

MEAA SURVEY VOICES – APRIL and MAY 2020

Theatre director/artist: 90% of my entire annual income has disappeared in 5 days. I have just got through 3 months without any new income while developing new projects and used up my savings normally reserved for quiet periods / development times so now have very little left. I've managed to survive and from time to time thrive as a freelance artist for 14 years. This is probably the end of it.

Staging Company worker: My company has been established for 25 years and not ever encountered anything like this in its history. This industry contributed approximately 2.4 billion last season to the Australian economy. The effect of one single cancellation is a burden on most of these companies as the industry is somewhat seasonal, of course summer here is winter elsewhere and vice versa, so a single cancellation is a substantial strain on companies counting on the booked work to the yearly bottom line- now multiply that by 50 or 100. Personally as a company in the last week we have lost \$100,000. It's the Australian way, when the bushfires and floods ravage our country we carry on and rebuild. The impact of this is no different in our industry, as it is to farmers. We are strong and passionate about this industry and determined to rebuild it when the time is right, keeping in mind the most important task at this point is to defeat the virus.

People in this industry and associated industries are casual workers and rely heavily on this work for their income, people will not be able to pay rent feed themselves or their families. The chances of getting other work will be seriously affected. This is our drought and our bushfire rolled into one and we are struggling to ensure the long term wellbeing of both the companies and people associated with an industry that often gives without a second thought.

Orchestral musician: As a freelance musician a loss is a loss. We don't have the luxury of a salary therefore we budget according to the contracts we get. When they are cancelled there is no substitute, particularly under these unique circumstances. Not knowing which contracts will be honoured ongoing is a bigger issue. Opera Australia's Melbourne season for example and Australian Ballet Anna Karenina Melbourne season.

Freelance production manager: I don't have access to government support at this stage. Unless they waive the pre requisites for eligibility I am without income indefinitely.

Freelance Artist: I'm used to instability, but this is something else. I've got between 3 to 5 months of savings and then I'm out of money, which sucks because I had other things I wanted to do with that money other than see it drained away on rent and utilities. I applied for Newstart, but got rejected for reasons that are currently unknown. (I'm having to wait for them to mail out a physical letter of all things.) Definitely makes me wish UBI (Universal Basic Income) was a thing in this country. And as a sole trader, the government's stimulus package doesn't help me one bit.

Freelance writer: As a freelancer who has just come off an intense writing and editing period for two books respectively, I am now in the troubling situation of living off a small second advance for one book, and looking for freelance opportunities at a time when they are understandably thin on the ground. A lot

of my 'pocket money' has come from small gigs, such as extras work, which is looking like it will also dry up due to the size of film and television productions.

Events worker: As a freelancer worker in events industry, this is my only income. I understand government suggestion is fair but there should be some fair call for all the workers in this industry to support their essential needs.

Freelancer: I have savings for inevitable down times between contracts and for any time of injury/illness, but this is an unimaginable scale. Personally, with Government support I will be able to see my way through this time financially but I know many others won't be that fortunate. Over and above this immediate impact, the ripple effect of this crisis to the audiences and venue workers of the small towns and regional centres that Monkey Baa tours too across the country hurts my heart.

Self-employed artist: As a person working as PTY LTD (myself as the only employee), with assets I will not be eligible for any centrelink payments, and will probably need to sell my assets to live on, leaving nothing for retirement which is looming. I have 4 adult children who are now living at home due to inability to afford mortgages, so the financial pressure is great.

Props assistant: I just wish the government would implement something for us so we could make it through this period that is totally beyond our control.

Stage management: As a sole trader, having a years' worth of work taken from me is a huge financial crisis. The problem is many of us have to deal with that on a regular basis. However with all the other events being closed, there's no other options except to look for other work outside of our industries.

Specialist crew: Traditionally productions start up around March and my financial buffer has been exhausted as the productions start up just in time. The shutdown has meant I'm at my poorest position in the yearly cycle and am living almost solely off my credit card. I have a wife and two kids, 10 and 12 and am the major breadwinner. Now it's not bread I'm winning....we're simply just toast!

