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Senator David Johnston
The President
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia
Attention: Committee Secretary (Dr Dermody)

Senator Johnston,
Australian Major Performing Arts Group welcomes the Senate Committee's timely commitment to inquire into the role of cultural diplomacy in its broader look at public diplomacy.

Introduction

Whether labelled as "soft power", image building, or branding, Australian culture, and international perceptions of it, makes an increasingly important contribution to Australian diplomatic objectives. Live, visual and recorded arts are now an integral part of conveying national culture and policy agendas to people across national boundaries.

While Australian arts events don't have the international impact of an Academy Awards night, and the Cultural Olympiad has moved to new hosts, our producer companies are increasingly sought out as creative storytellers and performers of exciting and world class work by audiences in Asia, Europe and the Americas.

Over the next few years, the Australian Government should support cultural diplomacy to meet a goal that audiences come not to be surprised that Australian art is of world standards, but because they expect to be excited, enriched and extended by Australian live performance. This is the logical and useful development of the growing interest in Australian culture.

Although live performance does not have the immediate potential to reach as many people as a recorded performance, the more intense nature of audience engagement with live performance is likely to create major impact. Australian diplomats are already skilled in using touring by performing arts companies as opportunities to leverage meetings and discussion with business and government. Media coverage and marketing of major events like festivals allows fosters further understanding of

the “story” of Australia as a creative, diverse and innovative culture in mass audiences.

Our reputation for cultural excellence, innovation and diversity exemplifies and extends the similar reputation of Australian business and financial activities.

Recommendation

AMPAG believes funding for both Australia Council and DFAT programs should be substantially increased to reflect the high costs of touring. One-off occasional tours are not enough to build a long term creative brand for Australia, while those companies specialising in international work operate under severe financial that limit to the amount of touring they can responsibly commit to.

Rationale

The Committee has formal submissions by both the Australia Council for the Arts and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the policy objectives and outcomes of their public diplomacy programs. AMPAG does not intend to traverse this territory other than to say the Australia Council’s support has been of enormous value in growing the range of international relationships which now underpin touring by a diverse group of Australian producer companies. The AICC has also been a useful innovation in building Australia’s international reputation.

This support has aided in forming a great network of contacts around major venues and festivals across the world.

Over the past decade many major Australian companies have made international touring a core part of their activities. The Australia Council has classified three AMPAG companies as international companies with a funding model aimed at supporting the high cost of reaching international audiences from Australia while many more have participated in Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade cultural events. Recently Austrade has also shown practical interest in broadening its programs to include cultural businesses (for profit and non profit).

This growing capacity to tour and plan provides a strong base to leverage future cultural diplomacy campaigns. To take two recent examples: The Australia Ballet’s successful tour to Shanghai late last year and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra tour to Europe this year arose from invitations from international venues but grew into opportunities for both business supporters and Australian embassies to create important meetings and discussions. There is enormous potential to do more because of the interest in Australian performance already evident.

However costs of taking Australian artists to international venues have increased substantially since the September 11, 2001 events shook the world. Insurance, travel costs, security have made international cultural diplomacy more expensive at the very time that cross cultural knowledge is vital for building Australian security. If the Committee wishes to have further information we can give you examples of the impact on member companies who constantly juggle touring commitments and refuse invitations to key festivals and venues in order to meet financial budgets.

The funding sources are scattered across Federal and state departments. Often Government support is important in securing corporate sponsorship and philanthropic donation rather than covering all costs – but it needs to be quick and flexible if the leverage opportunities are to be realised.

The new funding for cultural diplomacy should be administered through the Australia Council so that an international network of contacts can be nourished, as well as through the DFAT which tends to see emphasis on one country or region at a time in its public diplomacy campaigns.

Cultural diplomacy funding should allow the international companies to tour at least at break even budgets (without subsidising costs from domestic work) and to allow more companies, including the symphony orchestras to tour regularly. It should also encourage cultural tourism to this country – which requires a significant presence in tourist source countries.

The collaboration and knowledge developed in programs like Asialink have also been successful in adding a new layer of relationships between cultures for instance between people in Australia and Indonesia. Collaboration of artists across international barriers has always been a feature of creative industries in Australia (and vital for development of opera and music in particular), but in recent years the programs developed with formal policy links to cultural diplomacy has allowed extra depth and reach.

While it is rare to see the fusion of Australian arts, physical competitiveness, technological and organisations skills so evident in a major event like the Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Olympic games, the impact this had on international public opinion is a reminder of what we are capable of achieving in projecting our creativity internationally.



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Australian Major Performing Arts Group

AMPAG is the umbrella group for the major performing arts companies. It has identified international touring and exchange as a key responsibility for its members.

As producers of live performance, the AMPAG companies are an essential element in creating a vibrant cultural life for Australians. They are committed to bringing the brilliance and range of talent in Australian performing arts to as wide an audience as possible.

The Australian Major Performing Arts Group represents 28 member companies from six States. The companies produce music, drama, dance, opera and circus for international and Australian audiences.

AMPAG provides a national voice and presence for the companies. Box office and private support provide more than half of companies' income, but subsidy is necessary to provide access across such a large country and to take the work of Australian artists to audiences around the world.

AMPAG Member companies:

Adelaide Symphony Orchestra,
Australian Brandenburg Orchestra
Australian Chamber Orchestra*,
Bangarra Dance Theatre,
Black Swan Theatre Company,
Circus Oz*,
Company B,
Malthouse Theatre,
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra,
Melbourne Theatre Company,
Musica Viva Australia#,
Opera Australia,
Opera Queensland,
Orchestra Victoria,

Queensland Ballet,
The Queensland Orchestra,
Queensland Theatre Company,
State Opera South Australia,
State Theatre Co of South Australia,
Sydney Dance Company*,
Sydney Symphony,
Sydney Theatre Company,
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra,
The Australian Ballet,
The Bell Shakespeare Company,
The West Australian Opera,
West Australian Ballet,
West Australian Symphony
Orchestra

*Designated as an international company by the Cultural Ministers Council (10 of the other companies also toured over 2006 and 2007. Others have regular international artists exchange.)

#Provided services to DFAT touring Australian fine music soloists and ensembles in conjunction with embassies over multi year contracts.