

02/02/2010

Julia Zemiro

<CONTACT DETAILS REMOVED BY SAVE VCA>

The VCA Review Committee
C/- University of Melbourne

By email: vcam-feedback@unimelb.edu.au

Re: Discussion Paper

Dear Review Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the future of the Victorian College of the Arts. I write to you as a 1993 graduate of the VCA.

In the late 80's, I was at Sydney University doing a Bachelor of Arts. The course was interesting, it was a golden time in our education as it was free, and it also gave me time to think about the best way forward in my pursuit of an acting career. The BA was theoretical, of course. Even in the subject 'Performance Studies', it was clear that these were theorists analysing performance, and none of these lecturers were practice based or knowledgeable in that area.

Luckily, the Sydney University Dramatic Society (SUDS) was a place where you could do practical work. SUDS had no department running it. It was completely run by, and for, students and we would produce over 20 small and large scale shows a year. The hunger for this practical knowledge was satisfied to a degree as we were a group of like-minded, interested people. But the next step in many students' sights was Acting School.

Every year, a number of us would audition for NIDA and the VCA, as these were the main options with clout at that time. Another course at the University of Western Sydney Nepean had a good enough reputation, mainly due to graduates like David Wenham, though his 'fame' had not yet propelled him into the public eye.

But really it was the feedback from ex SUDS members who were currently at the VCA studying that would filter back to us and make us prick up our ears: Ian Maxwell, Melanie Beddie and Andrew Upton to name but three.

I auditioned for all 3 schools and was accepted into both VCA and Nepean. Based on the detailed, exciting and disciplined audition process, the standards of the teachers who conducted that audition, and the excellent reputation of VCA, it was an obvious choice. I packed up and sold most of my belongings in Sydney and moved to Melbourne.

As stated in the Discussion Paper, there are many forms of training, and "knowledge" that are an integral part of any artist's life. However, it wasn't

until I had the opportunity to be part of a vocational, studio-based course, that I realized this was where I was going to learn my craft. The VCA was a 'poor' cousin to NIDA purely in a financial sense. There were times I felt the school was surviving on the smell of an oily rag. But the full commitment of staff to students, the excellent level of training, the hands on approach of practitioners still working in the industry and taking time to teach us in training, was invaluable. The notion that this model is disappearing from the city of Melbourne is devastating.

Such a model has been called "siloeed". If this is the case, I would suggest that a "siloeed" approach to learning is precisely what many artists want and need. The structure of any course ought to be under constant scrutiny and development (which I believe it is presently, due to a highly dedicated body of staff); but I feel that this should occur within its current paradigm of studio-based research.

I have always been extremely proud to say I am a graduate of the VCA. I have not seen the re-branding of the VCA before my eyes, as present students have. But having heard their stories, it sounded like a trying time, especially when students were led to believe they had enrolled for the Victorian College of the Arts, as opposed to the faculty of VCAM.

I fully endorse everything that the Save VCA group has stated in response to the discussion paper, and I urge the University of Melbourne to peruse optimum Arts Ministry funding so that the VCA can remain the household name it has always been, so that it can continue to produce excellent practitioners. Because that is what we want to be: practitioners, not theorists.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Zemiro

<CONTACT DETAILS REMOVED BY SAVE VCA>