

Melissa Callanan

Monday 18 July 2016

Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Perth
Western Australia

Dear Hon Simon O'Brien MLC

RE: Petition No: 123 - Perth Fringe World Festival

As a Senior Arts Administrator in Western Australia, I followed the protest movement a number of Western Australia's independent performing artists made against the 2016 Perth Fringe World Festival business model. The Board increased artist registration fees and also increased the percentage of box-office taken by the Fringe from these participating artists, alongside a number of restrictive marketing initiatives that limited opportunities for artists to access audience.

It is well known that the opportunities for WA independent performing artists are generally limited and the funding model of an open platform festival is high-risk for artists, many of whom make very little economic return for their investment in time.

As an arts administrator, I was concerned that the Board made a decision to fund the growth of the Perth Fringe World Festival by taking a bigger cut in box-office directly from artists, which from my perspective seemed inherently unfair and unjust, to take more from those artists who already do not making enough in direct economic benefits (as measured by a capacity to earn a living as an independent artist in WA).

I was also deeply concerned that Perth Fringe World Festival opened Elisabeth Quay, a multi-million dollar infra-structure project, where no funds were allocated to commission WA performing artists create new work, in order to participate in this opening celebration of new infrastructure at a major community event. The Minister for the Arts, Hon John Day MLA, is also the Minister for Planning and would be well aware of the significant funding challenges in the arts portfolio alongside significant funds spent on major infrastructure projects.

In making a choice to open the Elisabeth Quay with Perth Fringe World, the government, through the Minister for the Arts, has made a clear choice not to pay artists in the celebration

of the opening of an iconic multi-million dollar infrastructure project. This choice sends a message to the performing arts community, (and the sector), that The Arts are not valued enough for people to be paid fairly for their work, in celebrating the cultural life of WA and the opening of Elisabeth Quay.

I want to know exactly the level and degree that the Fringe World Festival was engaged to open Elisabeth Quay and why money wasn't put aside to support performing artists, and to pay artists fairly for their work and contribution to the cultural life of Western Australia. The position of advocating for anything less than this outcome for artists in the opening of a major infrastructure project is weak leadership from an Arts Minister.

On the basis of the above as outlined, I decided to actively support the leader of the Advocacy Group – A Better Deal for Perth Fringe World Artists, Tiffany Barton, write to the Board in order to advocate for an external review process of the Business Model and establish agreed measures with the WA arts community, that includes directly measuring economic benefits flowing to WA independent artists as a KPI of future Perth Fringe World Festival funding. (Attachment I).

The Board responded that the current process of evaluation was sufficient. The consequence of the Artrage Inc Board rejecting the proposed external review and stakeholder consultation process has resulted in *Petition No: 123 – Perth Fringe World Petition* to parliament.

On July 8, as reported in *The West Australian*, the Fringe released data highlighting millions of dollars in economic benefit to the WA economy. The report remained silent of the economic costs sitting with WA independent artists (Appendix II).

As a Senior Arts Administrator, I believe it is important that there is transparency on the lack of economic benefits flowing directly to WA performing artists from the current Fringe World Business Model, in order to address the issue of what needs to change for a better deal for WA's independent performing artists?

It is important to establish community agreement on the expectations of economic benefits flowing to performing artists and the promotion of greater opportunities to earn a living and/or receive public recognition for the positive contribution performing artists make to the cultural life of Western Australia.

We lose too much artistic talent to the East Coast, forced to move through lack of opportunity and our cultural life in WA is diminished as a result. Real and long-term government leadership and accountability is required.

Sincerely,

Melissa Callanan
Senior Arts Administrator

APPENDIX I – Transcript Letter to Board – Artrage Inc – Perth Fringe World Business Model

Tiffany Barton
Artist

Anthony Robinson
Chairman
Artrage Inc

Dear Anthony,

RE: Advocacy for Perth Fringe Artists – Protest to Board of Directors, Artrage Inc

Background

As a professional artist, having trained at the Actors Centre in Sydney (1992) and winning the Curtin University, outstanding student award for Bachelor of Arts, Creative Writing (2005), I have contributed to the local arts community for the last 15 years and all five of the Fringe World programs with self-devised work.

Diva won the West Australian Arts Editors Awards; a Turnstiles Award and was nominated for a Best New Play, Performing Arts WA Award. Metalhead won a best emerging artist award for Clarence Ryan and was nominated by Richard Hyde in the Top 10 shows of 2015 for all WA theatre shows.

2012-16 Fringe World Experience

As an independent WA artist I value the opportunities that Fringe World offers. However, I have become concerned as Fringe World developed and have noted changes in the Business Plan and operations that significantly discriminate against working independent artists in WA highlighted, but not limited to the following:

- Increasing the registration fees by 100%;
- Increase in box-office cut to Fringe World from 30-32%;
- The prohibitive cost of advertising in the Fringe guide;
- The ongoing request for artists to give a discount of 20% to Fringe World Partners;
- Poster distribution deals that limit access to public space and then posters not distributed properly;
- Lack of acknowledgement of the value of millions of dollars that Fringe World artists contribute by virtue of the fact that the economic rewards are so low for the majority of WA participants comparative to the amount of time to develop work and ongoing growth in size of program limiting access to audience;
- Complaints from patrons the brochure is hard to navigate and the rush tickets system not up to date;
- Fringe World control of ticketing data reducing the opportunity to further build WA audience outside fringe time and high ticketing fees associated to minimal service (\$3.50 out of 20);
- Requesting that WA artists refrain from making speeches during the awards ceremony.
- Unlike other Fringes of the same scale, the opportunities for independent WA artists work to be picked up by national or international producers is non-existent and to promote this as a potential outcome for WA artists is dishonest;

My experience of being a WA practicing artists contributing to the Fringe World program is as follows:

- 2012 Pollys Waffle, sold out 10 shows, cleared \$2,000 after expenses, shared between two actors, myself and a director, \$500 each, where in effect, I worked 8 weeks for \$500; 2 weeks to write the show, 2 weeks to produce, 2 weeks to rehearse, 2 weeks of performance. In kind support \$16 000
- 2013 The Garden cleared \$2,000 after expenses, shared between myself, four actors and a director, \$320 each; In kind support \$40 000
- 2014 Diva, cleared \$2,000 shared between, 5 creatives, \$400 each; In kind support \$17 000
- 2015 Metalhead cleared \$1,500 shared between, 7 actors, set designer, director, assistant director stage manager, and loss \$400. In kind support \$44 000.
- 2016 Diva as a remount. My numbers were half what they were because there were 700 shows to compete with. I made a profit of \$600 and shared it with my director. Yet the work was recognised on opening night by Marcus Canning, CEO, Fringe World as" The strongest work I have seen in the fringe so far this year."

Decision to Protest

The decision to participate in 2016 was difficult and created a level of anxiety about the economic burden I would carry. It is the same economic burden that many of my colleagues experience and we discuss amongst ourselves.

Personally, I decided that the economic burden I was expected to carry as an independent WA artist had been pushed too far. It was time for me to tell my personal story as a form of protest and raise awareness for the plight of independent artists in WA.

I started a change.org petition attached as Annexure I and began a social media campaign on facebook called Advocacy for Perth Fringe Artist with the following introduction:

"Advocacy for Perth Fringe Artists is designed to create a forum for artists to support and empower each other in their experience at fringe. We are currently looking at setting up a petition to request a better deal with fringe World as we believe the current \$300 registration fee and 30% are too high. This group exists because we want to create better conditions for Fringe Artists. Its s done with the upmost respect for Fringe and its Directors who have done a brilliant job creating a hugely successful fringe in a short space of time. However we are concerned that as Fringe gets bigger and bigger the power of the corporate dollar will take precedents over the artists and we will be squashed and exploited in the process."

The language of exploitation is strong and pointed. However, the dictionary definition of exploitation is "the action of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work." It is difficult, as a WA artist within the Fringe World program, to believe that I am genuinely being treated fairly, that the distribution of resources is fair and equitable, within the economics of the numbers outlined above. It is also difficult for me to believe the marketing promotion in support of Fringe World, Woodside proudly supporting West Australian Artists.

