



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, August 15, 2024

Musicians' union rejects MSO ban on political comment

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra has again overstepped the mark by declaring that a concert stage is not an appropriate forum for political comment, says the union representing its musicians.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance rejects the assertion by the MSO that there is no place for political commentary in its performances.

Political commentary through artistic expression is a longstanding tradition of hundreds of years, and many of the great works of music, opera and other artforms have been inspired by and refer to the political issues and current affairs of the day. It has also been a part of programming by the MSO on numerous occasions.

MEAA Federal President Michael Balk said the ban on political commentary was dismissive of MSO musicians and staff.

He said pianist Jayson Gillham made appropriately contextual comments about the war in Gaza on Sunday, when he prefaced the short instrumental piece 'Witness'. The composition was an artistic expression and response to the rising death toll of Gazan journalists since the war erupted in October 2023.

"MSO management's initial decision to cancel Jayson from performing with the full orchestra on Thursday was inappropriate, particularly after Jayson's contextualised introduction of the work," Mr Balk said.

"The explanation from MSO's management on disallowing political comments on its stages is an over-reach. Our artists have voices and this decision amounts to censorship, fuelling anger already felt by musicians.

"Music and art exist in a political and social context.

"Diversity and inclusion are not achieved by the silencing of artists. Creative workers should not have to restrict expressing opinions through their lifelong work for fear of jeopardising their careers.

"We call on MSO to reverse its decision and allow our artists to freely express themselves through their art forms."

More information: Mark Phillips, 0422 009 011

📍 PO Box 723 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 📞 1300 656 513

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ABN 84 054 775 598