

Governments are pressing ahead with stadium plans

Back in September, the state's Arts Minister, Madeleine Ogilvie, boasted in a budget media release that the "government will also continue to invest in the state's most beloved iconic cultural institutions", including the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

Well words are cheap, as they say. The TSO is facing a serious threat to its future because the Liberal/ALP stadium will cut revenue and operations if it is to be built (this columnist hopes not).

Worse than that, if the stadium becomes a reality then the TSO concert hall will be dwarfed by it.

Greg Barns



Recently the TSO's refreshingly energetic chief executive Caroline Sharpen made the point that the "stadium is just 170m from the TSO's highly sensitive recording, livestream and broadcast facilities including Federation Concert Hall".

Where else in the world is a symphony orchestra so cavalierly treated by government?

Put it this way. Could one imagine a

Elsewhere in the world, a symphony orchestra would not come second to sport nor receive merely lip service, writes **Greg Barns**

regional orchestra in Europe – let's say the very fine Bournemouth Symphony in England or the Bergen Philharmonic Symphony in Norway – having a stadium looming over it? The answer is no, because unlike the lip service of politicians in this country, with the wonderful exception of the musically refined former Labor prime minister Paul Keating, in other parts of the world,

cultural infrastructure doesn't run second to sport. Come to think of it, in the US, orchestras are highly valued in their communities and well-appointed concert halls are seen as nothing less than compulsory.

The TSO in fact should have a new home. Its current home, an appendage to an architecturally bereft hotel in Davey St, is inadequate. Compare it to its

counterparts in Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth for example and you get the picture.

But it seems the Rockliff government and its loyal sidekicks in the ALP have little interest in one of the leading small orchestras in the world. One would have thought that a small island would value a seriously good musical ensemble that puts Tasmania on the map.

It is scandalous, and it is perhaps a reflection on the Arts Minister's lack of clout in cabinet (her predecessor Elise Archer was a fighter and won some battles), that the TSO has had to hire its own experts to assess the damage to it from the stadium. This

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to the detriment of our revered cultural institutions

reflects very poorly on the Rockliff government's vehicle, the Macquarie Point Development Corporation (MPDC).

This work undertaken by the consultants has identified the need for "additional soundproofing of the TSO's concert hall, recording and rehearsal studios; legislative protections relating to stadium construction noise and vibration; temporary relocation to other venues for time-critical operations such as album recordings; and compensation if concerts or commercial activities need to be cancelled".

The cost to taxpayers will be about \$4.45m. Ms Sharpen makes the

excellent point that that governments in Tasmania love to fund 'high performance centres' for their favourite sports like AFL, cricket and basketball. So why destroy the cultural high performance centre?

The plight of the TSO, the fault of the Rockliff government and the MPDC, is sadly all too typical of the attitude of successive governments in Tasmania when it comes to cultural life.



Madeleine Ogilvie

The main art gallery and museum TMAG does the best it can despite government neglect. It sits in a collection of historically and architecturally significant buildings but sadly much of the facade looks drab and neglected.

It seems the gimmicky Mona, a building with an in-the-main juvenile and narrowly focused collection, lets politicians off the hook. Look, they say, 'we are cultured'. 'We have Mona and some swanky restaurants and a few Georgian houses, what else do you want?'

When Legislative Councillors vote on the stadium issue, and in this respect one hopes that the hard

working and smart Meg Webb is re-elected in Nelson, they need to take account of the potential damage to cultural excellence in Tasmania if the current trajectory wins the day. Not only is the TSO's future being put at risk, it is likely, given the fact that the Tasmanian government, aided and abetted by the ALP, will ensure there is crippling debt thanks to the stadium, that the orchestra and other institutions like TMAG will find that funding is reduced.

You can just see the crude calculation from ministers.

Saddled with that unprecedented level of debt the place to find cuts will be the arts. Easy pickings for a

populist government with some Trumpian types in it.

A society that does not invest in cultural excellence is one that loses its soul and its identity. Governments have a responsibility to nurture orchestras and galleries. Where they are housed and located is important. The TSO and TMAG deserve to be respected and embraced by politicians that conveniently laud them when it suits.

If, as Ms Ogilvie says, elite arts institutions like those just mentioned are 'beloved', then make them feel so! **Hobart barrister Greg Barns, a human rights lawyer, has advised state and federal Liberal governments**