


Helen Tuckey



I make this submission in my personal capacity, noting that I am

- ☐ a member of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra
- ☐ Western Australia Branch President (Musicians) of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) for Musicians Australia
- ☐ An AMEB examiner and syllabus writer
- ☐ a private studio music teacher
- ☐ a member of ASME (Australian Society for Music Education), WAMTA (West Australian Music Teachers Association), the Australian Music Centre and AUSTA (the Australian Strings Association) and affiliated organisations in Europe and America, (ESTA and ASTA), and the Australian and New Zealand and American viola societies.
- ☐ a committee member and immediate past State and National President of AUSTA

The Australian music scene is going from strength to strength in many ways, also faces many new challenges. These vary greatly within the industry, so my submission is drawn from my experience. Apologies if it goes to the mundane in places, but this is the nitty-gritty of challenges that we face in our daily professional lives that we would like to see addressed.

Sustainability and growth of the industry

I am a musician who has worked as a full-time professional viola player in Australian orchestras in three states since the late 1970s. During this time, as Australia has grown, more AFL teams have arrived, (our orchestra had the honour of playing with the Birds of Tokyo at the Grand Final in Perth) yet the number of positions in fulltime professional orchestras has not increased. As the cities have grown, the work for orchestras has increased and is now stretched thin and we struggle with budgets, as the basic federal funding model dates from the middle of the last century. Orchestras are not ever meant to be economically rational – but currently they are being edged out of the public domain into being objects of charity, hobbies for wealthy people, and opportunities for big companies to do their “greenwashing”. The history of the big civic symphony orchestras comes from the tradition of the growth of the middle class in the Industrial Revolution. Our Australian orchestras undertake an enormous variety of activities as well as concerts, and the “elite” tag is untrue (as well as playing at the Grand Final, I have played in remote indigenous communities, schools, jails, detention centres, factories, school of the air, hospitals, old people’s homes, day-care centres, kindergartens, special education units). Our orchestra plays alongside adult amateurs, youth orchestras, university music students and students from ANAM. Despite the high level of performance needed to join an orchestra, involving countless hours of practice over many years, an ‘elite’ tag can be a great barrier to us maintaining truly sustainable funding from government sources, as now, neither side of politics seems to look particularly favourably on funding us sustainably, from either side of politics, instead, preferring us to go out there and become pseudo-charities as well. This new way that philanthropy and arts sponsorship has been operating is also proving to be at times extremely messy ethically, and lacks transparency in terms of messaging, partnerships, extra expectations on musicians and public accountability.

Australian orchestras became full-time and professional under the guise of “Broadcasting” – an Australian musical voice to inform, educate and entertain – and we were there to be accessible for all Australians. I strongly believe we should continue to be funded federally for this purpose. We should take greater care to maintain and let our cultural legacy prosper, not wither, or let it go out to

tender without vigilance, due process and accountability. Currently there is quite a growth in levels of management and management positions to service these new pseudo-businesses with their unelected boards - with no share-holders, audience or player representatives - while the number of musicians is shrinking. The business model that has been thrust upon the Australian professional orchestral sector with divestment, needs to be examined again to see if it is really delivering the goods artistically and accountably for our whole community.

Suitability and location of venues for organisers, participants, and attendees

I have worked in the West Australian Symphony Orchestra for over 40 years. In this time, Perth has changed as a city. The concert hall in Perth has the best acoustics in Australia. It also has some structural problems due to building issues at the site and has concrete cancer and other issues such as not complying with safety standards of today for safe audience exits. Next year, the concert hall will close for renovations. The players have been kept somewhat in the loop about this as far as allowable by the State government, who, along with Federal, is contributing to this. So far, months out – no information available on how we are expected to manage loss of box office venue, as there is no other venue suitable in our city of same audience capacity. The players have never been invited to comment on plans or meet directly with the builders. Will there be enough toilets backstage? Unlike the current green room, there seems to be no single area large enough for the orchestra to assemble socially in the breaks. There are very strong concerns about lack of parking for players and audience. Poor public transport availability at night and working split shifts puts an enormous burden on players, in terms of stress, time spent commuting and safety going to and from work. Some players are opting to ride bikes – so far we have lost one player (not killed, but can never play again after a car ran a red light and knocked him off his bike) and there have been other accidents.

His Majesty's Theatre, where we play regularly for opera and ballet, does not have a dishwasher in the backstage area of the pit, despite all the Covid hygiene protocols. Millions of dollars were recently spent on new gorgeous historic balconies – but in a 15m break, the players still crowd around the one small sink to quickly rinse mugs (the sink arrived 4 years ago and we held a "Sink" party to celebrate - prior to that, players carried buckets of water up and downstairs to fill urns). The area around the theatre has paid public parking which gridlocks after each performance, adding potentially 30-45m sitting in car waiting to exit. If you park further away, the walk is often past many people sleeping on the streets, tragically, but also some on meth to be careful of. The bus may or may not be good, depending on timetables and your destination.

