

ABOLISH THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL – QUESTION MARK

By Derek Strahan, BA Cantab (Modern Languages, French & Spanish)

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ABOLISH THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL – QUESTION MARK

By Derek Strahan, BA Cantab (Modern Languages, French & Spanish)

[Part 1 – BIOGRAPHY - PREAMBLE](#)

[BIOGRAPHY](#)

My name is Derek Strahan. I am an Australian citizen. Like many Australian citizens I speak Australian with a foreign accent. Because of it, and to my continuing aggravation, people often assume that I am English. I am not. I am Irish. However, it is also true that I am British, being a native of Northern Ireland. Why don't I speak with an Ulster accent? To explain why I sound more "English" than "Irish", I feel I should briefly outline my background. I've been resident in Australia since 1942, though circumstances kept me away from this country between the years 1945 and 1961. I was born in Penang, in Malaya, as it was then called, when it was a British colony. As was the custom among British colonials, I was sent to boarding school at the age of four. I would have spent most of my childhood in boarding schools. Fortunately for me, the Japanese Imperial army caused a disruption in British colonial life by invading Malaya, which my mother, my sister and me to escape to Perth, Western Australia. You could say we arrived as boat persons. Given the political circumstances of the time we were not turned away. I spent the best part of my childhood living in the Perth suburb of Claremont, where I went to school as a dayboy, learning to swim at Claremont Baths and at Cottesloe Beach.

Sadly, my mother did not want to prolong our stay in Australia. She preferred life in a third world country, occupied by a foreign power, run by fundamental religious bigots, and riven by sectarian violence, rather like present day Iraq. So, in 1945, we moved to Northern Ireland. Here, although I had committed no crime, I was sentenced to seven years incarceration in a Protestant Boys' Boarding School in Belfast. Disregarding my desire to study music at tertiary level, it was decided instead that I should study modern languages, French and Spanish, in order to gain entrance to Cambridge University. An unintended side effect of my studies, which alarmed everyone, was that I quickly became imbued with the radical anti-clerical political views of the 18th century French philosophers, and, as natural progression, with the Fabian socialist views of George Bernard Shaw, whose entire literary output I devoured at the age of 18. Further details of this era in my life can be found in my article ["Ted and Sylvia – I was there"](#), which also covers the time I spent at Cambridge University (1953-56), where I met and briefly dated Sylvia Plath before she met Ted Hughes –an episodewhich earned me a brief mention in her Journal.

Yes, I did go to Cambridge on a scholarship, which was means-tested, so my father had to pay anyway – which infuriated me. I had earned the money. Why did I have to be indebted to him for my further education? After graduation in 1956 I spent five confused years in London, gaining employment as an actor, an assistant film director making commercials, and as casual teacher, while crawling back into music by writing songs for myself to sing with guitar. I dipped into rock'n roll, which had just burst upon the scene, led by Bill Haley and Elvis Presley, but also emulated the songs of the French chansonniers of the 50s and 60s, of whom the most famous, in the English-speaking world, was Jacques Brel – but there were many others. It was another unintended consequence of my education, that my French studies helped me return to music. I also began composing. Though I was singing in clubs, by 1961 I realised that I did not want to remain in London's concrete jungle. An obscure impulse, a dimly

remembered recollection of a time of sun and beaches caused my then girl-friend and I to book on a boat to go to the Canary Islands. We were late, and missed the boat train. Returning in chaos to the flat of our best friends I said: "Well, if you wanted to get as far away from London as possible, where would you go?" The flippant answer was: "Australia." But a light bulb lit up in my head. I said: "We'll go there". And we did.

Apart from 3 years working in television in New Zealand, and one year visiting family in the UK, I've been in Australia ever since.

I hope all that explains why I speak Australian with a foreign accent.

PREAMBLE

This text originates in a talk and discussion prepared as the inaugural event put on by the Australian Creators' Executive, at the premises of the New South Wales Writers' Centre, Rozelle, in Sydney, Australia. Australian Creators' Executive is an embryonic body formed to lobby for the cause of Australian individual creative artists. The talk was also designed as the first one to be held under the umbrella title "[Composers Earning money](#)", which is also the heading of the final section of this article. The overall aim of this series is to create a broad context in which to embrace many aspects of this topic, encompassing not only a survey of funding arrangements for composers today, but also of how composers earned money in previous eras. Although the emphasis is on composers, the issues are pertinent to the interests of all creative artists in any discipline. In the first part of this article, I'll touch on how the ways that (for example) composers and writers earn money differ from the ways that painters earn money. The differences are significant, and point up social aspects of how artists in different disciplines relate to society and to people who buy their work.

The first segment of the article presents the overall context, and also refers to the subject matter of future articles. The second segment addresses the topic as advertised – "[Abolish The Australia Council ?](#)" – QUESTION MARK. The question mark is important. This is a rhetorical question, in that the Federal Government will always need an arts advisory body whose activities operate at arms length from the government. No government wishes to be directly involved in the arts, any more than you would willingly wade through a pond full of cannibalistic piranha fish. One of the questions explored tonight is whether or not the Australia Council, as it has evolved, is capable of serving the needs of one particular section of the arts community – its individual creative artists. On its own admission, the Council is not able to fund "between 60% and 70% of its clientele. This is an improvement on the statistics of seven years go, when it could not fund 90%. However, is the improvement due to many of its "clients" (such as myself) having given up trying?

Some may feel that if an organisation can only fund from 20% to 30% of its clientele, its relevance is in doubt. On the other hand, the Council has only limited funds at its disposal. The cake it is given to divide is a small cake. Is there any way that the cake can be enlarged without making politically unacceptable demands on taxpayers' money? Probably not – at least not through the Australia Council. So abolishing it and starting again might only result in an equally unsatisfactory result.

This article offers some insights into how the cake is divided, on the basis of correspondence received on this matter from the council. Judgement by committee is supposed to provide protection against bias in funding. But this strategy is self-deluding. No artistic judgement can be unbiased. Bias is at the basis of artistic judgement. The problem is, therefore, that bias can, and will inevitably exist in a

system which denies its existence – but only if the system avoids accountability, by refusing to give reason for its decisions. Statutory bodies are required by law to give reasons for their decisions. So how can the Australia council avoid acquitting itself of this obligation? Correspondence from the council itself provides some clues as to how this balancing act is achieved.

The relevant section of this article has already posted on this website under the heading: [“No reasons For Saying No.”](#) The text has been there for several years. But, as we know, in its coverage of the arts, the press is motivated less by content than by celebrity reporting. Thus, a few years ago, an Australian council reform group was formed, and it attracted a great deal of attention from all media, since the group starred two high profile poets and an even higher profile pianist. The aim here is to attract interest in ideas, in policy, without the aid of celebrities, so, although the press may find nothing of interest in our proceedings, a few seeds of change may be sown.

Other possible methods of enlarging the funding basis are touched upon here with, again, the aim of encouraging discussion about how to enlarge the funding basis for Australian individual creative artists. I don't have any final answers. But I do have some suggestions. The more suggestions we have, the more discussion we have, the more likely it is that we will arrive at a situation where more than 20% to 30% of artists who apply for funding, do get funding, as might artists who no longer think it worth applying.

The 20% to 30% statistic is a blunt instrument with which to estimate the number of individual creative artists who do and don't get funded, since those percentages also include many of the other arts entities which apply for funding. It seems churlish, at this point, to add that a variable of 10% in assessing the success/failure rate hardly inspires confidence in the Council's ability to monitor its own effectiveness. It is significant, however, that the Australia Council does not resist discussion of the issues. A senior representative did attend the function at which this text was presented, and a lively discussion followed, in which assurances were given (1) that funding of artists from the private sector is under discussion and (2) the Council is always approachable to discuss these and other pertinent matters. This is heartening since some of the solutions put forward might lead to the council having a reduced role in the funding process. One would hope that the Council might even welcome a rational sharing of the funding function.