Stage management: Being a freelance SM, I, as well as most production crew exist gig to gig. We have no buffer, no paid or unpaid leave, the tour has been pulled out from under us. Our livelihoods disappearing without a trace. We need help to survive financially. The silver lining is that the global pandemic will plant the seed for many new creative endeavours. Maybe just maybe those who currently undervalue the worth of art to the human race may realise they are misguided. Art speaks to and from the human spirit. It is in our souls and for those of us in the Arts it is our life not just our livelihoods.

Vocalist: When I made the choice to leave the corporate world to become a freelance entertainer, I believed that I'd be able to sustain myself. And I have been able to do so, until now.

Now that I'm losing work, I may have no alternative but to give up my art and return to the corporate world. I will not have put in the time it takes to

cultivate my artistic career, as just with any other career, it takes time and dedication to rise to an appreciable level (I know this because I spent 20 years doing this in the engineering profession).

At this stage, I'm worried that I won't be able to pay my rent, my car registration, my driving license renewal fee (all which are due at the same time), and other monthly bills.

Producer, director, performer: In the last week alone, since the government's decision, of course, to cancel festival and events nationally; we have lost in excess of \$50,000 in immediate, and projected bookings for myself and our ensemble of performers – through to January 2021. Overnight we have seen our livelihoods dissolve, and the ability to put food on the table, evaporate. This is a very real situation and it is happening now - which is devastating for our community.

Artist: As a single, 48 yr old self-funded, freelance artist and maker I have not received government benefits and have always supplemented my arts work with additional work and now all my income streams have been reduced to almost nil. This is terrifying

Freelance musician: The consequences of not supporting our sector of the workforce will be dire, with the potential for massive upheaval to family networks due to financial hardship and mental health and psychological trauma that will potentially be equal to, or greater than the damage of the Coronavirus itself.

Box office: I am mother to two young children and my husband is freelance (sole trader) in the same industry. As many do, we live week to week and struggle with bills as it is. We are financially responsible for our children and my husband's two children from a previous marriage. All our work is drying up and we will literally be on the street in a week or two. We have no family support and no savings. Plus, we are already in a lot of tax and credit card debt. So, I see no way forward at all.

Technician: There is no leave for me to access or, at this stage, no government assistance. Newstart allowance would not be enough to even cover rent on its own let alone anything else. This has been my industry for my entire working life, which is approximately 16 years. With the industry shut down, the idea of trying to find work in other ways, is extremely overwhelming and stressful. Some savings will cover me for a few weeks but beyond that is a terrifying unknown.

Stage Manager/technical director: I have been working professionally in live theatre production for 20 years. I have always worked a mix of casual, contract and sole trader work because it's how our industry functions. I have never been out of work for any significant period in that 20 years. This loss of work has a devastating impact on me financially, I was hoping to buy a house after this financial year, but now the banks will label my income as unreliable. These closures also threaten to destroy many of the smaller companies I work for regularly. If they go bankrupt during the closures we will lose entire sections of

the industry

Director of Photography: I have just come off a very tough year - I had some major jobs fall over at last minute (a sad reality of Freelance work) and therefore I had not worked since June 2019. I just managed to make it through to late January when The Bureau of Magical Things Started - but now, this will cripple me financially.

Technician: I have lost all my work, and nobody is hiring production crew so there's no hope of finding work. Both myself and my partner work in the entertainment industry, he is a production manager at a venue in Melbourne, I work freelance, casual and temporary jobs around Australia and sometimes overseas. We are both now unemployed and we will not be able to keep food on the table let alone pay the mortgage.

Technician/front of house: I have watched hundreds of my friends lose all sources of their income in a matter of days. We are freelancers, casuals and we live job to job, contract to contract. It is not just the arts community either. Our casualised workforce will continue to suffer as economic downturn leads to more loss of employment across the board. A generation of graduates who've never experienced job security, signed a full or part-time contract, or had access to the worker benefits that unionists fought for before our time.

Stage manager/ sound designer: All of these cancellations have left me limited to no employment in the remainder of the year, and the prospects of more employment opportunities seem exceedingly rare. I am in a very difficult financial position, and am likely going to have to apply for welfare, and possibly seek other employment unrelated to the arts which will greatly affect the years of hard work and trajectory for me to reach the position where I was able to freelance in theatre as my sole income.

