it presented the musicians of the TSO an ongoing outlet for music-making.

***Daily Dose* was incredibly valuable to the musicians, but perhaps even more so, it was incredibly valuable for us to prove our worth as a cultural institution to important political players.**

Coming off the back of the *Daily Dose*, the orchestra finally began performing in larger numbers to live online audiences at the end of 2020. With everything that we learnt from *Daily Dose*, we set up a streaming service to continue reaching our audience – who still couldn't come to a live performance in person because of continuing state government restrictions.

This has been a costly undertaking for the orchestra. Still, the TSO musicians and management see the potential to create enduring value for Tasmanians through this new approach. In 2021 the TSO has committed to broadcasting via Internet live stream every single concert we play.

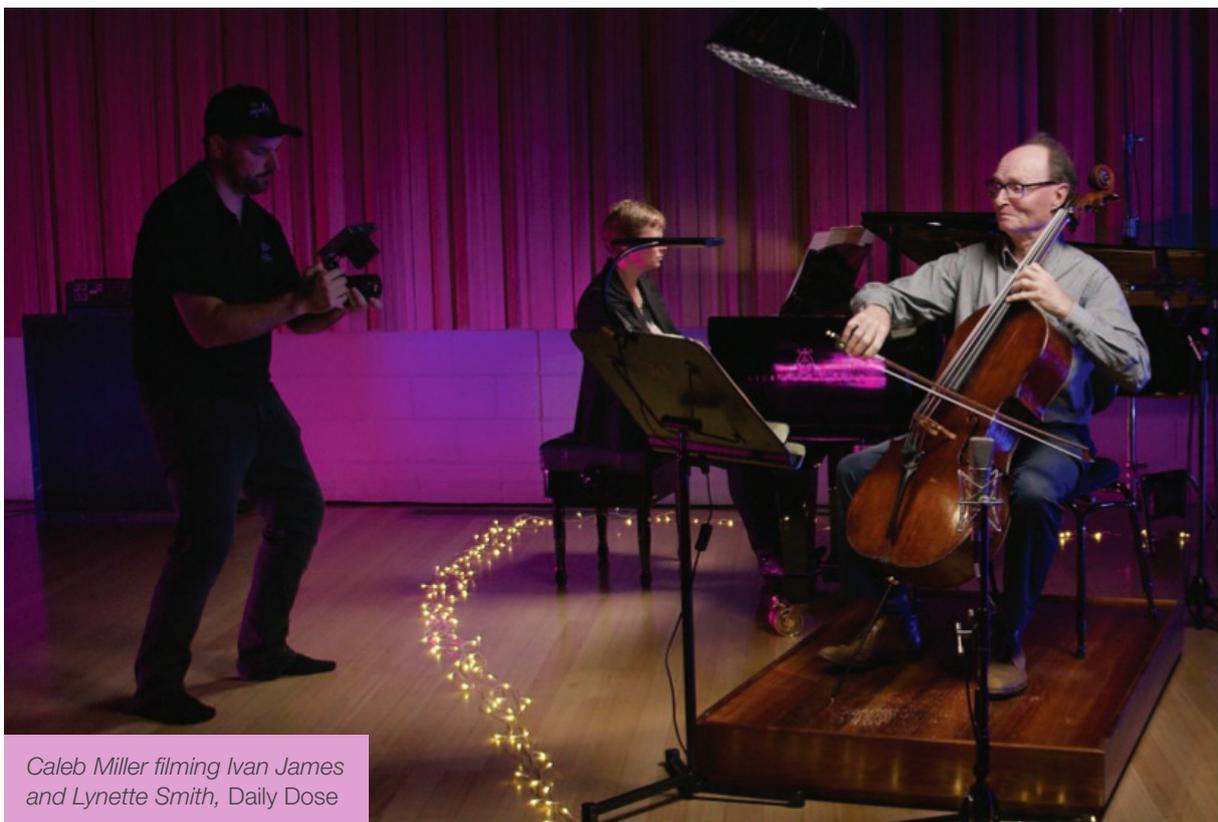
In March 2021, we simulcast our first performance to three cinemas across Tasmania – in Burnie, Ulverstone, and Queenstown. We were only able to

achieve this because of the security of funding that we have and the orchestra players' goodwill in accommodating the new working requirements of live video broadcasting.

Foremost in the minds of the players and management over the last year has been a commitment to serving our community. This common goal has enabled us to engage in discussions throughout 2020 about where we would like to be as an orchestra in 2030.

The irony of planning ten years into the future, when the reality of a global pandemic means it's nigh on impossible to plan a handful of months into the future, has not been lost on most players.

The players and management of the TSO been able to sit down and have wide-ranging – at times difficult – but honest discussions about the nature of our work and workplace.



Caleb Miller filming Ivan James and Lynette Smith, *Daily Dose*

This ability to be open is rooted in our stability of funding and the commitment from management from the board level down to place the musicians of the TSO at the centre of the organisation. In one early board meeting I attended in 2020, one board member referred to the TSO musicians as “important stakeholders”. Without missing a beat the CEO shot up her hand and interrupted the discussion with a pointed correction – **“the musicians of the TSO are not just stakeholders in the TSO. The musicians of the TSO are the entire reason we are here.”**

Although it has been a challenging year, it was always a comfort to me knowing that the TSO musicians’ interests and well-being were always at the centre of the decision-making process. In one of the most astounding acts of managerial good-faith many of my colleagues have ever seen, we were awarded an unsolicited 2% pay rise in March 2021, in

recognition of our flexibility and tireless work behind the scenes through 2020.

I am acutely aware that my experience at the TSO during 2020 is not the experience of many of my colleagues in the other SOMA orchestras. I am fortunate to have been the player’s representative at a time when the TSO has a management that sees our work as a musician body as valuable, that sees our musicians as valuable individuals, and sees our role in the community as valuable.

The honesty and mutual respect between the player body and our management have made what could have been the most destructive in the TSO’s history into, in my opinion, potentially one of the most significant turning points for the future of the TSO.

Tasmanian Symphony Daily Dose can be experienced here:
<https://www.tso.com.au/tso-daily-dose>



MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

EERIE SILENCE AFTER THE FINAL CHORD

Michael Pisani
Principal Cor Anglais



In March 2020, with the threat of coronavirus growing in Australia, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra gave two scheduled performances of *Scheherazade* in Hamer Hall. Little did we know that this was the last time the MSO would perform to a live audience in 2020.

The third performance of this program on Monday, March 16 could not proceed with a live audience due to restrictions which had just been introduced, but a huge eleventh hour effort went in to enable this performance to be streamed live on YouTube, albeit with an empty hall.

A unique experience at the time for all musicians involved, with eerie silence after the final chord instead of rapturous applause, symbolic of what lay ahead for the performing arts.

It was a huge effort across the company to “keep the music going”, and a much needed morale boost. And it laid the foundations for the live-streaming of projects over the coming weeks.

It was a shock to all when about two weeks later, we were notified that the MSO would stand-down all permanent musician employees – we had been deemed “non-essential” to the company. Thus began many months of negotiations, during which musicians were placed onto JobKeeper payments for five months and the city went into strict lock-down for nearly four months.

For musicians who had given many years of dedication and service to the orchestra, being cast aside at this time cut deeply.

Once our ability to perform live, and earn box-office income for the company was lost, we were left feeling worthless. It felt as though we had just been a means for the company to earn money, not part of a performing arts company and custodians of an art form.

At a time when musicians perhaps could have been utilised more for online work and performances (Melbourne Digital Concert Hall, for example), to build relationships with donors, patrons and an isolated community, been supported to maintain our skills through the period, or engaged in longer term planning for the company, we felt isolated and left to ponder our own futures and question our commitment to the orchestra.

FROM MICHELLE WOOD, CELLIST

As a generally optimistic person by nature, the more difficult and stressful years of life often remind me of one of those inflatable punching bags: the ones that you could knock down and they would inevitably rise back up (relatively unscathed) to take another hit. But 2020, as the new phrase goes ‘hit different’. Each knock seemed to have a series of little needles attached... they didn’t feel like much by themselves, but caused a slow leak that meant getting back up felt a lot more difficult as the year went on. These needles took the form of everything from the loss of performances, loss of contact with colleagues and friends, and for many of us, loss of income and security.

But I think the one that affected me the most was the notion that I (and what I contributed to society) was no longer ‘essential’ to anyone.

Growing up in a family with a doctor, nurse and teacher, I could see that this was of course true in reference to the services required during the height of a pandemic. But when the narrative also stretched to being made to feel like this within my own organisation, when MSO was stood down in April of last year, it became much harder to pick myself off the mat.

Without going into the long, arduous process of our stand down and subsequent negotiations, I should point out that my frustration lay not with the idea that I would have to make do with less (and look after the company’s long term interests) but that my employer couldn’t see how useful we could be.

I of course knew full well that I was one of the ‘lucky’ artists supported by JobKeeper. But it was like I was being viewed as a one-dimensional cog in a machine.

Being on stage performing is, of course, our primary function as musicians, but most of us possess a wide range of skills and ideas that were being vastly undervalued. And whilst for most people that frustration manifested itself in anger, resentment, or even intense productivity: for a period of time I just shut down completely.

Classical music was suddenly the last thing I wanted to hear, do, or talk about.