A Way Forward

Woodside is a respected West Australian company. I believe Woodside needs improved advice on how their level of investment can better serve the WA artists participating in Fringe through a more directed approach.

The West Australian editorial on the opening of 2016 Fringe World highlighted the major economic benefits of fringe artists to the West Australian economy (\$71m) and the significant social and cultural impact for the community (as researched by Fringe World).

If the majority of WA artists are not economically benefitting from the Fringe World experience, as I believe quantitative data would reveal, then in truth the artists are not being supported by Woodside. In reality, the artists are building a profile and better community in which to operate for Woodside. The Woodside promotional posters should say.... THANK YOU to all of West Australian's independent artists for your active citizenship and making a significant contribution to building the WA economy and cultural fabric in which we operate.

In simple terms, this is the truthful message when WA artists by the value of their time are contributing more than Woodside and failing to be recognised for their contribution in monetary terms or social standing as engaged 'volunteering' citizens.

WA Fringe Artists should be celebrated as philanthropists and recognised in every speech as such by the Minister for the Arts, the Chairman of Woodside and by the Chairman of Artrage Inc at least to the same level and degree as the corporate partners and public funding bodies. Please update all future speech notes with hard data on this contribution by the artists and include in media releases distributed to stakeholders by Fringe World accordingly.

I request that the substantive economic challenges experienced by WA artists participating in the Fringe World program, as outlined above, are fully investigated by the Board, by way of an external independent review, focused on the direct economic benefit to WA artists as an agreed indicator of success directly measured by government funders and corporate partners.

The report would include box-office analysis, infrastructure build cost ratio benefit analysis and model international best practice that promotes equity and fairness in the distribution of resources suited to the particular needs of a West Australian environment.

The outcome of the report is made public to inform strategic decisions for the future development of a sustainable Fringe World business model that better serves the WA independent artistic community as a major stakeholder.

My objective in raising the issues is to address the challenges of exponential growth and focus on a solution that is research and data driven, supported by transparency with the key stakeholder group, where independent WA artists are actively being consulted as major stakeholders in building a sustainable fringe festival and cultural capital for the State.

Sincerely
Tiffany Barton
Artist

Supported by
Melissa Callanan MBA (UWA)
Senior Arts Administrator

The West Australian
Friday, July 8, 2016

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Fringe makes millions for WA economy

■ **Stephen Bevis**
Arts Editor

The big numbers of Perth's record-breaking Fringe World have rolled through the wider economy, a review of the summer arts festival reveals.

The bumper 2016 Fringe, funded to the tune of \$1.24 million from the State, achieved turnover of \$20 million, earned \$8.3 million for artists and had a flow-on economic impact of \$98 million, the impact report said.

Beyond the economic rationalist value, the Fringe's biggest impact was its boost to Perth's cultural life, tourism appeal and social cohesion.

Surveys showed 80 per cent of people thought Fringe World, which attracted 990,000 people to free and ticketed events, was one of the best things about Perth.

For every \$1 of Government investment in Fringe World, the flow-on economic impact was \$74.50 — nearly double that of last year.

After five years of rapid growth into the world's third-biggest Fringe, organisers said the priority was to entrench and stabilise the

event rather than expand it next year.

Some growing pains were reflected in a lower average session capacity (from 64 per cent to 56.4 per cent), a slight fall in artist satisfaction and a drop in public perceptions that Fringe made Northbridge safer.

Fringe World chief executive Marcus Canning said the festival delivered more box-office income for artists than any other in WA and stimulated a bigger audience for non-mainstream shows.

"We all acknowledge that Fringe has grown very fast and that many people have generally referred to the 2016 Fringe as the 'growing pains' year," he said.

Mr Canning said market demand and internal measures would restrict growth next year.

Organisers also were doing more to inform artists about the financially risky open-access Fringe participation model.

Most surveyed artists listed the chance to expose their shows to new audiences as their main reason for taking part.

Registrations to participate in Fringe World 2017 open on July 14. It runs from January 20 to February 19