Camera crew: I'm the sole income provider for our young family of 3. My wife also works in the industry as a makeup artist but she has not been able to return to work due to chronic pain and health issues.

We've had a really hard year all round and the loss of work at this time is going to impact us in a major way.

I'm looking at trade work and dog walking as there looks to be very little tv/drama and camera assistant jobs available.

We have a \$10,000 credit card debt, rent to be paid, food to buy and no family support as our families are either interstate or overseas.

Actor/producer: the opportunity of new work from castings or auditions has completely stopped as well. So actors and performers especially can't look for more work because there is none.

Violinist: Dipping into super isn't an option because as a female casual employee in my 50s (time off for children) there isn't a lot there. I am incredibly fortunate as an artist to be able to practice at home and improve my skills but the real joy is sharing music with colleagues and an audience.

Actor/musician: It's not just theatre work we have lost. We cannot teach, do hospo, retail, anything.... we can't get a job anywhere. We are always the first to fundraiser for every other cause, and put on concerts to raise awareness or just raise our voices when others need help. Now it's our turn.... we need assistance. We will drown and disappear without help.

Performer: I'm also genuinely concerned that the current government doesn't recognise the value we provide to the economy, respect our expertise and skill, or even care about us as human beings.

Mechanist: I've been working full time in this industry for over 10yrs, and have been a freelancer for the past 3 years. All my gigs until June have been cancelled, and if the Bell national tour is cancelled - which is looking possible at this point - I will have lost all my work for the rest of the year. I have no income. This situation is unprecedented and we need help - the industry has been on a knife edge for years, and this could be the end for many smaller companies.

Singer: I've finally gotten to the point in my career where I could have supported myself on singing alone. A projected 9 months of straight singing work has been absolutely decimated by this situation. I have one more contract this year that starts rehearsing in June. If what the government said yesterday remains true, that these bans will go on for the next 6 months, that contract too will be cancelled

Entertainer/teacher: Like many gigging artists, I make the income that pays my family's bills, rent, and keeps food on the table, through many different (arts-related) sources. Most of that work has now been cancelled (or postponed for an indefinite period of time - which means the same thing for my family financially right now). I am in the fortunate position of having been attempting to save a house deposit - there will almost definitely be no house purchase now (so we have likely lost any sense of future security), but at least my family will not get to the point of eviction in the immediate future.

Freelance writer: Like many in this sector, I have no superannuation, property or savings to fall back on. It's a month to month existence anyway - feast or famine. I have operated this way for 35 years and it's tough but I've always managed to get by with diversification. However, those diversifications - the publishing industry, the film industry - are similarly in strife. In 35 years this is the first time I have no idea how I will pay my rent. My husband is an artist, so we are both in the same boat.

Actor – independent theatre: The financial loss of the cancellation could potentially ruin the company for another year or even two. They're not the biggest money maker for actors but they're great to keep us going and practicing as actors and developing up and comers of the industry.

Art director: Many of my family including my wife also works in the film industry. As freelancers we currently have nowhere to turn for work and as my wife and I are in the same industry we have been completely cut off financially. I received 1 week payout and that is what we have as income for the next 6months or more unless a job is found in a field outside my expertise, which is highly unlikely given the dire situation employment is facing.

Production coordinator: As a result of the current situation, I know that I will be unable to cover rent payments because I don't know when the next job will come so I've had to give up looking for a home. I am based in NSW where there are usually more work opportunities but I've had to return interstate to SA to stay with family and friends until this passes and I can work to pay rent again. So I am homeless and jobless which is a horrible situation to be in.

performer: My partner and I, who have recently bought an apartment, both work as performers in live theatre. We have both lost our jobs. And with my partner returning from overseas we are both headed into an isolation period. I haven't had a secondary job for 5 years so have no other source of income to turn to and am finding my skills fairly non-transferable to other industries. Basically, I am unqualified to do any other work. My partner's second job is as wait staff in a hospitality venue - another hugely impacted industry, who may no longer be in operation soon. We are currently crunching numbers to see how long we can afford to pay our mortgage/bills/etc. the outcome is BLEAK.

Technician: I no longer have any hope. Optimism will not pay my bills.

