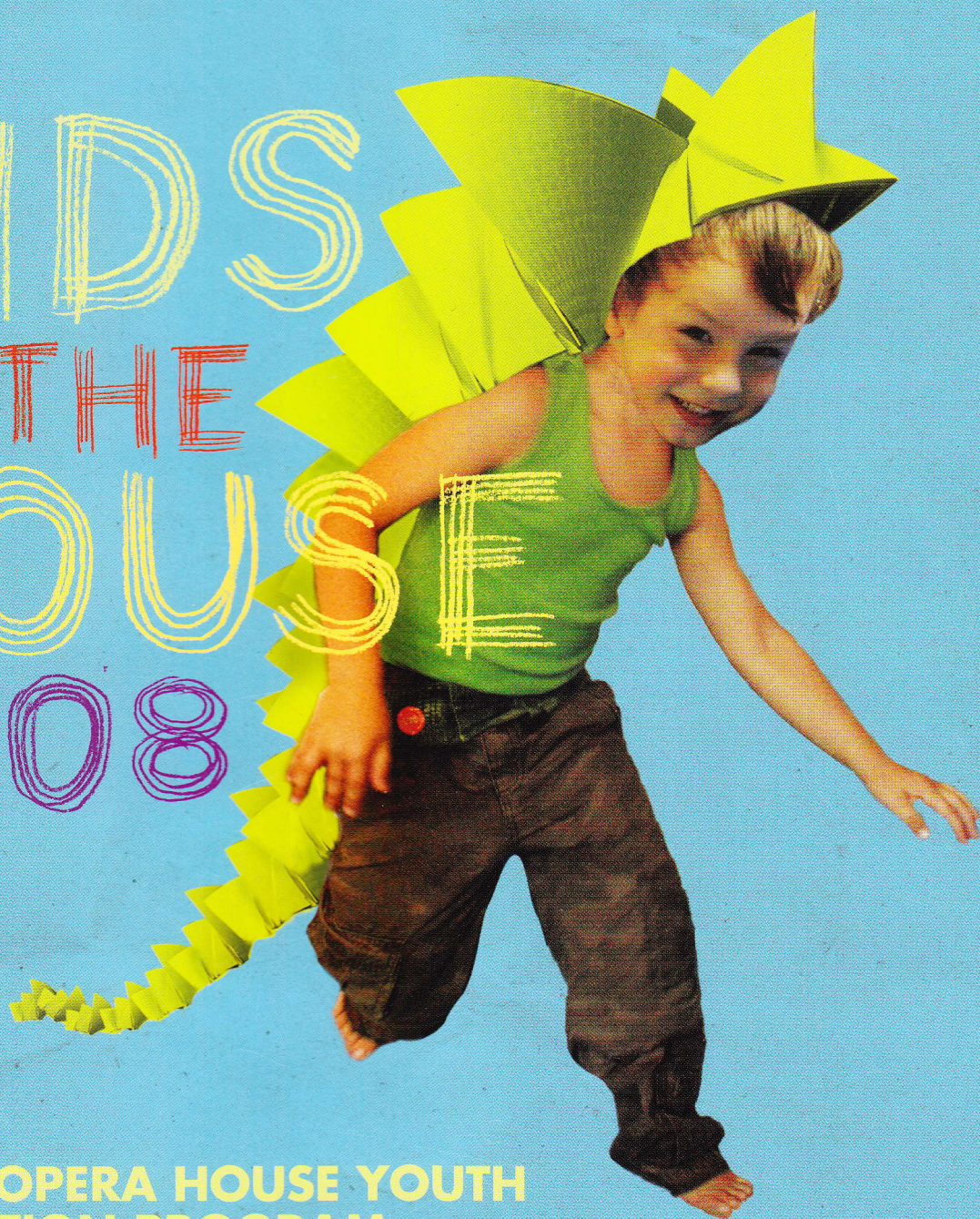


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The Give And Take Of Arts Funding:

arts funding in Queensland

By Saffron Benner

The introduction of a new arts business funding model has changed the way Queensland companies operate - perhaps for good. Saffron Benner explores the latest funding outcomes for the state's s2m arts organisations.

| 2high Festival 2007; photography by Aaron Veryard and Ivy Shambitt
- photography Nicholas Martin

The 2007 outcomes of Arts Queensland's new s2m (small to medium) 'flexible funding model' were significant and widely reported after seven organisations were inaugural recipients but fourteen longstanding organisations lost their operational funding. Others were reduced from triennial to annual status.

