

## **#FreeTheArts Adelaide Meeting**

Thursday 17 September 2015, 6-8pm  
Adelaide Festival Centre

Organised by: Arts Industry Council of SA and #FreeTheArts Adelaide members  
Facilitator: Anne Dunn

What's happening in #FreeTheArts now (from Norm Horton, Feral Arts)

- Sector gatherings happening nationally, following first forum in Canberra
- Sector is coming together – independents, small-to-medium organisations and larger companies; artists and arts administrators; across art forms
- Current issues are lifting us out of our own individual crises, and into whole sector discussions
  - There have been efforts by Brandis to divide national sector (consciously or otherwise)
- 3 core elements coming out strongly in #FreeTheArts discussions
  - Arts funding, arts policy, arts advocacy
- Chronic underfunding of the arts is being covered up by shuffling existing funding, without growth in total amount available
- Destructiveness of current arts minister Brandis, who has disregarded the significant work put into the restructure of the Australia Council grant system in 2014
- Political environment is unpredictable and changing rapidly
  - Can't align arts issues with one major party or the other
  - Need a long term vision that is bipartisan
- Arts sector needs to start to set agenda ourselves; can't rely on others to do that for us
  - Opportunity now to "fix this thing properly" re: arts funding
- Senate Inquiry
  - Recommendations that come out of inquiry can't lead to reversal of decision on NPEA
  - It can make government uncomfortable about decisions already made
  - It can deal with immediate impact of this process on artists in Australia; companies are already falling over from NPEA changes, so need to ask for help to pay for transitional costs to help artists through this time
- For survival, companies are needing to apply to NPEA
- #FreeTheArts has the aim to not have any company/artist 'fall over' during this time
- Companies who get funded have a responsibility to support others and share resources
- Need to work to find a way to get through this, and make us stronger as a sector
  - There is maybe 3-5 years of work in this
  - As a result, the sector will be more independent, viable, sustainable
  - Bringing together individuals to be part of something bigger – but still maintaining individual identity
- Investment in arts is low compared to other sectors
  - Without growth in funding, there is no way of growing sector
- Key message of #FreeTheArts: Put money back into Australia Council, so it can do its job – if NPEA continues to exist, its funding should be in addition to Australia Council's previous funding

Group discussions, facilitated by Anne Dunn

- Context – Senator Brandis:
  - Took money from Australia Council budget to form National Program of Excellence in the Arts (NPEA)
  - As a result, reduced capacity of Australia Council to deliver six year funding, along with other programs (ArtStart was one of the first casualties, which had previously had a great impact on emerging artists)
  - Australia Council has estimated that half of funded companies will go
- Questions and issues around NPEA
  - Will politics be involved in decision making for grant recipients, or based on merit?
  - NPEA final guidelines aren't released yet – for now, individuals can't apply, but feedback on draft guidelines might result in change that they can be auspiced
  - NPEA doesn't allow for operational funding– companies would need to find other funding to keep going (reduces sector infrastructure)
  - Will there be genuine peer assessment? Concerns expressed that general public are eligible to assess, who may not be familiar with arts sector – this isn't 'peer'
  - From a successful peer assessment applicant: Grant assessment process appears to be a 'rolling process', with question asked: "How many applications can you assess a month?"
- In discussions, it's critical to talk about key organisations affected, but also other smaller organisations and groups that had utilised funded artists
- Arts 'brain drain' from SA may occur even further
- Small-to-medium organisations do a lot of touring – majors needed the additional touring funding to get up to that level
- #FreeTheArts meetings are happening with the support of the major companies
  - AMPAG itself has said money for NPEA should not come from Australia Council's funds
- Clarification around major companies
  - Funding for majors has been quarantined
  - No extra money going automatically to majors from money taken out of Australia Council
  - Majors will be able to apply to NPEA, especially for touring
- Support is being requested for transition period – But what are companies transitioning to? To survive long enough to see a change of government?
- Arts industry (artists, workers) need to look after themselves in this battle
  - Fatigue – need to look out for our well-being
  - Stress of already trying to survive with low pay, then also trying to save the sector
- Take ownership of funding issue as a sector; put together a proper case
  - Focus beyond 'my organisation', how 'my work' will continue, and think whole sector
- Need to get public voice concerned, beyond our own arts voice
  - This affects communities, families, audiences, Australian culture overall
  - Arts empowers communities; by reducing arts, reduces the voices of communities
  - Commit to tell one person a week – make it a bigger responsibility / everyone's problem
- In times of uncertainty and strain, arts should be funded more, not less
- Be careful to not mix messages, especially with Senate Inquiry ; need to tackle issues differently
  - 1) Concern about money moved to NPEA (Senate Inquiry focus)
  - 2) Need for more money in the arts generally

- Campaigning of politicians
  - Elected representatives are meant to reflect what their constituents want (eg. culture)
  - Shift conversation from policy (as parties may not be able to share a policy) – instead, focus on promoting that they can share a vision
  - Put pressure on your local MP on this issue; especially in marginal seats
  - Show arts muscle and demonstrate that community is behind us – community who vote for them will be affected
  - Only Greens appear to have an arts policy
- Local government
  - Local councils can get stats on local artists numbers; help to mobilise community
  - #FreeTheArts could send letter to LGA (representing local councils) to get them onside
- AICSA is currently working on a 40 Year Vision document since Nov 2014 – but now isn't the right time to release in this environment
  - Soon to release a Creative Boom report, which focussed on four segments of creative sector
- #FreeTheArts movement needs an elevator pitch
  - #FreeTheArts sounds like it comes from 'within' the sector; need something outsiders can identify with too
  - Need a campaign like "Imagine without" – highlight to general public what art is (as they may not realise that it's art they're consuming in their everyday lives; eg. film, entertainment, books, music)
  - Run a marketing campaign for audiences – get them involved and affect who they vote for
  - Use info that arts is at the heart of economy; a fast growing sector for employment
  - Find allies outside of the arts itself
- Majors companies having funding protected does promote elitism in the arts
  - Brandis is meeting with people, but those are usually AMPAG
  - Need solidarity across the sector in these issues
- Australia Council's role
  - Need to see Australia Council as more than just a funding body; it does consultation, has a vision, maintains statistics
  - We need to build Australia Council up again; send support to our Australia Council contacts
  - Australia Council also needs to fight for itself too; some of the arts sector's exhaustion has been as a result of fighting for Australia Council
  - Australia Council feels constrained and needs to be careful that they are not criticising government, as they are an arm of the government

#### Going forward

- #FreeTheArts – an internal phrase; how do we make it with external view?
- National meeting happening in Sydney, 6 Nov
- Those leading the push need to be representative of all of the industry; bring together the 'tiny islands' of disparate small sections of the sector
- Adelaide #FreeTheArts leaders (self-nominated at end of meeting)
  - Local sector needs to support this group and adopt a shared responsibility to organise own spontaneous, anarchic advocacy within individual companies/groups
  - AICSA will continue to promote and support what is happening; act as a catalyst to activating sector (be the start of the conversation), within realities of limited available resources