

GENDER EQUITY AND DIVERSITY IN OPERA SUMMIT

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Background and context

As in many areas of life, gender equity in arts and culture requires discussion and change. A particular focus on opera nationally and internationally was identified earlier this year.

In May 2019, a [call to action for cultural leadership and systemic change in opera](#) was published by Sally Blackwood, Liza Lim, Peggy Polias and Bree van Reyk. They invited the opera sector to join the conversation and actively support gender equity, diversity and the championing of a multiplicity of voices. They identified key areas for opera in Australia to evolve and lead the way with diversity on the stage, in creative teams, and in public discourse.

On 2 December 2019 the Gender Equity and Diversity in Opera Summit was convened by the Australia Council, Australian Music Centre and APRA AMCOS. This Summit was an opportunity for deeper discussion of the issues and challenges, and included participants from other sectors where positive shifts had taken place more recently.

Moderated by Professor Julianne Schultz AM FAHA, there were 29 participants including composers, singers, producers, and administrators representing a wide range of expertise and organisations from across the country. It was acknowledged throughout the day that many other people, including those active in the discourse were keen to participate in the Summit, but a focused day of discussion was required to establish the best structures for moving forward.

Issues discussed

A high-level summary of the discussion areas included:

- Exploring the primary issues to address (including systemic lack of diversity in the sector, the need to support female, nonbinary and diverse creatives, and creation of new work including by female composers).
- Exploring sectors where positive change had taken place (including theatre and literature, and international initiatives such as *Keychange*). This was an opportunity to establish case studies for success as well as identify barriers to realising change.
- Investigating different pathways, models of change and what this could mean for resourcing.

Conclusions and principles for change

1. Opera in Australia is one of many areas of arts practice that needs to change to actively reflect the diversity of contemporary Australia. This ensures it continues to meaningfully connect with current and future audiences.
2. This requires artists, individuals, organisations as well as funding bodies to reflect on the necessary shifts to support equity and inclusion in participation.

3. Individuals and organisations who demonstrate leadership will be celebrated for having a real and positive impact by better reflecting contemporary Australia.
4. It is recognised that change will be different for every artist and organisation. This means proposed actions need to be realistic and measurable.

The Summit participants agreed:

The Australia Council will coordinate activity to further progress the issues raised in the call to action and summit.

This will include the convening of a working group to create a codesigned approach with the sector and funding bodies for positive change. This group will also consider the key issues in detail, providing recommendations for best practice principles and an agenda for change.

The Australia Council will continue to support positive change towards equity and inclusion across all art forms as part of its strategy *Creativity Connects Us*.

This working group will be confirmed in the new year with a view to concluding initial work later in 2020.

Attached is an Issues paper, giving context, empirical data and examples of best practice in Australia and internationally. This is the first stage of sharing information with the sector to encourage positive discourse and change.

Participants

Adrian Collette (CEO), Australia Council
 Anni Heino (Editor (Communications and *Resonate*), Australian Music Centre
 Bree van Reyk (Percussionist, Composer, Sound Artist)
 Cheryl Barker (Soprano)
 Chris van Tuinen (Music Director), West Australian Opera
 Cressida Griffith (General Manager), Pinchgut Opera
 Genevieve Lacey (Chair), Australian Music Centre
 Harriet Cunningham (Writer, musician)
 Jack Symonds (Artistic Director), Sydney Chamber Opera
 Jana Gibson (Head, Member Services), APRA AMCOS
 Jane Ede (Soprano)
 Jane Sheldon (Soprano)
 Joanne Kee (Executive Producer) Riverside's National Theatre Parramatta
 John Davis (CEO), Australian Music Centre
 Julianne Schultz – Moderator (Academic, Author, Editor)
 Lindy Hume (Artistic Director), Ten Days on the Island
 Lissa Twomey (Executive Director MPA & Artistic Development), Australia Council)
 Liza Lim (Composer)
 Lucy Shorrocks (Director, MPA Projects), Australia Council
 Naomi Edwards (Director)
 Patrick McIntyre (Executive Director) Sydney Theatre Company
 Patrick Nolan (Artistic Director), Opera Queensland
 Peggy Polias (Composer)
 Rory Jeffes (CEO), Opera Australia
 Sally Blackwood (Director)
 Sonya Holowell (Vocalist, Composer, Writer)
 Sophie Cunningham (Writer and Editor)
 Tamara Saulwick (Artistic Director), Chamber Made
 Vanessa Reed, President and CEO of New Music USA (previously PRS)
 Wendy Were (Executive Director, Strategic Development and Advocacy), Australia Council