The end result should be, I suggest, to increase Australia's artistic produce. A term for individual artists introduced for the Creative Nation initiative, put forward by the Keating government, was "Primary Creators". The term quickly passed out of use, I suspect because other members of the arts community, such as arts bureaucrats, did not wish to be reminded that their role is secondary. Such sensitivity was inappropriate. The term "Primary Creators", was clearly derived from agriculture. Creative artists provide primary produce for the arts. But a description that works for farmers didn't work for artists. In agriculture there are eggs. In the arts there is ego. In the arts, ego gets in the way.

It is typical in the arts that an initiative should get bogged down, and lost, by the use or misuse of terminology. So let's sidestep that issue, and ask the question: does Australia want more artistic produce? If so, this must come from the individuals who create the produce. To achieve greater output than is presently achieved, what changes are necessary?

I would suggest: less regulation **in** artistic content, and less politicisation **of** artistic content.

To achieve this end, who should participate in the production process who currently do not participate? In a word – consumers. The general public. Simple. Obvious. But you be amazed - or perhaps not - to discover how many people in the arts regard such a proposition as heresy. Examples will follow. And so to main item on the agenda!

Not that I endorse the use of the word “agenda”. I regard it as a suspect term. Explanation follows!

Part 2 – AGENDA - ARTS ORGANISATIONS – A BRIEF HISTORY

AGENDA

The main agenda of this exercise is:

TO EMPOWER THE INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE ARTIST WITH AUTONOMY.

Many aspects of Australia Council operations and procedures could be discussed, but tonight only those pertinent this agenda will be raised.

Does the individual creative artist have autonomy now?

A simple sounding question, but not so simple to answer, since there are various levels at which autonomy must operate if the artist is to have total autonomy. If autonomy is not total, if it is restricted, then there is no autonomy, not if the word means what it says. You can't be partly autonomous, any more than you can be partly pregnant.

Firstly, let's look at the term: Individual Creative Artist. The term itself is tautologous. The same idea is repeated. An artist should, by definition, be creative, since art is artifice, and, to exist, art must be created by the agency of the mind. Nevertheless, we have to use the term Creative Artist, to define an artist who is solely responsible for the concept underlying the artwork which he or she produces; and we distinguish such an artist from one who employs technique to produce a work to specifications supplied by an employer.

It is the issue of **copyright** which, legally, distinguishes the employee-artist from the creative artist. Who owns the concept? The employee-artist works to concepts which he or she does not own, except through negotiations to establish a degree of beneficial ownership. These negotiations, however, must, of necessity, be additional to the negotiations which establish the artist's working wage. For example, when I wrote TV soap opera scripts I never owned what I wrote, and though I had to use some creative ingenuity in my writing, I was not working to an original concept, but one which had been created by a consultative team at a story conference.

I might have contributed ideas at that conference, but the moment I contributed them, I ceased to own them. Writing a script for a feature film is only slightly different. You own what you write while you are writing it, but at the point where the production company undertakes to make a film from the script, and your full fee is paid up, you are obliged in law to surrender copyright in the script to the production company.

In an entirely separate negotiation, a writer may secure a percentage interest in profits, net or gross, made from marketing the resulting film. But that's an entirely different deal, which few writers succeed in striking.

And the situation is entirely different again as regards painters. Although, in common law, painters retain copyright in their work, this doesn't do them much good, if they sell the original, which is usually what painters do. Reproduction rights don't amount to much in the art market.

Most art lovers buy a painting not only for the love of art, but also to acquire a property of which they have exclusive ownership, in the hope will the property will increase in monetary value. **Capital appreciation as much as artistic appreciation!**

Since the increase in monetary value will be in direct proportion to the scarcity of the artwork, the less it is cheapened through reproduction the greater the capital growth will be. This is a simple law of commerce. Scarcity raises the price. Abundance lowers it. So the opportunity for painters to earn royalties through sale of reproductions is very limited.

The method of the marketing of a painting is in total contrast to the method of the marketing a book or a music composition. The marketing of these is almost entirely geared to mechanical reproduction of the artwork, for reading or listening, or to live re-enactment of it. These are the means by which income is generated.

The contrast could not be greater, and so we cannot have one cure-all solution to the earning problems of all the various kinds of artists represented by all the different crafts. Nevertheless, despite these complexities, let's not lose sight of the focus of this discussion. The focus is on the Creative Artist.

Is the term Creative Artist sufficient? Do we need to gild the lily and say Individual Creative Artist? It shouldn't be necessary, but, in practise, it is, in order to distinguish the Individual Artist, as an entity, from an Arts Organisation, which is also an entity. Why? Because we're going to examine what advantages an Arts Organisation enjoys in law, which the Individual Artist does not enjoy.

ARTS ORGANISATIONS – A BRIEF HISTORY

Firstly, let's explore how the Arts Organisation came into being. I don't need to remind you that, in the performing arts, it is the Arts Organisation which is the principle employer of artists; but the Arts Organisations of today are very different to those of yesterday. To provide a perspective, what follows now is a very brief survey of the evolution of employment prospects for the artist, in European culture, with some anecdotal digressions, and brief reminders of yesterday's art which is still sold in today's market places. This history shows that, previously, there was always a mix of organisations and individuals in the matter of providing artists with paid employment.

It also shows that there always was, and still is, an interaction between social and economic factors which influences the very nature of an artwork. Art for art's sake is a romantic notion dating from the 19th century. Trying to sustain this ideal in the absence of money leads to poverty, illness and premature death.

To illustrate the sometimes crass relationship between payment of money and content, let me cite the case of the writer Charles Dickens. The reason why Charles Dickens' novels are so long is because he wrote them as serials for magazines. Each chapter was an episode, he was paid per episode, so that's why there are so many chapters. You could say that Dickens pioneered the soap opera. And now, we skip backwards about three centuries, in search of the identical nexus - and you will, I

hope, forgive me if I take my examples from music history, in which I take a particular interest.

For centuries the main employer was the Church, which, I'm sure you will agree, we can define as an organisation, and which required from its art employees works of religious content. With the Renaissance, secular art began to emerge as a result of patronage of artists by wealthy individuals, inevitably from the aristocracy. The Church, however, remained an important patron.

Not all composers were able to secure patronage from the aristocracy. Johann Sebastian Bach tried, which is why, for example, we have the Brandenburg Concertos, written for the Duke of Brandenburg, who did **not** give Bach a job, and who does **not** deserve to have his name branded on these works, since he left the manuscripts of the Concerti abandoned in a back drawer, where they languished for two centuries, until the Baroque revival in the 19th century, in which Mendelssohn played such an important part.

In previous eras composers were regarded as servants, along with performers: indeed there was not much distinction between the two, because composers were also performers and musical directors, in Germany, Kappelmeisters. The status of the composer was, in fact, not much better than that of a serf, a topic which is visited in detail in an article at this website- [“The Artist As Serf.”](#) The serf did not own the land he tilled. Are things very different today? Only since the introduction of laws of copyright at the Berne Convention of 1886, to which there have been numerous revisions. The US was not party to any multilateral convention until 1952. As we have noted, copyright laws are of minimal assistance to painters, who habitually sell their copyright with the painting.

Taking music again as a case study, the period of Haydn, Mozart & Beethoven is pertinent to our topic, since it was at the beginning of the 19th century that the composer-entrepreneur emerged, doing deals with publishers while also soliciting support both from the aristocracy and from the wealthy bourgeoisie.

Later in the 19th century we come to the case of Richard Wagner, who also survived on a combination of support from the wealthy bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. Considerations of art, politics, sex and money were of equal importance in Wagner's life, and were inextricably intertwined, particularly as he wrote the libretti for his own operas, and all of his preoccupations are evident in them.

These examples are explored in greater detail at the end of this article: [“Composers Earning Money”](#). Expanded versions of these topics are also available or in preparation – see [“The Beethoven Files”](#), [“Was Wagner Jewish?”](#) on this website.

