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Subsidy as Choreographic Act:

Examining the establishment of a permanent national ballet company in Australia

In 2023, The Australian Ballet (TAB) celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in a programme of reworked classical ballets, restaged twentieth century masterworks, and newly commissioned contemporary ballets. Given that TAB repeatedly invokes its history during anniversary celebrations, it is worth re-examining the conditions in which TAB emerged as a permanent national company in order to understand how subsidy functioned in the formation and maintenance of ballet in Australia. In this article, I examine the policies of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (the Trust) between 1954 and 1975 to demonstrate how the provision of subsidy restricted, delayed, and eventually enabled, the formation of a permanent national ballet company in Australia. As such, this article argues that the Trust choreographed the development and maintenance of TAB through the distribution and restriction of live performance subsidy.

Between 1954 and the passage of *The Australia Council Act* in 1975, the Trust was the primary distributor of government subsidy and private benevolence, through tax-deductible gifts, for the performing arts in Australia. The Trust was established for the “encouragement, promotion and development of drama, opera and ballet in Australia” (Coombs 1954, 283), however, their initial activities focussed on subsidising spoken drama. In this article, subsidy is defined as financial benefit allocated by governments to offset the cost of production and enable market competitiveness. The Trust enabled live performance through a series of direct grants, guarantees against loss, and profit-share arrangements (Coombs 1954, 284), that were decided upon, and distributed, through their Board of Directors and Executive Committees. While the Trust did make a brief attempt to subsidise ballet in 1957 through the formation of the Elizabethan Opera Ballet Company (EOBC), meaningful subvention of ballet did not occur until the establishment of the Australian Ballet Foundation (ABF), a partnership with J.C. Williamson Theatres (the Firm), in 1961. The ABF functioned as the governance structure of TAB, and its board was made up of representatives from the Trust, the Firm,

and TAB. Through the ABF, the Trust imposed conditions on TAB's performances, training, leadership, and artistic policies; an arrangement that I will show constrained the development of a distinctively Australian style and repertoire of ballet.

Viewing subsidy as a choreographic act offers a method to understand government and organisational intervention into artistic practice, and the ways in which artists incorporate and subvert these interventions within their practice. In this article, I build on Julian Meyrick's notion of the "policy-practice fit" (2014, 142), which articulates the ways that artists have responded to policy interventions by subsidy organisations and government institutions. I argue that the Trust utilised the provision of financial and theatrical resources to direct the development of Australian dancers, choreographers, and ballets. In *Funding Bodies* (2021), US dance scholar Sarah Wilbur employs a flexible utilisation of the term choreography to explore how the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) rewarded, and constrained, dance artists and companies in the USA through the provision of subsidy. The policy-practice fit offers a lens through which to examine the role of the Trust's leadership in enabling and restricting the development of ballet in Australia, and the agency of artists to interrogate, integrate, and subvert bureaucratic intervention into artistic practice by the Trust.

Beginning by articulating my theory of subsidy as a choreographic act, I will examine policy statements made by the Trust's Chairman and successive Executive Directors, alongside archival documents, to show how the Trust established and maintained a subsidised national ballet company in Australia. Following this, I will discuss the history of TAB, the support structures that existed prior to subsidy, and the Trust's role in restricting, delaying, and eventually enabling the development of TAB. Finally, I will articulate how the policies of the Trust enabled the creation of a national ballet company, while simultaneously constraining the development of distinctively Australian ballets. I will utilise interviews I conducted with dancers who danced for TAB between 1962 and 1975, to examine how the Trust restricted the development of repertoire, careers, and artistic practice for Australian ballet dancers while developing their own vision of an Australian ballet company.

Subsidy as a Choreographic Act

At its most simple, choreography arranges relationships between bodies, space, time, and dynamics.¹ When governments and institutions choose to distribute money, it motivates artists to practice in specific ways. Examining subsidy as a choreographic act underscores the top-down organisational structures that govern eligibility for, and distribution of, subsidy, while maintaining the agency of recipients to negotiate policy interventions within artistic practice. Viewing subsidy in this way provides valuable insight into the legacy of the Trust's subsidy of TAB, and how this legacy continues to choreograph Australian ballet dancers. Meyrick's "policy-practice fit" (2014, 142) explains the ways in which Australian theatre companies worked with, and around, the policies of the Australia Council between 1975 and 1996. I utilise the "policy-practice fit"

to examine how conditions imposed by the Trust's policies enforced particular managerial practices and financial arrangements for Australian ballet companies by providing—or withholding—subsidy between 1954 and 1975. The Trust's use of subsidy to motivate dancers and dance organisations to move in particular way also acknowledges the work of US dance scholar Sarah Wilbur, whose history of the NEA examines the subvention of Western concert dance forms in the USA between 1965 and 2016. Wilbur uses the notion of choreography to hold decision makers and wealth-holders to account for the ways in which they incentivised particular artistic and managerial practices over the NEA's fifty year history. By applying the term choreography to an examination of the policies that govern subsidy, I argue that they function as complex organising systems that reward particular ways of creating, presenting and administrating ballet.

