

The VCA Review Committee
C/- University of Melbourne

By email: vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au

Re: Discussion Paper

Dear Review Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts. I write to you as a graduate of the Bachelor of Music Performance degree, Gwen Nisbet Scholarship awardee and currently in full time music performance employment in Shanghai, China.

The VCA endowed me with clarity of artistic identity, passion and independence to carve out my own creative career and a profound sense of what I can achieve as a member of the Melbourne artistic community, along with personally established industry connections aided by the strength of the VCA community (staff, students, local and international sessional visiting artists – imperative to my current employment abroad). To an onlooker, the above mentioned outcomes of a tertiary education may sound abstract and difficult to implement in a formal academic environment, yet it is my experience that the VCA execute this year after year with great success due to their past independence and autonomy allowing them to refine the curriculum on their own terms. This is profoundly different to the culture of Melbourne University's Conservatory of Music teaching methods and goals. I believe the two schools are overwhelmingly different and incompatible. Merging the two schools will be a disaster for what the VCA has established in it's history.

In reference to the Discussion Paper, I offer you the following feedback:

Curriculum

The curriculum of the VCA is one based on the idea that the students at the VCA are artists. From this concept stems the unique curriculum of the VCA, where each students learning path is based on their individual desires and creative endeavours. They learn art from artists : current practitioners in the real world, locally and internationally successful artists, curriculum based on the current generation of elite artist's methods and principals. In short, it is a non conventional, real-world practice based, results focussed curriculum.

I do not believe there is a need to add 'breadth' to the VCA programs through the introduction of the Melbourne Model. This is in great part to the fact that the current 'breadth' subjects ('modules' as they are known in the School of Music) are already very broad, and offer useful, practical and stimulating courses on subjects that will directly influence ourselves as practicing musicians. For example, Italian/German for Opera, Studio Engineering, Film Scoring, Performance psychology, Studio Teaching. The list is long and varied, all subjects taught by respected and elite artists engaged in professional careers. In addition, all VCA students are enrolled in the Centre for Ideas courses, a compulsory breadth subject that deals with artistic concepts and realities of working as an artist.

I support the retention of the VCA as an elite arts training institution with a focus on intensive, practical, studio-based training. VCA should continue to offer degree-award courses across all art streams including Drama, Dance, Music Theatre, Production, Art, Music and Film and Television.

Funding & Structure

I support the view that the optimum outcome for VCA is to be an independent institution, capable of awarding its own degrees and managing its own curriculum.

Accordingly, I suggest that direct Arts Ministry funding (through inclusion in the Australian Roundtable program) at levels comparable to NIDA, is the best hope for a financially sound, independent VCA. I

encourage the UoM to aggressively pursue this option, drawing upon the great public and industry interest in VCA evident in recent times.

In the interim, I support calls for the Federal Government to immediately reverse the 2005 \$5m p/a funding cut to VCA. I believe the Federal Government is putting great strain on both the University and VCA by holding off on this review until 2012, and is thereby threatening elite arts education in Australia.

I also support calls for the Victorian Government to commit to sustained funding for VCA to supplement the Federal contribution. I support the Victorian Shadow Minister for the Arts' suggestion that this sum be in the ballpark of \$6m p/a or alternatively in the guise of a sustained contribution to VCA infrastructure development.

I support the demerger of UoM Music and VCA Music from the 2011 academic year. I believe this outcome would return choice to the music education sphere, so that students can choose between a Melbourne Model based degree with strong ties to scholarship and research (UoM Music) and completely practical, studio-based training (VCA Music). Demerger would also address the unworkable constraints of having two music campuses. I support this demerger regardless of whether VCA remains a faculty of the University or becomes independent.

As secondary structural options, I would also support investigation of VCA being transferred to another University that was willing to retain the practical nature of VCA's courses OR VCA becoming an autonomous VET institution. In either case, the Federal and State Governments would need to recognise the unique cost of providing elite arts education and fund VCA's new guise appropriately.

I support the pursuit of new income streams (e.g. extended post-graduate programs, open programs, pursuing international students) and believe VCA's best chance of obtaining this income is by committing to the supply of intensive, studio-based training which is most attractive to the arts education marketplace.

Leadership

I am concerned the current senior leadership of Victorian College of the Arts & Music does not necessarily represent the views of the current staff and students. As such, I would support a review of VCAM management as part of any structural and/or funding changes, with particular preference for allowing students and staff a direct say in appointments of the Dean, Deputy Dean and Heads of School.

I support a greater, active involvement by both the Victorian State and Federal Governments at VCA, to ensure Australia's arts education and arts business landscapes are better safeguarded than has been evident throughout 2009.

Accountability

I would urge the University of Melbourne to address contraventions of the Heads of Agreement that merged UoM with VCA. Particularly:

- Reinstating the VCA name.
- Reinstating the VCA logo.
- Reinstating VCA's unique graduation ceremony.
- Reversing the alignment of VCA and UoM's funding arrangements, which was not due until the fifth year of integration.
- And in the interim of VCA's future being decided, UoM should allow VCA "to continue to exercise high levels of autonomy over the conduct and future development of its educational programs [including] the VCA's commitment to provide individual and small group tuition within an arts practice environment with an emphasis on context, performance, production and exhibition and with studio practice as its core."

Students & Staff

To be trained by the most elite Australian performers for 3 years in a specific field of study within the sphere of music performance was an honour that I believe cannot be replaced by a general degree under the Melbourne Model. I express concern that many talented and valuable teaching staff will not be returning to VCA in 2010.

The caliber of students and low student intake is imperative to the intensity of the education at VCA and the learning environment. The elite artistic community atmosphere is in great part what drives the artists who train at VCA to achieve their best. I express concern that suggestions the Melbourne Model would be applied to VCA, and news of staff leaving, may have impacted upon VCA's attractiveness to high calibre applicants.

As such, I would support new mechanisms to actively retain quality staff, such as formal, quarterly opportunities for VCA staff to supply feedback to VCAM Management (both anonymously and publicly).

I would also encourage a renewed drive to attract high calibre students as part of any 're-launch' of an independent VCA, through emphasising the College's continued commitment to providing 100% practical education across the entire arts spectrum.

Future

What the VCA has established in its time is unique in Australia's training of artists. What it offers is both on par with Australia's leading arts institutes such as NIDA and WAPA as well as offering a unique alternative.

I look forward to the VCA being able to enjoy autonomy and to carve out it's curriculum based on concepts it has refined for decades, concepts based on arts training methods inspired by the arts industry locally and internationally, drawing from knowledge of the elite and established practitioners in Australia and abroad.

I look forward to the VCA being able to reestablish it's reputation as one of the finest arts training institutes of Australia.

I look forward to the VCA being able to proudly lay claim to the next generation of outstanding Australian music, drama, dance, film and art. I look forward to the Australian Arts industry being propelled onto the world stage, lead by Australian artists with a unique Australian vision, identity and message that will be a part arts history.

I look forward to VCA being able to contribute in the above ways to the Australian arts scene, offering the highest level of intensive, wholly practical-based, studio training across the entire arts spectrum. I am confident the protection of this ideal will ensure VCA graduates will continue to have the best chance of making a career in one of the most competitive industries in the country. In doing this, we also support a vibrant Australian artistic culture and ever-expanding arts business.

Yours sincerely,

<REMOVED BY SAVE VCA AS REQUEST OF AUTHOR>