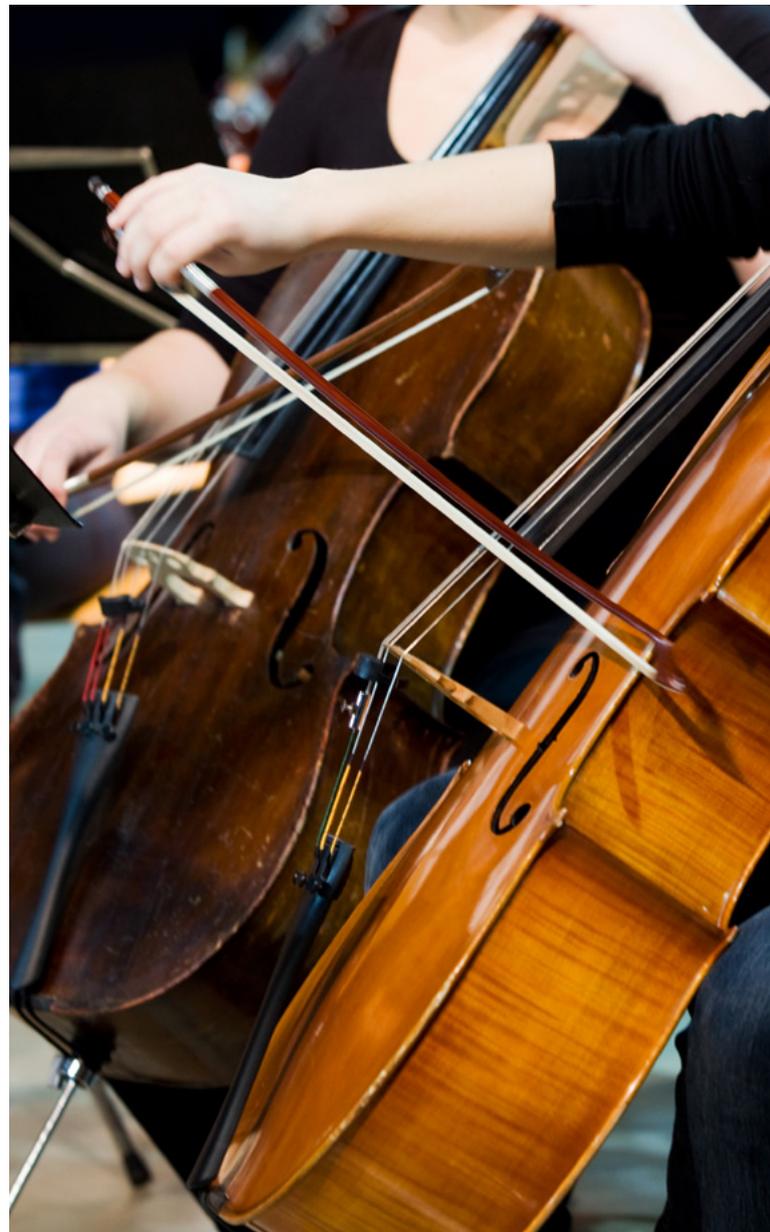
Inspiration, for me, came from an unlikely source; a fellow musician that I didn't work with, but someone who reminded me that the reasons I loved my career were more far reaching than it just putting a roof over my head. Every so often there would be a request for recording something (both formally and otherwise), or we'd share little side projects that had little to do with productivity and more to do with discovering what it felt like for both of us to just rediscover music for fun.

And slowly but surely I got my 'mojo' back... the value I didn't feel like I was getting from my 'job' was simply something I created for myself instead. It's a reminder for which I will be forever grateful.

So as we emerge back into a 'normal' life after a year of lockdowns, I'm choosing to continue this ethos. I'll always give my absolute best to the performances I'm employed for, but this time I'm saving a little of myself for the projects that define my own value.

The fact is, only we can truly understand what it is like to be musicians, and it's our responsibility now to rebuild our organisations by communicating that with as much understanding, clarity and honesty as possible. The arts will survive, but it's up to us to reinvent it for a slightly different future... where all of us feel essential.

Many struggled through this period, suffering from financial stress, social isolation or lack of self-worth. Home schooling proved challenging for many, especially with no other outlet in life for parents and children. But after the initial shock and hurt, many musicians did find other things in life to sustain them through 2020. With time on their hands, some found enjoyment in family life, time for other hobbies or study – things that were always just a dream. Some even found jobs in other industries.



FROM GABBY HALLORAN, VIOLIST

Like everyone else in the world, I had great plans for 2020.

Those plans were scrapped in March when all live concerts were cancelled. In April, MSO musicians and some of management were stood down and placed on JobKeeper. This was devastating for us. However, the prospect of an empty schedule, after a lifetime of diarising, was strangely alluring. The long lockdowns experienced in Melbourne brought out some new skills in everyone.

I had always planned to do some study, so I enrolled in a Grad Dip in Strategic Communication and Media at Griffith Uni. The course started in July, and I managed to study about 30 hrs a week. There was also plenty of time to practice, and I pulled out my Sevcik, Gavinies, Bach Suites and many other old faves.

Performing in a few Melbourne Digital Concert Hall concerts, as well as some online MSO work, kept me sane musically.

Gardening also filled my days, and we enjoyed the fruits (and vegies) of my labour all year. I made four quilts for my family, including one for my dear mum, who says she now can't sleep without it! And finally, I took up hip hop/funk dance classes online. Every weekday at 5pm I sweated out all my worries, and embarrassed my kids, especially when I kept dancing through dinner preparation!

Today, when I'm sitting in a traffic jam, or stressing about an upcoming program, I look back with mixed emotions at 2020. Sometimes I remember the anxiety-inducing daily death tolls on the news, and the fear of touching any surface. But mostly I think of the golden time I spent at home with my family, and the simple rhythm of the empty days.



AND FROM SARAH CURRO, VIOLINIST

In a way COVID for me was like some people's retirement. A chance to get all the extra projects done that I'd not had time to start or finish. After the initial gluttony, too much alcohol and thanking my stars I had married the right person, I realized that it was a precious opportunity. I changed banks (away from the big four) and my super fund to ethical ones, I paid off a credit card and destroyed it and got to work.

I completely embraced Zoom, bought a mic and a camera and made my background lovely. All my private students continued throughout the year which made a huge difference to my grocery shopping which I also treasured. To think, the only kind of shopping I love was the only kind of shopping we were allowed! I continued a Classical Music podcast I'd been doing with my student Annabel Plahuta, called *Splitting Hairs* and when we couldn't video record in person we simply switched to remote audio recording. I also started a channel called *Sarah Curro Interviews* where I basically get the people I love to talk about the amazing things that they do.

I recorded a play along 20 duets by Jakob Dont which I haven't released yet. For practically the whole year I had two sessions a week editing the 40 pieces for electric, semi-acoustic and traditional violin which I commissioned over the last 15 years for my solo show VOLUME. The aim was to make them into a digital sheet music book for release. The editor was Sydney composer/arranger/orchestrator Anton Koch and we meticulously transformed 40 separate pieces into a cohesive book aligning every margin and unifying every front and checking every note. It was epic and so satisfying. This is yet to be released so stay tuned for that.

I started yoga, which actually changed my life, and even though it's great to be playing real concerts again to real audiences I can feel the changes slipping away as we run straight back to what it was like before. I'm not sure I want it to go all the way back because actually I realized I was very burnt out. How can I keep the space and time I found whilst still filling my diary with projects and students and MSO? What a mystery the future is. That's what I take from the whole experience.

So how has this period affected the MSO?

On a practical level, when we resumed playing together late in 2020 live audiences were still not allowed. So the orchestra took the opportunity to record a number of concerts, all for release on our newly developed digital platform – MSO.LIVE. The investment in this platform would hopefully not only earn extra income for the company in the longer term, but also give the orchestra the ability to adapt quickly during any future lockdowns or audience restrictions, and continue performances (and earning income) online.

For the musicians though, there may be lasting effects on their relationship with the company. Some might question their dedication to the orchestra – there are certainly those who have sought and found jobs in other orchestras.

Others might have discovered other aspects of life with greater meaning and importance to them now, or other outlets for their musical creativity. Certainly the damage done to the culture of the organisation over this period is serious, but COVID may have just been the catalyst for this, not the cause. The year 2020 may have just highlighted issues that have been brewing for some time.

Now these have been brought to the surface, it is time to fix them and look to a brighter future. In the end though, we are musicians first and foremost, and when on stage performing we can't help but give all of ourselves to the music – it is in our DNA.

MSO.LIVE can be found here
<https://www.mso.com.au/your-visit/our-venues/msolive-digital-platform/>

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN OBOIST

Leanne Glover

Principal Cor Anglais, West Australian Symphony Orchestra

Reprinted with kind permission from Seesaw Magazine (27 April 2020) and Leanne Glover. This article is not a retrospective, but rather the reflections of a musician in the early stages of lockdown.