Stage manager: Our tour has been cancelled with no notice as of today and the 7 company members are being sent home. This was a six month tour and many of us have moved out of rental properties and/or sold cars to go on tour. Our company has said we will receive two weeks' pay from our accrued annual leave, there has been no other help mentioned. As a freelance stage manager my future contracts could also not go ahead if the gathering ban continues for longer than four months.

Sound recordist: Our current situation highlights more than ever the insecurity of living and working as a Sole Trader and freelancer in the Screen Industry, and should serve as a reminder that the people who bring content to life for everyone to enjoy, have been left out and are now experiencing a deeper level of financial insecurity than we've ever had in our lifetime. Please support our crew, so we can survive to bring your stories to the screen once this crisis has passed.

Camera operator: Having our production cancelled has been a relief, but we're now in the same boat as the rest of our freelance workforce - in a sea of uncertainty, not knowing where or when our next pay-check will appear or if the government will fully recognise the devastation to our industry.

Production coordinator: We are facing months of uncertainty as many companies are no longer hiring, and our work can't be done from home. We are mostly freelance workers, meaning we receive no pay should we be quarantined. Although I have a six month contract with my current employer, it has been cut short, effective immediately, and we have no support now we are suddenly unemployed. I do not qualify for any government assistance-short of applying for unemployment benefits- and my industry is all but shut down.

Performer/writer: The impact is also massive psychologically and on mental health. To create something takes confidence and tenacity. When each project ends in failure through no fault of your own but through the impact of the economic climate, climate change or a world pandemic - it makes you terrified to risk again which is part of what you need to do in the arts.

Production rigger: When there is a bushfire crisis or flood crisis the country rallies together and raises millions for those affected. Not to mention the Fire Fight Australia concert that was put on here in Sydney not too long ago...it was all of us event crew people that donated our time to help out!!! It's now our turn, we need the support, we need help to survive as our industry and livelihood has been shutdown!!!

Front of house supervisor: As of yesterday I don't have a source of income for at least a month, maybe longer. So I'm not angry, I'm just scared.

Director: The situation has had a huge impact on my mental health. Fortunately my family has been able to pull me out of a downward spiral before it took too much of a hold. But the fear, uncertainty and mass of cancellations has caused me a lot of anxiety and threatened to send me into depression.

SFX: This event will force the complete closure and sell-off of assets of my 40-year business and the layoff of all my staff

Actor: This is devastating for actors/creators like myself who have no safety net and a government that do not support, nor understand the plight of our industry. I'm trying to stay positive but it's the long-term unknown factor of how long this will go on for that is most challenging.

Actor / front of house: This is having such an affect on my mental health. Not only because I have no income but because my friends and work colleagues are out of the job, have no income, no way to move their life back to their parents without having to uproot the life they have built for themselves in Melbourne.

Production assistant: I have very little savings and will not be able to support myself for more than a few weeks. And if this break extends, then I will run out of money altogether. I feel extremely stressed and worried now. I don't know what to do. There are no guarantees or security that this production will even continue on...they could pull the pin completely and just decide to not film anymore. There are numerous crew members in a similar position to myself, and no work prospects as other jobs are closing or upcoming jobs being cancelled or postponed.

Theatre technician: We work nights and weekends, miss all the social events and can't connect with friends and family. Working a full time theatre job means we commit to that sacrifice for the long term in return for a stable and a reliable income. To see the sacrifice that we have made in previous months/years/decades not honoured in this time of crisis by our full time employees is a huge slap in the face.

Site electrician: All casual staff from my company are being stood down from tomorrow as there is no work. With no income for the business we can't even get hours doing maintenance of our equipment

Actor/teacher: All my employment is casual. Outside of performing, I have 3 other casual jobs that are all at risk of shutting down. I will have no income other than what I've got saved.

Actor/performer: Fortunate enough to live with parents, but the money will only go so far to pay for a family of four (two children 3yrs and under) for the near future. If the isolation period is 6 months, then we are in a dire situation where I cannot provide for my family as the primary financial source.

Producer: Have been out of work/job hunting since late last year. I finally got booked and it's now been cancelled!

Ticketing: Having spent the last 7 years building a small business and keeping a couple of casual jobs to be safe and sensible it has all fallen in a heap at once seeing me lose ALL income streams.

