

22 October 2020

Committee Members  
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts  
Parliament of Australia  
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**Theatre Network Australia's Circus and Physical Theatre Advisory Committee's  
Submission: Federal Inquiry into Creative & Cultural Industries & Institutions 2020**

Theatre Network Australia (TNA) is Australia's peak body for performing arts, focusing on strengthening the small to medium and independent sectors. We have over 500 members across Australia, including large companies and institutions, small to medium companies, and independent practitioners. Our dedicated Circus and Physical Theatre strategy focuses on the contemporary Circus and Physical Theatre sector made up of independent unfunded individuals and collectives, small-to-medium companies and large organisations funded through the Australia Council for the Arts' National Performing Arts Partnership Framework.

Circus and Physical Theatre is a highly physical art form between collaborators and is inherently incongruent with the concept of physical distancing. The Australian sector is highly regarded internationally, with its performers and workers predominantly supported through extensive touring nationally and internationally.

This submission follows from and endorses Theatre Network Australia's submission, and amplifies a response specifically from the Circus and Physical Theatre sector.

This submission makes the following recommendations:

1. To devote resources to measuring the economic impact of the cultural and creative industries;
2. A continuation of a JobKeeper-style support program for employees in our industry;
3. To invest in a Guarantee Against Loss program for venues and festivals;
4. To harmonise income averaging arrangements between the Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink;
5. To support the development of a funded Young People and Culture Plan driven and implemented by the Australia Council for the Arts;
6. To invest in regionally-led and industry-led solutions;
7. To facilitate and expedite COVID-related travel requirements to enable national and international touring.

**• The direct and indirect economic benefits and employment opportunities of creative and cultural industries and how to recognise, measure and grow them**

Contemporary Australian Circus and Physical Theatre are amongst the most sought-after cultural exports internationally. World-renowned companies ranging from major performing arts organisations such as Circus Oz and Circa, to independent unfunded companies such as Gravity and Other Myths, Company 2, Casus and Briefs Factory tour multiple shows eight to ten months of the year nationally and internationally.

Domestically, contemporary Australian Circus and Physical Theatre and international circus acts are widely and regularly programmed in both urban and regional festivals, including Fringe Festivals. In 2019, contemporary Circus and Physical Theatre made up 18% of programming at the Adelaide Fringe Festival; 23% at Fringeworld in Perth; and 9.6% at Melbourne Fringe whilst representing 28% of their box office revenue.

The economic value of Circus and Physical Theatre is unquestionable – for every \$1 invested by the Western Australian state government into FRINGE WORLD, \$68 was stimulated and spent in the local economy with 2,214 FTE jobs being created through this activity<sup>1</sup>.

The National Mullumbimby Circus festival is a seven-day festival and training program. In 2017, it injected \$3,445,154 into the local economy<sup>2</sup> and engages with 224 regional arts and arts workers in a regional town population of 2500 people.

The travel and gathering restrictions that have been put in place worldwide due to COVID-19 have led to hundreds of cancelled engagements throughout 2020 for Gravity and Other Myths artists. As 90% of the company's income is derived from touring, they expect a potential loss of income upwards of \$2,500,000 over the coming year.

With three full time touring ensembles on the road in 2019, Gravity and Other Myths presented 431 shows across 23 countries to audiences in excess of 150,000. As all international bookings in 2020 were either cancelled or postponed Gravity and Other Myths lost upwards of 450 presentation opportunities across 25 countries.

Moving forward, COVID-related travel requirements such as travel permits, mandatory two-week quarantine, and the limitations on securing travel insurance, make returning to touring, both inbound and outbound, unviable. There is opportunity to support the sector through establishing COVID-safe travel guidelines, travel permissions and exemptions, and subsidies on quarantine costs.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://fringeworld.com.au/impact-report>

<sup>2</sup> Calculated via the Byron Shire Council Council Event Impact Calculator.

**• The non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity, and how to recognise, measure and grow them**

The Circus and Physical Theatre sector is intimately linked within community arts and cultural development and the youth arts sector, through circus schools and social circus work. Some prominent organisations include Circus WA, Corrugated Iron Youth Arts in the Northern Territory, Westside Circus in Melbourne (and its partner program in Shepparton), Cirkidz in South Australia, Spaghetti Circus in New South Wales and The Flying Fruit Fly Circus in Albury/Wodonga.

There is demonstrated long-term social impact and non-economic benefits on community, wellbeing and identity across Circus and Physical Theatre, community arts and cultural development, and youth arts.

