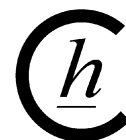


# Annual Report 2007



CURRENCY HOUSE

Presented by Katharine Brisbane  
at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of Currency House  
2<sup>nd</sup> December 2007

*This PDF available from [www.currencyhouse.org.au](http://www.currencyhouse.org.au)*

The year 2007 has been strenuous one with small triumphs and hard decisions. The high points included the stir—which still continues—caused by *Platform Papers 13*, Lee Lewis' *Cross-racial Casting: Changing the Face of Australian Theatre*, and the launch by NSW Parliament House of *Singing the Land: The Power of Performance in Aboriginal Life*.

## **Board changes**

In July four of our directors chose to leave us and we have coopted two who today present themselves for election. Steve Lawrence is the founding CEO of WorkVentures, a national, non-profit entrepreneurial organisation which has been responsible for the establishment of 13 further non-profit organisations; and is also founder and director of Social Ventures Australia. Harriet Parsons is a Melbourne artist who has been developing financial tools for self-employed artists and has taken charge of Currency House's financial systems and record-keeping.

The loss of Malcolm Duncan, who had completed his five years as a director; Mary Vallentine, now Chair of the Australian Youth Orchestra; Luke Nestorowicz, deputy GM of the Sydney Theatre Company; and Sandra Jones, a policy adviser with the Education Department, is a matter of regret. But they remain valued supporters of Currency House and we continue to be grateful for their generous time and service. Their reasons were variously to do with their professional commitments but prior to their resignations they were also instrumental in the initiation of a thorough overhaul of our financial systems and planning which is still continuing.

The failure in 2007 to reduce the overdraft loan taken out in 2003 to publish the *Companion to Music and Dance* had raised the concern of the Board at the April meeting and Harriet volunteered to prepare our financial records for the end of the financial year and create new systems for reporting and budget planning. The procedure curtailed our activities over a two-month period but, as you will see from the Financial Report, the outcome showed a small but comfortable profit for the year 2006–07.

For this we are particularly indebted to both Harriet and Board member Greg Quirk, a professional accountant, who was absent overseas during the critical period, but on his return supervised the review. We have resolved to maintain the smaller size of the Board and focus a more concentrated effort in our determination to prepare over the next twelve months a long-term plan to meet our aims.

## **Platform Papers**

The Platform Papers have made steady progress this year and engaged widening interest. In January Lyndon Terracini (PP11) travelled on our behalf to centres in NSW, Queensland and WA, advocating his view that in regional and remote Australia the changing demography has

made Eurocentric arts irrelevant and these areas are now rich sources of cultural innovation. In April Richard Harris (PP12) undertook workshops (in association with the Australian Film, Radio and TV School) in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth on the impact of digital technology on Australian film product. In July Lee Lewis (PP13) made a *succès de scandale* with her claim that our stages were too 'white'. It inspired full-page commentary in two successive issues of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, TV coverage, some passionate debate among practitioners and a great deal of blog comment. The debate will continue at NIDA next year and in the January issue of Platform Papers. The October issue, Kay Ferres and David Adair's *Who Profits from the Arts* (PP14), had a more sober reception; their speech at the Sydney Institute was well covered by the *Australian Financial Review* and has drawn fresh attention from the business community.

We are particularly proud to be able to announce a twelve-month grant from the Copyright Agency Limited Cultural Fund of \$30,000 to pay the expenses of our authors to travel to interstate speaking engagements. This is a huge boost for which we are enormously grateful. The funding includes money towards the part-time salary of an events manager to support and expand these activities with the aim of making *Platform Papers* and Currency House's advocacy a truly national conversation.

### ***Singing the Land***

John Golder and I also spent a major part of our year in the editing of Jill Stubington's massive work, *Singing the Land*. It is the product of a lifetime, in which the author has sought to help white Australians better understand Aboriginal music and ceremony, and black Australians to restore their traditions. The editing was demanding and stimulating, requiring not only editorial skills but those of negotiation and diplomacy. We raised \$11,500 towards upfront costs, for which we have to thank the generosity of the Besen Family Foundation and some 40 individual subscribers. *Singing the Land* was launched at the Melbourne Town Hall by composer Dr Ros Bandt and Aboriginal activist Lillian Holt; and in Sydney at Parliament House by the Hon. Linda Burney, MP.

Currency House will continue to publish books of this nature from time to time: works of research and cultural reference that we believe deserve publication but are prohibitive for a trade publisher. Given our small resources, however, the Board has determined that in 2008 we will publish only *Platform Papers*.

### **Arts and Public Life Breakfasts**

These continued successfully during 2007. We changed direction a little this year by inviting three entrepreneurial figures to talk about their belief in the arts: Joseph Gersh, a Melbourne investment banker who has spent a lifetime as an arts advocate and is Deputy Chair of the Australia Council; David Borger, then Lord Mayor of Parramatta, who spoke passionately about his vision for a creative city; and Donald McDonald, a career arts manager, former Head of the ABC and now the Commonwealth Censor. These speakers brought three new perspectives and three new audience sectors to us. Sadly, our three-year sponsorship by the Sofitel Wentworth Sydney has now expired. We await the outcome of an application to extend their sponsorship for two years and meanwhile have had approaches from two arts institutions. A brief questionnaire to our regulars brought us convincing evidence of their will to continue, so one way or another the breakfasts will continue in 2008.

### **Finance**

The Financial Report shows equity of \$57,669. We still have a working overdraft of \$38,000 to be reduced, and our first priority will be to increase subscribers and sales of Platform Papers. Last year PP's costs after sales amounted to \$22,827 (due in large part to author's travel expenses) which was covered by donations and other revenue. This year, the CAL funding will transform our budget; but even when we reach our sales target we shall still need \$12,000 for production. The Keir Foundation has been a generous supporter for two years, for which we owe them a great debt, and we have applied to them again. Beyond that we are particularly seeking tax deductible contributions of \$1,500 from individuals and the managers of small prescribed private funds with whom we can develop a friendly relationship.

## Conclusion

In the last few days further events, among them a change of government—and with it a change of national mood—have confirmed the changing times. For Currency House it has meant the resignation of two more Board members: Mark Seton, who has moved out of Sydney to pursue his own good work, the Australian Society for Performing Arts

Healthcare; and Eamon Flack, whose 'pathway' through the theatre increases in velocity. We hope to do the same for our present executive officer, Polly Rowe, who leaves us next week to become literary manager of the Sydney Theatre Company, just as Eamon left us two years ago for the same role at Company B Belvoir. We wish them every good wish for their blossoming future. They will remain both members and friends of Currency House.

Career pathways will be a major theme in 2008, for the new government as well as ourselves. In February we shall launch Platform Papers 15, *A Sustainable Arts Sector: What will it Take?* with public forums in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. The authors, Cathy Hunt and Phyllida Shaw, have examined the many sustainability programs devised by Australian and UK governments and offer a new policy direction based on cooperation and respect for the artist in society. Initiatives of the Australia Council, the state governments and the recently-announced ALP Arts Policy also reflect this changing landscape. Our hope is that through spreading this national conversation we might begin to define, as the year progresses, first the common ground and then the common good.

It now remains to me to thank Polly and Harriet for their sterling work in difficult times; Peter Fyfe our diligent webmaster; John Golder, our invaluable editor, Martin Portus, our marketing consultant; Greg Quirk, our financial mentor; and our editorial Board members Greig Tillotson and John McCallum. I am deeply indebted to them for their voluntary time, support and loyalty and look forward to the involvement of all our members in our new directions for 2008.



Katharine Brisbane

Chair