Front of house: I also try to put a bit of money away each week so I will have savings to pay my expenses when I go on full time, unpaid clinical placement and cannot work during this time. I also have 2 chronic health conditions, 1 of which costs me about \$100 every month just on medication and up to \$400 every 6 weeks for specialists' appointments. I am still 2 years off finishing my degree and this job loss has impacted on my life immensely.

Costume designer: I am a young, new member of the theatre industry. I trained for 3 years and this marks my 3rd year out of study. I have worked extensively in the independent sector with no payment for my work. Paid jobs were few and far between. This year was my busiest 6 months of my career, of paid work. I am mostly devastated for the lost opportunity of the projects to keep my career moving forward.

Front of house: I am an International Individual working on a Post Grad Work Stream Visa. I do not get support from the Government and I live pay-check to pay-check, Foundation Theatres was my only source of income.

Front of house: I am currently on a work cover return to work plan where I am supposed to be allocated 2 shifts per week. I have not had any communication from my employer about what my options are. I have not heard from the insurance company either.

Director/producer: I am looking at changing industries

Director/producer: I am pregnant, expecting my first child in July. This is terrifying time to be bringing a baby into the world emotionally and financially.

Performer: I am unable to seek government support as I am currently in the country on a bridging visa. I have no other work apart from my self-employed music work for over 10 years now

Musician: I am very concerned at what is going to happen post crisis. Musicians are already being exploited by venues. They will have even more excuses to underpay us as they will be struggling. Musicians need to be protected with wages, contracts and work conditions.

Events coordinator: I didn't have a lot of work lined up but had interviews with major event companies that have now been postponed due to COVID-19. I do mostly ad hoc work and try and find work in the lead up which is now impossible in the major event industry, I have been doing it for 3 years and this is the first time I have not had any potential leads or no work in the coming weeks.

Venue worker: I feel like, there is not much support from our workplace or the government at the moment. Everything is closing down yet nobody is really talking about how to compensate for the financial loss.

Lighting technician: I had only just got to a place where I was starting to do full time hours again and have established myself as a freelancer.

Director: I have a very small baby and a toddler and this work was not only financially important, it was mentally important. Going from creating work and directing a major show to being house bound with my 10 week old and 3 year old is a shock to the system. I have had moments where I despair for my industry and my colleagues. I wonder if I will be able to find my way back into an already tough industry if I am already so removed geographically, removed by circumstance (mothering two little ones) and now removed literally.

Cinema worker: I, along with the 40 casual staff at my cinema, and hundreds more across the country, was laid off today as a response to Scott Morrison's ban of indoor gatherings of over 100 people. I have no other form of income.

Lighting crew: I have some savings, which is all my life savings, so I'll be okay for a short amount of time. But having work cut for the foreseeable future and no end in sight, it's dire.

Stage manager/theatre technician: I not only appreciate but welcome these restrictions on group gatherings, but it is disappointing and frightening that the government's main focus has been on the people not being able to attend these events and theatres instead of the three hundred thousand people out of work (which no longer has a title in a department, but seems to employ more people than the mining and transport sectors combined). There has been nothing put in place to help those out of work. The Prime Minister said that we should have savings, but he doesn't understand in this economic climate and the cost of living makes that extremely difficult.

Performer: I now have no business. As a self-employed artist in entertainment and live events, the industry has been wiped out. My business is another casualty.

Freelance makeup: I received an email from Ch7 saying that casuals & Pty Ltd (of which I am both) will not be needed in their rescheduling moving forward.. I have worked as a freelancer on Home & Away since 2011.

Set worker: I understand my financial loss is not comparable to what some will experience, however the money I would have saved by being fed on set was crucial to me paying my car registration, which is equal to about the same amount.

Flyperson: I was to be employed as Head Flyperson on 9-5 which has been delayed indefinitely. This will result in a minimal delay of employment of 2 months and a loss of \$10,000 of income.

Voice worker: I will need to move in with my brother which involves sharing the couch with my mildly disabled son and it means my son not being educated or structured properly which is a huge burden and undoes literally years of therapy

Performer: Our Federal government has made it abundantly clear over the last several years that the Arts community is viewed as a coffer to tap when it needs to divert funding to another source. I currently hold little hope of a lifeline for our community.

