

**Hong Kong Arts Development Council  
International Arts Leadership Roundtable 2017**

**Full Transcript of  
Panel Discussion of Plenary 1: Connecting the Arts with Audiences**

**Moderator:** Ms Tisa HO (Executive Director, Hong Kong Arts Festival)

**Panellists:** 1) Dr. Sorcha CAREY (Chair, Festivals Edinburgh [UK])

2) Mr. Leong CHEUNG (Executive Director, Charities and Community, The Hong Kong Jockey Club)

3) Mrs. Rosa Huey DANIEL (Deputy Secretary (Culture), Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth; Chief Executive Officer, National Arts Council [Singapore])

4) Mr. Rupert MYER (Chair, Australia Council for the Arts)

5) Ms. Lynn F. C. YAU (Chief Executive Officer, The Absolutely Fabulous Theatre Connection [Hong Kong])

Tisa HO:

On behalf of everybody in the room, thank you. This is truly inspiring, and I love being reminded of the value of what we do and the impact that it can have on communities, on individuals. And I love particularly what Ms. Yau mentioned at the end of her presentation that it takes time, research and data to support the arts. And also, as Dr. Carey shared, there is the need in Edinburgh for involving the community and working together in clusters and thinking about what we do and why we do it.

It is wonderful to have these values. Meanwhile, all of us need to work with people who provide funding, while they also have their measurements that include data and numbers for funding the arts. How does one measure impact? You can measure headcount: how many people came, how many people saw, how many bought tickets etc. But how do you measure, quantify, begin to address the deeper level of the significance that we were talking about and thinking about?

Sorcha CAREY: I think it is a really important question because I think we probably all collectively in our sector have been on a journey where we all need resources to fund the work that we do. We are working together with funders to align ourselves to their objectives.

Certainly, in Edinburgh, we have been on a journey from thinking carefully

and building a very strong case for the economic impact that the festivals have for the city, both for the city itself and the country as a whole, to thinking about how we can actually measure, really measure impact--the social impact of the festivals, the way in which the festivals build a sense of quality of life, a sense of well-being, intellectual stimulation and so on.

As part of the study that I referenced, the [Impact Study](#) published in 2016, we actually conducted a fairly extraordinary cultural survey in which we had 30,000 respondents responding to questions about the festival including, critically for us and for the first time, qualitative questions, and a really resounding sense, a very strong sense. Out of that survey, over 90 per cent of people said they felt that the festivals and the cultural offering and the quality of the cultural offering were actually some of the things that made Edinburgh such a unique and special place to live.

So I think it also demonstrates a demand for that work and the extent to which we are working in partnership with the city to deliver that experience people have come to expect.

Rosa Huey  
DANIEL:

Right, I guess I would answer that in a couple of ways. The first is to understand that the arts is a sector that has very long-term consequences and impact. You cannot deliver results overnight. It is inter-generational, across time. So the conversations we have are always about multi-year journey towards targets and key performance indicators (KPIs).

I would also make the second point, and that is in funding which the National Arts Council in Singapore is very mindful. We do two things, one of which is broad-based funding in order to answer, as necessary, the stakeholders who are demanding results for their funding, or their sponsorship in terms of numbers, targets and so on. This kind of broad-based funding needs to be amplified by targeted funding to get those results.

Having broad-based funding is important because it is really about a facilitative environment for the arts that allows others, especially the arts community, to define impact in their ways. The arts practitioners and communities define impact very differently from what bureaucrats and policymakers do, and broad-based facilitative funding really grows the arts for them to define what impact is.

Rupert MYER:

I think in the case of the Australia Council for the Arts, one of the things we spend a lot of time talking about is how you measure vitality, and I think that is really at the heart of what this discussion is. And different forms and measurements of vitality and the different metrics you might use in order to measure it. Increasingly, our approach has been what might often be described in business as a balanced scorecard approach where

there are a number of different components that get measured in different ways, and that builds up an overall impression of the impact that the different arts projects and organisations are having.

The second is that there is obviously a very real difference between multi-year funding for an organisation that is measured year by year with impact at the end of the funding cycle and a one-off project that has some very specific outcomes and very specific measureables around that particular project.