As reported by Youth Arts Queensland in the last issue of Lowdown (Dec/Jan 2008), companies to lose their operational funding include: Arts Law Centre of Queensland (ALCQ), the Queensland Arts Council (QAC), Brisbane Multicultural Arts Centre (BEMAC), Extensions Youth Dance Company (Townsville), Frank Theatre, Hands on Art, Kooemba Jdarra Theatre Company, Queensland Community Arts Network (QCAN), Tropic Sun Theatre Company (Townsville), and Vulcana Women's Circus. Expressions Dance Company was also controversially downgraded to annual funding.

Arts Queensland says the 2007-2009 Sector Plan funding priorities were specifically aimed at reinvigorating and sustaining the small to medium arts sector. The new funding priorities were developed by Arts Queensland in consultation with the arts sector include:

- Increasing support and infrastructure for regional organisations and artists
- Developing audiences
- Increasing international touring and export of Queensland arts products
- Developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture
- Strengthening the growth and viability of the arts sector:

While none of these key priorities specifically mention children, youth, or education, many companies who received ongoing or increased funding have a youth arts focus, including Backbone Youth Arts, Catalyst Youth Arts, La Luna Youth Arts, Youth Arts Queensland (YAQ), Contact Inc., and Queensland Youth Orchestras. Others, such as Metro Arts and first time recipient Zen Zen Zo have longstanding histories of supporting new and emerging artists and engaging (although not exclusively) younger audiences.

However, many de-funded or decreased companies also either directly support and engage young and emerging artists and audiences (such as Hands on Art and Extensions) or include them as part of their broader programs and services (such as Expressions), and appear to comply with Arts Queensland's new priorities. Most de-funded companies claim to have been given no clear justifications for the outcomes and several believe the assessment process was non-transparent.

The creative business development approach prioritised by the Queensland Government is in line with national and international trends of arts policies based on cultural economics; prioritising sustainability and entrepreneurialism in the creative industries. In an article for *The Australian* (December 6, 2007), Queensland Arts Minister Rod Welford stated that the new criteria were designed to generate a sectoral shift from 'handout mentality to business building'. The funding outcomes have certainly highlighted the 2007-2009 Sector Plan's themes and strategies, such as strengthening partnerships and collaboration, to build sustainability.

However, the situation still raises the problematic issue of how governments evaluate the arts. How exactly do Arts Queensland's funding policies, focussed on productivity and outcomes, encompass less quantifiable themes such as 'promoting a diverse, dynamic creative culture, or 'capitalising on Queensland's unique characteristics' by telling 'Queensland stories'? Why did some organisations seem to 'fit' the new priorities but not others? Were companies clear about what the new priorities meant and how they would effect funding decisions? And what long term impact could the outcomes have on the sector?

Evaluation: Product v Process

Outwardly, it seems that many de-funded or downgraded organisations were service providers rather than production companies. QCAN's Bronwyn Jewell thinks that Arts Queensland does not understand what these organisations do, (wrongly) considering them to have a 'social justice' focus. She believes Arts Queensland decided to 'rationalise' service organisations with 'social outcomes', because they are over-represented in the sector and perceived as 'welfare' oriented. Jewell considers Arts Queensland's interpretation of audience development and engagement as quantifiable participation, not 'social engagement'.