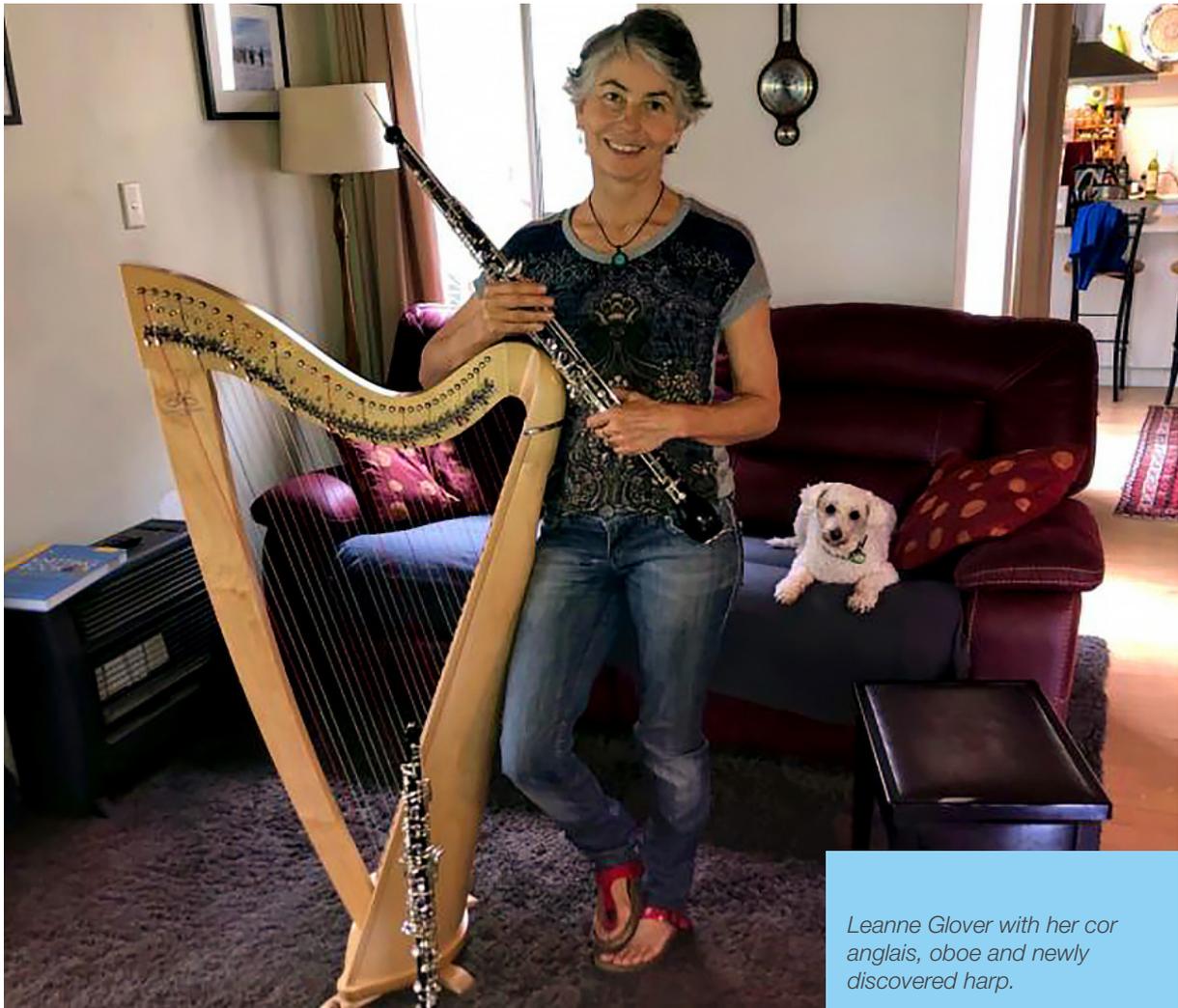
Seesaw Magazine is West Australia's premier online arts magazine.
<https://www.seesawmag.com.au>

27 April 2020

For the first time in her life as a musician, Leanne Glover has nothing to prepare for. The oboe player from the West Australian Symphony Orchestra describes the challenge of remaining at the top of her game, despite having no idea when her next performance will be.

Leanne Glover has faced the terror of auditions, concerto premieres, impossible solos and more in her pressure cooker career with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. The Perth musician writes about what could be her greatest challenge yet: the concert-free zone.

For a professional musician this period of social shut-down and isolation has been a challenging one. There has been plenty of media coverage about sports professionals trying to navigate their way through this



Leanne Glover with her cor anglais, oboe and newly discovered harp.

journey in order to come out the other side match-fit and fully ready to go. I have read reports about AFL players each being given a personal plan from their respective coaches specifying exactly what their own fitness program should be and how to maintain strength, flexibility and elite skill levels.

People would rarely put athletes and musicians in the same basket but there are so many similarities. We both need to regularly perform at an elite level on any given day, at any given time and there are not many valid excuses – if any – for mistakes. As much as we both give entertainment and joy to the public, we are also both up for continuous public scrutiny and judgement. And when we come out the other side of this isolated situation we all must be absolutely at the top of our game because that is exactly

what the public will expect and crave. They will want to be entertained and possibly will also be hyper vigilant about not wanting lower skill levels.

So how do we go about maintaining our skills with no idea of how long the isolation will go on?

Most importantly, I think it all comes down to finding a way to ignite your self-motivation. And this has been a challenge during the last months. For the first time ever, speaking personally, I have nothing specific to prepare for. Right back to when I first started playing oboe, there was always some lesson, exam, audition, concert, opera, ballet, recording, or webcast to prepare for. Always. Now, there is absolutely no way of knowing when we might be able to start performing to any sort of audience again.

So how does this change our inbuilt motivation? Of course I can only speak for myself. But I can tell you my experience of the process.

On that auspicious night Saturday 14th of March when our first concert was cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak I was very fearful. I wasn't thinking about music at all. I was worried for everyone's health and scared about what was looming on the horizon. I didn't play at all for almost a fortnight. Not a single note. But I realised over this time that I was feeling more and more uncomfortable with starting to feel "out of shape". Coupled with this was the knowledge that our wonderful WASO board and management were working crazy hours to find a way financially through this so that our family of people within the company and the company itself would survive and come out shining on the other end of this situation. I realised I owed it not only to myself but also to the company to pull myself together and start practicing!!!

So I did. And once I started it felt so good to once again discover something to be working towards.

I realised that all musicians, and athletes, have an inbuilt desire to always improve. We are always researching and looking for better ways of thinking about things, cleaner technique, better sound, better endurance. Sometimes in the middle of a busy year, with back to back concerts, there just isn't time for this sort of focused work. So this has become part of my means for motivation. At the very least to maintain my standard, but also, hopefully, with an aim to improve it and find new concepts and ideas about playing.

The other motivation, of course, is also just the fact that I actually really love the experience of playing, and especially in

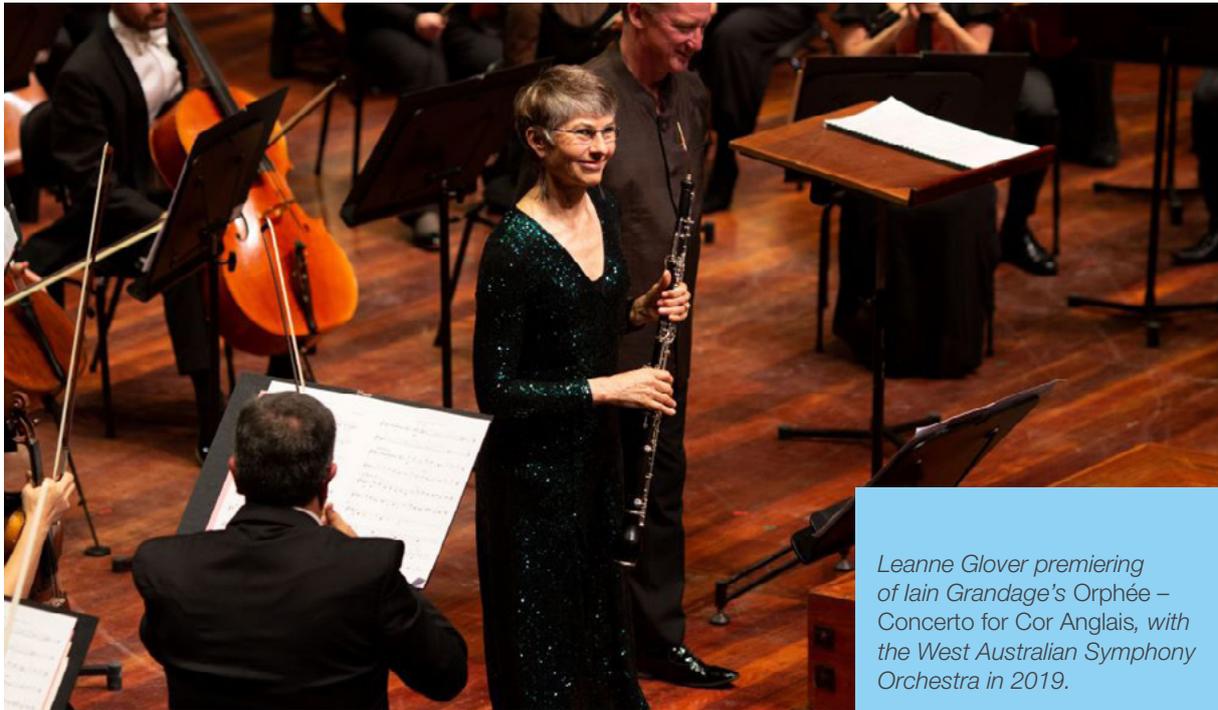


Leanne Glover, principal cor anglais with WASO.

an orchestra. There is something about the sensation of playing amongst a group of other highly skilled, motivated and creative people that is pretty addictive. It is still, after all these years, an absolute thrill. It sounds like such a cliché but it's true. I have been so very lucky to have spent my working life actually doing something I am completely passionate about.

I think what also really helps is just the knowledge that this is for a limited period of time and the orchestra will be back together again sometime. I don't think I could maintain this routine indefinitely. It has to be with the aim of performing again at the end of this COVID-19 period.

So for me, that now means a really structured practice routine every day except Sunday (a day off is also very important)! I do a mixture of scales, studies, orchestral excerpts, and pieces. Not for hours and hours a day (I'm not a saint!!!!) but certainly for a set amount of time. And for me it has to be first thing in the morning. Quality over quantity is super important to actually achieve goals. It needs to be extremely mindful practice, never mindless! Otherwise the new discoveries just don't come. It is interesting for me to notice the days when I am totally in the flow



and I fly through the practice like an acrobat: new ideas about little things come and can really change your playing. The sense of achievement is so rewarding. On other days I'm all over the shop with the concentration of a gnat and have to constantly bring myself back to the moment and to what I am trying to achieve. For me personally it's all about following a structure and routine, otherwise I'm just not very productive. Then, when I'm finished for the day, I feel completely free to not think about it again until the next day.

There is also a lighter side to what I've been doing in this isolation period. I've been learning a new instrument, going back to absolute basics; I've started to learn the harp! Not a big orchestral pedal harp but the smaller lever harp (Irish harp). It is so appealing to someone who plays a single line instrument like the oboe to be able to play harmony as well as melody. It's also something I can do when my orchestral days are over. I don't ever want to be unable to play music and oboe is pretty limited to playing within an orchestra. So I'm learning the beautiful harp which has so many possibilities.

