

**APACA 2005 CONFERENCE  
CHANGING ATTITUDES  
CANBERRA THEATRE CENTRE**

**“APACA has no lacka cultural platitudes,  
So far ranging now we're changing attitudes”**

*Shortis and Simpson, APACA's official satirists for the event.*

This, the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual APACA Conference was opened by David Whitney, Director of the Canberra Theatre Centre, who reminded us that APACA started at the Canberra Theatre Centre in 1986.

**Keynote Speakers**

The first Keynote Speech was delivered by **David Gonski AO**, Chair of the Australia Council, who spoke of being particularly impressed by the essence of the conference – changing attitudes. He suggested that too often in business people don't examine and challenge changing attitudes and he observed that Performing Arts Centres are at the forefront of Australian cultural life offering great opportunities for the people who run them to be leaders in the cultural richness of Australia. However, as we live in what Mr Gonski called “the options generation”, with more choices than ever before, we face huge challenges. Increases in education options, resulting in extended minds; improvements in travel allowing us to move easily around the world and to assimilate into other cultures; increases in the standard of living, resulting in a disposable income and rapidly increasing entertainment choices; have presented these challenges. As a consequence entertainment options are changing. The ability to personalise entertainment in the comfort of our homes, using technology such as ipods, DVD's and computers, means that people do not necessarily have to seek out other people in order to enjoy a cultural experience. Another reality of the modern world is that aging populations mean that government money will become even tighter and more difficult to access for anything other than essential infrastructures. Performing Arts Centres are not alone in having to deal with increasing competition for the entertainment dollar. All the arts are facing change. ‘Art for arts sake’ is a decreasingly viable option and Mr Gonski suggested that the arts must move with the competition of the times in which we live.

The one constant in this world that works to the advantage of the cultural sector is that people want to be with other people, to interact with other humans, and Performing Arts Centres need to centre themselves at these interactions. He believes that to keep audiences we need to present popular programs and not just challenge the audience. Mr Gonski encouraged us to look beyond arts funding and to other strings such as health, education, partnerships between not-for-profit organisations, such as teaming up with clubs, schools, hospitals to allow efficient use of money. Whilst he noted that traditional sponsorship was becoming scarcer and the philanthropic tax laws have changed, Mr Gonski suggested that with a bit of lateral thinking both these avenues could still be tapped.

In conclusion Mr Gonski said that the ipod won't be thrown away but it should make people think they really want to see the *real* thing.

The second Keynote Address was delivered by Melbourne barrister and human rights activist **Julian Burnside QC**, who reported that his attitudes towards asylum seekers changed inadvertently. He discussed 'the Tampa affair' and how his involvement in the case, and his success in bringing the refugee passengers to Australia, led to him learning about refugee asylum. He said "a thing once seen cannot be unseen, and to ignore that thing is immoral". Mr Burnside described, in graphic detail, some cases of alarmingly harsh management by the Australian government of refugees in detention. He moved everyone present with his observations and rhetoric.

Mr Burnside believes that the press and the government collaborate by feeding the public alarmist propaganda. John Howard claims that he stands for a fair and just society, however the Anti-Terrorism legislation which has been tabled allow ASIO are able to detain people for five days and if they tell anyone they can be jailed for five years. Australian citizenship can be taken away for "un-Australian behaviour", resulting in possible detention for the rest of your life as you are unable to obtain a visa without citizenship. Mr Burnside urged us to help change the legislation that allows this to happen. He believes that art gives people the courage to stand up and do things differently and suggested that if groups of people should want to use our Performing Arts Centres to inform the public of the dangers of the current, or proposed, legislation that we should allow them to do so.

He urged us to lobby for a Bill of Rights, which would put a boundary around the ability of Parliament to pass certain types of laws.

Mr Burnside's moving and powerful speech resulted in a particularly lively question and answer session.

Julian Burnside left us with a quote from James Thurber who wrote 'Fables for our Times' and 'Further Fables for our Times' –

"It's better to have the ring of freedom in your ears than in your nose".

### **Gerald Yoshitomo**

*Increase Participation, Personal Benefits and the Public Value of the Arts*

"What really counts is what you learn after you know it all". Helen Hayes.

To paraphrase Gerry's talk is difficult. He used a lot of dynamic diagrams to illustrate the effects an arts experience has on different sections of society. Performing Arts Centres can have a profound impact on society and the changes that are shaping it, and are better equipped to deal with change than theatre companies, dance companies or orchestras as each night we can present a different performance offering different audiences and cultures different experiences. In other words we can react faster to changing attitudes and situations.

It is important for Performing Arts Centres to continue to reassess their effectiveness.

Current attitudes arise from socio-demographic characteristics, personality factors, past experiences and social cultural identity. The perception of benefits influence people's attitudes towards participation. There must be an intentional decision to participate and PACs need to remove the barriers towards participation, the key barrier of which is time.

We need to make it practical for people to engage in arts. We need to

- Make it easy to buy tickets, let people know the cost in time and money so that the instant their attention is engaged they can make a decision without having to seek another set of information.
- Make a place for people to talk about the experience, encourage social interaction by such things as after show discussions or keeping the bar open.
- What memory objects are we creating for people to remember the experience?
- Create experience in such a way that people will come next time.

*Come as you are – leave different.* In this section Gerry suggested that two signs be mounted in the foyer – 'Loved It' and 'Hated It'. The ensuing discussions between the two groups which congregate under the two signes would no doubt be lively!

Gerry Yoshitomi reminded us that Performing Arts Centres provide significant, personally meaningful and transformative arts experiences. He suggested that we could better reveal the full personal benefit and public value of arts experiences. The highest reason for attending arts events are social reasons, therefore look at ways at making your centre people friendly and welcoming. Gerry's high energy presentation reminded us to remain interested and connected with what we do, to engage with our audiences and discover what motivates people to participate. The key element is to continue to explore, ask questions and to challenge yourself and your staff.

Delegates were provided with a copy of Mr Yoshitomi's presentation for future reference – valuable stuff indeed.

**Ian Kiernan AO**, Founding Chair of Clean Up Australia, began by telling us some of his history as a solo yachtsman. He told us that when he finally achieved his life long dream of sailing into the Sargasso Sea in the North Atlantic, where the myth has it that the Halcyon Bird lays its egg on a seaweed raft, he found the sea was calm, the seaweed rafts were there and in the middle of the raft he found a thong, a toothpaste tube and other debris which showed human imposition on this beautiful wilderness. This was a life changing experience for him, changing his attitudes. In 1989 Ian and some friends decided to clean up Sydney Harbour. 40,000 people turned up, including Shiite Moslems who came because they wanted to give back to the community that had given them a new start. From there it snowballed, people from all over Australia called wanting his help in establishing their own clean ups. So the National Clean Up Australia event began and the attitudes of Australians everywhere changed.

Ian spoke of never giving up on a passion, and fighting for what you believe in. He sees many instances of community attitudes being changed for the better by persevering.

"If your dreams don't frighten you they are not big enough". George Bernard Shaw.

I must admit that a refrain from Paul Kelly kept going through my head for this session – "From little things, big things grow, from little things, big things grow."

## **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

Several choices were offered to delegates in the form of break out sessions over the two days.

### **National Occupational Health & Safety Standards**

The panel comprised David Hamilton (AEIA), Moira Hay (Bell Shakespeare), Gregory McGrath (VAPAC) and Geoff Bishop (Adelaide Festival Centre). Issues discussed included

- the problems faced by companies which tour nationally, and who have to produce risk assessment documents for each venue
- the need to either make the workplace safer, or the worker safer
- the need for mandatory training in OH&S and that working to an industry standard is an important defence in the event of an accident
- the recent legislation change in Victoria which takes the onus off the corporation and on to the individual
- the proposed changes to workplace relations by the Howard government and mooted Australian Occupational Health and Workers Compensation standards, which would be achieved in the form of a National Safety and Compensation Council.

## **Managing Up**

Facilitated by Arlene Howes, a Psychologist, Trainer and Career Consultant.

The main message of this session was about the use of effective communication by keeping your cool, being honest and using accurate information and negotiation techniques.

## **Ticketing**

A panel comprising Seme Dickerson (Sydney Opera House), Ian English (tickets.com), Sarah Lewis (Canberra Ticketing) and Brendan Hughes Schwab (AEIA) explored how buying habits have changed. Web sales have provided the ability to extract more information about the customer. Digital ticketing is an emerging new technology which allows a bar code to be sent (for example) to a mobile phone with all the ticketing information on it.

When looking to purchase a ticketing system it must be established what is required of the system, such as the collection of customer data, marketing ability, available support, the system portability etc.

The majority of delegates indicated that Internet Ticketing had not increased sales but they conceded that the buying habits of patrons had changed. Experience has shown that Box office costs have not/do not reduce enough to reduce staff numbers. Internet ticketing just gives the customer a 24 hour box office.

AEIA research has shown that 13.5 million people attended theatre in 2004, which generated \$690M in sales. Research shows people want to attend more regularly but accessibility to purchasing a ticket is the greatest barrier

Other break out sessions covered **Privacy Legislation** with a panel comprising Brendan Hughes Schwab (AEIA), Christopher Tooher (Bell Shakespeare) and David Whitney (Canberra Theatre Centre) and **APRA**, conducted by Jennifer Gome and Alice Allen.

The final PLENARY session was a workshop conducted by Jason Cotton and on **Performing Arts Touring**, an on-going issue for delegates to the APACA Conference. The intention of this workshop was to head towards setting the benchmark for national touring. To that end, this was an extremely beneficial session which was attended by producers, presenters, policy makers, touring co-ordinators and practitioners and resulted in the formation of a National Touring Working Party. No doubt Performing Arts Touring will continue to be covered at future APACA conferences until we get it right.

**Social events** kept the delegates busy. The first, on the Wednesday night, was a **cocktail party at Parliament House**, hosted by Senator the Honourable Rod Kemp, Federal Minister for the Arts and Sport. The Minister welcomed us and APACA President Peter Owens spoke eloquently on our behalf. Special guests Jackie Weaver and Bud Tingwell were superb ambassadors for the touring programme, espousing the virtues of touring and capturing some amusing moments on the road. It was an interesting evening with a chance to lobby some politicians, Bronwyn Bishop, Peter Garrett, Malcolm Turnbull, Santo Santori, to name but just a few.

On the Thursday evening, delegates boarded coaches to be transported to historic **Lanyon Homestead** for a **cocktail party** hosted by the Cultural Facilities Corporation. Guests were enchanted by the beautifully restored homestead and outbuildings and were delighted to be given the opportunity for a sneak preview of the Arthur Boyd exhibition in the Nolan Gallery on the Lanyon grounds.

The traditional **Gala Awards Dinner** was held at another beautiful setting, Old Parliament House, where delegates arrived gussied up and very glad to be able to kick their heels up

after the final session of the day. Special guest, Senator the Hon Garry Humphries, presented the Drover Awards (information elsewhere on this website).

A fabulous swing band provided lots of opportunity to dance, and excellent food and wine was abundant.

The final award for the night must go to the Blue Heelers, for showing us all that fancy footwork is not only the order of the day in organising logical itineraries but also the order of the night on the dance floor.

Thanks to Pippa Davis for compiling and writing this report.