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Morwenna Collett

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Monday, 26 June 2023

Captioned by: Gordon Dickinson

ROBERT REID: Issue No. 5 of New Platform Papers focuses on diversity and inclusion in the Australian arts, presenting two new papers by Morwenna Collett and Jeremy Neideck. We're speaking with Morwenna about her paper, *More Risk, More Play: Creating an Inclusive Culture*. Morwenna, thanks for joining us.

MORWENNA COLLETT: Lovely to be with you, Rob.

ROBERT REID: Thank you. So...we'll start with something fairly simple. Tell us a bit about the paper itself.

MORWENNA COLLETT: Thanks, Rob. It's been such a pleasure to work on this paper. My paper talks about diversity, equity and inclusion issues really broadly, and essentially it talks about the fact that to make our arts and cultural sector more inclusive, we need to have both incentives and disincentives to get artists and arts organisations to do the work, because without that, it's hard, and so we need some carrots, we need some sticks to kind of help us along the way to make sure that we're thinking about these things, we're prioritising them, and ultimately, we're creating a richer, more diverse and more interesting arts sector for us all to enjoy.

ROBERT REID: Sure, sure. You go into some detail about what those carrots and sticks are. Could you let us in on that before we get to the paper itself?

MORWENNA COLLETT: Yeah, so, I think it's about acknowledging those of us within the arts and cultural sector that have power and privilege to help platform or highlight certain things, so whether you're a festival that's commissioning work, whether you're a funding body who might be

putting funding requirements or assessment criteria together, there are all...we all have a role to play in kind of creating an ecosystem that can encourage diversity and inclusion to shine through.

ROBERT REID: Mmm, and so there are obvious things that arts centres and organisations can do, I think, that come to mind to support people with disabilities, artists with disabilities and that are differently abled. Things like putting in ramps where there are stairs and putting in lifts, obviously, are the obvious things, but I wonder if there are more subtle things as well that the industry needs to look at. I'm thinking particularly about networking and access to the creative community for artists who struggle to go to spaces that are perhaps not as socially or accessibly friendly.

MORWENNA COLLETT: Yeah. So, my paper talks about diversity, equity, inclusion really broadly, but disability is one example that I draw on and talk about within the paper, because that is my own lived experience, so, yeah, really happy to chat to you about that element of the paper. And you're right - there's so many different things that arts organisations and artists can do to make their work more accessible.

For me, I really believe that access starts online, so it's about what's the information that you might be putting about your event on your website? Might you be using things like alt text or image descriptions so that people who are blind or low-vision can engage with your content online? Does your website reach current accessibility standards? Have you told people about the access that you'll be providing at your event so that they can make an informed decision about whether they go? And, of course, it's not just audience access that we're talking about but also artist access and access for our workforce too, because, of course,

you know, we're at a time where a lot of people are choosing to leave and move on from the arts sector, so making sure that we are able to welcome in people from all walks of life to work with us is really important as well, so thinking about inclusive recruitment and retention strategies is really important too.

ROBERT REID: Mmm. There has been, I've noticed...myself, I've noticed a lot more presence of alt text and things like that in marketing, certainly. I haven't seen as much of it from internal texts, but I'm sure it's there to some capacity. How...and that feels like it's been fairly new, in...say, in the last 10 years. How far have we come, do you think, and how far do we still have to go?

MORWENNA COLLETT: Yeah. I think there's been many activists and advocates of people with lived experience of disability who have been chipping away at getting some traction in our sector for a really long time, and progress has been slow, but I do feel like we have reached a tipping point where organisations on the whole cannot ignore this anymore.

People with disability are 20% of the population, so it's one in five of us, so that's a really large audience segment that you're going to be missing out on as an arts organisation if you're not opening yourself up to having everyone be able to buy a ticket from you, so, yeah, I think...I think...progress has been slow, but it's...it's moving. We're still a good decade behind places like the UK, but we're certainly further advanced than some other countries in this area as well.

ROBERT REID: Mmm. Where is that lag happening? Is that mainly at the major kind of...I imagine a lot of those places have got kind of at least

policies in place. Whether they've acted on them is another question. Is that the case or is it sort of across the board?

MORWENNA COLLETT: Yeah. I think, you know, places like the UK, one of the reasons that they're ahead is they've got much stronger legislation generally for disability than we have here in Australia. Our Disability Discrimination Act is 31 years old now, so it's not the most contemporary of beasts. In the UK, they have something called the Equalities Act, which I talk about in the paper, which is much newer, from 2010, I think.

So, because of that, that then trickles down to things that funding bodies like Arts Council England do. It filters down to requirements for major venues like the Southbank Centre or festivals like Glastonbury, so there are...you know, not that everything should be kind of just compliance- and legislation-driven, but I think it does really help when the legislation's a little bit stronger than what we have here currently.

ROBERT REID: Yeah. OK. That's interesting. So a lot of what has happened has been mostly driven by the companies here, do you think?

MORWENNA COLLETT: Yeah, yeah. I think we haven't traditionally had a lot of great sticks and carrots here, so the good work that has happened has been off the bats of organisations who have recognised the importance of diversity and inclusion and have wanted sort of willingly to do something about it, and that's been great, and I think there's some really great examples and case studies that others can follow here in Australia now, but what I do think is that, you know, while a willingness to do this work is great, having some more of those incentives and de-incentives is useful too.

ROBERT REID: Oh, without question. One final question before I let you go, 'cause obviously we don't want these to be too hugely long, otherwise no-one will watch them, you, of course, mentioned at the top that the paper itself is not just about disability access but is a general look at inclusivity. It strikes me...I mean, I have my own things, but, of course, I don't have the same kind of barriers to entry as, like, say, people of colour or people from...other cultural backgrounds or even people with disabilities. It strikes me that there would be obvious differences between those, but I wonder about the similarities between them. Are there any?

MORWENNA COLLETT: Mm-hm. Yep. Absolutely. I think...it's really important to recognise intersectionality within this conversation, so the fact that none of us are just one thing, and when people kind of belong to multiple groups which are marginalised, those layers of disadvantage can really compound, but while all of those different kind of under-represented group areas that you mentioned do require their own nuanced approach, there is absolutely some similarities in the solutions.

One example might be outreach being a solution across those groups, so if you're wanting to engage with the Deaf community, that's going to require a particular type of community outreach approach to do that, but it may end up being, you know, similar but with a different group to how you might engage with people from a particular cultural background as well, so I think...I think there are definitely some similarities in what the solutions look like, but, of course, a bespoke and tailored approach depending on who you're wanting to engage with through your work is really important too.

ROBERT REID: Hmm, yeah. So a sort of similar base for some starting points, but also once you get into the specifics, then it is more about

dealing with individuals and communities, yeah. Which is a huge task, of course. Probably not as huge as it is made to seem by funding bodies or those who are resistant, but there is still a lot of...I like your 'outreach' word for that, actually. There's a lot of outreach that needs to be done, I think, generally in Australian theatre and certainly to cultures and communities that are...have been largely excluded from it in the last 10, 15, 20, 100 years.

Well, that all sounds fantastic, and I can't wait to get my hands on a copy finally to actually look at it properly. The Platform Paper itself, number for the New Platform Paper itself, No. 5, is titled Diversity and Inclusion: Building the Good Life in Oz. Morwenna's paper is More Risk, More Play: Creating an Inclusive Culture, and it will be out in the next couple of weeks from Currency House. In fact, I think the launch is next week. Morwenna, thank you so much for your time.

MORWENNA COLLETT: Thanks for having me, Rob.

(End of transcript)