In this article, I use the policy-practice fit to articulate the ways that Australian ballet dancers and ballet companies responded to policy interventions by subsidy organisations and government institutions. Similarly, in his study of US cultural policy from 1990 onwards, US performance scholar Paul Bonin-Rodriguez explores the intersection between policies that regulate artistic practice and artists' lived experiences. Rather than examining the constraints and limitations that policies placed on artistic practice, Bonin-Rodriguez views artists' interactions with policy as performance—both as an embodied “doing”, and a “type of optimisation, as in job performance” (2015, 2). Where Bonin-Rodriguez and Meyrick examine the intersection between artists, their practice, and the policies that govern it, US performance studies scholar Brandon Woolf examines the history of the cultural policy debates, finding fascination in performance practices that challenge the institutional support structures that make artistic practice possible. Woolf asserts that “there is no outside of institutionality” (2015, 109): whether subsidised or not, artists practice within constraints placed on the field by subsidy organisations. As the sole channel for federal live performance subsidy and tax deductible gifts between 1954 and 1969, the Trust set the rules of the game for ballet dancers and companies during that time. While the “policy-practice fit” shows how policies create the conditions in which artists practice, some artists are deemed ineligible for subsidy and remain outside—but affected by—rules the Trust placed on subsidised ballet companies.

In the decades either side of the turn of the twenty-first century, Australian dance historians repeatedly made attempts to articulate a distinctively Australian style of dance and ballet. Jill Sykes (1996, 35–46) and Valerie Lawson (2012; 2019) have taken journalistic approaches to their attempts; Michelle Potter (2003, 7–10; 2014) used extensive archival and ethnographic methods to examine both artists and their practices; while Amanda Card (1999a; 1999b), Jordan Vincent (2009), Stephanie Tuley (2012), and Stephanie BurrIDGE and Julie Dyson (2015), have all approached their articulations of dance identity through dance and cultural studies lenses. What is evident in all of these approaches is that TAB has been unable to create a distinctively Australian style of ballet, or a lasting repertoire of distinctively Australian ballets.

Criticism of TAB's inability to create a distinctively Australian style of ballet are not confined to academic examinations of Australian ballet and dance. In his book, *The Australian Ballet: Twenty-one Years*, Queensland Ballet's founding Artistic Director, Charles Lisner, asserts that financial concerns govern "the entire philosophy and the artistic policy [of TAB] . . . quite out of proportion with the Company's original aims" (1983, 57). As a direct competitor for, and eventual recipient of, federal and state government subsidy, Lisner stated in his memoir that he sought to build a unique and distinctive ballet company in Brisbane, Australia, that focussed on the creation of new, Australian choreography (1979, 101). In contrast, Lisner believed that due to monetary concerns and institutional interventions, TAB had not developed a national style or identity for itself (1983, 57), relying instead on restaged classical ballets and international guest artists. The development of an original, Australian repertoire was restricted by financial and managerial policies the Trust enforced on Australian ballet dancers and companies, while the practice of art-making was a difficult fit with the Trust's policy of financial management. By subsidising specific artists and companies, the Trust changed the ways of doing ballet in Australia, without producing a repertoire of distinctively Australian ballets, or a distinctively Australian style of ballet.

Policies that governed the provision of subsidy

The Trust was established in 1954 to commemorate the first Australian visit by Queen Elizabeth II. Led by its Chairman, Australian economist, H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs, and Executive Director, UK theatre director Hugh Hunt, the Trust's Anglocentric vision for the performing arts in Australia emerged within the competing interests of Australian nationalism in the post-war era, and renewed fealty to Queen Elizabeth. Calls for a national theatre of Australia were frequently expressed in the decade preceding the formation of the Trust (Radbourne 1992, 1; Batchelor 2002, 58), as a growing section of Australians sought a new identity for Australia; what historian Anna Clark describes in *Making Australian History* as the "distinctiveness of Australian history and the recognition of 'ordinary people' as nation-builders and history-makers" (2022, 190). By naming itself both Australian and Elizabethan, the Trust grafted together nascent Australian nationalism and colonial nostalgia onto plans for a subsidised national theatre.

