

JULY 2011 SEMINAR SUMMARY

Suffering for Our Art? Achieving Work/Life Balance in the Arts

6.00-8.00pm, Monday 25 July 2011
Australia Council, 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills

Working in the arts brings its own particular challenges. For artists it often means practicing their art form and working another job to earn a living. Arts managers are often in the position of working a fulltime job but then having to attend evening performances. Working in the arts can offer more flexibility but it can also be an area where the demands beyond office hours are extensive. Is it harder to find a balance working in the arts? Do the rewards of doing a job that you're passionate about make the juggle worthwhile? Or is that just a myth to keep us working harder and longer? And then how do you manage all this when you have a family or other caring responsibilities.

CHAIR: Penny Miles

Penny has an extensive background in theatre and in regional arts in New South Wales including roles as General Manager of Arts on Tour NSW, General Manager of Australian Theatre of the Deaf. She has also been Treasurer for Accessible Arts and a Committee member for SAMAG.

PANEL: Siobhan Hannan

In a previous life Siobhan was an agent (at Hilary Linstead & Associates/HLA Management and The Cameron Creswell Agency), representing some of Australia's leading theatre, film, opera, television and literary talents. A graduate of the Australian Film Television & Radio School, she worked in television and film drama development and production before taking her degree in psychotherapy and counselling. As a creative coach and counsellor she works with individuals and organisations finding solutions to work and life difficulties, and enhancing the experience of creativity itself. Siobhan is a partner in the private practice Creative Counsel, a faculty member and group therapist at the Jansen Newman Institute, and provides drug and alcohol counselling at ACON. In her spare time Siobhan tries to keep up with her 5 year old daughter, wants to practice yoga and meditation much more than she does, follows the Sydney Swans, and is desperately waiting for the next season of Mad Men.

Teresa Bell

Her play "Taizé" won the 2007 George Fairfax Award. She is Founding Director of the Australian Poetry Centre and her first book "36; formless writings" was released in 2009. She is currently completing a doctorate in Creative Writing at Wollongong University, falling in love with Elvis and being mum to a lively three year old and an incredibly busy six year old. Her next book of poetry "Under a Nightingale's Wing" will be launched at the Byron Bay Festival in August 2011. Teresa was also Artistic Director for Playworks and Mainstreet Theatre in Mt Gambier and a producer for Performing Lines.

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George Catsi

George has an extensive and diverse 25 year background that overlaps film, theatre, film business, health and education and is currently completing a Doctorate in Creative Arts at UTS. He is the 2010 Kit Denton Writing Fellowship winner for his satirical evangelical piece I Want to Be Slim. George has performed in comedy, cabaret, stage and TV. As Executive Producer, he created RPAtv, an in-house health and wellbeing TV channel. RPAtv was shortlisted for the NSW Premiers Award in 2006. George originally trained as a nurse before moving into the arts. From 1997-2001 George was co-owner and Executive Producer of Flickerfest International Short Film Festival. He played a key role in restructuring and repositioning the Festival, achieving huge increases in audiences and building it into Australia's premier short film festival. In 2005 he was a juror for the 33rd International Emmy Awards and has been a pre-selector for various festivals including Flickerfest and Dendy Awards. George has a partner and two children, both boys. He refuses his children pets.

Associate Professor Lyn Craig

Lyn is Deputy Director at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales. She has researched work-family balance, the time impacts of children, parenthood and the gender division of labour, over a period of ten years, using time use analysis as her primary methodology. Lyn has held a Time Use Fellowship from the Office of the Status of Women (2005-06), an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship (2006-09) and currently holds an ARC Queen Elizabeth II Fellowship (2010-14). She is a member of the NSW Premiers Expert Advisory Council for Women and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

SEMINAR:

Associate Professor Lyn Craig

Australians work longer hours compared to their overseas counterparts, and as a consequence of the Global Financial Crisis, many people will remain in the workforce for longer. University of NSW research into work and family has identified that the high cost of childcare in this country is resulting in occupational downgrading for a significant number of women who are raising children. Mothers with young children are moving into self employment as an option to balance family life with work. However it is not only caring for children which impacts on the work life balance; the so called "sandwich generation" describes women who are having children later in life and are also caring for ageing parents. Lyn highlighted that there are external factors which influence work life balance such as commuting times which erode free time, and internal factors such as wanting to be good at everything. Lyn exhorted employers to share in responsibility for addressing work life balance for their employees. The pace at which people are working, their care giving responsibilities and other social pressures have reduced leisure time. In addition the advent of gadgets such as Smart Phones means that employees can be available at all times. Managing the technology and minimising its intrusion into personal time can be a dilemma for many, exacerbating an often already stressful lifestyle.

