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Before editing ...

Session 22d - The Future of the Arts

The panel consisted of Stephen Heathcote, Simone Young, Jonathan Mills, Jill Berry and Richard Evans. Helen Nugent moderated the session.

Helen Nugent introduced the session by stating that the key issues to be addressed were the value of the arts; the key issues faced; and approaches for moving forward. In this context she read sections from David Malouf's introduction to the Major Performing Arts Inquiry where he had pointed out the value of the arts to Australia and the Australian community.

Stephen Heathcote emphasised the need to change attitudes towards the arts and to ensure that the relevance to people's everyday life was understood. In this context, he emphasised the need for education in the schools and the education of the media to ensure that the arts were embraced by wide sections of the community.

Simone Young focussed on the conundrum faced by artists between access and excellence. In the case of opera and symphony orchestras in particular, broader access could be achieved through touring. This was politically attractive. However, the financial costs and the burden on artists would increase, potentially eroding excellence on the main stage. She emphasised that without secure long-term, stable funding the economics of major performing arts companies were very difficult indeed.

Jonathan Mills emphasised the key role the arts play in an individual's development, in particular in creative and innovative thinking, so critical to the future of the country. In this context, the role of the arts in the schools was key. However, there had been an adverse impact from the outsourcing of the music in the schools, where "canned music" was often used. He emphasised that evidence existed that auditory pathways in children were encouraged through access to live music. It did not occur in the same way by exposure to electronic sounds. He also stressed the need to draw a distinction between commercial and non-commercial media and the important role the ABC should be playing in encouraging non-commercial arts. Finally, he stressed the importance of a commitment to the commissioning of new works....

After editing...

The Future of the Arts

Panel members in this session discussed the value of the arts and how to make them more relevant to the Australian community. Among the most important issues raised was the perpetual battle for funding to maintain excellence and future growth in the arts. Speakers also identified a need to nurture artistic expression in the school system, as these children are tomorrow's creative thinkers.

According to Dr Helen Nugent AO, who moderated this session, key issues that need to be addressed include ensuring a culture that values the arts and one that takes creative approaches for moving the arts forward. In this context, Dr Nugent read sections of an introduction by David Malouf in the Government's 1999 *Major Performing Arts Inquiry*. A large section of Australia's working population is now employed in the arts, from the work-intensive film industry to opera, theatre, dance and our lively pop music scene.

Mr Malouf observed that when we think of other countries, we bring to mind their identity or style, their contribution to the world through music, literature, film, orchestra or opera. Shouldn't we assume that other countries make the same assessment of Australia? A vibrant and sophisticated arts community shows the world that Australia has a cultural depth and identity to match its dramatic landscape.

Stephen Heathcote AO, a principle artist with The Australian Ballet, emphasised the need to change attitudes towards the arts to ensure that the broader community understands, and benefits from, its relevance to everyday life. He raised the need for more education and understanding of the arts in schools and in the media in order to propel the arts to all sections of the community.

Artists still face a conundrum between achieving access to new markets and developing their reputations through diverse experience, which is largely driven by economics, according to Simone Young AM, Maestro of the Hamburg Opera. In the case of opera, and symphony orchestras in particular, broader access could be achieved through touring, however the financial costs and ensuing strain on artists would increase. Ms Young emphasised that without secure, long-term funding, the economics of sustaining major performing arts companies are very difficult indeed.

The arts are critical to the future of this country, says Australian composer and artistic director, Jonathan Mills. They play a key role in an individual's development, in particular in creative and innovative thinking. Nurturing this link between artistic endeavour and innovation should be an important part of our school system.

Mr Mills said students are being adversely affected when "canned music" replaces live music programs. Children do not achieve the same level of creative growth or music appreciation by exposure to electronic sounds as they might through hands-on experience, and there is evidence to support this.

He also stressed the need to draw a distinction between commercial and non-commercial media and the important role the ABC should be playing by broadcasting non-commercial arts. If Australia is to continue to grow its reputation for excellence in the arts, it is also necessary to make a commitment to the commissioning of new works, Mr Mills said....

More information on Lisa Mitchell's writing at lisamitchell.net.au