While opera and ballet were included in the Trust's conception and initial policies for the development of a national theatre tradition, the Trust's primary operations were concerned with spoken drama. Australian theatre historian, Chris Hay, argues that the Trust was "the most visible attempt to craft a national theatre", and "the first official attempts at live performance subsidy in Australia" (2021, 135). Hay links UK director Tyrone Guthrie's "Report on Australian Theatre" (1949) with the founding principles of the Trust. As he argues, the eventual form that live performance subsidy would take in Australia can be largely attributed to the Report, and, further, the Report's particular emphasis on an import/export scheme found a place in the Trust's vision for spoken drama in Australia (2021, 134–35). Extending Hay's work, I will show that an

import/export policy was central to the Trust, ABF and TAB's operations from 1961 onwards, both through the engagement of international guest artists, and subvention of international training and touring for TAB and its artists. By grafting together an emerging Australian nationalism with an Anglocentric way of subsidising, promoting, and training performing arts companies, the Trust instituted theatre, opera, and ballet companies that remain some of the most generously subsidised, and nationally prominent, performing arts companies in Australia.

One of the most conspicuous public statements made in an official capacity by the Trust is an article by Coombs announcing the formation of the Trust in the literary journal, *Meanjin* (1954, 283–85). With an aim “to establish a native drama, opera and ballet which will give professional employment to Australian actors, singers and dancers” (1954, 283), Coombs asserted that preference would be given to projects that operated in more than one state (1954, 283), and that were “of genuine cultural value, at an adequate professional standard, and had reasonable prospects of being financially self-supporting” (1954, 284). The Trust had no intention of giving permanent subsidies and, instead, offered financial support through guarantees on loss, or direct involvement through profit-share agreements. Coombs announced that the Trust intended to maintain, and increase, a capital fund, expected to be a minimum of £100,000 when operations commenced in late-1954. Finally, the article outlines the Trust's policy to “supplement and not replace” existing State and national organisations, instead planning to collaborate with existing organisations where possible (1954, 285). Here, Coombs outlines the Trust's eligibility criteria for, and methods of, subsidy that would arrange how ballet companies worked over the coming decades.

In the Trust's annual reports, successive Executive Directors made statements that shaped the policy direction of the Trust, and the companies that hoped to secure Trust support. In the Trust's first Annual Report, Executive Director, Hugh Hunt, stated that the Trust hoped to “stimulate the development of modern ballet in Australia with special attention to Australian subjects” (AETT 1956, 10–11). Hunt's focus on “modern ballet” and “Australian subjects” distinguished the Trust's plans from the existing Borovansky Ballet, which Hunt described as a “first-class ballet company” (AETT 1956, 11). The Trust's short-lived EOBC, formed as an adjunct to the Trust's 1957 opera season, presented a season of three ballets by female choreographers at matinees in major east-coast Australian cities (Pask 1982, 219).² Following losses on both the 1957 opera and ballet seasons, the Trust suspended any future involvement in ballet. Hunt reported that the Trust's first ballet company “did not prove sufficiently popular”, and that the Trust would be backing away from presenting “small-scale ballet in major theatres” at the present time (AETT 1958, “Ballet”). Indeed, the Trust's fierce protection of its capital reserves prevented meaningful, ongoing support for Australian artists creating modern Australian ballets.

Contemporary notions of funding applications and expressions of interest were not part of Trust procedures. Correspondence held in both the Trust papers at the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and the Papers of Geoffrey Ingram at the National Library of

Australia (NLA) evidence a lack of transparency in the Trust's processes and procedures for awarding subsidy. What is recorded in the Trust and Ingram papers is a series of personal letters from prominent ballet directors, teachers, and advocates, petitioning various Board Directors and Executive staff for financial support from the Trust. Correspondence from Coombs, Hunt, General Manager of the Trust's Opera Company, Robert Quentin, Victorian Manager, John Sumner, and Board Director, Aubrey Gibson, show that while the Trust was supportive of ballet artists, between 1955 and 1959, it did not support external ballet organisations (NAA M448, Folders 268–72). While annual reports show the Trust subsidised a number of external theatre and opera organisations in Western Australia, Tasmania and Northern Queensland during this time, there was little meaningful involvement with ballet until the early 1960s.

The Trust's founding principles included the policy to support—not replace—existing organisations (Coombs 1954, 285). A letter from Hunt to the Chairman of Ballet Guild, Alex Bottomley, dated 28 April 1958, reveals the Trust had agreed to refrain from involvement in classical ballet while the Firm's Borovansky Ballet was operating (Hunt 1958). The Firm presented the Borovansky Ballet between May 1957 and August 1958; with the first Sydney and Melbourne programmes of the 1957–58 season featuring four Principal Artists from the Royal Ballet, Covent Garden. Hunt encouraged Bottomley that support for Ballet Guild may be available in 1959, and suggested he meet with Bottomley and Ballet Guild's Artistic Director, Laurel Martyn, to discuss future possibilities. While the Trust's leadership repeatedly stated its support for ballet in principle, in reality, the Trust delayed subsidising ballet, believing that other art forms were in greater need of support at the time.

While representatives of Ballet Guild and the Borovansky Ballet petitioned for support of specific projects and programmes, a significant proposal for a subsidised national ballet company was submitted by the Australian Ballet Theatre Group (ABTG) in 1959. Although the ABTG never established their own ballet company or presented any seasons of ballet, it remains noteworthy given the prominent role that many ABTG members played in the eventual formation of TAB and its training academy, The Australian Ballet School (TABS). ABTG's central members, Margaret Scott, Derek Denton and Geoffrey Ingram were all prolific correspondents with the Trust's leadership throughout the second half of the 1950s. Scott and Denton were also personal friends of Coombs, as well as Australian federal Treasurer, Harold Holt. As former dancers, Scott and Ingram strongly advocated for continuous employment and improved working conditions for Australian ballet dancers; institutional stability for Australian ballet companies; and more sophisticated promotion of ballet in Australia. Their proposal for a subsidised national ballet company described a small, touring ballet company with a repertoire of modern, Australian ballets that offered continuous employment for its dancers (ABTG 1959). A draft of the ABTG proposal was submitted to Coombs on 21 November 1959, with an updated version being considered by the Trust's board in March 1960. However, two events would irrevocably alter the progress of the ABTG: first was the death of Edouard Borovansky on 18 December 1959, after which English pedagogue and Ballet Mistress Peggy van Praagh was appointed as the Borovansky Ballet's Artistic

Director in February 1960. With the death of Borovansky and the potential end of his company, ballet in Australia was at a critical juncture. The Trust took the opportunity to graft itself and the Firm's management together to form the Australian Ballet Foundation (ABF), and guide the development of a national company in the coming decade.

After six years of operation, the Trust made its first meaningful steps towards subsidising ballet with the formation of the ABF. The ABF grafted together the financial backing of the Trust with the Firm's network of theatres across Australia and New Zealand and their store of sets and costumes from past seasons of the Borovansky Ballet. Through the ABF, the Trust maintained financial and institutional control over the national ballet company. The ABF's initial board was composed of the Firm's senior management, Sir Frank Tait and John McCallum, and Coombs and Hutchinson from the Trust. Peggy van Praagh, as the future Artistic Director of TAB, maintained an advisory role to the ABF Board. Through the ABF, the Trust retained the services of van Praagh, Ingram, and two Principal Dancers, Marilyn Jones and Garth Welch, with a view to establish a national company before the end of 1961. Although it would take the Trust 18 months to secure the funds required to establish TAB from the federal government, all four returned for the premiere season of TAB. The ABF enforced financial stability; management structures; employment practices; an import/export policy for artists; national and international touring; and an Anglocentric notion of professionalism on the establishment and management of TAB. Through the ABF, the Trust directed the development of TAB and ballet in Australia in line with its founding policies for a subsidised national theatre tradition.

The Australian Ballet as a Case Study in Subsidy as a Choreographic Act

As the highest profile subsidised ballet company in Australia, and the first to receive ongoing federal subsidy, TAB is the central case study for my argument that subsidy functions as a choreographic act. Ballet existed in Australia before subsidy, just as dance and dancing existed on the lands that make up present-day Australia before colonisation and the proliferation of Western dance forms. Prior to the establishment of TAB, ballet in Australia was defined by the precarity of commercial, cultural and infrastructural support. Support was often withdrawn—temporarily or permanently—when directors, artists, and administrators were unable to generate a return on the investment required by their supporters. Withdrawal of support resulted in layoff periods for artists and administrators while companies rebuilt themselves, and extended periods of low-or-no paid performance work with semi-professional companies and groups. The disbanding of companies between tours is something Australian dance critics and writers Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon describe as “a regrettable feature of company life . . . [that] hindered the development of an artistic unity and style” (2010, 9) for Australian ballet companies and dancers. While subvention promised ballet companies continuity, the constraints placed on TAB by the Trust's leadership also hindered the development of a distinctive repertoire and national style for TAB, despite the stability that subsidy offered.

Framing subsidy as a choreographic act acknowledges that funding arrangements not only impact the activities and policies of organisations, but dancer's bodies as well. Ballet dancing requires strong, well-trained muscles to stabilise the body in motion, particularly in the torso and lower limbs. These stabiliser muscles enable dancers to perform technically difficult choreography with reduced risk of injury and increased appearance of ease. Similarly, ballet companies need financial, executive, and managerial stability to meet the requirements of continuous operation. Without financial and managerial stability, companies often incur extended hiatus periods, and dancers suffer from long periods of financial precarity. Daily ballet class is often the first of many aspects of a dancer's life that is sacrificed during periods of precarity. Support structures designed to stabilise dancers weaken, and the foundations of ballet companies—and individual ballet dancers—fracture. Van Praagh believed that without continuous, stable employment, “any cohesion that the group possessed breaks down” (Brown 1967, 6). No Australian ballet company had offered continuous employment for its dancers until van Praagh achieved this central policy aim for TAB in 1963.

The most common criticism in scholarship of TAB comes from its inability to create a distinctive Australian style, or identity, for the company. National identity is a contested notion, particularly in Australia. Australian historian, Richard White, contends that all national identities are invented, and Catriona Elder advances White's argument to explain the disciplining role that the term “un-Australian” plays within Australian society (2007, 2–3). Former TAB dancers I have interviewed for my doctoral research at the University of Queensland have all suggested that there is nothing distinctively Australian about TAB, or ballet in general. Many suggest that the most distinctively Australian feature of TAB was that it was not British, and approached ballet differently from the Royal Ballet companies. Holding the national imprimatur, the ways that TAB functions remains a standard by which other ballet and dance companies are judged against, regardless of how Australian the national company has become.

The Australian Ballet emerges

In 1961, the Trust joined with the Firm, Australia's largest network of commercial theatres, to form a new institution: the Australian Ballet Foundation (ABF). The ABF represented an alliance between the leading non-commercial and commercial entrepreneurs of Australian live performance, with the express purpose of securing the future of ballet in Australia following the closure of the Borovansky Ballet in February 1961 (AETT 1961, “Ballet”). The Trust's support of selected artists and arts workers between the closure of the Borovansky Ballet and formation of TAB, as well as the contradiction of its own regional policy for theatre companies, restricted the development of existing state-based ballet companies. The Trust and the Firm appointed TAB's artistic leadership, required the company to maintain financial viability, and enforced almost continuous performing through national and international touring. By channelling subsidy through the ABF, the Trust constrained the development of

individual dancers, state-based ballet companies, a distinctively Australian repertoire, and changed the ways in which ballet was danced, performed, and presented in Australia.

The ABF secured access to theatres, sets, and costumes from the Firm, and an institutional structure eligible for government subvention through the Trust. The Trust provided £250 each to retain the services of van Praagh, Ingram, Jones and Welch, throughout 1961. The Trust also presented a five-week Australian tour of Leningrad's Maly Theatre Ballet Company in 1961, investing the £10,000 profit from the tour into the ABF (AETT 1961, "Ballet"). In a letter to Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, on 10 July 1961, Coombs stated that without increased subsidy from the federal government, "there is a real danger that the future of ballet in Australia will be endangered for very many years" (Coombs 1961, 2). Capitalising on the formation of the ABF and the Firm's refusal to independently support another large Australian ballet company, Coombs secured an increase in the Trust's federal grant of £25,000 per annum on 14 September 1961 (Menzies 1961). With additional federal money guaranteed, in the Trust's 1961 Annual Report, Hutchinson announced the establishment of TAB, van Praagh as its Artistic Director, and a proposed starting date for the company (AETT 1961, "Ballet"). With delays and disputes resolved, a subsidised national ballet company was about to be established in Australia.

Between the closure of the Borovansky company and the premiere of TAB, the Trust attempted to maintain interest of Australian ballet audiences by touring international companies, rather than supporting existing Australian ballet and dance companies. As a result, many Australian dancers faced renewed career and financial precarity, being forced overseas to find work, or perform in music theatre, small state-based and regional touring ballet companies, and televised variety shows. In an interview for this project, former Ballet Guild and Borovansky dancer, Janet Karin, said that she returned to Ballet Guild after the closure of the Borovansky company, where she danced and taught until she joined TAB in January 1963. Marilyn Jones told me that with funds from her Trust retainer, she and Welch travelled first to England, where they were assisted by van Praagh to secure a television appearance dancing in England; guest contracts with Ballet Ireland; and finally, ongoing employment with the Paris-based Ballet Marquis de Cuevas company (Personal interview 25 March, 2022). Welch and Jones both returned for TAB's first season, going on to be leading figures within Australian ballet as dancers, choreographers, teachers, and Artistic Directors, for many decades. The Trust supported the careers of selected Australian ballet dancers, but increased the career precarity for many former Borovansky dancers by choosing to establish its own company, rather than support existing organisations.

The Trust's policy to progress a centralised national company conflicted with its policy to develop resident state-based drama ensembles, rather than a national drama company. Concurrent with their support of Jones and Welch, the Trust subsidised professional ballet classes in Melbourne and Sydney, organised by ABTG member, Margaret Scott. Class lists held in Derek Denton's papers show that many of the first

cohort of TAB dancers regularly attended Scott's classes (NAA M448, Folder 145). Support, however, was not extended to state-based ballet companies, except for Valrene Tweedie's Sydney-based company, Ballet Australia. Ballet Australia presented five seasons at the Trust's Elizabethan Theatre between July 1961 and 1963 (Ballet Australia 1960–64), and received a one-off subsidy-grant of £96 from the Trust in 1961 (AETT 1961, "Statement"). Despite presenting 21 original ballets by Australian and international choreographers over six programmes, Ballet Australia received no financial support from the Trust or state governments after 1961. In 1964, Ballet Australia staged its first choreographic workshop season at the Cellblock Theatre. It would not stage another full programme in a major theatre again. The development of state-based ballet companies into professional ensembles was constrained by the Trust, who directed all subsidy towards the establishment and maintenance of its own company, TAB.

TAB has been an international organisation from its very beginning. While the company's first cohort of 46 dancers (Brown 1967, 13) was predominantly Australian, its leadership, appointed by Coombs, Tait, McCallum and Hutchinson, reflected the Anglocentric preferences of the ABF. TAB was led by van Praagh, whose career with Ballet Rambert, Antony Tudor's ballet ensemble, and Sadler's Wells Ballet, was at the heart of British ballet's development; English Ballet Master, Ray Powell, direct from the Royal Ballet; and Danish, Bulgarian, and Russian Guest Principal dancers. While the core of TAB had worked with the Borovansky company, including dancers, technicians, musical staff, and Associate Ballet Master, Leon Kellaway, and Assistant Ballet Mistress, Sandra Bingham, van Praagh worked to distinguish the new company from its predecessor (Kitcher 2016, 675). Peasley recalled the dancers' concern that TAB would become a smaller version of England's Royal Ballet; a sentiment echoed by former Borovansky and TAB dancer, Barry Kitcher, in his autobiography, *From Gaolbird to Lyrebird*, (2016, 658). However, Karin recalls being impressed by the changes van Praagh made to the artistic standards, professionalism, and culture of TAB, saying "it was chalk and cheese from Boro's" (Personal interview, 22 February, 2022). In the first seasons of TAB, its cohort of predominantly Australian dancers, designers, and production staff was under the direction of an international artistic leadership. While the international influence on TAB developed TAB's artistic and technical standards, it restricted the company's expression of Australian identity to the nationality of the dancers it employed.

In "The Artistic Policy" (Brown 1967, 3–10), van Praagh presented an outline in eight points that choreographed the company and its dancers over the thirteen years of her leadership. TAB's artistic policy centred around the artistic development and stable employment of Australian dancers, and the development of a "national style" (Brown 1967, 4). At its heart, van Praagh's policy reiterates the Trust's original commitment to establish a native ballet, giving professional employment to Australian dancers (Coombs 1954, 283), but does not equally support the employment of associated artists such as choreographers, designers, and composers. TAB's first season included two works by Australian choreographer, Rex Reid, and two by Powell, with the remainder made up of standard classical ballets and modern masterworks. Van Praagh stated in her policy that TAB needed the standard classics in its repertoire for international guest artists to dance

(Brown 1967, 7), constraining the number of original Australian ballets presented. However, van Praagh does not mention the reality that much of TAB's initial repertoire originated from the Borovansky Ballet, with the sets and costumes for *Swan Lake*, *Coppélia* and *Les Rendezvous*—all international works—supplied by the Firm from old Borovansky productions. Van Praagh's artistic policy created conditions for TAB to develop within the model of large European and British companies and relied on the involvement of international guest dancers and choreographers to create interest in TAB from both Australian and international audiences.

TAB's engagement of guest artists between 1962 and 1975 increased awareness of the company, by grafting established artists with international renown onto a newly formed ballet company. Famed dancers Eric Bruhn, Margot Fonteyn, and Rudolf Nureyev all danced with TAB in the first three years of operation, and all featured in TAB's first major international tour in 1965. In particular, the involvement of Fonteyn and Nureyev—separately and together—assisted TAB to secure tours of continental Europe in 1965/66, North America in 1967 and 1970/71, and Asia in 1971. Bruhn, Fonteyn and Nureyev also had a lasting impact on the company's repertoire: Bruhn's appearance with the company in 1965 introduced New Zealand-based, Danish Ballet Master, Poul Gnatt's, staging of *Le Conservatoire* to TAB's repertoire; Nureyev's involvement introduced his production of *Raymonda*; while Fonteyn's appearances in 1965/66 may have contributed to the delayed introduction of Nureyev's *Don Quixote* into TAB's repertoire (Ingram 1964, 2). Nureyev choreographed his production of *Don Quixote* for TAB during their 1965 European tour, but finances, and Fonteyn's reluctance to perform the ballet, led to it being replaced by van Praagh's *Giselle* for that tour. TAB waited until 1970 for *Don Quixote* to enter its repertoire. Van Praagh's artistic policy, and her insistence on inclusion of the standard classical repertoire, gave opportunities to engage international guests, grow audiences, and secure international touring, but limited the number of original Australian ballets the company could present.

All of the dancers I have interviewed for this project report favourably on their experiences learning from, and dancing with, TAB's international guests. Colin Peasley explained that “for a young company, we were very lucky. We had the top stars” (Personal interview 22 February, 2022). Reflecting on creating the role of Queen of the Willis in van Praagh's production of *Giselle*, opposite Fonteyn and Nureyev, Karin said “the artistic depth of that experience was really terrific” (Personal interview 25 August, 2022). However, the Trust's insistence on engaging international guest artists also restricted the performing careers of Australian dancers. Jones recalls, “for me, when Margot came and did *Raymonda* . . . I didn't dance at all between that period . . . so that's hard. That side of it is hard” (Personal interview 25 March, 2022). Welch's performances were also restricted when Nureyev appeared with TAB—Welch was sidelined in a number of seasons, in favour of Nureyev. As the company's national and international renown grew, the careers of Australia's leading dancers continued to be constrained by the engagement of international guest artists.

Whereas performance opportunities for leading dancers were limited by TAB's international guest artists, they also emboldened Australian dancers to distinguish their dancing from English notions of ballet and theatricality. Peasley recalled that Nureyev thought TAB "were closest to the way he wanted to dance", explaining that "we understood theatricality better than the English do. The English went on stage in those days, [and] they were all very proper" (Personal interview 22 February, 2022). Peasley and former Senior Soloist, Mark Brinkley, both recalled changes made to Fredrick Ashton's ballet, *La Fille mal Gardée*, originally staged on TAB in 1967, that evidence the bold theatricality of Australian dancers; small changes that emphasised the physical comedy of particular roles. Peasley and Brinkley report that Ashton loved the changes, but these changes were omitted from future performances restaged from the original 1960 notation score by British Ballet Mistress, Faith Worth, following Ashton's death. International guest dancers, choreographers, and directors shaped TAB, creating a repertoire that had few major works by Australian choreographers, but that provided opportunities for Australian dancers to grow as artists.

Permanent employment for dancers in ballet companies had been a recurring policy aim for companies seeking subsidy: subsidy reduced the reliance on box office income for TAB, while increasing its ability to offer improved employment conditions for dancers. Van Praagh and Ingram both placed continuous, full-time employment and organisational stability at the heart of their policies for a national ballet company. Both their 1961 proposal to the ABF (van Praagh and Ingram 1961), and TAB's artistic policy sought full-time employment for dancers, with four weeks of rehearsal and four weeks of annual leave to be fully paid—conditions that were unheard of for Australian dancers prior to subsidised ballet. Van Praagh and Ingram proposed to meet TAB's national obligations to the Trust by suggesting the full company perform for 28 weeks total in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and Adelaide, before splitting into two touring units. A Major Touring Company would perform in Hobart, Canberra and New Zealand (van Praagh and Ingram 1961, 2a), while a smaller Regional Touring Company made up of 12 dancers would tour smaller regional and rural centres (van Praagh and Ingram 1961, 2b). Van Praagh and Ingram's policy of full-time employment for the company choreographed the conditions in which dancers were required to tour and perform almost continuously during their term of employment to maintain the company's financial security.

Despite van Praagh and Ingram's advocacy for permanent employment for TAB's dancers, a financially disastrous first season saw the company's future called into question in mid-1963. After TAB's full-company tour was cancelled mid-way through its engagements in New Zealand, van Praagh fought the ABF Board to secure the dancer's continued employment, and the future of the company. Van Praagh threatened that she would not return to Australia if the company was placed on hiatus, and enacted her and Ingram's plan to split the company and tour regional towns and cities. The ABF's policies of national touring and financial viability conflicted with van Praagh's insistence on continuous operation; van Praagh leaned on and into the support of the Trust and state-

based arts councils, and reinforced the imperative for TAB to tour and perform almost continuously.

During TAB's financial difficulties, the Trust and ABF asserted its leadership over the company. In mid-1963, TAB's Administrator, Louis van Eyssen, was replaced with Ingram, and the following year, TAB was co-opted into a shared season with the Elizabethan Opera Company—a decision that proved unpopular with audiences and financially difficult for the Trust. As a result, in March 1965, and against the wishes of van Praagh, Ingram and Tait, Coombs and Stefan Haag, the Trust's third Executive Director, appointed Robert Helpmann as co-Artistic Director of TAB, (Ingram 1988, 44). Helpmann's international standing was considered by the Trust to be invaluable to the future of TAB, and increased publicity for the company—especially as Helpmann was a notorious self-promoter. However, Helpmann's appointment restricted the development of other Australian choreographers: Rex Reid was not engaged by TAB again, despite the popularity of his ballet, *Melbourne Cup*; and Garth Welch faced limited opportunities to choreograph for TAB, ultimately leaving to be Assistant Artistic Director of Ballet Victoria in 1974 (Welch 1990, 70). Ingram was replaced as Administrator in 1965, during TAB's European tour when the production of Nureyev's *Don Quixote* was cancelled. Ingram provided an undated report on TAB to the ABF board (Ingram n.d.), and confirmed in an article for *Meanjin* that he resigned from TAB due to both the death of Tait in 1965, and the growing influence of Coombs and the Trust over TAB (Ingram 1988, 47). Following Ingram's resignation, Peter Bahen was appointed Administrator of TAB. Leading TAB until 1983, Bahen oversaw the company's establishment of a subscription season, TAB's independence from the Trust in 1969/70, and industrial action by TAB dancers in 1970 and 1981. Peasley succinctly evaluated the Trust's involvement in TAB, saying, "The Australian Ballet didn't become a success until they got away from the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust" (Personal interview 22 February, 2022). Although Bahen managed an independent, financially strong company, his focus on making money and touring led to criticism over the company's failing artistic standards and integrity under his management (Welch 1990, 67). Despite the promises that subsidy offered ballet in Australia, the institutional managerialism enforced on TAB by the Trust and the ABF restricted the development of an Australian repertoire, individual dancers' careers, and choreographed the conditions that shaped the company's continued operation in the coming decades.

Conclusion

In Australia, the Trust choreographed the conditions in which a new, subsidised way of performing and presenting ballet occurred, limiting the development of existing state-based ballet companies in favour of its own model of a national ballet company. The Trust's insistence on financial sustainability, institutional stability, engagement of international guest artists, and continuous performing and touring, constrained the full implementation of TAB's artistic policy. Although international guest dancers, choreographers, and teachers enabled Australian ballet dancers to develop technically

and artistically, and fostered the popularity of ballet in Australia, their involvement restricted the development of a distinctive Australian ballet repertoire. The Trust and ABF's direct management of the financial, touring, and staffing of TAB impacted the ways that TAB functioned, leading to an internationally distinguished company whose 'Australianness' centred on the nationality of its dancers, rather than the subjects and themes of the ballets in its repertoire. While TAB has fulfilled the Trust's policy to create a national ballet company, it has failed to completely implement van Praagh's founding artistic policy to create a distinctive national style of ballet for Australia.

Subsidy arranges the resources with which Australian dancers practice their art, offering financial support for specific, eligible projects and people. The Trust's policies between 1954 and 1975 impacted the ways that subsidised and unsubsidised companies worked. Ballet companies that operated prior to the establishment of the ABF and TAB sought support from the Trust, but only two of these, the EOBC and Ballet Australia, secured any financial support from the Trust. Other, long-standing state companies such as Queensland Ballet (then Lisner Ballet), West Australian Ballet, and Ballet Guild (later Ballet Victoria), were unsuccessful in securing Trust support. While receiving subsidy does not determine if a person is a dancer, the policies that govern subsidy exclude and marginalise particular dancers and companies from institutional support. Had the Trust not subsidised the formation of TAB, Australian commercial theatre promoters would not have supported the formation of a national company. Whole cohorts of Australian dancers would have been forced overseas for training and employment. However, if subsidy had been choreographed differently by the Trust, ballet in Australia may have developed in dramatically different, and more distinctively Australian ways.

Notes

1. Dance studies has, since its emergence in the 1970s, been progressively expanding upon the definition of what choreography is, and what the term can describe. Examples of a flexible approach to choreography can be found in Susan Foster's "Choreographing History" (1995), Ric Allsopp and André Lepecki's "Editorial: On Choreography" (2008, 1) and William Forsythe's "Choreographic Objects" (Spier 2011, 90–92).

2. The Elizabethan Opera Ballet concurrently performed an independent season of three one-act ballets—*Ballet Academy* by Eileen Treiber, *Sigrid* by Laurel Martyn, and *Wakooka* by Valrene Tweedie (Pask 1982, 219). The company was disbanded at the end of the opera season following losses of £5,601 (AETT 1958, n.p.)

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