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Distinct, unusual, specific. It works

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TONY Klein's supposition that artistic training at the VCA does not include "a basic general education" (Letters, 27/8) is far from the truth. Does he really believe that emerging artists can develop their craft without a detailed analysis of the world, Australia's culture and their place in it? Daily immersion in making and reading works of art, literature, music and the materials of artistic creation demand that any talented artist is skilled in analysis, prediction, politics, history and co-operative modes of communication. Economic survival after training, in an industry with 93 per cent unemployment, is a reality for any artist.

It is important to look at the distinction being made that models be focused on training talented artists. I have just received a citation worth \$10,000 for "the vision, planning and implementation of an artistic training model in a regional setting which has had outstanding graduate success". I trained at the VCA and owe my success to the inspiration and knowledge passed on by staff. I may not be delivering actor training in the same way, but I am inspired every day to build Victoria's cultural heritage because of the time I spent at the VCA. Let's celebrate and protect the future of the arts. Let the VCA be distinct, unusual and specific. It works.

Associate Professor Kim Durban, Arts Academy, University of Ballarat

Actors, not academics

AS AN actor for more than 20 years I know how essential training is to a performing artist. The VCA offered this, but now with the planned introduction of the VCAM Melbourne Model, performers who want to train (then gain employment) in their chosen field will *never* apply to do this second-rate course, which doesn't do what is required - train actors.

As an agent now for the past 10 years, I represent numerous VCA graduates employed in the profession. I will not be offering to represent anyone who doesn't have the resources I need to keep my business viable, and this is what will happen under the Melbourne Model. By diminishing contact training hours and substituting practice for an enforced academic component, Melbourne University will reduce the essential element of the course - hands-on training. I need actors, not academics, in my agency.

John Powell, Active Artists Management, Prahan

Numbers don't add up

SHARMAN Pretty (Comment, 27/8) and others have tried to placate critics with the assertion that the University of Melbourne will keep 75 per cent of student hours within their school of specialisation. This is only half the problem: the university is also planning to shorten the VCA's semesters from 16 weeks to 12. Thus, students will only get 56.25 per cent of the current practical training.

For the past few years, the VCA has imposed Centre for Ideas subjects on all undergraduates. The removal of four hours a week for 12 of the 16 weeks per semester has already had a marked effect on the organisation of the practical courses.

We keep getting told that the implementation of the Melbourne Model will be done with "consultation of staff and students". Really? Which staff in particular? The staff that have been told it will be "unwise" to speak to the media if they disagree with policy? The ones that have already left due to dissatisfaction with the direction of the college? Pretty now even has VCA staff on tenure worried about being sacked - that surely must be a first.

Jarrold Factor, VCA film and TV graduate, Hawthorn

Advertisement

Let the VCA be distinct, unusual and specific. It works.

College is 'a major event'

TONY Klein claims only a few VCA graduates work in their chosen field, with many managers and agents making a decent living. The obvious question is: who are they administering if there are so few practitioners? Perhaps too much arts funding is supporting top-heavy administrations.

As for where funding should come from: the Premier claims the Federal Government should directly support our "Victorian" College. His Government spends at least \$60m on the discredited formula one grand prix each year, enough to ensure a flourishing VCA for the benefit of the whole community. Even Mr Kennett has dubbed the VCA "a major event", which should give Mr Brumby the excuse to find the necessary millions.

Keith Wiltshire, Carlton

Audacious claims

AFTER presiding over the most disgraceful period in the protection of basic human rights in Australian political history, John Howard (*The Age*, 27/8) has the audacity to claim the adoption of a bill of rights would represent "the triumph of elitism in Australian politics".

To brand as elites those who refuse to accept that democracy is simply the rule of the majority through its representatives in parliament belies his own contempt for the rights of individuals and of minorities.

A bill of rights would strengthen the judicial development of common law, in keeping with its international obligations to implement binding conventions to which Australia is committed.

It would ensure no government ever again had the power to so expediently politicise the rights of any minority grouping on the inviolable basis of their racial or religious profile.

Neither would it necessarily "weaken" the role of parliament as a moral force for good. But it would instead provide a judicial mechanism that will carry this nation's collective aspiration for democracy well into the future.

Reverend Dr Vincent Zankin, Rivett, ACT

On the right

AS A former journalist and producer in ABC TV and radio, I cannot let Peter Costello's claims of left-wing bias (Comment, 26/8) pass without comment. He claims there is but one Liberal broadcaster in the ABC in Perth, and he is regarded as "an oddity". As examples of left-leaning staffers who have gone into politics on Labor's side, he cites Mary Delahunty, Maxine McKew and Clare Martin.

Mr Costello might like to note the following list of ABC broadcasters who have entered politics on the Liberal side: Eoin Cameron, federal MP; Peter Collins, NSW leader; Ian Cover, Victorian upper house; Pru Goward, NSW MP; Cameron Thompson, federal MP; Bruce Webster, NSW MP; Sallyanne Atkinson, lord mayor of Brisbane; Rod Henshaw, failed state candidate for Brisbane; and Sarah Henderson, federal Victorian candidate. None was regarded as "an oddity".

As someone who spent 30 years with the ABC, I can say with confidence that all of those above, being professional broadcasters, would never allow their personal political views to cloud their objectivity on air.