The point of citing those examples, however briefly, is to demonstrate how varied were the forms of support which composers have enjoyed in past eras, and, through sound files, to hear reminders of the work which that support enabled the composers to produce. Although those works are still heard, the forms of support which made them possible no longer exist. Those kinds of person-to-person deals, with all their passion and eccentricity are no longer made.

Why not? It is perhaps precisely because of the socially anarchic and highly individualistic nature of these kinds of deals that, by the time we get to the 20th century, support of the individual creative artist has become politicised by invoking more severe standards of correctness. I'm referring to the rise and rise of the Committee.

Part 3 - THE RISE AND RISE OF THE COMMITTEE (AND WHY AGENDA ARE SUSPECT)

The Committee, in all its manifestations confers respectability on THE DECISION. And it is THE DECISION which now, throughout the civilised world, determines which artist gets paid how much for doing what work. Committees are seen as irreproachable because their DECISIONS are always deemed to be FAIR. They are deemed to be FAIR because they are warranted to be NEVER BIASED.

That's the theory. I pass on the absurdity of this proposition - for the moment. As I suggested earlier, a non-biased decision in the arts is a contradiction in terms. Art is subjective, and any reaction to it, by definition, reveals some kind of bias. So let's concentrate on the magic formula which is supposed to eliminate the possibility of bias. This magic formula can be conveyed in one word. AGENDA. In order to have a basis for its DECISION-MAKING, a Committee has to have AN AGENDA. What, you may ask, is wrong with an agenda? A great deal. Firstly, the word is being misused, or rather, its meaning has shifted. To understand how and why, we must explore what the word "agenda" originally meant. **This is a surrealist exercise!**

The word "**agenda**" derives from the Latin verb "**agere**" which means "**to act**":- hence "**agent**", one who acts, and "**agendum**", meaning, originally, "something to be acted upon" -

just as an "**addendum**" means "**a thing to be added**", derived from the Latin verb "**adere**" -

from which we also get "**adhere**" mean "**to stick to**" - having been "**added on**".

"**Agendum**" is the singular, meaning "**a thing to be acted upon**":-

"**Agenda**" is the plural, meaning "**things to be acted upon**".

The singular form is no longer used. Dating from 1882, the word "**agenda**" - plural - was used to mean "**things to be done at a meeting**", hence "**items of business to be done at a meeting**".

At this point in the evolution of meaning, the rot sets in. We all know how rare it is actually to get things done at a meeting, which explains why that meaning could not be sustained in usage.

Consequently the meaning of the word "**agenda**" now shifts so that it comes to mean: "**a list of items of business to be talked about at a meeting**" -

no longer "**items of business to be done at a meeting**", but now, as in current usage "**a list of items of business to be talked about at a meeting**"

The purpose of a meeting has now become "**to discuss whether or not these items of business should, in fact, be done**". But you will note that, as a result of this shift of meaning, the word "**agenda**", which is a **plural word**, has become a **singular word**.

It becomes "**an agenda**". Thus "**Agenda**" is no longer "**things to be done**", nor is it even "**a list of things to be done**".

The word is now used to refer to the end product of a discussion about what to do. In other words, "**An agenda**" now exists because it is the result of a meeting, or of a series of meetings, the purpose of which is to establish "**an agenda**".

So the word now effectively means “**a program of action which excludes alternatives**” - because all the decisions about what to do have already been made. “**An agenda**” no longer means “**a range of possibilities, of options, of alternatives**”.

It now means **one singular purpose**, which has been cast in concrete, and which is not subject to any further discussion - unless, of course, another meeting is called whose agenda is to discuss the agenda.

In short, the word “**agenda**” now means the exact opposite of what it used to mean.

The shift in meaning reflects the action upon language of human nature. Another example comes to mind. The word “**pacification**”, derives from the word “**pax**” meaning “**peace**”. “**Pacification**” means “**to make peaceful**”. In the Vietnam War, when a village was bombed, killing everyone in it, this was called “**pacification**”. The village was made peaceful by the method of applying violence until all movement ceased. The village became “**pacific**”. The ocean of that name was so-named because its waters tended to be peaceful.

So, in military parlance, the word became used to mean the exact opposite of what it originally meant. What was the motivation in human nature which brought about this change? Simple: the need to deceive, to misrepresent in order to achieve an objective.

Now you understand why Committees love **AN AGENDA**. Establishing **AN AGENDA** removes the need for, removes the obligation to consider or discuss any proposals which are put to a committee, excepting a discussion about whether or not the proposal fits **THE AGENDA**.

It is not the committee which makes the decision, you see. It is **THE AGENDA** which makes the decision. The Committee is absolved of any responsibility in accounting for its decision. All it needs to do is to cite **THE AGENDA**.

We will shortly see how important this strategy is to the Australia Council whenever it is asked to fulfil its statutory obligation to give reasons for a decision it has made. But not yet. There is more ground to cover before we get to that point in this evening’s deliberations. It’s time for a reminder of this evening’s **AGENDA**.

Yes, I’ve given in. **AGENDA** is the buzz word, and I intend using it too. So - time for a reminder of **OUR AGENDA** in this article. When I say **OUR AGENDA**, I don’t mean to presume that the Agenda under discussion here will become **YOUR AGENDA**. But it is **THE AGENDA under discussion**.

Here is a reminder of the main **AGENDA** for tonight’s discussion:

To find ways and means **TO EMPOWER THE INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE ARTIST WITH AUTONOMY**.

Let’s now amplify that description of the Agenda, and derive from it a simple proposition that describes some of the powers the artist should have in order to achieve autonomy.

[Part 4 - A RADICAL PROPOSITION – SIX POINTS](#)

A RADICAL PROPOSITION

The proposition is:

THAT THE INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE ARTIST SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEEK SUPPORT FOR HIS OR HER OWN WORK BY DIRECT PRIVATE TREATY WITH INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.

A simple enough Proposition. It is hard to believe that anyone would object to it. It falls into the category of a motherhood statement. And yet I assure you that after a century of the institutionalisation of art by academia and government sponsorship, it is a radical proposition.

Why do I say this Proposition is radical? Because if it is taken seriously enough to be acted upon, a number of implications would become apparent, and a number of developments would have to follow, which certain groups within the arts community might find threatening. Threatening to what? Threatening to the basis of their employment. By eroding the validity of their job description.

To put it bluntly: if artists are able to find their own support within the community, they will have less need to turn to government agencies to obtain support. Guess whose jobs will be at risk? But let's be systematic about this. Blunt talk does not allow for forensic analysis. For that we must create a points system.

SIX POINTS

[Point 1. Direct support from private sector for individual artists?](#)

[Point 2. No need for funding from federal or state art bodies?](#)

[Point 3. No need for funding bodies?](#)

[Point 4. Nervous arts bureaucrats?](#)

[Point 5. Individual artists not empowered to find their own patrons.](#)

[Point 6 Statistics, damn statistics! Proving artists are poor!](#)

Here then are 6 points, each of which follows on progressively from the previous one:

POINT 1.

DIRECT SUPPORT FROM PRIVATE SECTOR FOR INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS?

If the individual artist were able to obtain a significant degree of direct support from the private sector (whether from individuals, groups or corporations) this would make him or her independent of the judgements of peer groups, of committees, or of management groups which run arts organisations.

POINT 2

NO NEED FOR FUNDING FROM FEDERAL OR STATE ART BODIES?

If the individual artist could benefit from direct private support, he or she would not have to make application for funding to federal or state art bodies, nor, in the case of writers and composers, would they have to depend on the capricious largesse of performance organisations.

POINT 3.

NO NEED FOR FUNDING BODIES?

If individual artists did not apply to federal or state art bodies for funding, the need for the existence of these bodies would be put in question, at least as far as their function in supporting individual artists was concerned.

POINT 4.

NERVOUS ARTS BUREAUCRATS?