It's been great to see some new, fabulous arts venues in regional centres, (Albany, Karratha) – we would like to tour more often, as when we go, it is always so well attended.

It's astonishing that Perth, with fabulous outdoor climate, has not got the equivalent venue to the Myer Bowl – a venue near public transport, huge capacity, with proper facilities dedicated for music performance. We play on temporary stages erected in various parks in the metro and suburban areas. We have played on stages built over ponds (Kings Park – lovely, but limited audience capacity and environmental preservation vs parking concerns), a stage built over a swimming pool in Port Hedland many years ago, and once on an outdoor stage at Cable Beach. All these temporary stages are dependent on amplification and the vagrancies of weather conditions for sound quality, unlike a dedicated outdoor concert venue.

Artist development and career pathways

Many of us choose to develop our career and work outside the orchestra for several reasons

- financial necessity – so we can afford accommodation with room and space to practice at home, to pay for and maintain our own instruments of quality, and to pay for our professional development.
- to build our skills as musicians in areas that the orchestra may not have the scope or willingness to do so, such as appearing as guest soloists with community orchestras, running concert series of chamber music and solo recitals. Our rewarding work in the music education sector may include teaching our instruments in the private studio, school and university sector, music examination for the AMEB, adjudicating Eisteddfods, coaching youth orchestras, conducting, voluntary committee work on community not-for-profit music education organisations, presenting music in small groups.

At times, the orchestra may choose to then use these externally developed skills, however, many times they are overlooked. The job definitions currently focus on orchestral playing, which is based on a very traditional model of work, with a fixed number of positions at every level. Dividing orchestral skills and assessing who is and isn't worthy of certain pathways and/or further pay is extremely complex and fraught with many problems. In WASO there is \$10,000 funding provided by the Patrons for up to four players in a year for professional development. There have certainly been a wide range of activities that players have undertaken. Who assesses this, and the measurable benefits are not totally clear. Contrast this with teachers, who are required to do X hours of professional development per year to remain registered. Or management, where PD is provided by the employer. Players have been included here also in areas such as first aid, fire safety and OH & S training. I have been involved with providing professional development for string teachers and players through my voluntary work for many years with the Australian Strings Association, including a time as National President. However, all professional development has a major challenge in that it is not formally part of our work – it's a nice add-on if you can manage it, but for most professional development, players must use their own personal paid or unpaid leave. The demise of the ABC in Perth has also reduced the opportunities for broadcasting and recording. When I joined WASO in 1982, some players would earn the equivalent of about a quarter of their WASO income in recording and broadcasting chamber music for radio. In my earlier career as casual in MSO, there was a considerable amount of TV work as well. In WA in the 1980s and 1990s, I participated in recordings of chamber music for TV and radio. When I look at ABC iView today, the musical offerings there are so slim and there are hardly ever any new ones going up. With this demise of opportunities for recording and broadcasting, we are losing both the skills of the recording engineers and another important career pathway for musicians, not to mention keeping a tangible record of what we have done.

Local economic benefits

The city of Perth is undergoing many changes at present. We see empty offices and shopfronts, new glitzy waterfront hotels, a CBD that shuts down after dark, lots of buildings going up in some areas, and public transport that requires frequent changes of mode – from train to bus, from one bus to another. The Perth Concert Hall precinct has Government House on one side (heritage listed, with large garden, closed at night), a glamorous hotel on the other side. On the city side, over the road is an empty block of land where people camp at night. The shopfronts include coffee shops and other businesses, closed at night, but the lights from the massage parlours are blinking well into the evening. The river side contains a large car park for the audience to supplement what is currently available underneath. Much of this will change with the redevelopment. The precinct certainly has challenges, which we all hope will turn into opportunities, including for local economic benefits. It would be nice to be able to have a haircut, visit a chemist, supermarket, get our instruments repaired and maintained, teach our students, have a variety of healthy food choices near where we work, hopefully this will happen with the new development but as musicians and

workers in this area, we have not been a party to the whole planning vision of the precinct, unfortunately.

When the orchestra tours, we need transport, accommodation, and food. Often there are chances for shopping and tourism, so this also benefits local communities. Orchestral touring benefits our regional economies in many respects. Our schedule, number of musicians employed plus costs of transport within the state seems to be making touring much more difficult today than in the past. Employing more musicians would make this much more feasible, as outlined in the Vickery report which spelt the demise of the WA Arts Orchestra on the basis that positions in WASO would grow soon thereafter to 'a minimum of 100 players' followed by even more growth (which has not happened). Tangible benefits to the local economy can also be the empowerment of local music and music education in those regions on a long-term basis, which in turn will have social, health and economic benefits. Consider only one formula - more music = better mental health = less jails. The impact of the Bungarun orchestra in the leprosarium near Derby in the Kimberley in the 1950s-70s had a long term impact on health, education and more. Yet WASO has only visited the Kimberley once as a whole orchestra, but we visited China twice.