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George Catsi and Theresa Bell

When George's first child was born, the realities of parenting led to a reappraisal of what was important in his life. For a time it proved more efficient to return to nursing to ensure a stable income, rather than pursuing myriad projects in the arts. For Theresa, the road back to work life balance was much harder. She had always worked hard and with some intensity and this eventually caught up with her when she had a family. One of the casualties of her highly stressed lifestyle was her relationship with her partner. When that relationship broke up and a combination of other stressors overwhelmed her, Theresa was compelled to reassess her lifestyle. She realised that she had to put in place strategies to simplify her life. This meant no longer checking emails and messages outside work hours and making a concerted effort to switch off. George also talked about wanting to say "yes" to ideas and projects as they came up, and realised that this was one of his strengths while at the same time also a weakness.

Siobhan Hannan

Siobhan counsels mid career professionals who are struggling with work life balance. In the arts, identity is inextricably linked to the type of work one does which can sometimes blur the boundaries between work and life. Often the demands of the workplace mitigate against the individual maintaining their own creative practice which in turn impacts on their overall wellbeing.

Furthermore, people in the arts have a particularly loud and even "abusive" inner critic. This inner critic, Siobhan cautioned, is an element of the self which is crucial to address. It is not uncommon for personal and professional high standards to conflict with available resources. For example, the budget is never big enough and neither is the pay cheque.

In the arts, many people employed part time are actually working full time. While this reflects an altruistic motivation about serving a greater good, often the individual's needs are not met. One way Siobhan suggested employers can improve this is by taking more time and care to delineate the duties and hours of their part time employees. Employers can take the lead by putting in place boundaries such as not contacting staff outside their working hours. The individual can also take ownership by giving him/ herself permission to have a work life balance. "We are not victims of our circumstances," Siobhan reminded the audience. She advised having a plan which details the life balance component and which features inclusions such as exercise, recreation and other self nurturing activities. These are to be as important as all other obligations to work and family.

At the conclusion of the panel discussion, audience questions followed with particular emphasis on recommended strategies for implementing balance.

Siobhan emphasised Mindfulness Meditation as an invaluable technique for creating the stillness and space required to sustain creative practice. She also talked about the fallibility of the notion that artists must "sacrifice on the altar of creativity".

Lyn also commented on some of the internal pressures which could be better managed, such as the compulsion to work long hours when we don't have to. In all aspects of life, individuals are

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buying into new pressures. Siobhan shared Lyn's concern that the phenomenon of a more anxious society is leading to an over anxious focus on children, which only creates more work for people who are working harder than they really need to.

Seminar Summary: Aviva Finberg

Recommended websites:

Jon Kabat-Zinn has an informative Facebook page which demystifies Mindfulness

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Jon-Kabat-Zinn/105469655215>

The following link is Jon Kabat-Zinn presenting a lecture on Mindfulness

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSU8ftmmhmw&feature=relmfu>

The following research was commissioned by insurance company Medibank Private. The article is an easy to read snapshot of Occupational Stress.

<http://www.medibank.com.au/Client/Documents/Pdfs/The-Cost-of-Workplace-Stress.pdf>

Beyond Blue is the national Depression Initiative and provides information and resources online and via the phone

<http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?>

The Better Outcomes in Mental Health program provides eligible Australians with subsidised clinical interventions by Psychologists. A referral from a General Practitioner will establish the Care Plan.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/mental-boimhc>

Refer also to the SAMAG Seminar Summary for August 2011. Eliza Muldoon has provided an interesting range of resources on organisational psychology and stress management.

The Centre for Clinical Interventions provides excellent online resources called "Workbooks" Click on "Consumer Resources" and select the relevant topic. For example: Overcoming Perfectionism, Overcoming Procrastination and Managing Worry. These are all evidence based tools and the site includes other topics as well.

<http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>

Martin Seligman is known as the founder of Positive Psychology and has visited Australia on many occasions as a guest lecturer now that this model of psychology has gained interest and adherents all over the world. The following website has some interesting questionnaires including one on Work Life Satisfaction.

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<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/seligman.aspx>

The Valued Directions Worksheet is another great tool for appraising work life balance.

<http://integrativehealthpartners.org/downloads/The%20Valued%20Directions%20Worksheet.pdf>