So, within the arts, it is hardly surprising that we do have apples, pears and bananas in a sense as a way of measuring what the impact is for different pieces of funding and support along the way.

Leong CHEUNG: Yes, this is obviously a very difficult question I think not just for arts and culture funding but, to be honest, for any sort of philanthropic foundations. When they think about social impact, I think it is always a very challenging question.

For us at the Jockey Club Charities Trust (Charities Trust), the way we look at it is we look at our projects through four dimensions. We call them outcome indicators. So we try to look at whether there is behavioural change, whether there is attitude change, whether there is conditions change, and whether the project continues to build up knowledge for the field, so we call it a “BACK” system: behaviour, attitude, condition and knowledge.

Of course I agree with Rupert, because when you look at things from a project perspective and from a long-term, using government words, subvention perspective, it could be very, very different. It is because, on a project basis, sometimes you tend to ignore the capacity-building side of things whereby, in a more long-term funding, you can also look at organisation growth as part of the indicators.

So I think, for different foundations or government agencies or different bodies, we all have different preferences and priorities. I think exactly like what you said, we have also our stakeholders to answer to, so it cannot be one foundation or one government agency fitting everyone's needs. I think on the foundation side and government agency side, we ought to think more forward; But then on the applicant side, they also need to choose and pick which are the best foundations, which are the best government agencies they should work with.

Lynn F. C. YAU: 30 years ago, when I was very young, I did not believe in assessment or evaluation. Why should a funder come and tell us we are doing this well or not?

30 years later, seriously, we have to build a decent dialogue. My best funders are the funders who really align with values. So Mr. Cheung is right, not every funding organisation is right. For something like our [Bravo Youth Theatre Awards](#), we use the BACK model and the Kirkpatrick model as well. So those of us in the arts needing grants, we need to speak their language because it is easier for us to speak their language than for them to speak our language.

The way we measure is qualitative. Young people, or even our volunteers--they do a lot of reflections, and I am quite serious. Through collecting all the reflections, we are able to actually gauge how they change. But how do you change stories into numbers, into grades? Well, that is called creativity.

Leong CHEUNG: I think at least to us in the foundation, the Charities Trust, what we usually discuss is what do you need those measurements for? We do not set them up as a test and I do not think that is the purpose. I think the purpose is more to say what we have learned over that period. If there is no measurement or no outcome, we do not know what we have learned. We all know society is changing, and how people look at the arts, culture and heritage are also very different. So, without those measurement or data, you actually do not know or it is hard to gauge where the audience is moving to. I think part and parcel is we like to use some of these measurements as an input to the next funding cycle.

Tisa HO Thank you very much. If we do not have a conversation in the audience, we will not know how other people are thinking so I am delighted to open this up.

1<sup>st</sup> question from the audience: It is quite interesting about the title. Perhaps other than asking “Where Do the Arts Lead Us”, maybe we can also ask where we can lead the arts.

Tisa HO: It is a very provocative question--are we leading the arts or are the arts leading? We are supposed to be leaders on this stage. Where are we leading the arts or are we working with the arts to lead us, the community, somewhere? Maybe since I have not had the chance to speak my mind very much, I am going to jump in their first and then you guys get your chance to.

I think what we have been defining, the way that we have been talking about our community, society, including the younger generations, is that we feel that the arts could have really important impact on how people live, how people view the world, how people relate to each other, how people have a sense of community, including some of the things that are mentioned like empathy, active listening, pride in their community, their identity as an individual as well as in a community. So I think those are the

things that I have been hearing today and I feel very strongly. I agree with this, that the arts could get us there, that we can use the arts, that the arts can help us. I do not like to say we use the arts, because I think the arts are bigger than we are, but the arts can help us to get to a better place as a society, can help us as individuals to get to a place where we would like to see everybody be.

Lynn F.C. YAU:

Yes, definitely. I would like to see the arts as foundational in schools. It is not just music or visual arts, but you work through the arts to learn about history, you work through the arts to learn about social issues and the human values come in as well when you have to work as a team. The gentleman asked a very good question--where do we lead the arts, or where do the arts lead us? Personally, at the Absolutely Fabulous Theatre Connection, we believe in taking one further step forward to see if there is any reaction. In other words, to put it very bluntly, we do not really like to be led by the market. I think there has to be a balance to this, that we have to provide people with what they need and want at the moment, but as arts practitioners, we ought to be one step ahead.