*Our research shows that for every dollar invested for a child in a circus training program, seven dollars are potentially saved in their future mental health costs. – Dr Richard McGrath, UniSA, Lead Researcher on The art of the circus: Cartwheeling kids to better mental health, 2019<sup>3</sup>*

*As a paediatrician and child health researcher, I don't need any convincing about the benefits of the creative arts to child development. We know that a broad range of stimuli help to maximise cognitive, emotional and physical function, particularly making the best of the developing brain. And there is plenty of evidence around the specific benefits of exposure to, or even better participation in, the creative arts. – Jonathan Carapetis, ED Telethon Kids Institute, WA*

*Another unexpected but pleasing outcome since the inception of the original circus and performance program was a massive decrease in crime in the Hilton area. An article published in the local community newspaper in 2004 showed a 24% reduction in overall crime, including a 10% reduction in burglaries and a 17% fall in car theft from the previous year and much of this can be attributed to the running of this program. – Snr Constable Ian Abercromby, PCYC, WA*

As reported in the Youth Arts Sector COVID-19 Impact Statement, the “sudden cut off of activity is negatively impacting participants, mental health, confidence, opportunities to be creative and also physically interact with their peers. Parents are concerned to be able to provide their children with meaningful activity and are looking for ways...to support their children.”

An investment in Australia's youth arts and arts for young audiences sectors would offer the Federal Government an effective, affordable opportunity to address pressing cross portfolio issues. We support the development of a funded Young People and Culture Plan driven and implemented by the Australia Council for the Arts. This investment would increase opportunities for Australian children and young people to experience arts and culture; enhance their development and overall well-being as well as help build social and personal capabilities that will aid young people throughout their lives.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/05/190509101843.htm>

• **The best mechanism for ensuring cooperation and delivery of policy between layers of government**

TNA's Circus and Physical Theatre Advisory Committee supports A New Approach's call for the government to develop a National Arts and Culture Plan, similar to Sport 2030, to be implemented across the Australian Government; with states and territory governments; with the Australia Council for the Arts; and with the wider arts and cultural industries<sup>4</sup>. A comprehensive plan would provide a blueprint to guide all layers of government, and could result in strong outcomes as well as efficiencies in the areas of research, data collection, audience development, and of course coordination of efforts to respond to COVID-19.

• **The impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural industries; and**

The closure of venues and the restrictions on public gatherings has meant the shutdown of the live performing arts. More specifically, international and national border closures have also significantly impacted the Circus and Physical Theatre sector, which as mentioned earlier, mostly relies on touring and has such a global context. This will have an ongoing long-term impact on the livelihoods of performers and the revenue of our companies.

Circus and Physical Theatre respondents in Theatre Network Australia's second biennial report into working trends and conditions of professional independent artists and producers<sup>5</sup> reflect a devastating impact on the livelihood of individuals.

*Loss of 3 separate seasons of performances that were already confirmed including a 5-week fee paying UK tour. Rehearsal and training space closed, yoga studio closed (body maintenance). New work research and development had to be reinvented to zoom meetings and change the nature of my acrobatic work which is highly dependent on other bodies. – survey respondent*

*Everything got cancelled. All tours and bookings. All my flights. My full-time performing partner is Canadian, and we were forced to separate and go home which makes creating new work almost impossible. – survey respondent*

*Inability to train physical skills due to lockdowns - absolute stasis of creative acrobatic practice: unable to maintain let alone innovate this part of our practice for the future. Thoughts of changing careers due to uncertainty of future for performing arts, and anxiety caused by these thoughts. – survey respondent*

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<sup>4</sup> Supporting the call from A New Approach, Insight Report 3, pp 49-51.

<sup>5</sup> THIS IS HOW WE DO IT - EDITION 2 Working Trends of Independent Artists and Creatives

While half the respondents managed to negotiate some form of alternative arrangements, 45% of respondents did not get their contracts paid out with the cancellation of creative work. 75% of respondents lost employment outside of their creative practice – which is usually how individuals supplement their income in the sector. 33% of the respondents who had to relocate due to COVID-19 did so because their tours were cancelled. 37% of respondents have also accessed mental health services due to the impact of COVID-19.

Circa is the only Australian Circus company that has artists on full-time contracts. This means the sector is predominantly made up of independent and unfunded artists currently relying on JobKeeper or Jobseeker.

Circus and Physical Theatre performers also have a limited performing lifespan due to the physical nature of their work. A year out of work is significant and returning to work as things open up again requires adequate time and physical preparation. Circus and Physical Theatre works also rely on specialist equipment and appropriate spaces, which means new work is not created in isolation nor in various lockdown restrictions. Returning to work in a COVID-safe environment is also complex as demonstrated by Circa's example, which is not something easily replicated by smaller companies and individual practitioners.