Liz Burcham (Metro Arts) admits she was 'surprised' at the apparent backlash on service organisations. She sees advantages to funding priorities that focus on sustainability, but thinks Arts Queensland haven't necessarily supported or valued the processes that make it possible. For example, despite Metro's successful triennial application, their innovative Biz Arts Makers (BAM) program was not funded. BAM is a unique program providing arts business skills for sustainable practice. 'Metro Arts has been rewarded for its creative development program but not for programs that support artists' sustainability or professional development'.

Cate Collopy (Hands on Art) agrees that Arts Queensland does not appear to understand 'what the real needs of artists are to help them create sustainable practice and develop audiences'. She believes the government recognises the importance of investing in young and emerging artists and audiences, but doesn't sufficiently understand what the arts industry does or how it works. 'They are still asking the sector questions about how they should address young people's participation in the arts and cutting established services before having any new ones in place to replace them with', she says.

Out with the old and in with the new?

One of the main aims of s2m was to increase Arts Queensland's 'capacity to support new organisations'. While congratulations to newly funded companies has been widespread and heartfelt, there have also been questions about the price the industry has paid for their inclusion. Lorna Hempstead (Tropic Sun), believes that the new criteria and funding has

been prioritised at the expense of older, more established organisations and artists.

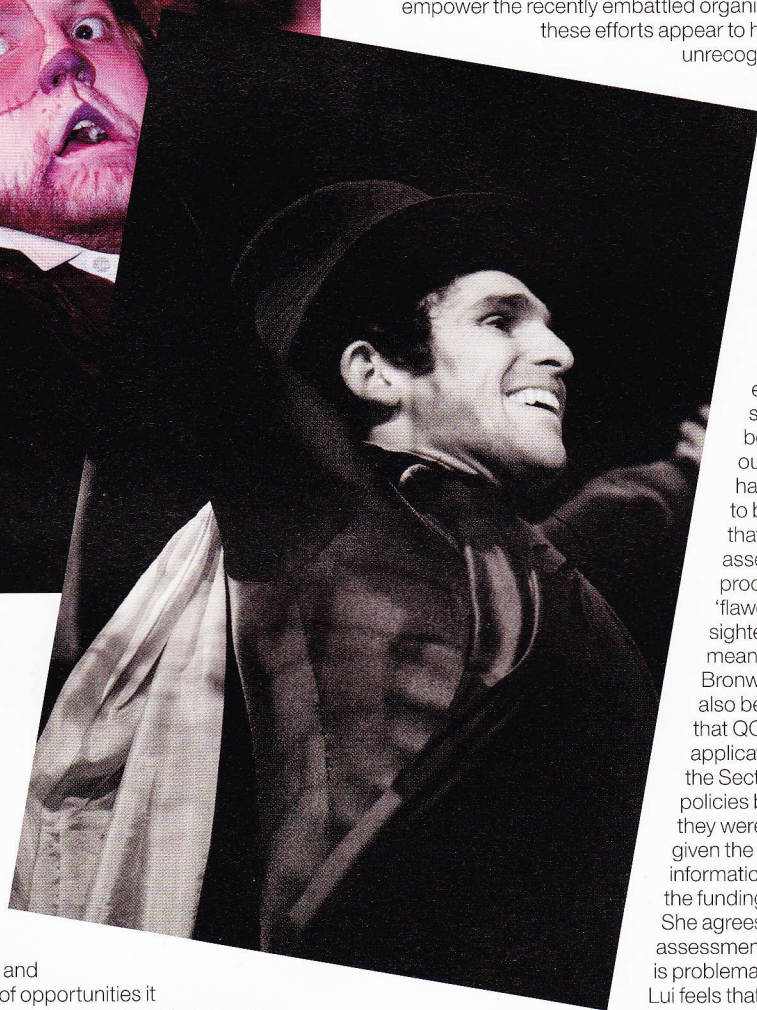
Maggi Sietsma strongly feels that Expressions was targeted 'because we are the top of the funding pool and more money was needed for new initiatives and new entrants'. However, she is also sceptical of the Government's claims to be supporting 'new' players given that companies like Zen Zen Zo, for example, 'have been around for fifteen years' and there are 'no new faces in the [Queensland] dance sector'. Sietsma says 26 000 young people participate in Expressions programs and there are no other players to 'pick up the slack'. She deplores the

organisations and long established networks?', she asks. She thinks that under the new 'sustainability' strategies, 'experience means outdated and should be punished rather than respected'.