The story that Dr. Carey was sharing earlier on about the man 150 years ago who led the arts, maybe you can help us with that as well. So he led the arts in a way.

Sorcha CAREY:

Yes, there was a reference to it. I think that is one of the unique things about Edinburgh as a city--the history is so compelling that it informs, I suppose, and sometimes gives us roots through our contemporary experience.

I was sharing a story about a real man who lived in Edinburgh 130 years ago and who in fact is credited with coining the phrase, "Think global, act local". He was called Sir Patrick Geddes, and I do not think he was particularly liked in his day because he was a difficult person. He was coming up with challenging, radical ideas of new ways to live and a very holistic vision of society in which he wanted to build a better life for the community and citizens of Edinburgh who at that time were living in one of the worst slums in Europe. He saw art as one of the ways in which to support his vision, he saw art as the way in which to provide a conversation, to provide a sense of dialogue to understand and encourage citizens to see their place in a city in relation to the world.

One of the things he said--he is infinitely quotable and easily quotable because he is dead; He said something which I think is very powerful and is something we are all attempting to do: "I want to give everyone the vision of an artist because they begin with the art of seeing". He wanted to share that, that way of looking that an artist can sometimes bring with a completely broad community.

I think that represents the extraordinary examples and amazing work shared in the panel today. For me the thing that connects this is less leadership and more a passion about sharing—because in some ways, art only becomes art if it enters into that wonderful relationship with an audience. It is the combination of a work with the people who participate and experience and gain something from that, that actually really creates what is an amazing art experience.

Rupert MYER: It is a really interesting topic to extend to, and I do not think there is an easy answer, but maybe a couple of pebbles in the pond. I come from a young country but a very old continent with a continuous culture of almost 70,000 years of indigenous culture in Australia. One of the things that is spoken about in indigenous culture is the sense of an art culture, that art itself is at the top of the pyramid, and political organisations and economic arrangements and even forms of kinship are in some way derivative from the significance, importance of art in everyday life. Understanding particularly the cultures of the southern hemisphere and some of the north as well of the resurgence of indigeneity and indigenous culture—I think that is a really important trend to think about in the next quarter century and what an art culture actually means, so it is actually combining those two words into a single phrase.

The second comment I would make is that, at the Australia Council for the Arts, we are increasingly talking about the concept of cultural democracy. Cultural democracy is a concept that goes way beyond just access and equal access; it is really about a sort of validation of a much broader expression of culture within a community that the singular titanic views that may have existed in the past are far less relevant to what might happen in the future. The broad sense of cultural democracy and what that might mean around inclusion and the breadth of diversity, I think, will become increasingly important considerations as we move forward.

Rosa Huey  
DANIEL: My take on it is that the difficulty is knowing when the arts leads us and when the arts needs to be led. There are different spaces, different things, different areas where these two apply. For the good reasons that both Ms. Yau and Dr. Carey have spoken about, clearly the arts leads us in terms of creativity, extending possibilities, pushing boundaries, unleashing visions which are new to many of us if you do not have that artistic lens, and we should really respect that and recognise that the arts leads there.

If arts councils are effective, we would have to explore where the arts need to be led, because where we are sitting, we do see the gaps. A vibrant ecosystem is necessary but there are parts of the ecosystem that may not be functioning so well for whatever reasons.

For instance, in Singapore, there are many areas in which museums and galleries can synergise, but left individually. So ours is to nudge that partnership and collaboration to have shared services, shared partnerships. Even in areas like conservation, a lot of value for money could be reaped if you just nudge them all together. That is clearly one.

The other is clearly research and capability. To help the arts, arts councils have to lead in research and capability development, because individual arts practitioners and arts groups either have no time or no competency to do that, and that is where I think if you could bring resources to where the arts really needs that kind of gap-plugging, I think that is where we go a long way.

