



ANNUAL REPORT 1998-99

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20 September 1999

The Hon Peter McGauran MP
Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I have pleasure in presenting to you, under Section 38 of the *Australia Council Act* 1975, the Annual Report for the Council for 1998–99.

Dr Margaret Seares
Chair of Council



This has been a significant year for the Council in a number of ways. Michael Lynch resigned as General Manager in August 1998, after four years of dedicated work implementing and refining the restructure recommended in 1995. Michael's understanding of and connection to the arts community was of great value to the organisation, and it has been indeed fortunate that we have been able to appoint a new General Manager in Jennifer Bott, who has also been able to bring a direct and long-term knowledge of the arts community to the day-to-day work of the Council.

We have farewelled three long-serving Fund Chairs from the Council: Ed Champion (Literature); Richard Mills (Music); and Geoff Street (Theatre); together with Lucette Aldous, a community representative. All four made a major contribution to the work of the Council and to that of their respective Funds.

1998–99 was also the first year of the renewed triennial funding agreement between the Government and the Council. This agreement is paralleled by a new strategic plan which reveals a significant shift in the Council's operations towards boosting the demand side for the arts in Australia. My fellow Councillors and I have become concerned over the past year that the imbalance between supply and demand would be to the long-term detriment of the arts in Australia. We have therefore given priority, during these three years, to strategies designed to increase demand for the arts from the general public, overseas promoters, young people, corporate sponsors and governments of all persuasions and in all jurisdictions.

In so doing, Council has made a concerted effort to broaden its network of strategic relationships, in order for the impact of the arts to be felt in areas where previously it had scarcely registered. Currently we have collaborative relationships with organisations such as the CSIRO, the ABC, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Local Government Association, the National Multicultural Advisory Council, the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council, to name just a few. It is our intention to build and extend these relationships over the next few years in order to widen the impact of the arts within the Australian community.

1998–99 saw the passing of the legislation establishing The New Tax System for Australia. The implementation of the GST will be one of the most challenging periods which the arts in Australia have faced for many years. Council has been working steadily to set up advisory systems to support arts organisations and individuals to deal with the new tax, and to monitor the impact of the tax on the arts generally.

The other major issue for the year was the commissioning of the Major Performing Arts Inquiry, chaired by Dr Helen Nugent. We have appreciated your recognition that the performing arts sector in Australia is in need of clear strategies to aid its future development. It is now the intention of Council to extend a strong planning framework to the other artform sectors within our purview.

Support for individual artists and for innovation in arts organisations remains the cornerstone of the work of the Australia Council. However, we have recognised that the Council must play an increasingly strategic and facilitative role within the Australian community as a whole if the arts are to be encouraged and enriched during the period of rapid change through which we are living. We thank you for the support which you have given us for this approach and look forward to working with you further to meet the challenges ahead.

Yours sincerely



Dr Margaret Seares
Chair of Council