Collopy is concerned that, while a new organisation might be able to replicate the same services as Hands on Art, 'they will not have the same networks or reputation that it takes 33 years to build and maintain. Hands on Arts has the trust of the community and a respected brand name that are not easily developed'. The Queensland Arts Council argues that the cuts seem to have undermined prolonged support: 'QAC is a highly successful arts business largely because of the government investment already made. This decision may jeopardise that government investment', a spokesperson claims.

Please explain?

Several companies to lose funding seem to meet the Sector Plan criteria and themes, such as diversity and telling unique Queensland stories, including Frank Theatre who are actually featured as a 'successful' case study in the Sector Plan itself. Allan Lui believes that Kooemba Jdarra met the new funding priorities, including youth and community programs. He asserts that considerable time had been spent working on alternative artistic strategies and a new infrastructure to try and improve and empower the recently embattled organisation, but these efforts appear to have gone unrecognised.



Maggi Sietsma says their application 'ticked every single' box, but the outcomes have led her to believe that the assessment process itself is 'flawed, short-sighted, and meaningless'. Bronwyn Jewell also believes that QCAN's application met the Sector Plan's policies but says they were not given the right information about the funding changes. She agrees that the assessment process is problematic. Alan Lui feels that Arts Queensland 'keep the goal posts' when

de-funding of Extensions and the likely loss of opportunities it will mean for young people in regional areas.

Kylie Ball (Extensions Youth Dance Company) thinks that Arts Queensland were looking for applications from organisations with stronger future directions and the company's 21 year history 'was not a consideration'. Extensions applied for annual funding and she believes the new model means that companies are 'more likely to get funded if they apply for triennial funding in large amounts'. Cate Collopy feels that Hands On Art's longevity worked against them, too. 'Arts Queensland think that a 33 year old organisation has become static and stale simply by virtue of age and this is far from the case. Why do older organisations have to go at the expense of newer ones and at a loss of service

moving it comes to funding - 'they won't tell us exactly what they want'. To *The Australian* (December 6, 2007), the Minister admitted that 'The goalposts have changed... [and] It was inevitable that, in terms of ranking, some were going to miss out'. Lui is adamant that the government is not demonstrating support for Indigenous performing arts in Queensland, despite ATSI culture being a key priority across all Sector Plans. Arts Queensland have reported to have 'conducted briefing sessions and meeting with all [arts] organisations. General information sessions were held across the state. The s2m funding guidelines gave detailed information on the criteria and assessment

process. The assessment was undertaken in strict accordance with these guidelines.'

Many de-funded companies, including the QAC, are all key service providers to regional areas and artists. Lorna Hempstead believes the cuts are part of a 'strategic redeployment' of limited funds. Tropic Sun and Extensions can be de-funded, she explains, because 'if La Luna and Dance North are funded, youth and dance are covered for the regions'. Hempstead claims that the Townsville arts sector has been told 'for many years' by Arts Queensland that they are financially over-supported. However, a spokesperson for Arts Queensland says that 'funding to Townsville's small to medium arts sector has increased from \$872, 624 in 2007 to \$922 000 in 2008 under the new funding program'.

The discrepancy between some arts organisations' perceived interpretation of the funding changes and the actual outcomes, suggests that there was either a miscommunication about and/or a misinterpretation of their implications. Arts Queensland believes that it gave the sector sufficient warning about the new funding arrangements, the criteria, and the assessment process. However, many organisations feel that there was insufficient time between this notification and the deadline for applications (about six weeks for most organisations).