If this were the case, one might expect some nervousness on the part of the arts bureaucrats who run these bodies, because it could be seen as the thin edge of the wedge. If individual artists were funded by some regulated system that enabled direct support from the private sector, arts bureaucrats might well perceive a trend towards privatisation of the entire arts sector.

We'll discuss the implications of this possibility below. But at this stage, it's important to note that arts bureaucrats are paid quite high salaries, and, naturally, they will be concerned to defend the basis on which these salaries are paid. Therefore, although the welfare of artists is at the top of the agenda of, for example, the Australia Council, this does not necessarily mean that the Council would support a motherhood agenda such as the one being presented tonight. As we noted (in the [Preamble](#)) they might be prepared to "discuss" it, but would they give actual support to have it implemented? Question mark.

However, at present, arts bureaucrats do not have to worry about a grass roots threat from artists, because in Australia today individual artists are not empowered by the system to go out and find their own patrons.

Did anyone know this? Does anyone doubt it? I'll repeat the statement: **in Australia today individual artists are not empowered by the system to go out and find their own patrons.**

POINT 5.

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS NOT EMPOWERED TO FIND THEIR OWN PATRONS

This situation prevails in Australia today, despite the fact that in the past, as we have noted, private patronage has been the most effective way to get new artwork created. This situation prevails despite the fact that living artists have to compete with the work of dead artists, who were able to get funding for their work through private treaty arrangements.

You might be of the opinion that direct private patronage of individual artists is socially undesirable because it creates inequality in the arts community, but you can only support that proposition if no one else in the arts community currently benefits from this kind of support. That is not the case, and I am not referring to the particular case of painters who sell their work outright.

There has been a long tradition in Australia of providing support to performing artists by means of making donations to tax-deductible organisations which exists to help them. Running competitions has always been a popular way of doing this, since the donors benefit by attending events where the competitors perform. This kind of event combines the excitement of art with the excitement of a gladiatorial contest.

But a more recent form of patronage for individual performers has been established, thanks to the ingenuity of lawyers. Individual instrumentalists in orchestras currently benefit from directed private patronage, by a legal device which we will explore shortly ([MEDICI PROGRAM](#)) The kind of support they get to pay their salaries is not available to composers whose music they sometimes play.

So what point am I trying to make here? It is this:- you can't cite inequity as a reason to discourage private patronage for individual creative artists when it is already entrenched in the system and available to other art workers, such as performers. Speaking of inequity, how about this? Although the old-fashioned system of private patronage is now relegated to the past, the works which it helped to create, are still very much alive. What this means is that living artists are constantly in competition with dead artists, whose works were brought into being by forms of support which living artists **cannot access. Repeat, cannot.**

That is why, at present, arts bureaucrats do not have to worry about rumblings from individual artists. These can be dismissed as the rantings of malcontents, and as long as such rantings and eruptions are only heard intermittently, and only from isolated individuals, no one in the arts bureaucracy is going to feel threatened by ineffective complaints from its clientele. Which brings me to Point 6.

[POINT 6. STATISTICS, DAMN STATISTICS! PROVING ARTISTS ARE POOR!](#)

If an Arts Body does not have a clientele it loses is reason for being. Let's sum up the status quo of the relationship between, say, the Australia Council and its clients. On its own admission the Australia Council can only fund between 20% to 30% of its clientele. This is because there is not enough money to go round. Naturally a certain percentage of the budget of the Australia Council is spent on maintaining its infrastructure.

The first time I went fishing for statistics, in around 1999, the costs of keeping the Australia Council in place for the previous year was (in round figures) about \$9.6 million dollars, of which \$6.5 million was paid in salaries to Council staff. A current figure cannot be obtained. You have to wait until the publication of the previous year's accounts. In 2003 the (round) figures are just over 13.5 million to keep the council in existence of which 8.3 million goes to staff salaries. Consistently the upkeep cost represents roughly 10% of the Council's total budget. These figures are no secret. Anyone who is interested can dig out the facts from the Australia council's own library. Any self-respecting journalist who wishes to write about this issue has not far to go to dig deep. Any reader who wishes further cogitation on these figures can jump ahead to ["NO REASONS FOR SAYING NO"](#).

However, that is not the whole story. The Australia Council does not just budget for the salaries of it employees. It also budgets, on an ongoing basis, for what amount to publicity exercises. There have been several of these, and I don't know to what area of the buget they are charged. They seem to recur at 2 or 3 yearly intervals. These are surveys of public attitudes towards the arts and artists, linked to research on the incomes which artists earn. I don't know how much these cost, but one of these was achieved with the assistance of a professional advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi. Not cheap. **These surveys ARE PR EXERCISES paid for by the Australia Council, for the benefit of the Australia Council. Several less expensive exercises have been conducted through Macquarie University, endowing the results with academic imprimatur, but with same intention, of bearing witness**

to deep concern felt by the Australia Council about the impecunious economic plight of artists.

The problem with these exercises, for me, is that the mountain of statistics they accumulate does little more than provide proof of what everyone knows - that dedicated artists are very poor, and that most of them live on or near the poverty line, or would, if they didn't also have a day job. It's hard not to see these surveys as self-promoting exercises by the Australia Council to prove how much they are needed. These surveys scream out:-

"We are here to promote the best in Australian art. Artists need us. We are here to speak on behalf of artists. We are the interface between artists and the community. Look at how well we do our job. Our job is essential. The arts cannot do without us. Governments cannot do without us. The money you pay us is not wasted. Maintain our organisation. Maintain our salaries."

You can taste the irony. The Australia Council cannot fund 60 to 70% of its clientele because of insufficient funding. To prove how needy artists are, they expend vast sums on expensive flag-waving operations to prove how needy artists are.

After the Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War 2, they sent over medical experts not to treat victims but to study the effects of radiation. The experts were well paid. Without victims, they would have no job. Or not that job.

But the main focus in tonight's forensic exercise is to examine the assessment procedures which the Australia Council follows in reaching its DECISIONS. Statutory bodies are required by law to give reason for their decisions, within a month of receiving a request for reasons. We'll see that the Australia Council has systemic difficulties in complying with this legal obligation.

But not just yet! Thank you for your patience. I did say it's important to be thorough! First, there are a couple of loose ends to tie up.

Part 5 - TYING UP LOOSE ENDS:-

**COMPARISONS WITH METHODS FOR FUNDING FILM
PROPOSAL FOR A REGISTER OF PRIMARY CREATORS
THE MEDICI PROGRAM**

In Point 1, I suggested that, at present, it is pointless for an individual creative artist to go into the community to try and seek out old-fashioned individual patronage. Why is this so? Because unless he or she is able to offer a tax benefit in return for such support, it will not be forthcoming. Not when a tax benefit can be obtained by directing a donation through a Registered Arts Body.

All support for the arts in Australia is made on the basis that it will be tax deductible, unless it is in the form of business sponsorship, which falls under a different section of the Tax Act. This section enables the sponsors to be named. Individual creative artists can only benefit from tax-deductible funding through the auspices of an arts organisation, or through trusts bodies, or foundations, and the only access to the decision-making processes of these bodies is through committees, which only accept donations for general purposes. You will find some useful background reading on this topic ["THE ECONOMIC DISEMPOWERMENT OF AUSTRALIAN COMPOSERS"](#), an

article which was originally published in the Journal of the Fellowship of Australian Composers in 1997, now posted on this website.

The reason why individual artists cannot offer a tax benefit in return for support is because the Australian Tax Office does not permit a directed donation from one individual to another to attract a tax benefit.

You can understand why. It would be rorted! Just as funding for film was rorted from 1982, when the so-called 10BA tax incentives were introduced.

The new system did break the monopoly on decision-making which the Australian Film Commission then held, and new ideas, good and bad poured forth. The film industry was reinvigorated. But 10BA had to be modified, because above-the-line personnel were rorting budgets, and pocketing huge fees before any money was spent on your actual film production.

Sometimes up to half the budget was not going up on the screen. It was going on legal fees and on large numbers of associate producers. It was a scandal.

