

DANCEHOUSE D/

Organisation: Dancehouse Inc

Submission: Made By Dancehouse Inc, a not-for-profit arts organisation
– Can be made public

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ABOUT DANCEHOUSE

dancehouse.com.au

150, Princes Street, Carlton North

Dancehouse is on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

Thirty years after its creation by a small community of dance artists, Dancehouse remains an organisation run by and for dance artists.

Dancehouse is Australia's only centre dedicated solely to the year-round producing and presentation of dance by independent dance artists. This primary role is increasingly important for the artform locally, nationally and internationally as artists and communities de-institutionalise but still require access to space, staff, resources and audiences.

Dancehouse's base is a heritage Victorian building, gifted by the City of Yarra for peppercorn rent. Three flexible spaces — a black box, a white box and a studio — are open 7 days a week for use by Dancehouse for programming, and by dance artists, teachers, thinkers and communities at affordable rates.

Dancehouse is a place to practice, experience and celebrate dance year-round. In 2022, Dancehouse will present approximately 28 in-person shows and 60 events attracting a ticketed audience of over 6,000.

Dancehouse programs (artform and professional development, residencies, online resources, festivals, commissions, talks and publications) employ over 350 artists annually and engage even more. Dancehouse has a team of 6 ongoing staff members (EFT 5.0).

Dancehouse is not a peak body (Ausdance Vic) or an artist-led making company (Chunky Move, LGI, BalletLAB, Weave) — we are producing and presenting house for all independent dance artists and communities. Dancehouse is the place audiences and dance communities come year round to experience exciting, diverse and exceptional Australian and international dance.

All forms of dance are welcome, and can be experienced, at Dancehouse.

Preliminary Endorsement

Dancehouse endorses the recommendations and submissions of key groups who we have worked and collaborated with to ensure a diversity of views on a National Cultural Policy for dance.

Specifically, submissions which diversify the voice of the dance sector, of independent artists, and of forms and practices which are more representative of the depth of dance practice and community in Australia but not in the make-up of funded or prioritised key organisations. These submissions predominantly involve the voices and views of First Nations artists and artists of colour and speak to an important opportunity for this National Cultural Policy including:

- Submission by BlakDance
- Submission by the South Asian performing arts
- Submission by street dance artists

1. FIRST NATIONS

Dancehouse endorses the submissions from sister First Nations dance organisations: Marrugeku, BlakDance and NAISDA as the recognised voices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island dance.

Dancehouse advocates for a National Cultural Policy that:

- Centres sovereignty and self-determination in all aspects of the design, governance and facilitation involving and affecting First Nations dance and dance artists.
- Recognises independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island dance artists play a vital and pivotal role in the dance sector. That artistic independence — without the expectation or need to establish company structures — is as vital to the health of the dance sector as organisation/ company models and infrastructure.
- Invests in First Nations global exchange and reciprocal relationships across a spectrum of dance practice, form.
- Employs a range of mechanisms and opportunities for First Nations independent artists to support their varied work and employment through new work creation, collaboration, skills and training, with organisations and institutions, and at every stage of artistic development: research, creation, producing and programming level.

2. A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

Dancehouse advocates for a National Cultural Policy that:

- Centres artform specific policies and strategies. Government agencies and the sector should work collaboratively on national and/ or regionally specific dance strategies which can uniquely respond to the needs of the form. Dance Strategies will recognise that the artform can involve intra-governmental consideration across areas portfolios including: participation, sport, professional and elite training, employment, community engagement, sustainability and climate change, health and allied health, education and training, diplomacy, trade and industry, as well as the arts.
- Recognises that dance is a professional artistic practice and form with many well-known and recognised Australian artists, companies, events and projects.
- Recognises that dance communities are communities of *practice*. Communities meet regularly, they practice together, they research, they present and form relationships and

gatherings. Communities of practice are not, in and of themselves, outcome or product driven (e.g. presenting shows) but are heavily participatory (e.g. once or twice a week). A National Cultural policy will equally-weight, and articulate that— like sport— dance requires access to safe and appropriate infrastructure and facilities. Affordable space for artists is included in urban and regional master planning.

- Undertakes independent research to redress an imbalance in Government investment in dance which privileges particular Western forms. The report should propose strategic Government investment (Federal, State and Local) to establish professional key organisations with a remit to support specialist genres of dance currently under-represented in the funded sector including: First Nations, South Asian performing arts and street dance. This research must redress the unfortunate systemic racism supported by the Government-funded professional sector which has institutionalised three major ballet companies nationally, but no professional street dance or South-Asian company (Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniattam and Odissi).
- There is a current challenge in the privileging of some Government interest and investment in musical and commercial theatre which, although it employs Australians, are essentially vehicles for American intellectual property. A National Cultural Policy must advocate that Government investment and influence — taxpayers money — is directed to Australian-made and Australian artist-led content.
- Recognise that dance styles or forms may have classical, modern or contemporary expression but are not 'contemporary' or 'classical' in or of themselves. This term has been used to sideline forms and practices particularly by people of colour and from the Asian diaspora. Australian dance and cultural policy must reflect the diversity of practice, participation, presentation, and creation. Any investment in "contemporary" dance should span forms and include Indigenous forms, street dance forms (vogue, house, krump, waack, popping & locking), South Asian forms (Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniattam and Odissi), cultural and folkloric forms as well as modern, contemporary, and existing methods, techniques and disciplines.
- A renewal of investment and focus on Screendance work (dance on screen) through a National Digital Strategy.