The late announcement of the funding outcomes also forced several organisations to delay or cancel their, at least early, 2008 programming in order to seek alternative funding sources from local and federal government or private sponsors. In the industry is widely recognised, however, that the Australia Council is less likely to support projects or companies without state funding. BEMAC states: 'It would seem there is a confidence in the organisation on a Federal and local level, but none on a state level'.

However, some sections of the industry believe that Arts Queensland gave sufficient time and information about the changes. Playlab's Executive Officer Kathryn Kelly feels that the Government's intentions were clear in the Sectoral Plan. Backbone Artistic Director, Fraser Corfield, agrees that Arts Queensland gave clear indication about the scale of its changes. But he notes that arts organisations tend to operate in cycles of stability and instability and the sudden changes wrought by the cuts have 'essentially removed opportunities for companies at a low point in this cycle to recover effectively'. Liz Burcham says Metro Arts had been working on their strategic planning process since 2006, so were ready to write their application. But she acknowledges that other organisations may have struggled to complete a new strategic plan that fit the new priorities in a short period of time. As the only full time staff member of Kooemba Jdarra, and in an acting position, Allan Lui says that the application took considerable time and effort.

Burcham believes Metro's successful triennial funding was the result of 'seeing what we already did that we could effectively sell to Arts Queensland because it met their criteria', rather than trying to make themselves fit into the new priorities. Corfield attributes Backbone's increased operational funding to the organisation's ability to quantifiably demonstrate its growth in the past three years. He believes that the youth arts sector is now being recognised and rewarded for higher outcomes after being forced to be lean and efficient on limited funds and administrative rationalisation for a long time.

Liz Burcham thinks the outcomes will force the industry to regenerate, which can be positive, but questions if the process needed to be so stressful. Fraser Corfield agrees, in principle, with setting industry standards, but believes that Arts Queensland now has a responsibility to lobby Treasury for more funds so that this situation won't happen again. There is widespread agreement in the sector that the Queensland Government must 'grow the funding pie' if it is to adequately support a sustainability policy line. Kylie Ball argues that the arts needs better support to seek private and corporate support. Hempstead asks why the Smart State (Queensland Government state catch phrase) 'can't be smart about the arts'?

Since the outcomes, many de-funded companies have been offered various forms of one-off project support or short-term 'rescue packages'. Expressions received a funding cut of \$170 000 and placed on annual rather than triennial funding with

