

Arts and Business Partnerships: Looking beyond the sponsorship dollar.**Chaired by Gareth Wreford**

- **Sally Begbie (Australia Business Arts Foundation - AbaF)**
- **Catherine Hunter (AbaF)**
- **Joanne Kee (The Song Company)**
- **Ben Reeves (KPMG)**
- **Ian Reid (Ebsworth and Ebsworth Solicitors)**
- **Robyn Ayres (Arts Law Centre of Australia)**

By Miah Hammond-Errey

In Australia, arts and business are usually considered disparate entities, but at what expense?

SAMAG's March seminar provided an opportunity to unite the two, looking at ways to move beyond the sponsorship dollar, toward intricate partnerships between the business and arts sectors.

The Australia Business Arts Foundation (AbaF) is one of the organisations focused on opening up dialogue between arts organisations and business, hoping to facilitate an exchange of skills and experiences and strengthen the connections between the arts and businesses.

Sally Begbie, AbaF's NSW Manager for Cultural Liaison, outlined the services AbaF is offering in 2004. One of AbaF's major outcomes, is the desire to open and expand dialogue between business and arts, leading to the creation of a suite of services, skill development groups, volunteer programs and philanthropy programs.

The skill development groups are based on training arts organisations to adopt a business style approach when searching for funding, looking at the types of structures available to be employed, and assisting groups to develop a comprehensive plan to target sponsors. The training is relatively cheap (about \$250) and AbaF requests all arts groups wishing to benefit from the volunteer programs attend the training.

The volunteer programs, **adviceBank** and **boardBank**, are the innovative new programs which AbaF is eager to make known, particularly **adviceBank**. In its second year, **adviceBank** locates members of the business community who are willing to donate their time to arts organisation in need of specialist skills. The work is predominately project based and aimed at providing the arts organisation with the knowledge and resources to work independently.

The recently launched **boardBank** locates members of the business community who are willing and able to sit on arts boards. The aims of **boardBank** are to improve the understanding of the work and functions of a board and to build the governance and management capacity of arts boards. This is done by introducing skilled business people, particularly in the fields of law, finance and marketing to arts organisations who require skilled board members.

The philanthropic arm of AbaF in conjunction with the Australia Council forms Artsupport, which began due to recognition that cultural philanthropy is becoming an important source of private sector support for the arts. Please refer to the September 2003 SAMAG article on philanthropy for further information.

Begbie also discussed the services AbaF offers for members, which are about formalising engagement with business. Once art communities have done the training and produced a plan, AbaF hosts functions where the arts organisation can mingle with corporate sector in an

environment that is conducive to dialogue. In addition there are business arts exchange forums, arts appreciation events and arts management forums.

Although AbaF runs each of the three arms, and the member services independently, Begbie suggested using the services holistically, utilising the resources offered for each. All the services are intended to look beyond the old construction of sponsorship, toward a new model of partnership.

Catherine Hunter, AbaF's NSW Manager for business and arts volunteering, discussed the volunteer programs, particularly **adviceBank** which was the focus of the evening's case study. Hunter's role concentrates on matching businesses with arts organisations and creating a register of business networks.

The role of AbaF in facilitating **adviceBank** includes, recruiting business advisors, introducing and matching business advisors with arts organisations and monitoring, supporting and evaluating placements.

Through **adviceBank**, AbaF have helped over 100 arts organisations nationally, and pro-bono support has been measured at nearly \$500 000. Despite measuring the financial aspect of support, the real success of AbaF lies, according to Hunter, in gaining deeper insight and understanding into the arts and business sectors. The pro-bono support is used to build a skill base, and to strategically plan for the future.

Catherine Hunter introduced a successful **adviceBank** case study, The Song Company and two business volunteers.

Joanne Kee, General Manager of The Song Company, discussed some of the successful corporate partnerships and connections made with business advisors. The Song Company is an a cappella ensemble, which sings songs from the 10th Century to present.

Like many arts organisations, Kee discussed how The Song Company had been struggling to survive for around 20 years. After joining **adviceBank** and completing the training, The Song Company, which receives 50% of its funding from the Australia Council and NSW Ministry of Arts, began to target corporations specifically.

The Song Company performed at an AbaF event and began to develop links with business people. The training they completed enabled them to broaden their appeal to sponsors, leading to support from numerous corporations, in the creation of merchandise, for example their website and C.D.'s.

By their 24th anniversary, audience numbers had increased by 25% and The Song Company had been able to expand their already strong commitment to education and the development of music within Australia.

The medium sized Song Company is now thriving with assistance from business advisors through **adviceBank**, corporate sponsorship and assistance through the AbaF functions and a clearer business plan.

Ben Reeves, National Development Manager at KPMG is one of the business advisors introduced to Joanne Kee and The Song Company. Reeves saw the program as a *lonely arts* matchmaker and having worked with The Song Company for nearly a year thought he'd been well matched!

The benefits experienced by Reeves include, a great sense of satisfaction at teaching The Song Company how to balance the budgets, provide statistics and plan for future income. Reeves expressed pride in work he would not normally be able to participate in and described the overall process as a 'fascinating experience.'

Ian Reid, a Partner at Ebsworth and Ebsworth Solicitors is also a business advisor who was matched to The Song Company some months ago. A musician before studying law, Reid was blown away when he saw and heard the Song Company perform. He feels it is an honour and a privilege to work with and be associated with such an excellent group.

Reid has been assisting the Song Company in constructing a framework for protecting trademarks and brands. He expressed feeling a strong personal connection to the company and gaining professional satisfaction from the work, which like Reeves he wouldn't usually focus on specifically.

Both Ian Reid and Ben Reeves have their company's support to participate in the program, however the time comes predominately out of hours. Both Reid and Reeves feel a great connection not only to The Song Company but also to Joanne Kee, who they work alongside. They expressed the wonderful personal and professional expansion they have experienced since joining the program.

Robyn Ayres, the Executive Director at the Arts Law Centre of Australia outlined the professional services offered by the Centre to artists and arts organisations. With its inception in 1983, the Arts Law Centre aimed to provide free legal advice to any artists in need. In 2003, at the 20th anniversary, and today, ten workers, five of whom are lawyers, staff the Centre and 150 volunteer advisors assisting the 1300 subscribers.

The core service offered by the Arts Law Centre is a free telephone advice service, with further advice available by appointment. The advice available comes from registered accountants and lawyers. When requested, the Arts Law Centre can also provide information evenings, taking experts to the locations of organisations, particularly in rural and remote areas.

The Arts Law Centre also offers a mediation service in an attempt to resolve conflicts and enforce the rights of artists and arts organisations. These services are available in all States and Territories with the exception of Queensland, which runs its own arts law service.

Ayres offered some examples of how the Arts Law Centre can help artists and organisations, such as the most practical types of business structures for the establishment of new arts organisations, including tax provisions and the development of a constitution.

Other often requested services include the discussion of contractual issues such as intellectual property, (IP) new funding agreements and employment contracts. Similarly to AbaF, the Arts Law Centre offers sample contracts. Insurance and tax are also often queried, particularly the relatively new areas of public liability and professional indemnity.

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