Leong CHEUNG: We are a foundation so it is hard for us to say whether we lead anything, but I think we are always in a position to facilitate, to support our partners so that they can go out to lead the field. So I think that is very critical.

But to us, it is very, very important. I hear a lot of echoes around here, is that art is really beyond just appreciation. It is in everyday life. It is about compassion. It is about an appeal to emotions, in addition to reasons, probably. So how can we harness that power to heal people, to strengthen people's confidence, to help families blend together? I think those are the issues that we would like to really explore a lot more with our partners.

Tisa HO: Can I come back to something else? I agree with all of that and I hope that addresses to some degree that very provocative and interesting question. As I was listening to this, there was something in my mind which is that we almost assume in our conversations that we are talking about excellent art, and that we are talking about art that will make you feel and think and grow as a human being--all of those wonderful things. Where does that sit? I know that we have talked about the dashboard and the balanced scorecard, I have heard the word "excellence", which was embedded in many of the presentations, and "quality" was mentioned a number of times. Is this something that we recognise? Is this something that we can talk about? Is this something that we can somehow distil some KPIs on?

I can tell you, from personal experience, the dangers of non-quality. For instance, I used to work in the symphony orchestra, whose musicians work very hard and really want to play to appreciative audiences. This was in the early days of engagement. We do things a little bit better now, at least at the Hong Kong Arts Festival we would bus 600 kids into the concert hall and give them a concert of classical music that they had never heard before. That is one side of the equation, and that is a hard threshold to cross sometimes. We have said somewhere, somebody has said life is short and art is long and art does take investing time. The more you invest in, the more you get out of it.

The second part of it is that the musicians who are really stimulated and want to play their best when they are playing fascinating works or when there is a classic conductor or it is an important concert--do not always feel the same way about a kids audience. And actually, they are wanting to get out of there. So, very often, I have felt that we have done more harm than good by having that kind of access, which brings me back to those keywords of "excellence" and "quality".

Are there any thoughts about how we can – in this inclusiveness, in democratising the arts and in bringing people in to share the things that those of us who already are privileged to know its value and understand the value.

Rupert MYER: I certainly feel there is a big difference between the role that I perform as a government agency and the role that I might perform as a member of a philanthropic trust. I think that when you are dealing with public funds, it is very hard to justify, for example, funding non-excellent work. That is a really interesting sort of challenge in the public domain.

In the philanthropic domain, it is often at the heart of what you might want to do in philanthropy land, to give encouragement and support and validation, and at levels of community engagement, to organisations that might not normally be in receipt of public funding, because they are at a different stage in their professional development. So I find it quite an easy distinction to make that when it is public money, it is really hard to give justification to something that most of the community might consider actually is not central to what the role of public funding might be.

Lynn F.C. YAU: I think this is really where arts education come in. We have a programme called "Smart Youth" and it is for children who are very vulnerable. We take them to five cultural outings a year. Before we take them to anything, in classrooms and workshops, we start to work on a particular theme so that they are not simply gaping when they get into the performance venue; We hope they are actually seeing something. But, concomitantly, because we take them to five cultural outings, we speak to the presenters and the arts companies as well, be it the Hong Kong Ballet or Hong Kong Sinfonietta. We actually bring them up to speed on what we are doing, and they will try and bring their artists into the picture as well. Again, it is a matter of managing expectations.

But the basic premise has to be about arts education or arts in education, and this is about nurturing the audience of the future. So I think the immediate message has to come out very clearly. Just bussing a whole load of kids into a concert hall is disastrous to both sides.

Rosa Huey  
DANIEL:

I am glad you asked that question, because it is something we think very deeply about. You have heard that we have been doing a lot of work bringing arts to the communities and going out to where people live, work and play. This sort of art is at the accessible level. It is not that kind of high art, high excellence kind of spectrum.

What we are trying to do now is to raise the level of play even in community arts we are delivering, and we realise that some arts groups are more suited to that as some artists have those skill sets, and some are willing to pick up those skill sets. Not everyone can do community arts well; it is actually a competency to be developed. So we are trying to identify the arts groups that are really excellent in what they are doing, or those having the characteristics or the wish to work with communities. We want to give the resources to train them and we also want to have a sense of dialogue with them as to the kind of offerings.