It is soooo hard!!! it requires really different pathways in the brain. For a start you have to read several lines of music at once, which

pianists do every day but I've never had to. And then there is the independence of hands which percussionist have to do every day but again, I've never had to. The technique of actually playing the harp is also completely new to me. So it's going slower than I thought it would, but I love it! I can sometimes literally feel the rusty cogs in my brain grinding slowly around as I try the next challenging step in my book.

It's pretty funny going so far back to the beginning (Hot Cross Buns never sounded so good) but it is filling in many a quiet hour and my brain is being challenged in a really healthy way. Another bonus is that my neighbours have commented about how nice it is to hear the harp tinkling away in the background. I'm not sure what that says about my oboe playing...

So that's the old and the new of how I am seeing my way through these strange times (coupled with much gardening, reading, cooking, knitting and dog-walking, like everyone else). Hopefully we will all be back on stage sooner rather than later and these quiet days of practice and solitude might be thought of with just a tiny twinge of nostalgia. There is certainly something to be said for a slower pace, home cooked meals and the gentle fulfilment of daily practice. Or is that just me?

WEST AUSTRALIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

WASO'S COVID-19 EXPERIENCE

Rachael Kirk

Viola

Our first COVID reality check came on Sunday March 9, 2020 when an audience member, who had attended a WASO performance the previous evening while awaiting the results of their COVID-19 test, received the news that they had tested positive.

This forced the Perth Concert Hall (PCH) and WASO to test out their freshly minted COVID safety plans. Fortunately, there were no reports of any spread of virus from the concert, but it did result in fewer audience members choosing to attend the performances the following week.

On Friday March 13 the Federal Government announced the impending restrictions on large gatherings and on Saturday March 14, our Board made the decision not to proceed with that evening's performance. We were all instructed to retrieve our instruments and belongings from PCH.

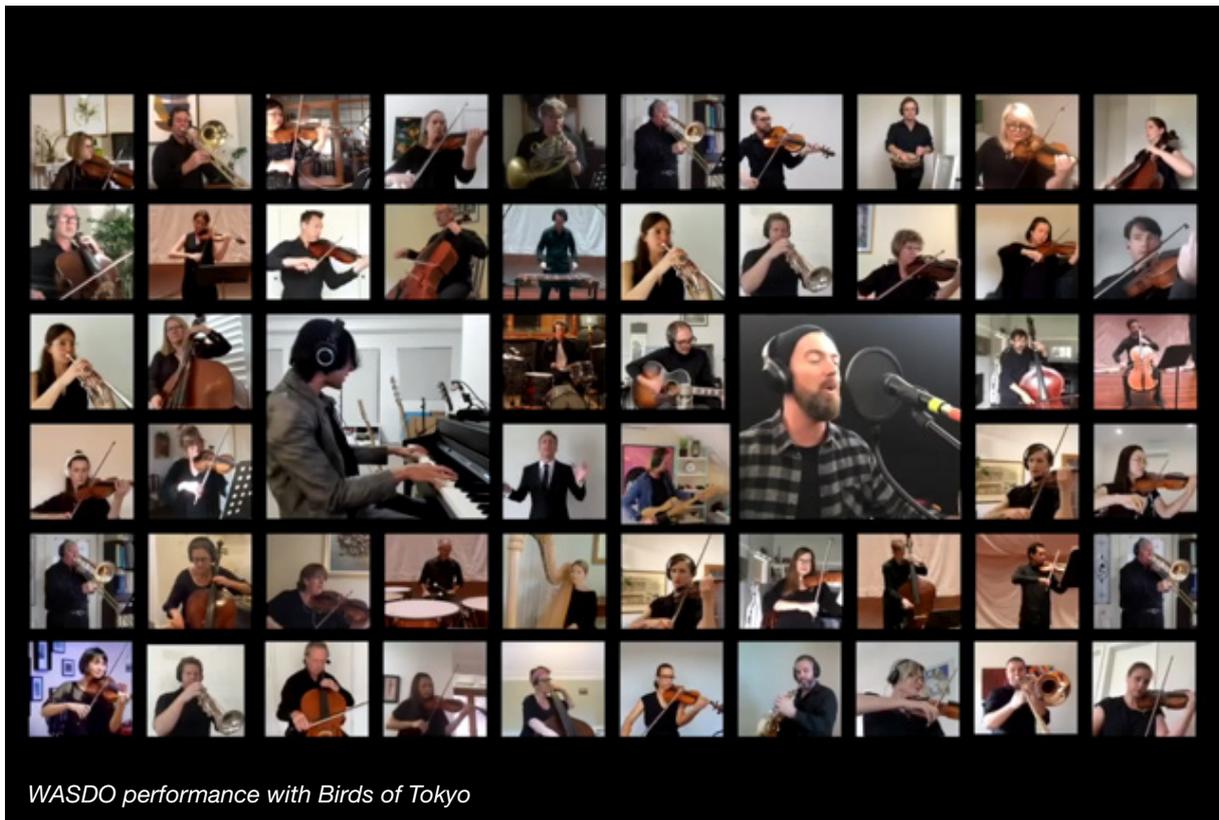
No one could have guessed that it would be another five months before we would play together again on stage as an orchestra.

A full Company meeting was held a couple of days later where we were informed that our Board's main concern was for everyone to stay safe and well, and consequently all concert activities would be cancelled until further notice and everyone in the Company was to work from home.

The Board set up a sub-committee to assess the situation and number crunch every possible scenario. The first couple of weeks after shutdown was a difficult period and everyone responded to the uncertain future in a different way. During this time, we took comfort from the news that we would continue to receive full pay until the end of April while the Board continued to assess the unfolding situation.

A team of musician representatives worked closely with the CEO and senior management to come up with a proposal to take to the Board to help navigate the Company through the uncertain future. The outcome was that from the beginning of May until the end of September when the initial JobKeeper arrangement ended, the musicians' hours and pay were reduced to 75%.

The shutdown forced us to join the tech world to keep in touch and informed through orchestral meetings via Zoom. With the formation of WASDO, the West Australian Socially Distancing Orchestra, we also had to quickly learn how best to video record ourselves performing at home on our phones so that we could contribute to the online creations. Over the ensuing months the WASDO appeared in a range of different performances including a version of *Unbreakable* with Birds of Tokyo for the Anzac Day 'Music from the Home Front' broadcast.



During the shutdown period, our marketing and philanthropy departments kept us busy with a variety of tasks designed to keep our sponsors, donors and audience engaged and connected. Phone calls were made to over 2000 delighted patrons and subscribers, and we also kept them entertained with insights into the lives of ‘their’ orchestra through the *44 Sounds and Stories* articles that were published on our website.

By the beginning of June, restrictions had relaxed sufficiently to allow the return of small groups of musicians to the Perth Concert Hall to begin recording chamber music for the weekly *Ensemble Editions* online series. In all, seven socially distanced chamber music concerts were produced using the in-house skills of violist Nik Babic (videography) with Tom Robertson, our Production Manager, in charge of the audio.

In August, as rehearsal and performance spaces were deemed workplaces and therefore the normal social distancing rules didn’t apply, we were allowed to return to the PCH stage. This gave us the long-awaited opportunity to ‘get the band back together

again’, and we spent a couple of days reading through repertoire and working with our emerging conductor group.

At the end of August, we were very excited to play our first concerts in over five months with ‘Thank You’ performances for our loyal subscribers who had generously supported us through the shutdown with donations including donating back the price of their cancelled concert tickets. We are very grateful to the many private donors who increased their support during this difficult time, as did Principal Partner, Wesfarmers Arts.

We returned to His Majesty’s pit in September for a season of *Dracula* with WA Ballet, and in October we finally restarted our 2020 concert season in spectacular fashion with performances of *Carmina Burana*, albeit to a reduced capacity of 600. Our Artistic Planning team worked long and hard to produce the remixed 2020 season, using mostly local conductors and soloists and one hardy soul from interstate brave enough to endure two weeks in hotel quarantine. Thank you, Guy Noble!



The audience capacity in theatres was increased to 60% towards the end of October but additional performances were still needed to accommodate the reduced audience numbers. Beautiful as it is, six performances of Dvorak 8 were more than enough!

During this time, we negotiated and adopted a new Musicians' Agreement to cover us until the end of 2021. Salaries remained at 2020 levels, but we tidied up a few clauses and altered our small ensemble clause to enable a more comprehensive rollout of education and community activities.

With JobKeeper 1 finishing at the end of September, the Board announced it would increase our hours and salary to 85% of normal until the end of March, when JobKeeper 3 was scheduled to end. Then, just prior to Christmas, we received the welcome news that the Company was in a strong enough financial position to increase salaries to 100% on our return from annual leave in January.

2021 began with much-anticipated performances with Birds of Tokyo and Ben Folds, concerts that had been postponed from 2020. Directly following these performances, WA had its first COVID

reality check in over six months when a community case of COVID-19 shut down Perth for five days and impacted on the first two weeks of the Perth Festival. Fortunately, we were able to reschedule all the postponed events into the weeks following the short shutdown.

Principal Conductor, Asher Fisch, was finally deemed an essential worker and he returned in March for the first time in over a year to conduct us in our opening two weeks of main stage concerts for 2021. The rousing reception he received from the audience showed that they were as excited to have him back as we were.

WA has now returned to 100% audience capacity and we're optimistic that the rest of 2021 will proceed as planned.

We thank our Board and management for the care they took for our wellbeing during the shutdown period and beyond, and for the collaborative approach they took to working through the challenges. We're also grateful they took the calculated risk to resume performances in the second half of the 2020, allowing Western Australia to be one of the first places in the world to experience the return of live concerts.

