

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
R.G. Casey Building
John McEwen Crescent
Barton ACT 0221

24 February 2017

Submission by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra on the Foreign Policy Whitepaper

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra (SSO) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Foreign Policy Whitepaper and addresses in this submission the key issues outlined by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

01. Australia's Foreign Policy needs to be grounded in a clear-eyed assessment of our national interests

The SSO submits that arts and culture should be one of the key values underpinning the foreign policy. As the leading cultural Ambassador for Australia in the Asia-Pacific region, the SSO has witnessed first-hand the role of culture in fostering cultural, diplomatic and economic interests.

Particularly in Asia, culture is an essential aspect of commercial negotiations; it is recognised not as an add-on, but as an essential part of doing business.

China, for example, has used cultural diplomacy for hundreds of years, sending acrobats, Peking Opera and the like as a way of projecting Chinese culture and sophistication overseas. The importance of culture is such that it was the focus of the sixth plenary session of the 17th Central Committee in Beijing in 2011, where it emerged as the centre of domestic and foreign policy for the next five years.

In a Confucian-based society such as China, trust is a precursor to doing business¹. The consumption of culture – attending concerts, exhibitions and events – offers an established pathway by which entities can find that trust through mutual shared experience.

In our experience arts companies like the SSO with an established brand in China, and indeed other parts of Asia, can help other entities build the requisite level of trust by way of association. On our tours we have witnessed the value of our performances and outreach programs in forming cultural, corporate and diplomatic relationships that lead from the Concert Hall and in to the boardroom.

02. Australia has diverse interests that span the globe

The SSO has developed a strategy to become the leading orchestra of the Asia-Pacific region by 2030. In line with the Australian Government's priorities, China has been a central focus for the SSO for the past eight years, and this year the orchestra will undertake its fifth tour

¹ For more on this see: Graham & Lam, *The Chinese Negotiation*. Harvard Business Review, October 2003, p 82.

to the mainland. The SSO has enjoyed supporting the Australian Government's relations with China, demonstrated by participation in, but not limited to, the following activities:

- An SSO string quartet performed in Tokyo at the Australian Embassy fundraiser for the 2011 Japan tsunami disaster, joining then PM Julia Gillard in demonstrating support for Japan by the Australian people. When the SSO toured Japan later that year, it performed [*Song for Japan*](#) by composer Steven Verhelst to show solidarity for the Japanese people.
- In 2011 the SSO also toured to Korea to celebrate the Year of Friendship between Australia and Korea, marking 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.
- In 2012 the SSO celebrated the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and China by performing a gala concert at Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), which was followed by a post-concert event hosted by the Australian Embassy.
- The SSO provided the cultural element to the 2014 Australia Week in China program, including performing at the Gala lunch in Shanghai hosted by then PM Tony Abbott.
- In 2014 the SSO held a gala concert at the NCPA and was welcomed at a post-concert event hosted by the Australian Embassy, at which Chargé d'Affaires for the Australian Embassy Beijing, Justin Hayhurst gave a keynote address stating that the SSO is "a model of how to succeed in China".
- The SSO performed at a dinner with then PM Tony Abbott and Chinese President Xi in Canberra to celebrate the signing of the Free Trade Agreement in 2014.

The SSO also has notable relationships with other nations. We have toured several times to Japan and Korea, both of which are considered important markets for classical music. Any orchestra that wishes to be regarded on the world stage also needs to develop a presence in Europe and next year the SSO will again undertake a tour of Europe.

While the Asia-Pacific region will continue to be a major focus for the SSO, we recognise the importance of culture in building new relationships and would welcome the opportunity to explore how we might align our international activities with any of DFAT's country priorities.

03. Australia is an influential player in regional and international organisations

The SSO is incredibly grateful for the support of organisations that have been able to foster and leverage its international activities. Two examples of such organisations are the Australia-Korea Foundation and the Australia-China Council with whom we have worked with on all our international tours to these countries. Both of these organisations have grasped the importance of culture within the development of economic and diplomatic relationships and, in our opinion, are models of how to do business in the Asia-Pacific.

04. Australia needs to be ambitious in grasping economic opportunities

The SSO reiterates that the embedding of culture in the Foreign Policy will ensure Australia is best placed to take advantage of opportunities in the global economy. Should culture fail to be a fundamental part of the policy, Australia will be disadvantaged – particularly in Asia where culture is an intrinsic part of doing business.

06. Australia uses a range of assets and capabilities to pursue our international interests

The SSO submits that the Australian Government can leverage the arts sector for its national interests through a coordinated communication approach.

Recommendations from the SSO for the Australian Foreign Policy

The SSO recommends that DFAT hold a regular forum with the arts sector to explore the diplomatic and strategic priorities for coming years. The SSO recommends that this forum take place twice per year to address the following:

- How can arts and cultural organisations align their international activities with foreign policy? (keeping in mind that often a two-year lead time is required for an international tour by an arts company)
- How can DFAT leverage the existing activities of arts and cultural organisations to meet its objectives in Australia and abroad?

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Foreign Policy Whitepaper.

Kind Regards,

Rory Jeffes
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