10BA funding has survived, and private sector funding for film still happens. So there is now one major difference between funding for film and for all other art forms.

Film funding is investment based.

But in other areas of the arts it is donation based.

There are strong arguments to be made in favour of applying the methods of film funding to all arts. Further discussion on that topic can be found in another article published in the Journal of the Fellowship of Australian Composers in 1999, now posted on this website: [“Creaky Machinery”](#) - a comparison of the assessment methods of the Australia Council and the Australian Film Commission, and of the different funding methods

Similarly, discussion on a proposal to set up a [“Register of Primary Creators”](#) - or, if you like, Individual Creative Artists. This can also be found at this website. This proposal is an attempt to devise a system for funding individual artists that could not be rorted because it would be closely regulated and monitored.

So, to recap:- the Australian Tax Office is absolutely correct to be extremely cautious about any scheme allowing direct funding to individual art workers. However, you may be surprised to know that it is not totally forbidden.

[THE MEDICI PROGRAM](#)

In 1988, with great fanfare, at Parliament House in Sydney, a brave new funding scheme was launched for the Australian Chamber Orchestra, which has since been emulated by every other orchestra which has registered itself as an arts organisation. This was the Medici Program. The scheme was devised by lawyers to allow members of the public to make Clayton’s “directed donations” to individual members of an orchestra. This is the “directed donation” you make when it is not a “directed donation”. It works like this.

Mrs. Smith of the general public can phone, say, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and tell the receptionist that he or she would like to consider making a donation towards paying the salary of Mr. G. String, a violinist. An enthusiastic conversation will probably then take place about what a wonderful violinist Mr. G. String is. The receptionist will send out a form to be filled in, to accompany the donation cheque. If

you heard this conversation you would conclude that what was being arranged was a “directed donation”. But no!

The money is not going to Mr. String. It is going to a chair. It is going to the chair upon which Mr. String sits. Legally, this is not a “directed donation”. The chair has been created by a committee, and it is a legal abstraction. However, Mrs. Smith thinks her money is being paid to Mr. String. That is her motivation. She knows nothing about the chair.

We note, in passing, that the Medicis, although they did keep orchestras, were better known for the direct support they gave to individual creative artists. It seems that the Australian Chamber Orchestra’s Medici Program was misnamed.

But back to that chair. Nobody has thought to create similar chairs for composers or writers or other kinds of creative artists. Nobody has thought to create a body which offers such chairs for artists to sit on as they create new works. The closest to this, in music, is the Composer-in-residence. But there are not many of these. Only as many as there are orchestras. And there are a lot of composers. And some of them have written music which Mr. G. String plays. He is paid a regular salary to play such music. The composer is not. He or she may not have been paid at all.

And so we come to the main business of this article: forensic analysis of the Australia’s Council’s methods of complying with a request to provide a Statement of Reasons for a particular decision by a committee to deny funding to an applicant. The following discourse is based on an article originally posted on my website in May 2001, under the title **NO REASONS FOR SAYING NO**.

Part 6 - NO REASONS FOR SAYING NO

The Australia Council for the arts is a statutory body. The ostensible purpose for which it was formed, is to “*promote excellence in the arts*” (clause i), a noble and daunting task. Naturally the bureaucratic skills required to achieve this high purpose deserve and receive an equally high financial recompense. Exactly how high?

Let me recap the figures that I cited earlier, updated from the Council’s Annual Report for the years 2002-2003, the earliest report I could obtain in 2004.

The Operating Statement for that year reveals (in round figures) that to disburse a grant total of \$124 million, running costs were incurred of \$13.5 million, of which \$8.3 million was paid in salaries to Council staff (actually \$8.275 – let’s say eight and a quarter million).

Eight and a quarter million dollars might seem a lot of taxpayers money to have spent in 2003 on “*providing, and encouraging provision of, opportunities for persons to practise arts*” (clause ii), but the figure is misleading. Only 30% of applications to the Council are successful, and therefore only (just under) two and a half million dollars was spent providing encouragement by saying yes. The other **FIVE AND THREE QUARTER MILLION DOLLARS was spent employing arts bureaucrats to discourage persons from practising the arts by saying no.** (In 1998 it was \$5,850,000.) That might sound simplistic, but the calculation has some merit as an old-fashioned time-and-motion computation.

However you look at it, however hard the staff at the Australia Council work at processing applications, however diligently they work to earn their salaries, the end result is still that most of their time is spent in processing applications which will fail;

and the consequence of that is that (depending on which year) going on SIX MILLION DOLLARS which might have gone to support failed applications is spent telling those applicants that their applications have failed. No amount of bureaucratic sophistry can negate that interpretation of the financial facts.

30% is OZCO's best estimate of how many grants they were able to fund in 2003, but their own somewhat vague estimate for that year was "between 20% and 30%, and if you take 20% as the figure, the amount spent on saying no is greater. In addition, what we are not told is whether or not that percentage increase (from only 10% in 1998) is the result of an **increase** in the number of "clients" who **have given up applying**. The information needed to make that calculation is protected by the Freedom Of Information Act. Much of the data needed to assess OZCO's performance is similarly protected, because it pertains to information provided by "clients", whether successful or not.

In the Australia Council's standard letter from the fund manager sent to inform persons of the failure of their application is the comforting assurance: *"If there is anything you would like to discuss in relation to the assessment of your application I invite you to contact (the officer) whose contact details appear above."*

But a person responding to this invitation, and expecting to be vouchsafed any kind of artistic assessment of their application would be sadly disappointed, as my experience with the Music Fund may suggest. I went through this process twice. The second exercise was a fishing expedition. This report records the result of my catch.

All that a person will be given in the way of "discussion" will be a percentage score averaged from marks given by committee members assessing the person's application. A person may then request a Statement of Reasons, but I found that the resulting 11-page document consisted largely of an elaborate re-statement of assessment procedures already familiar from the yearly handbook.

Aside from quoting percentages, 25 lines in the Statement were devoted to a resume of the project being assessed, and 3 lines to stating the obvious: that other projects were judged to "demonstrate the criterion" (for contribution to the arts) more strongly.

Having applied for such a Statement I had to wait much longer than the statutory 28 days for it to arrive (in fact, four months!) because (as the Fund Manager lamented in a second letter justifying delay, 31 August 1999) *"as some Fund members have been travelling and one is currently overseas, it is taking me a little longer than I originally anticipated to have the endorsement of all members of the Fund which is required before the Chair can sign the Statement."*

An identical delay for identical reasons having occurred 3 years ago, I now had the impression that the Council is never adequately prepared to acquit itself of its statutory obligation to provide a "client" with "reasons" for a decision, and, moreover, that the resulting Statement of Reasons (when it finally arrives) is devoid of actual "reasons"! I decided to continue my efforts to find out why.

Correspondence on the topic (of providing "artistic assessments") over 17 months, totalled, in all, a 70 page file, consisting mainly of more obfuscation and evasion. However, amazingly, several nuggets of pertinent information did emerge from the verbiage, which I am able to pass on to interested readers.

The first came in reply to my request (21 June 1999) *"that, in the present instance, the Statement of Reasons which is being prepared restricts itself to providing an*

account of WHY the Committee rejected the Application" and "that those preparing the Statement kindly refrain from subjecting me to a further lengthy elaboration of the assessment procedures of the Australia Council which are, by now, well known to me."

This elicited a response from the Fund Manager (8 July 1999) as follows: *"Council has a set format for Statement of Reasons which was formulated under advice in terms of administrative law best practice. This will involve providing details once more of assessment process."* I deduced, in other words, that the Council is under legal advice not to provide *"artistic assessments."*

Pursuing the matter further with the Chair of the Australia Council I was informed (27 October 1999): *"While I also understand that you might appreciate a detailed artistic assessment of your proposal, I am sorry that Council does not have the resources to provide these for the nearly 4,000 applications per year."* Interesting!