*When faced with limitations on the ability to create, rehearse, and perform after an international tour in Paris was abruptly cancelled and 10 artists returned to Australia as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Circa swiftly regrouped and developed an industry leading Covid Safe Plan to continue to operate. Beginning with working remotely individually through web-conferencing and limited resources in artists' own homes, Circa strived to maintain connection, creativity and strength in such unprecedented times.*

*With research into the Queensland Health Guidelines, Safe Work Australia, Gymnastics Australia, the Australian Institute of Sport, and consultations with health practitioners, Circa's Covid safe plan considers the health and wellbeing of artists and participants alongside the practical implications of working in the circus industry during a worldwide health pandemic. After several attempts at applying to the Chief Health Officer, Circa was successful in demonstrating the need for athletes and physical performers to continue working to minimise the risk of injuries as a result of degradation of muscles and specialised techniques that the lockdown and restrictions on work posed, and an exemption for rehearsals with physical contact was granted.*

*Shortly after the exemption was approved Queensland Health stated that arts organisations had to operate under an industry Covid Safe approved plan. Circa's general public classes operate under the Ausdance Queensland Dance and Physical Performing Arts industry approved plan to allow for the classes to recommence after having been shut down for three months. With a slow reintroduction of domestic touring Circa continues to monitor and adapt Covid safe practices as necessary, which are informed by presenting venues and state regulations.*

We support the call by the Live Entertainment Industry Forum for a "continuation of a JobKeeper-style support program for employees in our industry until such time as the live

entertainment industry returns to normal operation and without the constraints of major restrictions”<sup>6</sup>

We also support various calls for the government to invest in a Guarantee Against Loss program so that large and small presenters feel confident in programming many months ahead and can contract producers with adequate lead time.

We also support the National Association for the Visual Arts’s call to “harmonise income averaging arrangements between the Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink to ensure that funds or grants received by artists will not be treated by Centrelink as income that contributes to living expenses”<sup>7</sup>.

**• Avenues for increasing access and opportunities for Australia's creative and cultural industries through innovation and the digital environment.**

There is opportunity to strengthen the Circus and Physical Theatre sector’s capacity to work within the digital environment through funding towards new equipment and new collaborations with experts in the digital environment i.e. broadcasting, film, technology sector.

The Circus and Physical Theatre sector has responded to the digital environment extremely well in terms of maintaining their working relationships and networks, and in exchanging information as seen in the rise of online panels and discussions on platforms such as The Circus Arts Hub. (insert footnote - <https://www.thecircusartshub.com/>) However, the essential quality to the artform is the inherent physical risk in the ephemeral nature of live performance, which does not translate into a digital environment for an audience.

*When COVID-19 hit, our 30-acrobat ensemble was physically separated from one another across Australia and the world. We engaged in a 10-week remote creative development coined ‘No I in Quaranteam,’ and embarked on a virtual development process including 2 weekly check-ins, 3 training sessions and 1 yoga class via zoom each week and over 35 creative tasks resulting in hours of digitally recorded physical, visual and written task work which has already profoundly influenced creative developments which are currently underway for 4 new shows. We also engaged in regular discussions about current global issues or concerns to ensure our artists felt supported during such a disorienting time. This was only possible because we could pay all our artists through JobKeeper during this period. However, as acrobats we depend on touch as the core of our communication so despite our persistence to feel connected virtually our lack of ability to physically train together was hugely limiting to our creative process. – Jascha Boyce, Gravity and Other Myths Company Director*

While this digital environment has contributed to the development of new shows as in Gravity and Other Myth’s example, there is uncertainty as to how new works will continue to be

<sup>6</sup> <https://leif.net.au/2020/10/14/australias-live-entertainment-industry-counts-the-cost-of-covid-extended-support-needed/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://visualarts.net.au/news-opinion/2020/welfare-rules-and-regulations-are-failing-artists/>

resourced and presented or toured, given the ongoing border closures, reduction to programming across venues and presenters, and changes to JobKeeper.

As the live performing arts sector opens up according to various COVID-safe plans, there is also opportunity to celebrate the innovation in delivery methods that Circus and Physical Theatre works are primed for – working outdoors in temporary structures. This is also a great model for boosting regional cultural activity, investment and jobs.

Happening outdoors, Wonderland Spiegeltent<sup>8</sup> has been touring Wonderland Under the Stars in Townsville and Port Douglas in September, and will tour Mount Isa in October 2020. Brunswick Picture House in Brunswick Heads, New South Wales has consistently sold out since reopening. Moving forward, these nimble smaller outfits and venues should be supported adequately to support recovery in cultural tourism, but also in creating resilient communities.

TNA's Circus and Physical Theatre Advisory Committee endorses the submission from our colleagues at Regional Arts Australia, in which they recommend regionally-led and industry-led solutions to increase social inclusion. RAA highlights the additional challenges that regional Australia faces, with drought, floods and bush fires as well as COVID-19. They urge the increase of digital capability as a way to enhance education pathways for communities, and training in regional Australia.

**Endorsed by the TNA Circus and Physical Theatre Advisory Committee:**

Jascha Boyce, Company Director, Gravity and Other Myths

Alice Cadwell, General Manager, Spaghetti Circus

Steph Cox, Independent

Jamie Lewis, Program Manager, TNA

Harley Mann, Independent

Lisa McCready, Deputy Executive Director, Circa

Jo Smith, Artistic Director, CircusWA

Devon Taylor, Creative Producer, Women\*s Circus

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wonderlandspiegeltent.com.au/>