Production manager: I've lost \$15,000 plus I had five tenders out and they've all gone, so I'm facing a potential loss of an extra \$30,000

Production assistant: If the large films are unable to come back due to travel restrictions then we should invest in local film makers and low budgets to continue to upskill locals until large films can return.

Lighting: I'm not scared about riding out a couple of months, but if it gets to 6 months and lockdowns continue or social distancing continues, it will mean my work won't come back for a long time. I don't know what I'm going to do, but it's not a great outlook at the moment.

Audio visual technician: There shouldn't be winners and losers in this kind of situation. We will all end up poorer in the long run, culturally and financially.

Sound and lighting technician: I will not be working in this industry again until the virus is mitigated. My average yearly income is around \$40,000, that's what I'm really losing.

Costume worker: My husband and I are both freelancers, now out of work as a result of changes resulting from the corona virus.

Performer: My secondary source of income when I'm not performing is ushering, consequently my secondary job has also been shut down and I am unable to earn an income there.

Props worker: Myself and my partner both work in production. We are now living off a few furniture delivery jobs a week and my partner's minimum wage receptionist job.

Technician: Our industry has been hit harder than any other industry, including travel/airlines. The live event industry has been decimated. A lot of people won't get through this unfortunately.

Performer: Recent graduate who has lost both my casual work in front of house with no payout AND loss of first contracts in the industry.

Musical performer: The avenues I normally turn to in a situation like this (other gigs/freelance work, teaching and odd jobs) are closed due to COVID19.

Sound crew: Our industry is in a position it has never been in before and just like farmers during droughts, fires and floods we need the State and Federal government to provide much need financial assistance to its workers.

Front of house: The fact that the prime Minister has not mentioned the thousands of arts workers who have lost their source of income is despicable.

Cinematography: The loss of a job is nothing new in the industry, it's this paired with the fact that there is no other work available and no idea when work will come in again. The whole industry is dry at the moment and cannot move forward. Usually, we lose a job and think it's all good because something else is just around the corner, now we have no idea.

Actor: No potential work ahead and no flow on from people seeing my work on stage and film for potential future castings.

No savings as work has been sporadic over the past 12 months and as an older female actor many fewer opportunities to begin with.

Artistic director: The arts all over the world are in free fall due to the need for social distancing. I am focusing all my energies on finding casual work & online work to tide us over.

Writer/producer: The arts all over the world are in free fall due to the need for social distancing. I am focusing all my energies on finding casual work & online work to tide us over.

Performer/writer/front of house: This health crisis has had devastating impacts for me and everyone I know in the arts industry. The government must make assistance easily available to freelancers and sole traders otherwise lives, livelihoods and mental health could be at grave risk.

AV Technician: This impacted right when we were going to buy/build our first house using our life savings. Years and years and years of savings will be undone in a matter of months if we do not get support.

Performer: I'm a contractor so I have no income security and I only earn approx. \$400 a week. This job makes up the bulk of the money I use to pay rent. Without it I am no longer able to pay rent without dipping into savings which is a finite resource.

Technician: This is the most stressful time in my life, the industry just shutting down overnight. I hope there can be some concrete info coming soon as to what's going to happen to the entertainment industry and us.

Producer: We can make good money when we can work...and, we pay a lot of tax too on those good years. This makes us budgeting and saving experts, but no one could have predicted this kind of scenario with a whole industry pretty much wiped out and with thousands of casual and freelance workers left with absolutely no where to go.

Sound department: We need assistance from the government, Film and TV/Event sole traders are by far hit the hardest by this. All our work involves the public, we have no other income, no sick leave, no paid leave at all. Bills stacking up and no way to pay them.

Arts management: With no new jobs over the next few months, and many arts orgs facing potential closure, it is unlikely that I will be employed gainfully for quite a long time. I am very anxious about my future.

Actor: With the entire world watching television and streaming channel content. It is abundantly clear we are a necessary, essential and vital industry. We deserve to be acknowledged and offered financial support.

Broadcast technician/vocalist: My income streams complement each other and cushion me from slow downs in either field. It's entirely novel that not only am I now exposed to financial loss across the board, but, and this is the case for most people in the industry, the financial loss is complete, total, everything. I have no other avenues of income.