3. THE CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

Dancehouse advocates for a National Cultural Policy that:

- Centres independent dance artists as the heart of the dance sector. Dance artists are a highly casualised workforce required to fulfil a variety of important roles across the sector: as dancers, as teachers, as creators/ performers, as researchers, as community producers and consultants, as drivers of communities of practices, as knowledge-keepers, as living archives and documenters of an ephemeral form. Independence/ self-employment and the ability to work across multiple organisations enables artists to make a living and increases community access to important, multi-skilled and experienced artists.
- Enables open, transparent, contestable and peer-assessed opportunities for Independent artists to support their projects and practice. Independent artists have very few mechanisms to receive ongoing or regular investment in their careers. Recurrent, familiar patterns of employment are rare. Diversity of regular employment e.g. teaching, dancing and making is necessary but currently inconsistent.
- Supports Theatre Networks Australia's key points:

- Art recognised as a profession by Centrelink and the ATO and a harmonisation of income averaging arrangements.
 - Long-term, stable funding for independent artists without the need to establish companies.
 - Raise cap, availability and scale of open, transparent, peer-assessed, arms-length project grant rounds through the Australia Council.
 - Increase pool of funding available through contestable grant rounds to increase success rates and align independent practice with organisational investment.
- Invests in a portfolio of organisations which support the diversity of artists' works. Dancehouse is the only place nationally dedicated to the year-round presentation of dance. Unlike theatre organisations, there is an absence of similarly-sized organisations in dance across Australia with capacity to co-invest in work or projects by dance artists for audiences. This greatly restricts the dance sector's capacity to provide employment and leverage income for artists, increase circulation and mobility for works, access new or existing audiences, and to leverage existing resources to best effect.
 - Invests in initiatives which influence, encourage and underwrite touring mechanisms for regional, national and international touring of Australian dance.
 - Restores Australia Council funds and resources restored to 2013 levels as a baseline and adjusted for inflation at a minimum. And raising the allocation for open and competitive peer-assessed and arms length funding for independent practitioners and at least 200 small-to-medium organisations through the Australia Council.
 - Enshrines the key artforms of dance, drama, media arts, music, visual arts and design are mandatory in the national curriculum for all children at all levels. Secondary schools are properly resourced with specialist arts teachers.

4. STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Dancehouse advocates for a National Cultural Policy that:

- Recognises and enables investment and recognition of the value of new 'institutions' and models established by the sector. Federal and State Governments have dictated appropriate 'arts business models' for decades but have not always been responsive to the sector's own designs. An example is the inability for the Federal Government to invest in a successful, internationally recognised, consortium dance festival in Melbourne with a 10-year history: Dance Massive. The festival existed without centralised infrastructure and, through the shared will and collaboration between presenting organisations, presented a hugely successful festival of dance works to general public audiences. A National Cultural Policy will recognise and adapt to new models of delivery as established by the sector.
- Utilises a National Portfolio approach to organisational funding informed by artform strategies is essential to a re-building of the efficiency and effectiveness of a functional arts sector.
- Re-prioritise assessment of the performance of arts organisations. Many government requirements and proposals require ill-suited and onerous assessment of business plans at the expense of program design, community engagement and art-making. The same requirements are often required for very large and very small organisations which crucially disadvantages smaller and newer artistic companies. There are very few pathways to salaries for established artists.

- Devises industry standards across industrial activity and which also guides funded organisations. Current standards are often designed through collective agreements and awards through the MEAA which do not functionally serve much of the art sector who do not work commercially or in large institutions or companies.

5. REACHING THE AUDIENCE

Dancehouse advocates for a National Cultural Policy that:

- Undertakes independent research analysing the 'stages' available for the presentation of Australian dance. Aside from Dancehouse, no other stage is available year-round as a presenting house for dance work at the mid-to small scale. There is no remit for mainstage theatre companies and large state-trust presenting-houses (Sydney Opera House, Arts Centre Melbourne) to present Australian dance. In the absence of other government-funded small to medium theatres and venues for dance, Dancehouse advocates that both large and small-to-medium stages have a remit to the commissioning, presentation of Australian dance works by both independent dance artists and existing Australian companies.
- A National Portfolio approach that understands that dance requires both making companies led by artists, as well as presenting and producing houses for audiences. A National Portfolio may advocate for 'hot spots' for stages to focus areas regionally and nationally for key forms or practices or demographics.
- Underwriting touring and incentivising presentation opportunities for Australian dance utilising existing venue networks (often operated by local Councils). Incentives are required to present the work of independent dance artists and companies in regional and outer-Metropolitan Australia and current touring circuits and investment is driven by the demand of many venues who, because of financial risk and/ or lack of programmatic confidence, restrict access to high quality productions because there is 'no audience' for the product. Understandably, there is no audience because little has been attempted. This disproportionately affects dance in Australia.

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