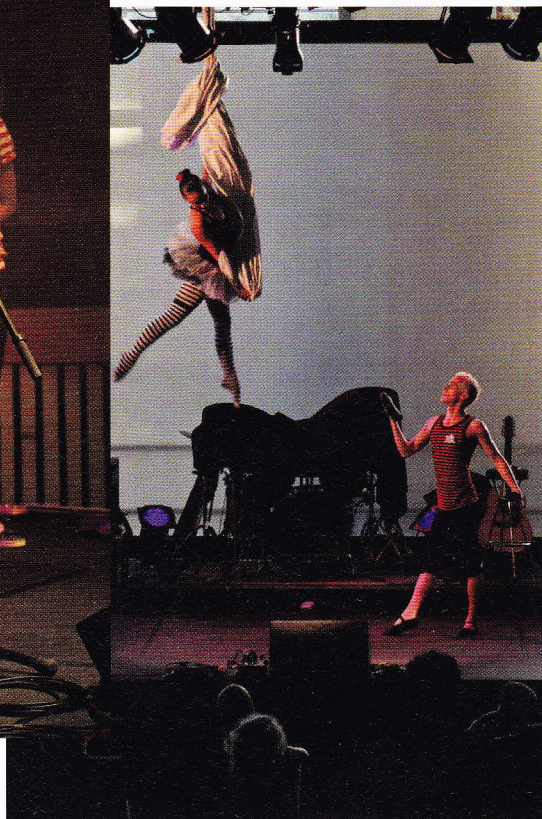
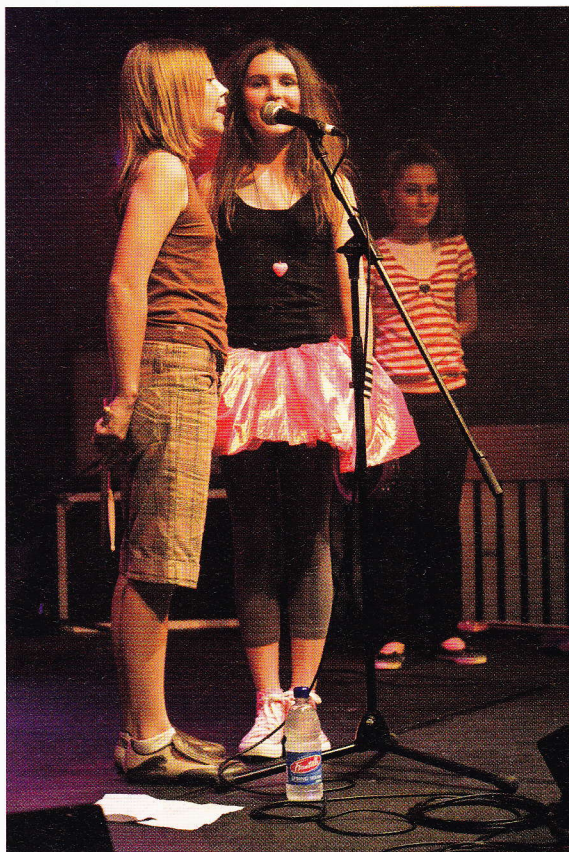
conditions attached to their annual funding with no real reason [why] despite numerous letter and campaigns asking the Minister to overturn the decisions. Maggi Sietsma says the 'interventionist and draconian' conditions originally attached to their annual funding has since been revoked. An Arts Queensland spokesperson says that they will be 'conducting meetings for all s2m applicants... [to] discuss funding decisions and future support possibilities'. One such possibility is the \$1 million sets aside for the so-called industry development initiatives (IDI's), although there is still a lack of clarity regarding what these IDI's will support and who might be eligible.

While the motivations behind Arts Queensland's individual funding decisions may never be entirely clear, the situation has raised a number of issues regarding arts funding and policy that has implications for all levels of government.

For the Queensland Arts sector, communicating funding criteria, assessment processes, and arts policy appears to require a higher level of transparency than

currently exists. Does the sector also need more support to interpret and implement the kinds of sustainable strategies funding bodies require? Sustainability does not equal longevity but the sector needs more support to plan ahead and adapt effectively. Kylie Ball states that the arts needs better support to seek private and corporate support. Most importantly, it seems Arts Queensland's own funding must be increased if they are to truly support the kinds of diversity, innovation, and sustainability the Government says it wants and that the arts sector can provide. Otherwise Arts Queensland will be forced to continually shuffle limited finances around; robbing one hand to pay the other.

For more information about AQ's funding outcomes visit: www.arts.qld.gov.au ♦



The future?

The Queensland arts industry has widely denounced the cuts, believing that they represent lost opportunities, abandoned investments, and an uncertain future. BEMAC announced that the demise of community arts and service organisations 'will dramatically change the Queensland cultural landscape through the lack of representation in the arts of diverse groups'. Bronte Morris (BEMAC) feels that the cuts are a political move and that, while the situation will change in the future, precious resources provided by such organisations will have been lost in the meantime. The one certainty in the cuts is that change is inevitable.

Katherine Kelly hopes that the outcomes will ultimately make the industry stronger and develop more collaborative organisations, but is uncertain of the long term implications for the sector and worries how destabilising the outcomes will be.

Saffron Benner is dramaturg who has been developing new work with young, emerging, and established writers for over ten years. She has taught drama at Griffith University since 2001 and is currently conducting research on knowledge management in theatre companies. She is also a member of La Boite's Creative Reference Group.

