

Response to a new National Cultural Policy

Tony Burke, MP
PO Box 156
Punchbowl, NSW, 2196

22 August 2022

Dear Minister,

My name is Claire Edwardes OAM, and I am writing as the Artistic Director of Ensemble Offspring to respond to the call for a new National Cultural Policy. I am sharing my insights on cultural policy as the leader of an Australian arts organisation with a 27 year history of excellence and an ongoing commitment to the commissioning, creation, development and presentation of new Australian music.

In short, what our new cultural policy needs is **increased support for innovative art** that reflects contemporary Australia. For too long, government funding has disproportionately supported music and arts organisations with conservative curatorial tendencies (including orchestras and opera companies). All art is important, but conservative, popularist and non-forward-looking programming should not dominate government funding. Government funding must be directed towards pioneering and risk-taking art which tells Australian stories, nurtures First Nations artists and emerging artists and reflects the society in which we all live. New, experimental and innovative art will never be financially viable or be able to support itself (even in Europe) simply because of the very fact that it is new and therefore not yet known - but is absolutely integral to a healthy and vibrant Australian culture.

Ensemble Offspring's response to the five pillars

First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

Ensemble Offspring openly recognises the damaging legacy of colonisation, and the immense value that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists can offer the cultural landscape. The arts sector at large is posed with the challenge of supporting and



empowering First Nations people to share their art with the world – without ever appropriating, limiting or censoring their cultural expression.

Ensemble Offspring's response to the need to empower First Nations artists is informed by ongoing cultural discourse with key First Nations figureheads in our field and is reflected in our **Commitment to First Nations Artists**¹ which is reviewed annually by our team and advisory board.

Our multifaceted First Nations Composer Program takes an active role in addressing the disparity in opportunities afforded to Australia's First Nations musicians and artists. With continued support from the government, our small but powerful company can do its part to lift vital Australian voices through contemporary art music, building and deepening connections between First Nations and non-First Nations Australians.

A Place for Every Story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

Ensemble Offspring are champions of diversity. In addition to our First Nations Composer Program we offer an annual \$4000 commission for female-identifying composers and are wholly committed to gender equity in our concert programming across the entire season. We also operate Hatched Academy, an emerging artist development program, providing practical, hands-on experience for a new wave of elite young Australian performers and composers.

In this area, the challenge for the government is to better target funding at organisations that are committed to diversity and supporting emerging and under-represented artists. Oftentimes, it is smaller arts organisations like Ensemble Offspring that fly the flag for the creation of new art. Many major arts organisations disproportionately program art and music from hundreds of years ago with a Western Art focus. While this art has its place we feel that the government should direct more of its support towards relevant Australian made art.

¹ <https://ensembleoffspring.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Ensemble-Offspring-Commitment-to-First-Nations-Artists-2022.pdf>



The Centrality of the Artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture

Ensemble Offspring employs on average over 120 artists per year, paid at industry award rates. We also commission on average 15 Australian composers a year, providing them with financial remuneration for their art which is so often missing in the arts sector.

One challenge we've observed through our work particularly with emerging artists, culturally and linguistically diverse artists and female and gender-diverse artists is the need to strive for fair and equitable compensation across the arts sector. This is alongside and not to the exclusion of the fundamental necessity to safeguard against exploitation and undervaluation of artistic skills and labour. We place respect for the artists at the centre of our operations and we believe this should be the standard for all Australian arts organisations. We urge the government to consider policy measures which can ensure this for generations to come, to create a more sustainable, supportive and vibrant arts sector.

Strong Institutions: providing support across the spectrum of schools and institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

In Australia, arts training and education begins in schools and continues through universities and beyond through independent organisations like Ensemble Offspring. We believe that secure funding for Australia's public education system will bolster our nation's artistic future (along with the economy at large) and ensure access to top-quality education for all. Indeed, this starts with music education in primary schools (as the great Richard Gill championed so hard).

Australian arts cannot thrive on a global stage without the backing of federal, state and local governments. It is therefore integral that the federal government supports organisations to back the creation and presentation of contemporary Australian art and music. Though schools and universities lay the foundations for young artists, small, dedicated organisations such as Ensemble Offspring are essential in supporting the professional and creative development of emerging artists beyond their formal studies. Our Hatched Academy program introduces young creatives to our professional network and empowers them to build their careers, and not-for-profit arts organisations like EO stand to benefit from proactive government incentives to undertake this crucial work of **investing in Australia's cultural future.**



We consider it the responsibility of the government to support emerging AND establish Australian artists, in grant rounds that are not in competition with each other.

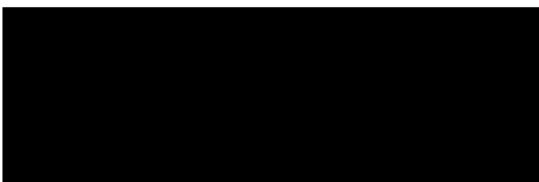
Reaching the Audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

Ensemble Offspring is committed to creating music for all. In addition to concerts in our home-town of Sydney, we tour regularly to regional Australia and major metropolitan centres. We also perform overseas, with tours to Helsinki, Berlin and London planned for 2023. On top of physical touring, we strive to make our content available online to further improve access to all. We regularly partner with the Australian Digital Concert Hall to stream high quality performances of new music to all corners of the globe.

In this area, the challenge for the government is to increase access to new and innovative art. It is vitally important that Australian audiences have access not just to familiar music from the established classical canon, but to new music that reflects current day Australia. The sector requires more support of living composers from emerging to established, as well as support to share this music as widely as possible.

I hope you will consider our recommendations. Please feel free to include this letter (in part or entirety) in the National Cultural Policy Report and/or publish online with attribution to myself or Ensemble Offspring.

Kind Regards,



Claire Edwardes and the Ensemble Offspring team