ORCHESTRA VICTORIA

WE CAME TO A HALT...

Ben Anderson

Principal Bass Trombone



Orchestra Victoria with Mo'Ju at the Bowl.

Photo: James Henry Courtesy Arts Centre Melbourne.

2020 began in quite a regular fashion for Orchestra Victoria, with a range of chamber music activity, opera galas, and a season of *Salome* with Victorian Opera. As March rolled around and we moved into our first ballet season of the year (a contemporary triple bill), and conditions radically changed, **like the rest of the country, we came to a halt after only one performance.**

After a short period of adjustment to the new reality of working from home, the musicians and management of Orchestra Victoria buckled down, and spent what was to be the next eight months producing an astonishing

range of activity from a very small team. Listing everything would take too long, but some highlights were:

- A range of videos documenting some of the great instrumental moments in Opera and Ballet repertoire.
- *Bodytorque digital* – a collaboration with The Australian Ballet featuring newly choreographed works from dancers at TAB with OV musicians. Footage of some of the beautiful *Bodytorque* performances can be found on the Orchestra Victoria Facebook page.

- A partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria, with OV musicians filmed playing repertoire that was paired to highlight specific works in the NGV collection.
- The launch of a new education program *MAP* (Mock Audition Program), where young musicians were able to submit a mock audition tape of opera and ballet specific repertoire, and receive live feedback from members of the orchestra. This rolled out to great success with close to 100 feedback sessions being facilitated over video chat, and plans are in train to remount this program again in the future.
- The development of a suite of educational resources to partner and augment Orchestra Victoria's *mOVe* program.
- An amazing amount of written content, including a series of feature articles hosted on the Orchestra Victoria blog. <https://australianballet.com.au/music/orchestra-victoria/blog>
- The development of a series of exercise videos for musicians in partnership with the strength and conditioning team at The Australian Ballet.
- A vodcast panel show *So You Got the Gig* focusing on orchestral etiquette and other skills needed once you enter the profession.
- An interview series *OV Talks* with Orchestra Victoria musicians interviewing prominent artists.
- And last, but definitely not least *dOughV*, the cooking program that accompanied the rest of our online festival for months. Recipes were tailored to the content of the week – and showed off the talents of many members of the orchestra in the kitchen.

Alongside all of this activity we also undertook a range of training, began the process of establishing a Reconciliation Action Plan, and strengthened our online presence through our musician-led, more casual Facebook group *OVERTURES*.

This complex web of different projects required a huge amount of back end support.

Musicians and management together upskilled in audio production, video editing, copy writing, curriculum development, presentation skills, and worked tirelessly to make sure that we continued to provide good quality, interesting and engaging content for our audiences.

Behind the scenes was Nicolette Fraillon (OV's Artistic Director) and Sara Pheasant (OV's Executive Director) advocating for the musicians throughout the early stages of the pandemic, through the Melbourne lockdowns, and then coming out to return us back to working together as an orchestra. Their communication with the players throughout 2020 was reassuringly consistent and ongoing.

(And a massive shout-out to Elise Lerpiniere and her superlative organisational and technical demonstratory skills for those of us who are slightly functionally illiterate in these areas... Ed.)

Once live performance activity was able to resume, and orchestras were able to regather, we have been resuming what we do best – partnering with other organizations. This has included: streaming a Christmas performance with Victorian Opera, recording a performance with the Teskey Brothers, partnering with singer-songwriter Mo'Ju at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, presenting contemporary opera *Scalia/Ginsburg* at the Royal Botanical Gardens, and partnering with Short Black Opera and Deborah Cheetham in a new work as part of the *Woven Song* project.



Photo: James Henry Courtesy Arts Centre Melbourne.

Orchestra Victoria with Mo'Ju at the Bowl.

On an industrial front, Orchestra Victoria's full time musicians remained employed on full salary throughout 2020. As for most orchestras, there were some changes made to leave periods (eg. Annual Leave period brought forward to enable regular work to resume post-lockdown). Long Service Leave was also mandated by the company for those musicians above a certain threshold of accrued Long Service Leave.

Hot off the press, we negotiated an extension and amendment to our enterprise agreement, which has just approved by the Fair Work Commission. The substantive changes are in two main areas: a complete rethink of our recording and broadcasting schedule, which will now operate as an annual buyout for all recorded activity as an ongoing change; and then a series of changes to conditions that will facilitate our partner companies to return to work in the Covid era which have been tied to the end of this agreement (December 2021).

The negotiations were very productive, with both sides recognizing the uncertainty of the time in which we were bargaining, and working together constructively to find ways to transition out of the immediate risks of the current era, and look towards creative solutions that will maximize opportunities, both artistic and financial.

In early 2020 the orchestra welcomed Tim Francis as Associate Principal Trumpet, and we have since been joined by our new concertmaster Sulki Yu (who joins us from the Royal Philharmonic in London) and our new Associate Principal Viola Tom Higham.

2021 has seen OV farewell three valued members of our management team: Laura Message, Harriette Blanden, and Glynn Davies. We wish them all the best in their future pursuits. We have recently welcomed Hannah Prouse as EA to the Executive Director, Simonette Turner as Orchestra Manager, and Vanessa Parry as Philanthropy Manager.

In February 2021 we returned to live audiences with The Australian Ballet at Margaret Court Arena (immediately after the Australian Open finished) and with Victorian Opera for Respighi's *The Sleeping Beauty*. We followed this with our first chamber music program *Five at 5* back in our home at Joan Hammond Hall, where it was great to reconnect with our regular audience in person.

As 2021 continues our schedule looks more like a regular year of performing mainstage opera and ballet with our partner companies, while continuing to present education programs and chamber music across Victoria. May we all be able to continue through 2021 to plan, prepare, and do what we do best – perform.

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

UNPRECEDENTED...

Emily Long

Violin

Unprecedented. This descriptor has become such a cliché these days, however the number and scale of unprecedented events that have occurred since my last orchestra report has been absolutely unprecedented!

2020 began with our regular outdoor concerts under a cloud of smoke and uncertainty amid concerns about air quality due to the unprecedented and harrowing NSW Bushfire Crisis. New Work Health Safety plans were prepared as everyone became familiar with new lingo such as AQI (Air Quality Index) and Hazard Ratings we'd never contemplated before.

Happily, the smoke dissipated for our Parramatta Park performance day, which became a fundraising event for NSW Bushfire relief to which many SSO performers and staff donated their fee.

Then our regular indoor concerts began and were soon under a cloud of uncertainty due to the new and unprecedented COVID crisis. New WHS plans were prepared and everyone became familiar with the new lingo of 2020 – lockdown, zoom meeting, social distancing, masking, PCR test, and much else besides that we'd never contemplated before.

Fast forward to 2021 and our outdoor concert with Vera Blue has finally gone ahead successfully after being postponed twice due to changing COVID regulations and border closures, and then again postponed due to the recent (unprecedented) NSW wild weather and floods. It really was a case of third time lucky!

It has been a time of great uncertainty for us all, and this time last year many of us were anxious about our employment, the survival of our beloved orchestras and the very future of the arts industry.

As SSO Musicians' Association President Rosemary Curtin details in her *Senza Sord* article, there was recognition early on from our Board, CEO Emma Dunch, musicians and staff that COVID was likely to be an extended challenge for the company rather than just a temporary blip.

Faced with a possible existential crisis, everyone felt it was necessary to tackle the problem head on, and together with SOMA negotiate a solution that would provide some certainty for both the company and us as employees. We are very grateful for Emma's "One SSO" approach, and for the productive relationship between Emma, our executive management, Paul Davies and MEAA, and the musician representatives that has enabled us to successfully negotiate the COVID variation to our Agreement.

In contrast to the radio silence unfortunately experienced by some of our colleagues in the industry, there was a great deal of communication about the orchestra's situation.

Many newsletters and Zoom info sessions with Emma Dunch, pastoral care calls from orchestral management, numerous Zoom meetings between musicians, and the establishment of a new internal Facebook

group and WhatsApp sectional groups to try our best to stay connected. It seems that musicians generally kept themselves busy with private practice, learning to play iso-chamber music with themselves in the new genre of Acappella app recordings, composing, research projects, study, sourdough baking, renovations, and writing many personal thankyou letters to patrons and donors.

Although there have been frustrations and many thwarted plans along the way we are feeling optimistic and extremely grateful that we have been able to return to live concerts. There has been a careful approach within the orchestra to COVID safety, with a strong focus on WHS and weekly meetings of the new COVID specific WHS committee. We are currently at 75% audience capacity with mandatory masking, 1.5m distanced single string players with individual music stands and masking backstage. These may well have changed by the time this goes to print!

Our first live performance in the COVID era was an unprecedented, extremely special and emotional occasion. An in-house concert held at City Recital Hall, it enabled us to test out COVID plans in front of a real live audience and to thank all the wonderful SSO staff who worked tirelessly behind the scenes during the COVID period. There was not a dry eye in the house during the heartfelt post-concert speeches which paid tribute to our wonderful Associate Principal Trumpet Paul Goodchild, retiring after more than 40 years with the band.

This year we have also regretfully bade farewell to Co-Principal Viola Roger Benedict and Principal Cello Umberto Clerici, who have both retired from their orchestral chairs in order to pursue careers on the conducting podium. In addition to his role as Co-Principal Viola, Roger has also been Artistic Director of the SSO Fellowship Program, which will celebrate its 20th Anniversary later this year. We have welcomed two new



SSO Beijing thumbnail: We treasure the memories of touring adventures we've had together in the past; SSO trumpets Anthony Heinrichs, Paul Goodchild and Dave Elton in front of Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts, aka "The Egg".