Damien Ryan, Emerald

Comrades in arms

PETER Costello's views would resonate with many people. I wonder if the fact that *The Age* printed only letters lambasting Mr Costello is reflective of the mailbag or is the letters page a sly way for the paper to offer support to comrades at the ABC?

Richard Burrridge, Beaumaris

Giving thanks

IT WAS heartening to read about the trials and the tribulations of Sophie Li (*Insight*, 22/8) as part of Hearing Awareness Week.

Like Sophie, I, too, was born profoundly deaf 22 years ago. I also have bilateral cochlear implants. When it came time to consider a second implant three years ago, I had the opportunity to meet Sophie, who gave me invaluable advice. I have never looked back and know that I would not be where I am today if it weren't for Taralye (an early intervention centre in Blackburn), the implants and the visionary work of Professor Graeme Clark.

Kate Moss, North Melbourne

Training places key

WHOEVER decided to direct extra funding for therapy to young children with autism didn't do their homework. Such schemes are only effective if there is a pool of specialists waiting for people to hire them.

This was not the case. There is a severe shortage of speech therapists throughout Australia.

The urgent need is funding for more speech therapy undergraduate training places and sponsored retraining to encourage the many graduates who have left the industry to return.

Dr Rosemary Crossley, Brunswick

Parallel universe

MR PALLAS, after reading your media release regarding the proposed E6 freeway link in the northern suburbs, I have some queries. In the original proposal you said 47 homes would be destroyed (now reduced to 12), but according to VicRoads, 56 homes were to be demolished.

Second, you stated this proposal would link Epping and Thomastown to the west. But those suburbs are already linked by way of either the Hume Freeway or the Craigieburn bypass.

This infrastructure is just five kilometres from the E6 proposal. Why do we need another freeway so close to an existing one? This infrastructure will, you say, cost \$38 billion. How much of it will be a tollway? Perhaps it is time the Government told the truth about this project.

Wendy Campbell, Protect Our Heritage Group, Wollert

Storages empty

NO MATTER how often the minister tries to spin the pipeline as a saviour of Melbourne's water shortages the numbers don't add up. In a media release on August 26 the minister claimed with the laying of the last of 5500 pipes that water could now flow to Melbourne. But there is no water to flow to Melbourne. Not because opposition parties voted against changes to the bulk entitlement but because savings do not currently exist.

Members of an upper house committee were told by Goulburn Murray Water at a hearing in Shepparton last Friday that the volume of water saved by the modernisation project could not be determined until after the audit process. The audit was due to be completed by the end of August but is not expected for another month.

Mr Holding claims "water savings are being made right now in irrigation channels in northern Victoria". This is impossible as northern Victorian irrigators do not have an allocation for this season. The system is therefore not operating.

The minister neglects to mention that Goulburn storages are at just 22 per cent and irrigators face another season in which they won't receive their full allocations. It is ridiculous that the minister believes he can prevent Melbourne running out of water by connecting it to a storage that has already run out.

Neil Pankhurst, Plug the Pipe, Tongala

Take a stand

PAUL Austin's suggestion that the Opposition frontbench needs new faces (Comment, 27/8) to enable electoral success covers over a profound problem.

What the Opposition really needs is a central theme. It could be ministerial responsibility and acting for the benefit of all Victorians. Specific matters could include a permanent independent commission on corruption, ensuring budgetary measures are transparent, opening PPP arrangements to public scrutiny and restoring the powers of the Auditor-General to examine and report on the effectiveness of Government use of public funds.

As it is, the Opposition appears to hope the Brumby Government will implode and it can just slip into the ensuing political vacuum, without saying what it stands for and what it intends to achieve.

Frank Pederick, Castlemaine

Closing arguments

YOUR readers and our political masters may be interested in closing times for bars and nightspots in tourist cities.

Bars officially close in Bangkok at 1am (new rules to combat street violence), and in Rio, Toronto, Boston, Los Angeles, and Rome, it is usually 2am.

In Rome the new closing time applies to the most popular tourist precincts, but not to some places frequented by Roman residents. The argument that allowing 6am and 8am closing times encourages international tourists is nonsense.

Brian Buckley, North Carlton

History lesson

WHEN I go to see *The Young Victoria* I hope to find that the filmmakers have achieved better historical accuracy than is implied in Jim Schembri's review (*The Age*, 27/8). King William was not Victoria's "father" but her uncle.

Prince Albert was not "Belgian" but German. To say that Victoria's mother, the Duchess of Kent, tried "thwarting her, if only for her own good" sanitises a malodorous episode: the Duchess, bitter that her husband's death prevented her from becoming queen, set out, in league with the evil Sir John Conroy, to promote herself as the obvious choice for regent should William die before Victoria reached 18. There is some evidence that the Duchess' first move, as regent, would have been to have Victoria declared insane, à la George III.

Robert Hogg, Middle Park

Embrace nature

HEAR, hear, Cordelia Fine (Comment, 26/8). As the mother of girls I dread and resent the expectations they may face from adolescent males, whose own pubic hair will no doubt remain intact!

I can only hope and trust my girls will have enough courage and sense of self to make their own decisions regarding their bodies, and embrace them as God intended them to be.

My advice to my daughters would be to tell their boyfriends: "You go first!"

Kristen Doell, Sanctuary Lakes

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/letters/distinct-unusual-specific-it-works-20090827-f13y.html>