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**CONTACT DETAILS REMOVED BY SAVE VCA**

The VCA Review Committee

C/- University of Melbourne

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**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 1979 scholarship-winning graduate of VCA and member of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra since 1982.

I was fortunate to attend VCA School of Music in the heady days of the Whitlam Government's support of fresh initiatives in the arts in general. The VCA was set up primarily because the tertiary sector had increasingly struggled and failed due to funding formulas not that dissimilar from HECS today, to provide the necessary training for skilled and highly educated performers. At VCA, the ratio of teachers to students, the individual and small class tuition led me to build my skills to such a level that at the end of first year, and then throughout my 3 year diploma, I received work as a casual musician with the Melbourne Symphony. The VCA timetable and staff attitudes gave me the flexibility to study and complete my course while undertaking high level employment, and the VCA scholarships I received, plus savings from my salary at MSO, meant I could save and afford to travel to New York for 2 year to complete a Post Graduate Diploma at Manhattan School of Music. The level of tuition I received at VCA in my 3 year Diploma gave me a high level entrance to MSM, with very few 'deficiencies' to make up, and I sat in classes alongside older Masters and PhD candidates. So, even the theoretical work that the VCA had given, which was brief and in a nutshell, stood up better to rigorous international testing than the vaster quantity of less-focussed academic preparation undertaken by fellow University degree students, who at the time seemed to have greater 'deficiencies' at MSM entrance. Being a 'manual labourer' at high levels actually requires intelligence, dedication and specialised quality education. I also won scholarship support at MSM.

I'm also aware today of the profound creeping cuts to budgets at all Australian tertiary music departments, that are so severe that staff are either teaching students for free or students are receiving the quantity of individual instrumental lessons that would only suffice for junior secondary level, and Australia is becoming internationally uncompetitive. Australia needs a thriving tertiary music sector in each state, and this will not happen if the bean-counters have no idea of the value of the beans they are counting and trying to cut, or sort in inappropriate ways. I'm also

aware professionally of many colleagues who feel the same way as I do about the value of their VCA experience at that time, and lament what is available to current undergraduates today across the board.

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

### **Curriculum**

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.

I do not believe there is a need to add 'breadth' to the VCA programs through the introduction of the Melbourne Model. The kind of 'breadth' that is missing from any tertiary course is comprehensive studies of physical motion in relation to pedagogy and long-term self management; the lack of this is seen in relatively high rates of physical injuries in the classical music industry.

I believe any move away from the intensive, studio-based training in defined areas of specialisation threatens the ability of VCA's students to compete with graduates of other schools like NIDA and WAAPA, and would make VCA graduates less work-ready. This would in turn impact upon arts business by causing a decline in the availability of Victorian-based graduate artisans with the skills required to enter the workforce. Like VCA, WAAPA started largely because the Music Department at the local University was not giving performers adequate education.

I do support regular curriculum review at VCA to ensure the College continues to meet the rapidly changing demands of students and their future employers. All reviews should include extensive consultation with all stakeholders and operate independently from VCA and University of Melbourne (UoM) management.

### **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**

I express concern that many talented and valuable teaching staff will not be returning to VCA in 2010. I know of students here who have considered traveling across the

country to attend VCA, who have now no longer any such plans.

I also express concern that suggestions the Melbourne Model would be applied to VCA, and news of high-level staff leaving, may have impacted upon VCA's attractiveness to high calibre applicants. I'm also aware as the spouse of an academic, the concerns that the academic world has elsewhere in Australia in fields such as science and medicine, with the negative and expensive impact of the Melbourne Model on their own faculties.

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**

I look forward to VCA emerging from the turmoil of the last year as a stronger institution, capable of answering student demand for 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,

Helen Tuckey