Photo: Dave Elton



Farewelling the wonderful Sim, Simonette Turner, who leaves us for the role of Orchestra Manager of Orchestra Victoria. From left, Rosie Marks-Smith, Simonette Turner, Aernout Kerbert

permanent members of the orchestra: Harry Bennetts (Associate Concertmaster) and James Burke (Principal Clarinet), both of whom we congratulated over zoom when they passed their trials. Congratulations also go to Kirsty Hilton who gave birth in September to baby Mateo.

There have obviously been fewer opportunities to perform than in a usual year, but there have been some absolute artistic highlights. It has been wonderful to work with Simone Young (now officially our Chief Conductor Designate), who has stuck out two periods of hotel quarantine to be with us in Sydney for digital recordings in 2020, and also for the live launch of the 2021 season. Returning to concerts in the Town Hall with Simone was an incredibly exciting and fulfilling way to begin the year, and the audience response has been truly inspiring.

Almost a year on from the first lockdown it was lovely to welcome back Paul Davies and his wife Carmel to one of our opening concerts, and we extend our thanks to him for his dedicated work for us all last year.

As we return to a version of normality we have begun audition processes for some of our key positions, including Principal Viola, Principal Cello and Associate Principal Cello. Soon we begin negotiating our next Enterprise Agreement, with the intention that this is in place for our return to the Sydney Opera House next year.

Let's hope the remainder of the year is a little less unprecedented and a lot more normal!

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NEW ZEALAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

SOME LESSONS LEARNED

Lyndsay Mountfort

Viola

The looming pandemic emergency became evident as NZSO was on tour in March 2020, piloting a new community access platform, entitled *Setting Up Camp*, as part of our larger outreach programme, *Engage*. The orchestra “Set Up Camp” in towns in two regions for two to four days.

A “main” ensemble of 65 players played a family-friendly evening programme around the music of Beethoven and composers

he influenced, schools concerts, “relaxed concerts” aimed at the disability community, and side-by-side rehearsals with community and youth orchestras. A smaller group of 18 musicians directed by Concertmaster Vesa-Matti Leppänen performed Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, alternating arrangements for mixed septet, strings and fortepiano, as selected by Vesa. And 13 musicians worked as education specialists, playing and coaching in schools, with youth orchestras and community



Play Our Part 15 April

orchestras, leading instrumental workshops in performance venues, and playing “Happy Hour” events in local bars. The pilot was overwhelmingly successful, generating great feedback from all activities and fostering much closer relationships and support from the communities visited. The *Setting Up Camp* model has evolved to a regular commitment each year.

During the second week of *Setting Up Camp* it became clear that Covid-19 was a looming threat. Back in Wellington, CEO Peter Biggs convened an Emergency Response Team of senior managers, and Concertmaster Vesa and I (as Players’ Committee Chair) were co-opted on immediately. The ERT met daily during the following weeks. Its first act was to develop a set of success measures, detailing how we would want our stakeholder groups to feel the NZSO treated them once the crisis passed, including employees, collaborating artists, government, sponsors, fans, suppliers and venues.

The principles defined were kept central to the NZSO’s response right through the emergency period. In particular, NZSO player and staff salaries were not reduced, and all commitments to contract players and staff were honoured in full. This was possible in part because of NZSO’s unusual funding model, where fixed costs are covered by the government funding, but **it was still notable that priority was given to preserving and protecting the workforce right through the crisis.**

Recognising this, the musicians were quick to suspend contract rules relating to schedule notice periods, small ensembles and categories of work.

Another early decision was made to order and install remotely operated video cameras into the orchestra’s home venue (the Michael Fowler Centre). The proposal for this had

already been in development over the previous 12-plus months, and it was now approved and actioned immediately.

CANCELLATIONS AND THE START OF LOCKDOWN

Over the weekend of our return to Wellington, we heard that the guest artists who were to open our main concert season in the South Island had decided not to risk travelling to NZ.

Initial plans were made to replace those concerts with the *Goldberg Variations* from *Setting Up Camp*, just as the Government created the NZ Covid-19 elimination strategy of four Alert Levels, and moved NZ to Level 2, forcing the cancellation of all concerts. Planning pivoted to livestream *Goldberg Variations*, but the following Monday, March 24, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced an immediate move to Level 3 (closing non-essential workplaces), and to Level 4 lockdown only 48 hours later. On April 3, the NZSO Board cancelled all touring and scheduled concerts until July 30.

ENGAGE@HOME

Like orchestras worldwide, NZSO knew that finding ways to stay in front of our audiences and fans and continue to develop new audiences would both be crucial to our recovery post-pandemic.

Having spent years talking about growing our online presence, largely unproductively, we were forced to dive in immediately.

Players from the orchestra drove the preparation of the first streamed concert, curated by Vesa and filmed in the musicians’ own homes, using Acapella and similar technologies. The marketing team worked with technical wizard Nate Ormsby of Latitude Creative to put it all together, and it was streamed on March 25 as the first of a series called *Play Our Part*, a few



Storytime

hours before the nation moved into Level 4 lockdown. This became the first of a five concert Wednesday series.

The Artistic Team set up an online survey to capture the many ideas musicians and staff were generating. Once that was complete a Zoom workshop was held, for team members and player representatives to sift the ideas, and create a priority list. Trello was employed to organise ideas by theme and priority, and by the end of the workshop, five additional stream series had emerged, along with some stand-alone events.

Between March 25 and June 26 NZSO streamed more than 40 performances and associated content, of which 35 were new and six previously recorded.

- Four more *Play Our Part* concerts, each curated by a different musician.
- *Ryman Healthcare Presents Discovering Beethoven*. NZSO players performed pieces by Beethoven in their homes to celebrate the composer's 250th anniversary, curated by Vesa-Matti Leppänen and including readings from Beethoven's letters by violist Victoria Jaeneke, locked down in an apartment in Germany.
- Three Shed Series concerts – *Heritage*, *Speed* and *Voice*, curated by NZSO Principal Conductor in Residence Hamish McKeich. An online extension of the Shed Series. Included world premiere of Rose Langabeer's *drawing fire from the well*.
- Six-part series *Sei Solo* featuring NZSO string players performing their favourite movements from one of J.S. Bach's solo partitas, sonatas, or suites, and sharing their thoughts on what the music means to them. Proposed and curated by guest Assistant Concertmaster, Jessica Oddie.
- *Music Room* educational videos on NZSO website – a ten-part series for children and families, featuring members of the NZSO covering many aspects of music.
- New Zealand composers were commissioned to write soundtracks for small ensembles, for popular NZ childrens' books, to be filmed and streamed as *Storytime*.
- *Pōkarekare Ana*: NZSO in partnership with composer Ngatai Huata and the Tomoana whānau, invited everyone in Aotearoa to join in performing from their homes the well-loved waiata *Pōkarekare Ana* on April 18. Hundreds of people all over New Zealand

participated and many uploaded videos of their performances.

- NZSO Associate Principal Trumpet Cheryl Hollinger performing the Last Post, released on ANZAC Day.

Planning, preparing, recording, editing and releasing three streams per week was a punishing schedule. Like musicians all over the world, players had to assemble and learn to operate equipment and software, with advice as required from Nate and their colleagues, while quickly learning the music in parallel. Artistic staff coordinated schedules and the upload of raw files, for Nate to compile and edit. Our librarians chased down publishers and licence holders, many of whom were closed or working from home, to clear recorded material for release. Nate and his team worked long hours close to deadlines putting the streams together.

NZSO's mentoring programme also moved online quickly. This is a nationwide programme, which links young instrumentalists with individual NZSO players as mentors. As the orchestra moves around the country, mentors meet up with their allocated students, whether for a chat and advice about the profession over coffee, or for consultation lessons. As this work was transferred online, some NZSO musicians also contacted other groups, including El Sistema and other community music programmes around the country, offering online coaching and inviting colleagues to participate. The result was the expansion of mentoring to over 180 hours coaching in the weeks from the beginning of lockdown until normal touring resumed, and the further expansion of links into many communities all over NZ.

On April 28, NZ moved down to Level 3, which made little difference to the music business, but raised expectations of a limited return to workplaces within a few weeks.

Online discussions moved to planning socially distanced video recording using the new camera equipment. With the anticipated move to Level 2 on May 14, a return to the Michael Fowler Centre Auditorium became possible. Initially the new gear was road-tested with small group performances, continuing the Beethoven series already underway. Then on May 27-29, a larger ensemble assembled for video recordings of Bartók, *Music for Strings Percussion and Celesta*, with Principal Conductor-in-Residence, Hamish McKeich.

Those that participated found this a challenging exercise, getting used to rehearse-record sessions straight to cameras, feeling that our ensemble skills were a little rusty and coping with a well-spaced orchestra as per the instructions of the health authorities.

With these shakedown experiences completed, the first genuine livestream performance, of Beethoven's 5th Symphony, was scheduled for June 10. Although the Government moved NZ to Level One 2 days before the livestream, this proved too late to open the performance to an in-person audience, because the venue was not yet fully reopened and staffed.

The gradual return to in-person performance started with three short performances of a selection of the lockdown small group performances in the national museum, Te Papa Tongarewa on June 21. And a few days later, the full orchestra returned to live performance with a free Gala concert in Wellington, in partnership with Wellington City Council. Titled *Harikoa Ake (Celebrating Togetherness)*, the programme included popular opera arias with Simon O'Neill and Eliza Boom, a bracket of songs from popular Māori songwriter and vocalist Maisey Rika with taonga pūoro performer Horomona Horo, short works by NZ composers Gareth Farr and John Psathas, and Strauss' *Rosenkavalier Suite*. The concert



Harikoa Ake

started with a ceremonial welcome back from a world of silence, with three strikes on a pounamu (NZ jade) gong. The concert was live broadcast by RNZ, and livestreamed via multiple channels. Uncertainties about the possible reluctance of audiences to attend large concerts were allayed by the packed house and substantial waitlist for tickets.