Further enquiry produced the following question/answer exchange by email, which allows easy compilation of question/answer reply (January 25 2000).

My questions, AO replies:

QUESTION: Is the inability of the Council to supply "detailed artistic statements" the result of budgetary constraints?

ANSWER: Yes, as per instructions from government about maintaining a lid on the administrative costs of the Council (e.g. staff) as opposed to funds for grants.

QUESTION: If the answer to the above is "yes", would you please supply an approximate figure for the additional budgetary requirement which would make it possible to supply "detailed artistic assessments" to client-applicants?

ANSWER: Across all art form areas, it would require at least a doubling of the staff and peer budget, which would not be permitted by government. We would also have to increase our peer costs, to enable them to provide the detailed artistic assessments in writing on each application. We estimate this would add another \$500,000 to our peer assessment budget, due to the time required.

QUESTION: If the additional budgetary requirement specified above were to be made available to the Council, would the Council then have any objections, either in principle or in practise, to supplying "detailed artistic assessments" to client-applicants?

ANSWER: No.

Answer "no"!!

Hello? So is insufficient funding **the only reason** for non-provision of *"artistic assessments"* to clients? If so, was it misleading, in the first place, **to cite "administrative law best practice" as the reason?**

You may feel as confused as I did, and still do. Is the Federal Government aware of this inconsistency in the advice given by its own arts advisory body? You might be moved to question why our government is spending eight and a quarter million dollars on the salaries of arts bureaucrats to create such an impenetrable maze of contradictions!

And you might think that a better system could be devised which would apportion most of that eight and a quarter million directly to the persons to whom the Australia Council is presently saying "No" without saying why! That way Australia would be richer in intellectual property (but poorer in bureaucrats). A good thing? Some do not think so. Some to whom I have spoken (in preparing this article) are entirely happy with a system in which a dozen people make decisions for the entire Australian continent as to what intellectual product gets developed with public money.

This system is called "peer group assessment" and it has been developed so that the government of the day remains "at arm's length" from the decision making process. The problem begins with the amount of money which is available for funding so-called "**grassroots**" arts activity, as distinct from the amount available for funding what is called arts "**infrastructure**".

In round figures, I was told, in 1999, that \$2.5 million is available for the former, and \$55 million for the latter. The work of the individual creative artists falls into the "grassroots" category, and arts organizations fall into the latter. I haven't had the heart or the energy to update that figure. Delving into such a dismal statistic would be bad for my health, and unless I look after my health I will not survive the economic and psychological deprivation which is the lot of those artists who do not benefit from intravenous dip-feed funding from the Australia Council. The names of those who do receive such medication on a continuing basis are there on the record, for any journalist who wishes to find out. There never has been such a journalist and there probably never will be. But as to my contribution to any ensuing debate, there is absolutely a limit to the time I will spend on producing a document such as this, for which I will receive little or no thanks. Nevertheless, I plod on.

Individual artists might well be aggrieved to realise that the Australian Council does not regard them as part of the "**infrastructure**" of the arts. But they should not be surprised. Arts bureaucrats are incapable of conceiving that they are not the most important part of the "**infrastructure**" of the arts. Infrastructure sounds important, and importance attracts money. Their liking for money explains why, although they claim to "represent" artists, they do not include artists in the number of those who make up the "**infrastructure**". If you want to understand this conundrum, simply follow the money trail. In fact, if you want to understand any puzzling aspect of human behaviour, involving inconsistency, humbug and hypocrisy, just follow the money trail. But the problem does not end there.

The full funding picture is even more discouraging for the individual creative artist when you include the fact that, in addition to getting most of the public money, the "infrastructure" sector also has a monopoly on receiving the tax-deductible arts-donation dollar. This source of funding is only available to "registered arts organizations", and in the performing arts, for example, money from this source is rarely spent on commissioning new work, since performance organisations need every cent they get from any source, simply to stay afloat - i.e. to pay the salaries of their own administrators.

So, if they want to commission new work, to whom do they apply? Why, to the Australia Council, of course!! And have to submit to the judgemental processes of an Australia Council committee!

A reminder here that those interested in reading a **proposal** for a widening of the funding base for the individual creative artist, also formerly known as the "primary

creator", can read the article "[Registrar of Primary Creators](#)", posted on my website. It's quite short, giving just the skeletal idea as a basis for discussion.

This **proposal**, in essence, offers a formula which would empower individuals in the private and corporate sectors to make decisions about what new art works get written - without the benefit of advice from "peer groups" or committees of any kind. The prospect of private individuals having the power to decide what art works get created fills many people in the mainstream music establishment with alarm, just as it probably does in other areas of the arts.

In my most recent conversation on this topic what most struck me was the distrust displayed by the speaker towards the aesthetic standards of the very people on whom the speaker relied ultimately for employment - the general public, otherwise known as the taxpayer.

I was told that the power of decision in this area should not be granted to the general public (i.e. the taxpayer), because this would result in a form of economic rationalism in the arts - in other words, it would result in artists writing to order to sell their product in the market place.

Shock, horror!

It was suggested to me that on no account should this unorthodox approach be encouraged. When I protested that members of the general public might not appreciate having their artistic preferences treated with such disdain, I was told that it was all right sometimes to "eat at McDonald's", but that some people might prefer to go round the corner to eat at a better class of restaurant.

Amazed, I asked if the speaker was suggesting that the general public is only capable of appreciating McMusic, and that only McMusic would result if they were allowed to decide what gets written!

It was a rhetorical question, because I had already been given the answer. And I think the General McPublic should know what their arts gurucrats think of them.

So we're agreed then? It makes nonsense of the concept of individual creativity if an artist works to order. Correct? But if an artist successfully second-guesses what **AGENDA** will score him or her a government grant, that does not constitute writing to order, or selling a product in a market place, does it !

Of course not. That's producing the best that Australia has to offer. Otherwise the Australia Council would not have funded it.

Time for a summing up.

Part 7 – A SUMMING UP – A PLAGUE OF GURUCRATS

A SUMMING UP

Abolish the Australia Council, question mark. The Australia Council is the Federal Government's Arts Advisory Body. The Government will always need a body of some kind to act at arm's length from government, and to make decisions about how taxpayer's money is spent in supporting the arts. Is the Australia Council the right kind of body? Has it become too large, too expensive and too self-serving?

What other kind of body, with what functions could replace it? Or what other mechanisms could be devised to empower members of the public to support artists of their own choice, without having to depend upon funding bodies or committees to make decisions on their behalf?

Can the basis of funding be widened? Is the very existence of the Australia Council an obstacle to such a widening? Or worse, is the existence of the Australia Council an obstacle to even discussing such a possibility? Would the Australia Council accept such a widening, or would it resist the possibility, as a threat to its existence? Just a reminder of **the agenda** being discussed here:

TO ENDOW THE INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE ARTIST WITH AUTONOMY

In discussions on this topic, I venture to suggest it would be helpful to avoid discussions about what kind of art should be allowed. Debate on this topic is an irrelevant tangent. This is not the context in which to discuss what kind of art should be created. If the artist truly has autonomy, then the kind of art which is created is a matter entirely for the artist who creates it.

A PLAGUE OF GURUCRATS

That might sound obvious, but that statement is anathema, for example, to some academics and to some musicologists who feel that the basis of their employment rests upon their ability to prescribe the kind of art which should be created.

Their job description implies a superiority of knowledge, and a right to guide students along recommended pathways.

The test of their power, the proof of their influence lies in the degree to which students, when they become artists, follow the precepts laid down by their teachers. Such individuals strive to extend their power base by becoming critics and journalists, and, by their opinions, they seek to influence the judgement of committees, in the hope that their own careers will be enhanced by the success of their protégés.

The last thing such individuals want is for the general public to have a say in what kind of art is created, and so we may expect them to be rigorously opposed to any move towards allowing ordinary members of the public to express preference by supporting individual artists of their choice.