I will use the example of dance for instance. We all know dance and music is a very accessible way of reaching out to people. We have excellent arts groups who perform at the Esplanade, and we are having conversations with them as to what we fund them up to do if they go to the community. So it is a led process. We understand you have to go out there, offer us something quite like a curtain raiser, a kind of a teaser, and then lead the audiences to different types of experiences. That is what we are doing in Singapore.

Leong CHEUNG:

I think it is a great question about time conflict and resources conflict. A world-renowned violinist, if you ask him or her to always perform in front of students, which is good perhaps for the students but he or she will then not have enough time to practise. I think it is a difficult question.

But I would take an example in sports. In sports, you have elite sports. Now, those who go to the Olympic games might not be the best community ambassadors sometimes. Of course, their fame is helpful, but whether they could actually coach students is a completely different thing. So I think it is a fundamental question of how we build up the whole ecosystem so everyone can be taken care of. There will have to be discussions, potentially debates and conflicts on how you then allocate resources, for example, do you put resources on this end or more on that end? But I think that again is a healthy discussion and debate in the community and sometimes even within the philanthropic foundations.

Sorcha CAREY:

I think that quality and excellence definitely exist. They are not always easy to define, particularly in the arts, but I think that they come from a position of knowledge, both within a generation but also intergenerational, a constant exposure and building up of a sense of artists' ways of working. I think that Ms. Yau has touched on some really important points in her

presentation with that wonderful slide of the novice: the excited novice and the regular novice. I think what we need to think about is finding ways in which that knowledge can become part of the process of becoming an audience member. If an audience has an initial exposure to something that is compelling enough to make them want to return, then they too will begin to build their own personal experience. I think a knowledge bank is based on personal experience, and I think that is really critical.

I have heard the expression yesterday at the Asia Cultural Cooperation Forum 2017 (organised by the Home Affairs Bureau) by that wonderful presentation from the gentleman who was working for the National Library of China. He was talking about cultural confidence. I think this is where we can bring audiences into that engagement of feeling that they can go in. In my case to a gallery, in someone else's case to a piece of theatre, and see a piece of theatre that others and critics might view as being of extremely high quality and still come out and say, "I did not enjoy that", and to have confidence in expressing a personal response to a piece of work without the feeling that they cannot express a personal view because they do not have the knowledge or because they have not been engaging as an audience member for that long.

Tisa HO:

One more opportunity for any interventions or questions from the floor.

Winsome Chow  
(Chief Executive  
of Hong Kong Arts  
Development  
Council)

Thank you for giving me this minute. I just want to add to the discussion about the balance that we have to strike between quality and the impact on individuals and communities; It is also the chance that we have to give or maybe create for artists to stretch. For example, in the Jockey Club New Arts Power that we are organising, we asked the artists what particular communities they want to work with, and we find for them a social organisation to partner with and enable them to immerse in their communities. In the course of it, the artist would get nourishment from the experience of working with a particular population.

I do think that if we in a way ground the artists in communities, they would get something back. At the same time, I think we respect artists, that they have to have a dimension to stretch, so we make sure that they have professional display, performances or exhibitions, and they also have the chance to listen to their own audience.

I think we need to have an ecosystem, not only in cultivating competency and talents, but we also have to let artists who are already experienced to learn through their own journey, to be an even more versatile and receptive artist, and to contribute back to our own communities. The trust and respect to artists are what I want to emphasise in this ecosystem.

Tisa HO

Thanks for bringing the artist back into the conversation. We have been

talking about working with artists, of course, while the focus has been really about the audience, and how we grow and encourage them? What support systems are necessary for growing audiences? Let me just share my thoughts with you.

Mine are that we need to continue to articulate the impact of the arts and what they can do in this space. We recognise that arts can change lives and communities, how we see ourselves and each other and how we interact with each other. Therefore, the arts have a really important role in any society, perhaps particularly in societies that are a little bit fractured.

As to the subject of where the arts lead us, I think one of the things we want to do is to lead everybody to the arts as well, and then hopefully the arts can, with all of us, take us to a better place.

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