With a month remaining before the scheduled resumption of the planned touring season, two more Wellington concerts were added in July, for live and online audiences. The first was another Beethoven programme, and the second was the revival of the *Goldberg Variations* programme. And there was time to squeeze in some backing track recordings for vocalist Hollie Smith.

In August we finally had a brief resumption of our planned touring season, although with conductor, soloist and half the repertoire replaced. But just two weeks later, a border leak in Auckland caused a rise in alert levels and another month of disruption, with a return to livestreamed concerts, and a second return to planned touring in November. This pattern has repeated, disrupting the second iteration of *Setting Up Camp* in 2021. But each time, the company has employed new skills, pivoting into replacement activity quickly.

SOME LESSONS LEARNED

Improved agility and responsiveness were characteristics that NZSO had worked to achieve for several years, with limited success. **Covid-19 forced us to make decisions quickly, and act on them.**

All of the emergency initiatives involved players and administration in idea development and decision-making. It wasn't always smooth, but mutual trust levels are much higher, and musicians are both more willing and more empowered to contribute to ongoing program development.

Not all players were equally involved in the development and executions of ideas. Some struggled more than others with connectedness and technology. It became clear that it was important to keep the band together with plenty of general communications. We aimed for one general newsletter by email and one video chat from the CEO per week, and held several online Q&A webinars.

And finally the obvious lesson – online performance and engagement with music communities are a huge and essential part of our future.



Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance SOMA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (PLEASE USE BLOCK LETTERS)

THIS AUTHORITY WILL REMAIN IN FORCE UNTIL CANCELLED BY ME IN WRITING

A MEAA Member

Surname First name

Title (eg Mr / Ms / Mrs) Gender F M Other Date of birth

I am an Australian citizen/resident Yes No

Home address

Suburb Postcode

Email Mobile

I was previously a member of MEAA Yes No

Employment status Permanent Casual / Freelance Employer/ Orchestra

What is your role?

Do you work in any other MEAA workplaces? Yes No

If yes, where

PAYMENT METHOD - PLEASE INDICATE EITHER OPTION ONE OR TWO

OPTION ONE - PAYROLL DEDUCTION

For permanent musicians and also suitable for casual/freelance musicians who wish to have their fees deducted in the weeks that they work for the nominated orchestra where payroll deduction is available.

I hereby authorise the pay officer to make deductions from my pay for MEAA membership fees for the weeks that I work and in accordance with the appropriate scale as advised to the pay office by the MEAA each year.

OPTION TWO - DIRECT DEBIT For credit card/debit card deductions

I instruct MEAA to deduct my membership fees (tick one): Weekly Fortnightly 4-Weekly Quarterly Half-Yearly Annually

Credit card Mastercard Visa

Card number ____/____/____/____ Expiry date ____/____

----- OR -----

Direct debit from my bank account

Financial institution Branch

Name of account

BSB ____-____ Account number

I hereby apply to join the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance as a new SOMA member and agree to be bound by its rules and constitution as amended from time to time. I request to pay my MEAA fees by payroll deduction / periodic credit card payment / periodic direct debit from my bank account until such time that I cancel my membership in writing.

SIGNED Date

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY				
Membership No:	W/	/	Rec / Chq No:	Paid
				Date

Obligations of Membership
Membership fees are levied annually by Federal Council in consultation with SOMA. All membership fees are tax deductible. Fines and Levies shall be the first charge of all payments by members. If you leave the industry and wish to resign your membership, at least two weeks written notice of resignation must be given to your Regional Director. An unfinancial member, in addition to being liable for all amounts outstanding to the union, shall not be entitled to any of the benefits of membership including voting rights



LET'S GET CREATIVE

**THE CASE FOR A
COMPREHENSIVE
ARTS & CULTURAL POLICY
APRIL 2021**

AUSTRALIA NEEDS A COMPREHENSIVE ARTS & CULTURAL POLICY

Art and entertainment are central to our lives. Social and community well-being relies on all types of creative activity, and our culture is defined by it, helping develop understanding and appreciation of the world and one another.

We mark our place in the world through art and creativity, through the entertainment we make, enjoy and share through the unique voices of our communities. Our lives are simply greyed out and joyless without structured creative practice.

The life of our creative culture starts with our children, who we nurture with music lessons, dance, visual arts, writing, performance and access to all forms of creative play. As work and sheer economic survival demand more and more of our time, a healthy society requires we remake the ways we develop and grow our entertainment and arts culture.

The arts and entertainment economy we make is built by the creativity, technical skill and innovation of our audiences and artists and the stories that make the most sense to us are those we generate about ourselves and not the ones simply sold to us by global production companies.

These activities are essential, demanding and complex, involving families, friends, schools, businesses and all levels of Government. How we invest and make the most of all inputs to our creative life and how we develop the most useful and rewarding results is not a simple task, and certainly not something that 'markets' solve alone.

Unfortunately, and too often, Government responses to these needs are inadequate. Falling investments, changeable policy arrangements

and the shallow politicisation of our creative culture is letting us down.

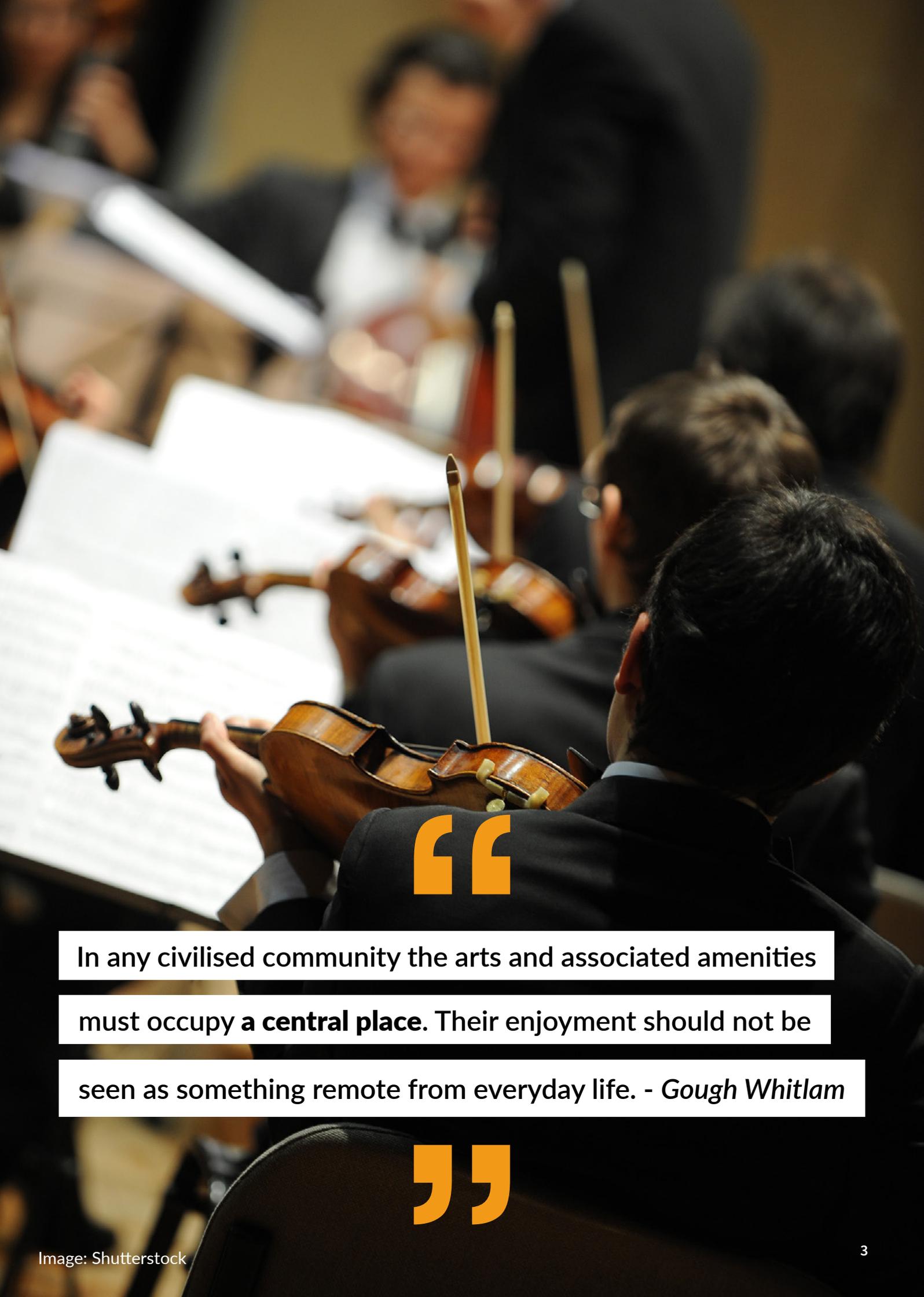
FUNDING CRISIS

Since 2015, 95 arts companies have been defunded by the Australia Council with the \$105 million in grants diverted at that time yet to be restored. Most crucially, through the 2020 global pandemic when the sector faced its most drastic challenge, the federal Government simply failed to provide the support needed, leaving the workforce bereft and companies and communities foundering.

More than 75% of us agree that the Arts are important to Australian culture and that it enhances our national reputation.

Well over 80% of Australians appreciate that the Arts and entertainment industry creates jobs and that Arts and structured creative practice are vital to childhood development.

Source: Measure Theory Analytics, Polling for MEAA, March 2020



“

In any civilised community the arts and associated amenities

must occupy a **central place**. Their enjoyment should not be

seen as something remote from everyday life. - *Gough Whitlam*

”

Australians need a new and comprehensive cultural policy, effectively and sustainably funded, to help us deliver on our responsibilities to each other. And we need to harness and organise community leadership to shape and deliver it.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL VALUE

More than 80% of Australians understand that creative practice is essential to the development and education of our children; a similar proportion see the creative arts as vital to creating jobs and employment.