I once had a discussion about this several years ago with Antony Fogg, when he was in a position of influence with the ABC. I pointed out that the ABC, being able to accept donations, might wish to consider the wishes of a donor in supporting the work of a particular composer. He was shocked! His reply was: *“Oh, we can’t allow to public to have a say in that! Who knows what kind of music would get written!”*

It was a revealing response, all the more so, since the formula I suggested was exactly the one which prevailed in Australia for the three decades when the Australian Elizabethan Trust was the sole conduit for donations to arts. Such donations, by law, had to be unconditional, but the form supplied to donors to accompany donations stated: *“This is an unconditional donation. However, it is not the policy of the Trust to disregard the wishes of the donor.”*

This is legalspeak for saying: *“This is a directed donation which is not a directed donation”*. It is a principle which is still practised in the legal device of the Chair in an orchestra, which is not a person. It is a chair.

So, let us please avoid any discussion about what kind of art might be created if artists are able to seek out and be paid by their own supporters. The public deserves to have a say in this matter. They buy the tickets. They already pay the pipers. They deserve the right also to pay the composers who write the tunes, and to pay them on the same basis that they already pay the pipers.

Here now is a reprise on the topic of how four composers in the past earned money – or, in some cases, failed to do so!

[Part 8 - COMPOSERS EARNING MONEY](#)

(the music cues in this section have not yet been posted)

To recap: the Arts Organisation is the principle employer of artists; but the Arts Organisations of today are very different to those of yesterday. A survey of the evolution of employment prospects for the artist, in European culture, shows that, previously, there was always a mix of organisations and individuals in the matter of providing artists with paid employment: and that there always was, and still is, an interaction between social and economic factors which influences the very nature of an art work.

For centuries the main employer was the Church, which we can define as an organisation, and which required from its art employees works of religious content. With the Renaissance, secular art began to emerge as a result of patronage of artists by wealthy individuals, inevitably from the aristocracy. The Church, however, remained an important patron.

[J. S. BACH](#)

Not all composers were able to secure patronage from the aristocracy. Johann Sebastian Bach tried, which is why we have the Brandenburg Concertos, written for the Duke of Brandenburg, who did **not** give Bach a job, and who does **not** deserve to have his name branded on these works, since he left the manuscripts of the Concerti abandoned in a back drawer, where they languished for two centuries, until the Baroque revival in the 19th century, in which Mendelssohn played such an important part. Here, as a rest from the sound of my voice, is the opening passage of Bach's 2nd Brandenburg, which features the brilliant tones of the so-called Bach trumpet, a small instrument in the key of C, higher than the usual instrument, and which is extremely hard to play.

[\(MUSIC CUE 1 – extract 1st Movement of Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in F\)](#)

Bach would like to have written opera, but the best permanent paid employment he could get was at the St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, which is why he wrote over 200 Cantatas, instead of an equivalent duration of operas which would have numbered about 60. By comparison Donizetti completed 65 operas, before dying prematurely of syphilis at the age of 51.

In previous eras composers were regarded as servants, along with performers: indeed there was not much distinction between the two, because composers were also performers and musical directors. The status of the composer was, in fact, not much better than that of a serf, a topic which can be visited in detail in an article at this website - [“The Artist As Serf.”](#) The serf did not own the land he tilled. Are things very different today? Only since the introduction of laws of copyright at the

Berne Convention of 1886, to which there have been numerous revisions. The US was not party to any multilateral convention until 1952.

As we have noted, copyright laws are of minimal assistance to painters, who habitually sell their copyright with the painting.

Taking music again as a case study, the period of Haydn, Mozart & Beethoven is pertinent to our topic, since it was at the beginning of the 19th century that the composer-entrepreneur emerged, doing deals with publishers while also soliciting support both from the aristocracy and from the wealthy bourgeoisie.

[JOSEF HAYDN](#)

The case of Josef Haydn illustrates the point, which will be the subject of an article to be posted on this website: **“The man who married the wrong daughter”**. In his early days in Vienna, Haydn fell in love with Therese Keller, the younger daughter of a middle class family of wig makers. To show their disapproval of the match, the family arranged for the daughter to become a nun. Haydn was employed to compose organ concerti for performance at the induction ceremony. He kept very few copies of his compositions, but he retained copies of these concerti throughout his life. And he made the mistake of marrying the older sister, Maria Anna, who accompanied him when he obtained a long-term appointment at the court of the wealthy Hungarian aristocratic family, the Esterhazy.

His employer, Prince Nicolas Esterhazy, devoted many years to building Esterhaza, an imitation of Versailles in a mosquito-ridden swamp in Western Hungary. Accommodation was scarce and, among the musicians, only the leader, Haydn was permitted to live with his wife - a privilege he would happily not forego, since the marriage was a total disaster.

Haydn himself is quoted as saying: *“She has no virtues, and it is entirely indifferent to her whether her husband is a shoemaker or an artist.”* The highlight of his wife’s social life was visits from the vicar. She tore up his music scores to obtain paper for her hair curlers. Do I digress? Is this information pertinent to our agenda?

Well, it’s pertinent in the overall context of **“Composer’s earning money”**, as it illustrates Haydn’s conditions of employment. Haydn’s attempt to solicit support from the bourgeoisie impacted disastrously on his quality of life, and had a bizarre side effect on it, when he finally obtained employment from the aristocracy. Fortunately, his employer, understanding Haydn’s situation, tolerated the series of well-documented affairs that Haydn had with female singers and musicians to whom he gave valuable employment, during his 30 year exile in that mosquito-ridden swamp, creating and presenting a constant stream of new music for his eccentric employer.

Haydn lived long enough to be able to capitalise on his vast output. When he was finally released from his long tenure he lived his remaining years based in Vienna, touring the great capitals, including London. Much loved for the sunny disposition and humour of much of his music, there is also no shortage of works revealing “sturm und drag” - “storm and stress”.

Here are two extracts, the first from the first movement of the aforementioned organ concerto, which shows no signs of the turmoil which Haydn must have been feeling when he wrote it. We follow that with the opening to Symphony No. 44 in E minor, subtitled “Trauersymphonie”, which is imbued with “sturm und drag”. He didn’t write this music because he was upset. He wrote it because “Storm and stress” music was

in vogue. Hadyn was a consummate professional, who wrote music to order. But of course he did know what “sturm und drag” felt like.

[\(MUSIC CUE 2 Excerpt from 1st movement Haydn’s Organ Concerto No. ? in ? \)](#)
[\(MUSIC CUE 3 Excerpt from 1st movement Haydn’s Symphony No. 44 in E minor\)](#)

[LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN](#)

Beethoven presents a different case, and this can be explored in greater detail at [“Beethoven & the Illuminati”](#), one of four articles on Beethoven posted at the website.

Beethoven’s first sponsors during his youth in Bonn were members of the Illuminati, a radical quasi-Masonic body which was soon to be banned throughout Europe, and had already gone underground in Bonn, where it was known as the “Reading & Recreation Society of Bonn”. In 1790 this society commissioned Beethoven to write his “Cantata on the Death of the Emperor Joseph II”, who was an unusually reformist ruler. It is highly likely that the contacts Beethoven made in Bonn, were at the basis of his financial support throughout his life in Vienna, and influenced the nature of many of his compositions. The libretti of some vocal works, including the opera “**Fidelio**” and the **9th Symphony** explicitly reflect the influence of Enlightenment philosophical thought. “**Fidelio**” even has a direct quotation from that early “Illuminati”-sponsored Cantata.

Beethoven, of course, supplemented his annuity from three aristocrats by doing deals with publishers, and accepted paid commissions, but that annuity provided a basic continuity of income. Although Beethoven’s interest in politics is well known, less well known is the link between his politics and the financial backing he enjoyed throughout his life. Articles on this topic are posted on my website: [**www.revolve.com.au**](http://www.revolve.com.au). My talk “**Beethoven & the Illuminati**” will illustrate the thesis with musical clues, two of which we will hear tonight. Do I digress? The context is, again: “**Composers earning money**”.

