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Nuanced review of crisis in opera is welcomed

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance welcomes the public release of the National Opera Review and the recognition that extra funding is needed to rescue a sector of the arts that is in crisis.

The report of the review, chaired by Helen Nugent, reinforces the key architecture of opera across Australia, by recommending that local companies be maintained not only in Queensland, but Western Australia and South Australia.

It is also important that the review has recommended an increase of productions of Opera Australia in the Victorian market. In the view of MEAA, a continuing presence in Victoria is vital for OA to maintain ongoing employment for chorus and long-term contracts for singers.

Opera has always been a major employer of singers, performers, musicians and technicians, and its labour intensive nature means any decline in funding has a disproportionate impact on its workforce as well as its ability to deliver artistic excellence.

In recognition of its unique and outstanding contribution, MEAA also supports Victorian Opera being funded as a major company.

Of the review's 118 recommendations, the most important and the most welcome is the proposal for an extra \$10 million in funding to the sector to enable it to put on more productions.

Importantly, the increased funds come with an obligation on the companies to deliver a minimum number of mainstage productions in each capital city, and to tour regionally.

This will place the destiny of the companies in their own hands, while protecting the core purpose of producing mainstage opera.

As MEAA warned in its submission to the review, the major opera companies have been under significant financial pressure, forcing them to respond by adopting short-term strategies that undermine and erode their artistic vitality.

Dedicated investment is needed to return the major companies from a cycle of crisis to a cycle of success, and MEAA urges the federal government to adopt these recommendations at no cost to other sectors of the arts.

A key set of recommendations in the review have a welcome focus on improving opportunities for local artists.

With a declining number of main stage productions and a 500% increase in international singers, the report makes special mention of the profound impact on artistic opportunities for Australia's community of operatic singers.

In just the last five years, opportunities to perform have halved.

MEAA supports the recommendation that opera companies be required to report on the composition of local/international singers in their productions.

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MEAA endorses the report's recommendation that it is time to restore the balance in favour of career development for local artists, noting that the report's proposed trigger point of concern of 20% international singers is well exceeded by Opera Australia.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain