



The Artistic Director: On the Way to Extinction
2014 Philip Parsons Memorial Lecture
Delivered by Ralph Myers on Sunday 30 November

Hello. Thanks for coming and sitting in a dark theatre on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in Sydney.

I think it's safe to say that people were quite surprised when in 2009 I was appointed to this job. I was too. It was a pretty left-field appointment – I was young, I had never run a bath before, let alone the third biggest theatre company in the country, and I was (and still am) a set and costume designer – not a profession that has been the traditional nursery of Artistic Directors. I was, however a practicing artist – a busy theatre-maker, plucked from freelance life and given the unfathomably wonderful task of being the artistic leader of one of the finest theatre companies around. It was a pretty daunting experience. I found myself thrust into a whole new raft of situations that I'd previously, in my sedate life as a hard-drinking international theatre artiste, not found myself in.

As it happens there was, in those first few months of my tenure here, a meeting of all of the artistic directors of all of the major performing arts companies that could be assembled in one room at one time. It was held in a light-filled room above the MCA, overlooking the harbour and the opera house.

In that room was the crème of the Australian performing arts. Actors, directors, playwrights, dancers, violinists, choreographers and composers who had risen to the top of their professions and were now charged with the task of leading the twenty eight largest and most established performing arts companies in Australia.

It was an intimidating group of people to find myself amongst.

Once I'd gotten over my fear, I looked around at this esteemed group of people and I was struck by a remarkable thing. They didn't look like artists at all. With the exception of myself, and maybe Mike Finch from Circus Oz, pretty much everyone else was in a suit. I was, it won't surprise you to hear, wearing a clapped out pair of jeans, a torn shirt and a pair of Dunlop volleys. Looking at the rest of them though, they looked more like the annual meeting of a group of insurance executives than a gang of artists.

So here are some of the finest and boldest artists – the great dreamers of our culture – dressed up like real estate agents.

I was mortified. Other than feeling embarrassingly underdressed, I felt sad. What had we done to these people? Why did they feel the need to adopt a corporate uniform just to meet with each other and (if I remember correctly) some people from the Australia Council. It reminded me of one of those nineteenth century postcards of dogs and cats dressed up in tiny suits propped up pretending to do the ironing on tiny ironing boards, or other domestic tasks.

However sad that sight made me feel at the time, the reality was that under those clothes were a group of artists. But things have changed. If we looked at that room now, five years later, we would see a number of people who are not just dressed like managers – they are managers.

The subject of this lecture is what I see as a grave threat to the artistic life of this country; the creeping replacement of artistic leaders with managers and producers, and the far reaching consequences this, if it allowed to continue unchecked, could have on our national cultural life.

There are three parts to this talk –

- first I'll note the trend and try and provide some answers to why this might be happening.
- secondly I'll explain why this is a bad thing – why we need the dreamers in charge of the art.
- and thirdly I'll suggest some ways that we might reverse this trend.

This lecture is about Artistic Directors and before I get started I want to say that while I will speak about quite a few people specifically, my criticisms are entirely about structures and appointments, and not about people or their artistic choices.

First up, what is an artistic director, and what do they, (or what should they) do?

An Artistic director is the artistic head of a performing arts company or festival. They're responsible for making artistic decisions - things like choosing repertoire, commissioning new works, hiring artists and so on. They're essentially there to exercise taste – to say what is hot, who is good, what is going to work, and then to work with those people to make great things happen – weather it be dance or music or theatre.

They're there to inspire, encourage and defend the work that their company makes, and our culture more broadly. The artistic directors of our major performing arts companies and festivals are our national cultural leaders. They're the Richard Tognettis, top-shelf artists who inspire us, and who lead their companies to move us, collectively, as a nation.

In the structure of most organizations, the AD is paired with a manager, someone whose task it is to make stuff happen, and happen on time and on budget. So, they're usually very different people. Management structures and hierarchies vary across the different companies, but, in a traditional structure these two roles work together in some way to run the company and produce the work.

So, what's happening.

When, in early 2012 the board of the Melbourne Festival announced that it had decided not to appoint a new artistic director, and that they would, instead, appoint Josephine Ridge, the Executive Director of the Sydney Festival, as a 'Creative Director' my ears pricked up. I'm a great admirer of Josephine Ridge – she expertly shepherded the Sydney Festival through some tough times as a Executive Director – but I must admit I was disappointed. Here was an opportunity for a board to appoint an artist, and instead they had appointed a manager. It is not a new thing in the world of Australian festivals to appoint artistic directors with distant and tenuous claims to being practicing artists. In fact, some quite successful ones like Fergus Linehan and Leo Schofield were like Josephine, never artists at all. Josephine's festival-hopping predecessor Brett Sheehy's most recent non-administrative job before his appointment as the AD of the Sydney Festival was as the literary manager of the STC in 1994. From that role he rose through the ranks of management there and at the Sydney Festival before eventually switching from Administrator to Artistic Director via a stint as deputy director. But here, in Josephine, was someone not even claiming to be an Artistic Director replacing someone who was, in name at least, one. It was Josephine's appointment that made me notice the trend emerging. And the fact that the board had renamed the position was a clue to what I suspected was going on.

A year earlier, in early 2011, the board of the Melbourne Theatre Company announced that Brett Sheehy, Josephine's predecessor at the Festival, would be their next artistic director – the first time that I can recall that a non-practicing artist had been given such a role at a major theatre company in Australia.

In Sydney earlier this year, Patrick Nolan, Legs on the Wall's AD was replaced by an Executive Producer - Kath Melbourne. And at QTC I've heard on the grapevine that the Queensland government is canvassing the idea of not replacing Wesley Enoch when he leaves his position as AD and rather replacing him with an executive producer.

And that's not to mention the festivals more broadly, the opera companies and the Orchestras, but more of them later.

So what's going on? Why is this happening?

At least part of it can be attributed to the way in which we decide who gets to be an AD in the first place. In almost all instances the company's board makes the appointment. Boards themselves are appointed in a variety of ways, depending on if the company is a quasi-government statutory body – such as QTC or the State Theatre Company of South Australia, or an independent entity, like Belvoir or the STC. With one or two exceptions, boards themselves are either appointed by the responsible state minister or are self-appointing. But regardless of this, what is clear is that in 2014 boards are overwhelmingly dominated by businesspeople.

There are a raft of reasons why this is the case, and some of them are broader cultural trends. There is an undeniable long term shift to the conservative right happening across our society that has all but silenced political dissent in the arts of the kind that was commonplace thirty years ago. The founders and shareholders of this company, Belvoir, would never have countenanced a board loaded with businesspeople of the kind that are now found on every board. There is, in short, a largely unremarked trend towards a society-wide acceptance of late capitalist thinking that underlies the dominance of businesspeople in the governance of our arts organizations. However, this itself does not explain their almost total dominance. The real reason is that businesspeople are on boards is very practical – they're there to raise money.

It has been noted often that government support for the major performing arts companies and festivals has been declining, in real terms, for decades. The companies have adapted to this by attempting to increase revenue from elsewhere – at the box office where they can – but primarily through cadging money from the private sector. This, depending on if the money comes from a corporation or an individual, is known as either sponsorship and philanthropy. Starting from a relatively low level, this dependence on money from the private sector has increased to such an extent that the reality is few, if any, major performing arts companies in this country could now survive in their current forms without it. This has led to overwhelming pressure to appoint well-connected and / or wealthy people to the boards of our

companies. And in Australia, which thankfully lacks a hereditary aristocracy, wealthy people are businesspeople. A cursory look at the boards of the twenty-eight major performing arts companies reveals a shocking lack of diversity. Wealthy white men overwhelmingly dominate, followed at some distance by wealthy white women. There are very few actual artists on these boards. The eight theatre companies who answer to the Major Performing Arts Panel of the Australia Council and their state counterparts have an average of just over one artist each on their boards, discounting ADs. Sitting around the board tables that I have, it is generally acknowledged that fundraising is one of the, if not the most important functions of the board of a company. Of all the MPAP companies, only Circus Oz has any more than two artists left on their board.

Government policy is to some extent responsible for this monoculture. Since the Nugent Report was delivered in 1999, governments have been encouraging, measuring and facilitating private and corporate giving to the arts as a way to deflect pressure on the public purse. Nugent rightly forced companies to be more accountable and financially responsible, but the consequence is that they rapidly became more corporate too.

The broader effect of this shift in the composition of boards on the culture of our arts institutions warrants further examination, but today I want to focus on its effect on that other key role of the board, the appointment of the Artistic Director.

There are any number of studies that show that humans are drawn to other humans who are like them – in gender, in background, in ethnicity, and in class. You can feel yourself doing this instinctively. I gravitate towards people like me in social situations. It makes me feel comfortable. And it's clear that when it comes to appointments we are much more likely to give a job to someone like us.

We like people with similar mindsets to us. People who think like us.

This is natural thing. We understand them and thus we like people like us better than those who are not. We speak the same language, we can empathize with them, and we instinctively trust them. So, it should come as no surprise to us that boards, when charged with the task of finding a new AD, are appointing people who they instinctively trust and understand. People like them.

In the structure of most of these companies, Artistic Directors are paired with a manager, and these two people run the company. In some instances, such as here at Belvoir, the manager and the AD are co-CEOs. In some companies the manager answers to the AD, and in some it's the other way around. Structures vary.

Those General Managers (or Executive Directors, as they now mostly like to call themselves) naturally speak a corporate language, the language of profit and loss, market and brand, because that is their job. They're there to be pragmatic, and prudent, and know how to read a balance sheet. So should we be surprised that boards, dominated as they are by businesspeople, and confronted with a task to which they are woefully unqualified, should be tempted to choose these people to lead our companies. People like themselves. People whom they understand and trust.

But board composition is not entirely to blame for this trend. We artistic directors are responsible too. There is a notable absence of examples of artistic directors behaving like artists. We're spending most of our time pretending to be managers and keeping our heads down. Part of this is practical – not wanting to make waves for fear of upsetting our government and corporate paymasters. But I think there is a sad, very Australian broader explanation too. We are afraid of being mocked, and of putting our head above the crowd. Broadly speaking there is a nation-wide cultural queasiness with artistic leadership, of people being passionate, saying difficult things and making us think about ourselves. We think it's embarrassing to stand up and talk about contemporary dance. People don't want you to tell them about Shostakovich. Or Euripides. Even now, in 2014, this country suffers from a debilitating case of tall poppy syndrome with lashings of cultural cringe on top.

This is a real problem. Of course it's not new. We've always had a problem listening to artists who say things that we collectively don't want to hear. A look back at the history of the big, bold, artistic projects of the last century reveals a disastrous lack of faith in artists who behave like artists.

For example, we invited visionary architects Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin to come and design our new capital city and then immediately set about undermining them and labeling them as impractical money wasters. The result is, to put it politely, deeply flawed. 'See', we say, as we stand on Black Mountain and survey the mess that is Canberra, 'I told you it'd be shit.'

Fifty years later, in one of the boldest and most inspired architectural commissions of the twentieth century, we invited another brilliant dreamer, Jørn Utzon, to build us an opera house. And then did exactly the same thing. Australia just

couldn't cope with an artist like Utzon, with someone who resolutely refused to be flattened and moderated. We balked at exactly the things that made him a great artist – his qualities as a dreamer. In the end we replaced him with the most prosaic, practical, managerial architect we could find, and the result, like Canberra, is an enduring monument to our national failure to accommodate artistic vision.

There are so many more examples. Peter Sellars at the Adelaide festival. Simone Young at Opera Australia. Both these artists were cut off before we allowed them to do what we invited them here to do in the first place. We have excuses for all these sackings, mostly to do with money, but really all they are are damning indictments of our collective unwillingness to be led by visionary artists. And each of those people, although presumably gravely damaged by our ill treatment and rejection of them, have gone on to do exactly what we didn't allow them to do here somewhere else in the world. We weren't right to sack these people, we simply revealed our weaknesses and insecurities to the world.

That we invited Utzon and the Griffins to design our monuments for us last century showed both great vision and deep insecurity about our own native capacity as artists. We grew out of this for a while – in the seventies and eighties when a wave of confident artistic nationalism brought with it a flowering in theatre, music, film and dance. But we've regressed. We've reverted to importing foreign artists to tell us what to do. Every one of our symphony orchestras has a fly-in-fly-out conductor. Perhaps they should look to their smaller cousins, Brandenburg, the ACO and Musica Viva, all of whom have Australian performers or composers at the helm. Look at the Australian Chamber Orchestra, which just has a guy from Wollongong. A guy from Wollongong who, in the face of all this, has managed to make the ACO, unlike any other Australian orchestra, rank amongst the finest ensembles in the world.

Likewise, the major festivals, when they're not being programmed by managers, are now dominated by imported artistic directors who have notably failed to excite enthusiasm by presenting generic, cookie cutter programs of moderate, balanced, largely imported work, that's usually pretty dated by the time it gets here. I'm reminded of the stories we heard in primary school of sunburnt European explorers dying of thirst and hunger in the Australian landscape, resolutely unwilling – or unable – to see the bounty around them, convinced they were in terra nullius, too proud to ask the locals for help.

So is it any wonder that our own artistic leaders are so timid? By creating a model where managers and artists are interchangeable in the role of Artistic Director, and where foreigners are favoured above local talent, we are implicitly signalling that the role is managerial, not artistic, that the role is corporate and generic, not cultural and specific. That we want our ADs to be moderate, and produce digestible and middle of the road work. This is a grave mistake.

ADs need to be dreamers and big thinkers. And they need to be cushioned within structures that allow them to be that dreamer, to be the risk taker that they naturally are. They should not feel compelled to change to fit in to an existing, managerial, corporate culture. They need to think big, be bold, and inspire – both the company they lead and our culture more broadly.

Take, for example, Belvoir. I'm not claiming that my tenure here has been all roses and an unmitigated success, far from it, but four years after that meeting at the MCA I'm still dressed like a bum. Which is something. How have I managed that? I think it's about how the place is structured.

This company had a great culture and structure when I inherited it from Neil Armfield, and it was one that I initially unthinkingly replicated and so has survived. Neil in his seventeen years as an AD was a dreamer, and he was backed up and partnered by a succession of strong, tough, no-nonsense General Managers, notably, for a long stretch Rachel Healy, and culminating before he left, in the appointment of Brenna Hobson, who is still in that role now. And unusually, here at Belvoir, the AD and GM are equals – Brenna and I are co-CEOs, and are thus jointly responsible for the welfare of the company.

It's a winning combination, and one that allows the AD to keep wearing rags and doing the frankly extremely difficult job of programming and inspiring a season, while the GM can power dress and focus on the pragmatic task of implementing whatever harebrained and nutty ideas the AD has had.

It's ying and yang and good cop bad cop situation all at the same time.

The key glue in this relationship is trust. I don't try and do Brenna's job, except when she's wrong, and on the whole she doesn't try and do mine. The truth is, I'd be a terrible General Manager, but it's surprising how many Artistic Directors get involved in stuff they really should stay out of. I once suggested a fairly fresh and crazy idea to a festival director, to see what he thought. I waxed lyrical about the piece, about its mood and feeling of menace, and his reply was something

along the lines of “if we did that you’d have to cover the set build costs and we want an even split of the box office”. I despair, can’t we talk about the work first, before we figure out who’s going to pay for it?

Of course, this is a gross over-simplification of the situation. Good GMs have well-honed artistic instincts. And good ADs love pulling a crowd and making a buck. But broadly speaking this structure allows each of us to work to our strengths, rather than having to be someone who we are not.

Brenna and I share an office now, so we can just fight all the time, but until I she moved in last year, I would spend an hour or so sitting in the armchair opposite her desk each morning rolling through – and fighting out – the issues of the day, finding practical, affordable, sustainable solutions to the difficult task of producing unaffordable, impractical and unsustainable theatre.

The critical thing is that we can battle this stuff out because we’re separate people. It’d be very hard to do this if both our jobs were rolled into one position.

But this is exactly what we’ve been seeing happen around the country.

So what are we going to do about all this? What’s the solution?

Firstly we need to fix the boards. We need to find a way to make the boards of performing arts organizations more diverse. We need at least some artists, preferably a majority of artists, on every board. How are we going to afford this now that every company is so hooked on sponsorship and philanthropy? Don’t ask me, I’m an artist, I’m here to spend the money, not find it. That’s someone else’s job. But for a start could I suggest that every board surely has a few underperformers, a few fat cats who were invited on in the expectation they could cough up and then never did. So we could start by kicking them off and replacing them with some artists. That might get the rest of the board shelling out too. And boards should reflect the reality of the wonderful, rich, diverse culture that we live in. Boards appoint boards – so this task is up to them. But we can hold them to account.

While they’re sorting out their composition, boards should delegate responsibly for appointments to an expert panel. Business people are not experts on the arts. It’s completely unreasonable of us to expect them to be. Sometimes they understand this and appoint head hunters. I don’t think head hunters understand the arts either. Instead they should delegate to an expert panel of artists and people from the profession who are actually involved in the process of making or commenting on theatre or dance or whatever the art form is, and who have a deep understanding of who will be right for the position. Give the job of appointing ADs to people who actually know what they’re talking about.

We need to encourage a culture of artistic change. Artistic directorships shouldn’t be jobs for life. Short tenures mean more diversity and allow for the mitigation of artistic risk. Appointments for shorter fixed terms would hopefully mean bolder appointments. It’s also true that AD’s generally program their best seasons early in their tenure and then run out of puff. And then resort to writing lectures telling everyone else how to run their companies.

But there is ample evidence that boards don’t like having to appoint regularly – it’s a bother and they generally have major companies to run. So they are reluctant to allow short tenures, instead preferring candidates who offer steady, long term leadership. In business, this makes sense, so it’s part of their DNA. Despite most ADs being on three year terms, these tend to roll over by almost by default and boards are extremely reluctant to call time on boring or underperforming ADs. And in the conversations I’ve had with prominent artists over the years about why they are reluctant to accept a position running a major company or festival this has been a recurring motif – Boards insist on at least three festivals – sometimes five, and there is a culture and expectation in theatre companies that ADs will stay for at least a decade. But good artists have careers as artists, and don’t want to sacrifice this. The last great Adelaide Festival, the one everyone still talks about, was a one-off, directed by Barrie Kosky before he too went into voluntary exile. By contrast, when I took this job five years ago, at the age of thirty, Graham Murphy had just stepped down as Artistic Director of the Sydney Dance Company, a job he took on three years before I was born.

So let’s speak hypothetically for a moment: Let’s ask ‘Why didn’t the board of the STC appoint say Leticia Caceres or Simon Stone or Matthew Lutton when they were searching for an artistic director in 2012?’ Don’t get me wrong, I think that the person they did appoint, Andrew Upton, has done a great job in the subsequent years. But he had just resigned! Resignation is a pretty strong signal that you’re ruling yourself out of contention for the job. It looks as though they had to go back and beg him to return. The appointment was a choice of a known, proven quantity, over an unknown one. I don’t know how it came to be that the board decided to re-appoint one of the very people who had just resigned from the position, but from the outside, it felt as though they really couldn’t find anyone new who they felt could perform the role.

So why didn't they appoint someone new?

But my guess is that potential candidates like, say, Simon were deemed 'too much of a risk'. In a few years from now, when he is running whatever temple of culture falls into his hands in Europe (and he's already been offered and turned down one prestigious gig) I suspect it's going to seem like a sadly missed opportunity. We keep doing this – failing to give opportunities to our bright young artists before they disappear overseas.

So, what is 'too much of a risk? What does that mean? Essentially, that he was too young and inexperienced to be the artistic director of a company with a turnover of thirty-five million dollars a year.

On the surface that sounds reasonable, but this thinking is wrongheaded. Artistic directors are there to generate risk. Good risk.

By not appointing a radical like Simon or Leticia or Matt, or someone like them, I think the board were essentially expressing a lack of confidence in their management team's ability to support and accommodate someone deemed so risky.

If not a reflection on the board's faith in their management team, it is at least an acknowledgement that structures are not in place to accommodate an appointment considered artistically exciting but practically risky. This is why we need to change these structures.

I know I'm speaking hypothetically, but I would have loved to have seen Simon get that job and work together with that great company to do something really wonderful. I know it sounds like I've drunk the Simon Stone Kool-Aid, but I've seen him in action at close range, and he really is as good as he says he is. I appointed him as resident director here when I took this job, and so I've programmed three seasons with him, and I can tell you he'd be a bloody good artistic director. He's a great combination - big, good, bold ideas with lashings of slightly ruthless drive and ambition on top.

I am discounting the possibility that the board simply didn't (or still doesn't) see the merit in someone like Simon, which is yet another reason to delegate responsibility to someone who would. My guess would be that an expert panel of say Neil Armfield, Barrie Kosky and Robyn Nevin would have made a bolder choice than having to twist Upton's arm to return to the job.

Taking the position that an artistic director needs to have the management and business skills to be able to run a thirty five million dollar company like the STC will rule out just about anyone interesting. It is a completely unreasonable criterion if you want an artistic director to be an artist.

That's how we end up with the former executive director of the Sydney Festival replacing the artistic director of the Melbourne Festival.

Why isn't Gideon Obarzanek the AD of the Melbourne Festival? Or Lucy Guerin? Or Kate Miller Heidke? Or Nick Cave? Why did Benedict Andrews, surely South Australia's greatest cultural export since the Chappell brothers, not have a chance to program an Adelaide Festival before he moved to Europe and became one of the most sought after directors around? I'm excited about each of these ideas in a way that I'm not by most of the appointments we've seen in the last decade.

Boards are seeking moderation and prudence in the very people who should exhibit exactly the opposite qualities. They want a steady hand when they should have a violently shaking fist.

We need to invest in our own young artists and give them a break. We need to stop importing foreign artists to run things for us whilst exporting the best and brightest of our own. The great cultural capitals of Europe have no problem having faith in Australian talent, shouldn't we too? In the same year as Simone Young was shown the door at Opera Australia she was named both chief executive of the Hamburg State Opera and chief conductor of the Philharmoniker Hamburg, positions she still holds.

The last Australian chief conductor of a symphony orchestra was Stuart Challender at the Sydney Symphony; he died tragically in 1991. Let's cancel the visas of all of the fly-in-fly-out conductors of our orchestras for five years and see what happens. Let's see what our young musicians can do. Maybe some will come home from exile. Simone Young herself said in the Herald in 2011:

"I think there should be at least one Australian [state] orchestra led by an Australian conductor ... because we risk losing these people. But the reality of the financial situation in this country is the state orchestras and state opera companies are all out there competing for the sponsorship dollar, the marketing interest and the media interest and it's easier to sell the story of somebody coming from somewhere glamorous than somebody you've seen grow up at the Conservatorium."

Let's limit the terms of ADs to five years.

Let's end the merry go round of festival directors. We see the same faces doing the rounds of the major festivals. Festival boards are endlessly optimistic. It defies logic to imagine that someone who manifestly failed to exact even a murmur of excitement in, say, Adelaide will magically be able to turn, say, Brisbane into a heaving orgy of artistic exuberance. It's as though just not going bankrupt is the only requisite qualification.

You get the feeling that boards are genuinely scratching their heads and scraping the bottom of the barrel looking for an AD. Well look outside the barrel! We have a vibrant, thrilling artistic community full of bright passionate artists who would kill to get put in charge of a festival or a theatre company or orchestra. We need to nurture these potential leaders within our companies and then appoint them to the top job. .

We need people making artistic decisions who've lived and breathed and succeeded as artists, who've had to innovate and adapt and dream and be bold, because that's what making art is. I've failed as an artistic director when I've thought I knew the formula for success. When I thought that all you needed to do was replicate what you had before. It's not how it works. Every season, every show needs fresh vision, new dreams. There is no formula for artistic success. You need constant reinvention. New, big, mad ideas all the time.

Commercial success and artistic risk are seen as mutually exclusive. They're not. There is a widely held belief that you can have one or the other, but not both, and that Artistic Directors are advocates for work that is worthy but unprofitable. This is not true. People want to come and see the most exciting, the most thrilling, the most moving, the most daring performance they can find. Successful arts companies know this. Successful tech companies know this too. Google invests vast sums in people who think big and dream. People to pursue mad ideas. Sure they have vast amounts of money – but the formula works, because they back up their dreamers with hard-headed business people who have the nous to capitalize on and market the crazy ideas their dreamers dream up. And sometimes they fail. Take Google Wave. But Google seem to wear these failures as a badge of honour. We could all learn something from this.

Those ADs still lucky enough to have a job need to be better at it. We need to stand up and fight. And not be afraid of being cut down, of being mocked in *The Australian* or the *Herald Sun*. We need to dream our dreams in public, and fight for our artists against the bean counters. We need thick skin.

In the end it's not about the background of the person, where the artistic director comes from, or what they're wearing, it's about the role. It's about having places for dreamers at the helm of our companies and festivals.

Because if we don't, we may as well get rid of the humans all together and just write a computer algorithm to program our seasons for us. It sounds ridiculous, but without an artistic director, our companies are going to have to find some way of choosing what to do.

It's a tragedy, but we've long ago abandoned the idea that performance, that art more generally, exists on a higher plane than the grubby world of commerce and money. We now unquestioningly accept that it is something to be bought and sold. But, at its best, performance remains unchanged. It is a remnant of our old lives before the markets put a price on everything. It's a remnant of our lives when we sang and danced and played for each other to keep out the dark.

Our theatre and dance companies, our festivals and orchestras are what we have left. We cannot surrender them to the markets. We can't let the businesspeople and their managers take charge. They've got their hands on pretty much everything else in our lives, but we must fight to keep the dreamers in charge of the arts.

Thanks very much.