Follow the trail of politics in Beethoven’s music, and you are following the money trail. After all, the work which earned him most money during his lifetime was “Wellington’s Victory”, also known as the “Battle Symphony” - complete with percussive use of actual gunfire -a forerunner of Tchaikovsky’s “1812 overture”.

Here are two samples of Beethoven’s music. From the rarely heard “Cantata on the Death of the Emperor Joseph II”, we hear the introduction on oboe and part of the beautiful soprano aria “Then Rose All Mankind”, praising the Emperor as a champion of the oppressed. This is followed by the rarely heard opening passage of the chorus from the final act of the **original** version of “Fidelio”, which was cut by Beethoven himself, when he ruthlessly produced the mutilated final version of the opera by which we know it. This passage, which is also introduced by the oboe, clearly reveals the relationship between the two works, separated by 15 years, but linked by identical philosophical concerns having to do with social justice. Our extract is from the complete recording of the restored original version titled “**Leonora**”, conducted by Herbert Blomstedt, now available on CD.

[\(MUSIC CUE 4 Excerpt from Beethoven aria “Then Rose All mankind”\)](#)
[\(MUSIC CUE 5 Excerpt from Beethoven aria from “Leonora”\)](#)

[RICHARD WAGNER](#)

Moving on through the 19th century we come to the case of Richard Wagner, who also survived on a combination of support from the wealthy bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. Considerations of art, politics, sex and money were of equal importance in Wagner's life, and were inextricably intertwined, particularly as he wrote the libretti for his own operas, and all of his preoccupations are evident in them. Wagner's professional activity often became complicated by his sex life. While still married, and a political exile in Switzerland, he embarked on an affair with the lovely Mathilde Wesendonck, wife of his patron, the wealthy businessman Herr Otto Wesendonck. The affair inspired his opera "Tristan and Isolde". It also eventually endangered the financial and practical support Wagner was receiving.

Wagner lived extravagantly and incurred huge debts. He would have ended up in a debtor's prison, but, in the nick of time, he was saved by the adolescent gay King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who had recently ascended to the throne. Ludwig was enamoured Wagner's music, and, at the time of the composer's rescue, was especially impressed by his opera "Lohengrin". Decor remaining in one of Ludwig's fairy-tale palaces bears witness to his obsession. After having secured the support of King Ludwig, Wagner then risked losing this by embarking on an affair with Cosima van Beinum, the wife of his conductor, Hans von Beinum. She and Wagner eventually married, after Cosima had born him one of their two children. The King remained loyal to Wagner, despite court intrigues against him. The Bayreuth Festival Theatre was built. Among Wagner's many innovations are these: he invented the darkened auditorium with the orchestra hidden in a pit, thus anticipating cinema; and he was the first to write music intending it to become a tourist attraction. It did, and it still is, more than ever. But none of this would have happened without money. A lot of money. The context is, again: "**Composers earning money**".

There are other mysteries about Wagner's life which I address in an article at this website under the title: "[Was Wagner Jewish?](#)" The topic is an old one. It involves questions about Wagner's parentage. Was his real father really his mother's second husband, the actor, Ludwig Geyer? Here is a brief summary of the salient points.

Until the age of 14, Wagner was known as Richard Geyer. He then officially changed his name. Why? The notorious anti-semitism of two infamous tracts which Wagner wrote, in 1850 and 1869, titled "Judaism in Music", is well known. In the context of the time they amounted mainly to attacks on two Jewish composers, Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, and they were probably motivated by Wagner's wish to develop a politically useful agenda for himself, that of German nationalism, which he hoped would bring him financial support.

Ironically, after the Bayreuth Festival was established, Berlin Jews were among his most enthusiastic supporters. Jews have a long and illustrious history of supporting new developments in the arts. In the context of financial reward, Wagner's anti-semitism was of little practical value to him.

It was more a case of "**composer not earning money**". After its opening the Bayreuth Festival had to close for six years, for lack of funding. It only re-opened shortly before Wagner's death, in time for the premier of his last opera "Parsifal".

And as Wagner's son Siegfried wrote, in 1921, when pressure was put on him to deny Jews the right to attend the Festival (and I quote): "*If the Jews are willing to support us, they deserve our particular appreciation, for my father attacked them and offended them in his writings. They are entitled to hate Bayreuth, and yet, many of*

them revere my father's works with genuine enthusiasm, in spite of his attacks on them..."

What is certain is that Wagner's second wife, the aforementioned Cosima, was part Jewish. She was the daughter of the composer Franz Liszt and the Comtesse d'Agoult, whose maternal grandfather was a Jewish banker from Frankfurt, a fact conveniently ignored by the Nazis, just as they conveniently ignored the fact that Mozart's librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, was Jewish. Da Ponte's father had converted to Christianity, and been baptised with his three sons. In a wonderful instance of pragmatism, they all took the surname of the bishop who performed the ceremony.

Those facts of Wagner's life are well known. Less well known, but also on the record, are some curious ambiguities in the content of Wagner's own opera libretti. These are consistent with a subtext of an awareness a Jewish heritage, but, of course, unrelated to orthodox Jewry or, indeed, to orthodox Christianity.

"The Flying Dutchman", for example, is known to be an analogue for The Wandering Jew, and the Dutchman's eternal voyaging is a symbol of the Jewish Diaspora.

Considering the cliché of the materialistic Jew, current throughout European history, one might say the Shylock syndrome, as dramatised in Shakespeare's play "The Merchant of Venice", it is worth noting that in Wagner's opera "The Flying Dutchman", it is not the Dutchman who is materialistic. He is spiritual. It is the Gentile father of his beloved who is grossly materialistic, and who is prepared to sell his daughter in exchange for the Dutchman's vast wealth.

The composer's great grandson, Adrian Wagner, also a composer, who lives in the UK, in Wales, is a colleague of the writer and genealogist Laurence Gardner, whose writings have explored connections between the Masonic Movement, the Templars and the surmised survival of the blood heirs of the marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. According to these theories, the Knights Templar, who were guarding the secrets of the Holy Grail, were the direct descendants of Jesus. By this reckoning, Lohengrin, of Wagner's opera of that name, was just such an heir; and when he refuses to disclose either his name or his place of origin, he is, implicitly, hiding the secret of his Jewish descent. This is not quite the version of history which the Nazis would have condoned. They regarded the Grail Knights as proto-Teutonic knights.

And yet, shortly before Wagner began writing "Parsifal", his second Grail opera, he did visit the mysterious village of Rennes-le-Chateau, in the South of France, which purports to be where the treasure of the Templars was hidden by the Cathars after the 13th century Albigensian Crusade against them. The treasure was two-fold, encompassing both the material treasure rescued from the Temple of Jerusalem, in 70 AD, but was also supposed to include the Grail itself, which is no doubt what drew Wagner to visit Rennes-le-Chateau. Here is the passage in which Lohengrin finally discloses his identity. What exactly is the sub-text of this passage?

(MUSIC CUE 6 Extract from aria from Act 3 "Lohengrin")

That musical addendum concludes the historical segment. The point of that exercise was to demonstrate how varied are the forms of support which composers have enjoyed in past eras, and to hear reminders of the work which that support enabled the composers to produce. Although those works are still heard, the forms of support which made them possible no longer exist. Those kinds of person-to-person deals, with all their passion and eccentricity are no longer made.

Why not? As I suggested earlier, it is perhaps precisely because of the socially anarchic and highly individualistic nature of these kinds of deals that, by the time we get to the 20th century, support of the individual creative artist has become politicised, by invoking more severe standards of correctness.

What I am suggesting now, is that perhaps we need to tweak funding arrangements to provide the opportunity for artists to make deals like these in the present era. It might greatly broaden the range of arts works which get created.

This might not be to the liking of the gurucrats who presume to dictate what kind of art is allowed, but it might be greatly to the liking of that greater proportion of the human race for whom art is created. Namely, the people.

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