

**Submission
No 136**

**INQUIRY INTO THE MUSIC AND ARTS ECONOMY IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Submission to NSW Parliament Committee: the Music and Arts Economy in NSW

- 1) I write as President of Shoalhaven Youth Orchestra (SYO) and also President of Kangaroo Valley Arts Festival (KVAF). SYO is engaged in fostering musical education, engagement and performance in the Shoalhaven generally and KVAF puts on a biennial festival of Music and Sculpture as well as Visual Arts shows and choral workshops.
- 2) I can say with confidence that the interest in music in Shoalhaven and surrounding areas is substantial though hard to appreciate for those not participating in the various groups which are active in the field. A great deal of energy is flowing into these groups from a small number of dedicated volunteers. Equally dedicated are the artists and musicians who, even on thin incomes, manage to support their passion and from time to time provide great delight to those seeing or hearing their works.
- 3) Neither of the organisations I am familiar has an annual turnover above \$200,000 but measurement of economic output in this sector is tricky and I would argue that in making comparisons with the rest of the economy one should try to take other factors into account. This is because so many of the inputs and outputs are not undertaken on a market basis. Kangaroo Valleys Arts Festival's Choir Workshops were priced well below market to encourage what turned out to be an extremely substantial level of interest. And on the other side one can see that customers or consumers of art and music product are often sufficiently pleased by their participation that they support our organisations with significant donations in money and possibly even more significant gifts of their time as volunteers. Community support for Shoalhaven Youth Orchestra is quite humbling. I think this makes it clear that merely by measuring the turnover and formally measurable aspects of arts and music one would be missing some level of customer satisfaction which would normally be included in a rigorous pricing approach, but in this sector is covered in other ways which make it harder to measure.

What role should government take in these fields, especially when such groups are already at work?

- 4) In NSW music education is poorly served. This is particularly true in early childhood and primary education, where teachers are generalists and the hours devoted to music in university teacher training have been severely reduced over a number of decades. There is always competition for time in a crowded curriculum but the present condition, in which music has been marginalised in many schools, will produce a sad outcome for future generations. There is substantial empirical evidence demonstrating that children participating in high quality music education during early childhood, a period when the brain is highly plastic, show improved skills in language development and particular phonological abilities needed to develop literacy. Additionally children participating in music have been found to have improved skills in a range of other cognitive abilities needed for learning in all subject areas, when compared to 'non-musician' children. At a time when governments and policymakers are focused on ensuring education prepares students for a complex and changing world by developing higher order cognitive abilities, it is counterproductive not to ensure that music, particularly in school and community music making are appropriately supported and funded. Music, being by its nature often a collaborative pursuit, also acts as a socialising force, serving as part of the glue which holds our communities together. Some of these benefits have been more widely appreciated after the publicity given to El Sistema, the approach which took children from impoverished families in Venezuela and created a very creditable orchestra and of course lifted the educational results and capabilities of the

children enormously (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Sistema). It has now been experienced by about 700,000 children worldwide.

- 5) Copying this example directly would not necessarily be the most productive course. However re-examination of the place of music in the curriculum and seeking opportunities to expand its funding in all schools, rather than a select few, would benefit the children and communities while improving educational results generally. In this area I would suggest that the level of community support for music education seems high, and in consequence such a move would be largely welcomed and appreciated.
- 6) Social media and hand held screens in general are taking an ever greater role in young people's lives. An activity which requires human interaction and skill, such as music, which also offers new and varied opportunities for socialisation, gathers significant support from parents and the community in general.
- 7) Given the existing level of engagement in music performance and education by volunteers, I advocate moving government funding support towards a co-funding model. The existing widely used model of offering grants and attempting to allocate them wisely and under a tolerable governance framework is cumbersome and inefficient. Offering funds, subject to fitting bureaucratically determined criteria, may also create a new, artificial, demand for art or music which is poorly supported in the community. The current process to obtain relatively small amounts of money, \$1,000 or \$2,000, involves significant amounts of paperwork being generated and reviewed. The alternative is to offer co-funding at some acceptable ratio to suitable organisations, thus leveraging the sums which are made available by private sector parties, who will generally be targeting their funds in a thoughtful manner.
- 8) I would also like to endorse existing programs which assist Sydney based performance groups in making regional tours by supporting their educational activities. A number of groups such as Australian Haydn Ensemble and Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra have engaged in very helpful training of young players as part of their educational outreach programs. This offers financial support to outstanding current performing artists while fostering and motivating young players in Youth Orchestras. This approach is simply excellent.
- 9) Funding of the Arts in NSW remains over concentrated on Sydney. Small orchestras, such as Steel City Strings in Wollongong and Orchestra Nova in Newcastle, are much loved, but struggle to obtain the sponsorship which large populations make available to their metropolitan counterparts. Government intervention to ensure their continued flourishing is a worthwhile investment in the communities concerned.
- 10) Almost all organisations fostering music or the arts are volunteer organisations. Most of them struggle to ensure they meet their reporting obligations correctly. Any support which could be given to assist them in discharging their formal obligations would be helpful and might help them raise sometimes variable standards of governance. A central point of contact to put such organisations in touch with legal or accounting advice, often available for free if one knows where to look, would be helpful.