Audience development and consumer behaviours

Orchestral audiences are vital stakeholders that are currently not being listened to systematically or methodically. Much more could be learnt about our audience members, including: Are they tourists? How did they find out about the concert? What instruments do you or your family members play, or did you play? What composers or particular works would you like to hear more of? Incentives for information could also be offers of free tickets at times that suited the orchestra. This data if consistently collected and integrated well by management, could help us in our outreach, marketing and artistic planning. In the distant past, there were "Subscribers Committees". Being a subscriber was seen as a thing of prestige. Perhaps it's time that a Loyalty Program/Frequent Flyer model could be explored and integrated in some way with subscription or purchases over X dollars in a year, with benefits such as short-notice offers of extra free seats to subscribers for concerts that are undersold. That way, the converted would be bringing in new consumers.

After-concert refreshment practices have changed. Many years ago there was one bar at the concert hall and lots of tables, and anyone and everyone could go there. In recent years, there are now different lounges for different groups – Patrons, Sponsors and so forth. So, the average audience member, who may in fact as a subscriber, have paid more over the years than the latest sponsor, will never get to rub shoulders with the soloist or conductor at the bar. The players are dispersed between the different lounges, too. I don't think this segmentation of players, conductors, soloists and audiences is conducive to promoting a feeling of belonging or celebration after a concert.

Barriers to growing the Australian industry, both domestically and internationally, including those relating to export

The product that we produce is either live or recorded. Selling recordings and streaming is an area of great complexity and debate and others will articulate much more strongly than I can in this area. Exporting means touring musicians – and the value of this is to promote Australia as ambassadors of our own culture, in every genre of music. In my sector, there have been several 'anniversary' celebrations of the Australian Youth Orchestra tour to China in 1979 and the Melbourne Youth Orchestra tour to Europe in 1973. Comparing memories of these tours with my tours as a professional musician, I would say that in general, due to the way the tours were planned and the purpose behind them, that we were able to be much better ambassadors on the youth orchestra tours. We gained more cultural understanding and contacts. On all my professional tours, we met no

professional musicians from the countries we visited. We heard no local musicians as part of our tour. The audiences for the youth orchestra tours were huge and the ticket prices reasonable. We got to listen to performances by local artists, by other youth and professional orchestras and taken to places of cultural significance. Not so for the professional tours – they seemed to be more for the benefit of the sponsors and those who accompanied us rather than the places we were visiting, with sometimes limited attendance even by local audiences. Symbolically this disconnect happened most of all in the receptions, where with the youth orchestras, we were all invited and met local musicians and dignitaries, with speeches and refreshments and a chance to even exchange addresses and subsequently Christmas cards for many years, but not so on the professional tours, where we were whisked back to our hotels while sponsors and board members and upper echelons of management attended the celebrations.

If we want to grow music when we travel, we need to share it with the communities we visit, whether regional Australia or overseas, and let musicians connect with each other before, during and after these visits as part of the structured opportunity with the tour. Making this a part of business will build sustainability and foster creativity and relationships within Australia and overseas.

We need to foster Australian creativity much more, so Australian music can join staples of our symphonic repertoire on the main stage. So much great Australian music from the past century is completely inaccessible to even listen to, due to the mismanagement of our sound archives. The scandalous neglect of Australian recorded musical cultural legacy needs to be addressed - where is the “archive” that we sign our rights away to on a regular basis, and on entering every Australian professional orchestra - surely as this is our music – our cultural material paid for with public money, so we should all be able to access it? Many past recordings are completely inaccessible or have vanished and places like the Australian Music Centre, which should be the prime repository with the demise of ABC Concert Music, operates as well as it can, but on a shoestring. How can students explore “Australian” content if the collections are so scant and incomplete? All institutions are tasked with an obligation to include more Australian content, but due to no extra resources for this, it is not easy to achieve (having just gone through the process of adding more Australian content into the new AMEB viola syllabus last year).

Barriers to building sustainability in the industry, domestically and internationally

The biggest barriers to building sustainability is political lack of excitement about the significant benefits that music could bring to our whole society. We need to harness with greater skill the confidence and vision to fund music so that it can prosper sustainably throughout Australia. Let's have greater equity nationally in funding, and have our resources managed in a truly professional proper way – a good music education at every postcode, iconic venues and funding and good management of Australian musicians properly across the country so that many more people can reap the massive benefits we offer in so many ways. Accountability and ethics are vital too in expenditure of public money - we also need the ability to discern and the guts to call out the parasites, charlatans and humbuggers. We no longer accept advertising from the tobacco industry. Why are our arts institutions being obliged through government policy to provide advertising and branding platforms for destroyers of rock art, polluters, human rights violators, fossil fuel companies? Managing our cultural legacy well for future generations means consistently involving musicians well in the process, and working with dedication, courage and vision. Better models of governance are sorely needed, alongside more funding. Think big - it can happen, let's consider the career of Taylor Swift not as a threat but as an inspiration for how musicians can run their own careers with values to the fore.