The arts and creative industries generate \$117 billion or 6.4% of GDP annually, of which \$23.5 billion is attributable to live performance, music, screen productions, sales, and broadcast – yet three-quarters of our schools don't even provide a formal music program, for instance.

Well over 60% of Australians appreciate that our culture is made by local, community practices such as singing, photography, dancing, acting, playing an instrument, designing websites, painting and drawing and yet, arts and creativity does not feature as a priority in government spending on education and community development.

Not only is government and public sector leadership failing us, but technology and demand driven disruption are creating challenges that the sector as a whole has not responded to well. In the era of content streaming how do we ensure that Australia is not swamped by overseas production and that we can instead make the most of new opportunities?

Are these issues solvable? If so, how? What role should MEAA be playing in finding and implementing solutions?

It is not difficult for us to list the benefits of writing, drawing, performing, music, literature, movies, television, design, theatre, comedy and all the related forms of creative activity .

We know the developmental value of structured creative activity in the early years.

We can talk confidently about the social value, the economic value and indeed the intrinsic value of self-directed learning and expression. And we understand the connection between art, creativity and all forms of human industry and productivity as well as the essential value of freedom of expression.

Leadership in the arts recognises and articulates these facts.

Historically, Australia has not lacked ambitious political leadership in arts policy. Through long periods in the second half of the last century in particular we benefited from thorough and far reaching arts policy leadership in the Federal Parliament and much of the current administrative and policy architecture was developed at that time.

A PLAN FOR CHANGE

Our hypothesis is that what we have missed is the sustained social and political organisation, the 'voice', required to support and drive contemporary arts policy and industry development. As a result, artists, arts workers and the community as a whole have suffered chronic lack of recognition, low incomes, division and political marginalisation.

Our strategy is aimed at fixing this problem. As the union of workers in Australia's creative industries our leadership will build the social and political organisation necessary for arts to occupy a central place in our community.

Our objective is a contemporary arts and cultural policy that moves us beyond the argument of elites versus the rest. Warring over funds for cultural expression is a symptom of failure and points to neglect of our values and what unites us.

We need an arts and cultural policy that is not simply the product of government or part of a political program, no matter how well intentioned. We need a policy that recognises, enables, and expands a community consensus on arts and creativity as social practice.

WHAT'S THE PLAN AND WHAT ARE WE GOING TO ACHIEVE?

As the union for creative workers, MEAA is a thought leader and driver of change with a long and proud history of strong and passionate advocacy to improve the working lives of creative professionals and the industries in which they work.

Created in 1992 through the merging of the long-established unions covering actors, journalists and entertainment industry employees, MEAA is an amalgamation of: Actors Equity (founded 1939), the Australian Journalists Association (founded 1910) and the Australian Theatrical & Amusement Employees Association (founded 1915), and the Symphony Orchestra Musicians Association (founded 1996). In 2018, we expanded further with the creation of Musicians Australia for all our musicians.

Our members include people working in TV, radio, theatre & film, entertainment venues, recreation grounds, journalists, actors, dancers, sportspeople, cartoonists, photographers, musicians, orchestral and opera performers as well as people working in public relations, advertising, book publishing and website production ... in fact everyone who works in the industries that inform or entertain.

Our campaigns have included protection of public broadcasting, press freedom, reform of screen industry policy, and improved funding for the arts.

In late 2019 it became clear that we needed a renewed effort to fix the problem of arts and entertainment sector leadership.

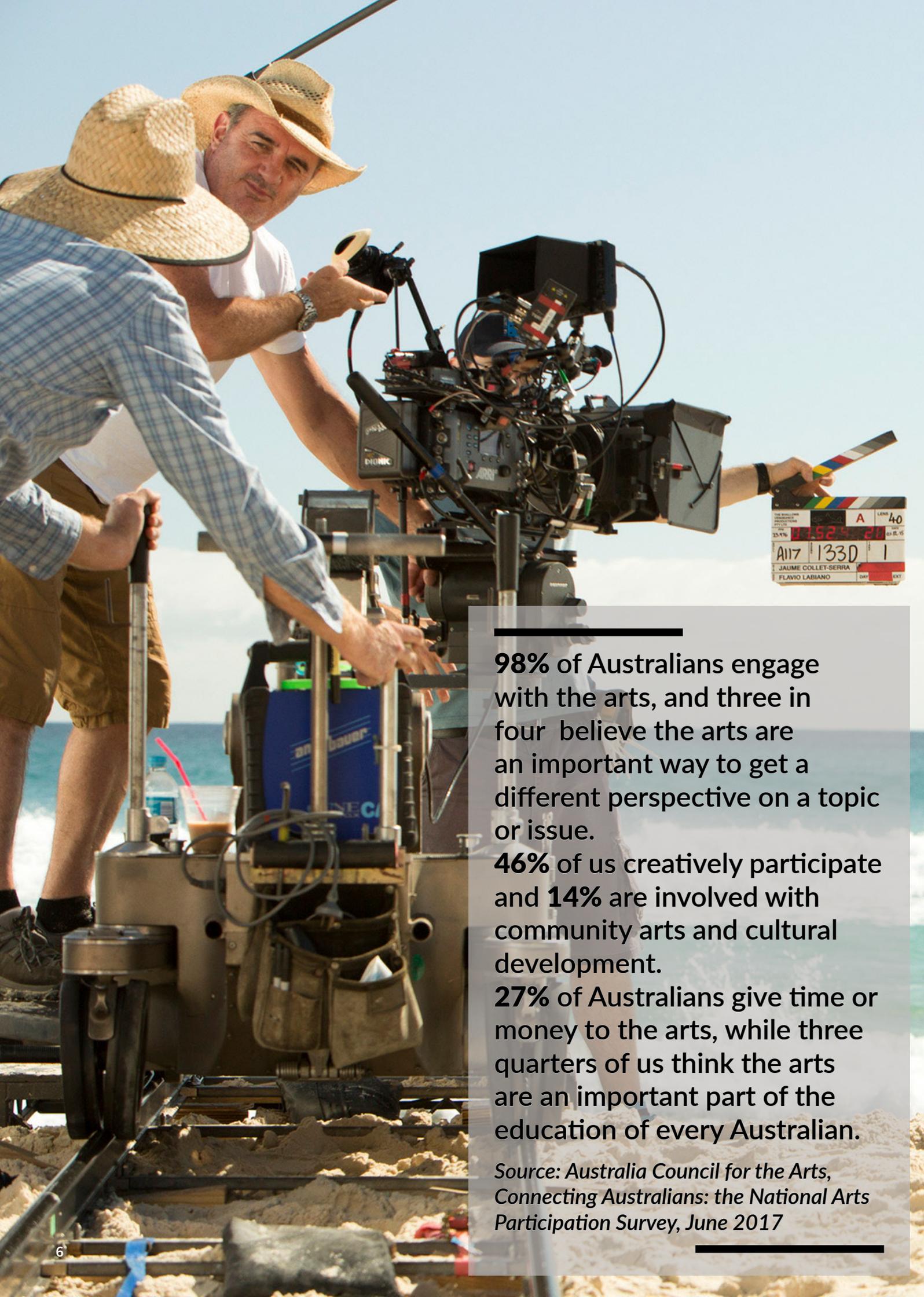
During the COVID crisis, the failure of Federal Government to provide a sector-wide solution simply accelerated the need for an overhaul of the way the arts and culture are viewed in Australia.

Put simply, the neglect of federal political leadership has placed in jeopardy the entire arts and cultural sector.

Building on our traditional role and history of sector leadership we have conducted surveys, focus groups, public polling and research as the first phase of the strategy.

Between 2008 and 2017, the total value of cultural and creative activity in Australia rose by 30% to \$111.7 billion per annum, or 6.4% of GDP. The combined economic value of the performing arts, film and broadcast media, music composition and publishing, literature and print media, and visual arts and crafts is \$13.7 billion, or 0.8% of GDP.

Source: Bureau of Communications and Arts Research, The Economic Value of Cultural and Creative Activity, October 2018



98% of Australians engage with the arts, and three in four believe the arts are an important way to get a different perspective on a topic or issue.

46% of us creatively participate and **14%** are involved with community arts and cultural development.

27% of Australians give time or money to the arts, while three quarters of us think the arts are an important part of the education of every Australian.

Source: Australia Council for the Arts, Connecting Australians: the National Arts Participation Survey, June 2017

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN ARTS AND CULTURAL POLICY

Based on initial work – including surveys, direct member engagement and research – we have developed the following ideas for discussion as the next step towards coming up with an endorsed policy platform:

- 1.** Increase the annual federal budget for arts, entertainment and culture to 1.11% of GDP, the OECD average.
- 2.** Recognise the importance of the sector and the increased contribution of state and local government by making arts and entertainment a responsibility of National Cabinet.
- 3.** Enhance and improve sector capability through an expanded Australia Council supported by annually indexed administrative funding, and through increased administrative and capital funding for commonwealth cultural institutions, including national galleries and archives.
- 4.** Improve First Nations arts and entertainment participation through expanded specific funding.
- 5.** Increase participation and sector employment through expanded funding to community organisations, including to before and after school care services, and to small-to-medium arts organisations.
- 6.** Introduce an arts audience voucher system for households.
- 7.** Fund instrumental tuition, ensemble programs and expanded music programs in public, primary and secondary schools in every state and territory.
- 8.** Improve income and employment security in arts and entertainment by introducing industry-based bargaining and an expanded income support system for the sector.
- 9.** Introduce Australian content quotas on international streaming platforms.
- 10.** Introduce a digital platforms tax flowing into a content production fund.



HOW TO GET INVOLVED

1. Sign up to the campaign at

www.letsgetcreative.org.au

2. Tell us what matters to you by filling in this survey on community arts.

www.meaa.io/arts-survey

Authorised by Paul Murphy, Chief Executive
Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance

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