



McCARTHY MENTORING

QUEENSLAND BALLET – philanthropy case study

Queensland Ballet’s remarkable turnaround in the past five years has been well documented. In the past two years the company has doubled its revenue, seen an extraordinary growth in audiences and continues to set new records for the organisation and arts sector across the state.

In 2009, the company was in decline. It was 25th out of 26 Major Performing Arts Companies. It was selling less tickets, reducing the number of performances and its revenue was limited and dropping. It generated \$168,000 per annum in philanthropy.

In 2014, it is the 8th biggest MPAC, has a revenue of \$11.5M via box office, sponsorship and philanthropy, relies less on government investment and at its last season of MacMillan’s Romeo & Juliet, attracted 70% new audience members.

CEO, Anna Marsden shared her insights on the three key elements behind this transformation.

1. **Getting the house in order.** Focusing on getting the internal structure right, investing in the best people to drive the philanthropy program before making the ask and taking the story to the community
2. **Appointing the Artistic Director.** The appointment of Li Cunxin was a significant coup for the organisation. His experience, passion, vision and leadership are all crucial to the company’s transformation. However Anna believes the current success may not have been realised if the company hadn’t been in a position to support Li’s vision and drive.
3. **Selling the story and taking the support base on the journey.** The company has strategically engaged with every donor and supporter of the organisation to drive philanthropy. From the board and their networks, existing donors to new audience. At every opportunity, showcasing what QB could deliver and then being organised enough to have a clear structure, program outline and menu on how they could help when asked

“In everything we did we asked ourselves... is this good enough? Can we do better?”

Li Cunxin discussed the need to ensure every touch point with Queensland Ballet was of the highest quality. From the launch party to the service of the door staff. Every experience with QB had to be world class. The whole team had to be onboard with the right mindset and vision of excellence for the organisation.

When asked what other elements led to the success, Marsden and Cunxin cited the following:

Engagement of the board. This is essential. In QB case, the board is now very focused on their philanthropy role. They open doors, invite networks and actively champion the company and its vision. The board bring education, community, business and philanthropy experience – all crucial to achieve the organisation’s vision

New initiatives to engage donors. Such as the Studio Program, inviting donors to pre-performance warm up, doing Q&A sessions with creative leads and holding free performances developed by up and coming choreographers as part of their Pre-Professional Program.

Extending the role of Artistic Director. Li Cunxin believes Artistic Directors are often the best person to do the ask. The days of just being the creative are over. “Artistic Directors are well placed to share the passion, drive and vision of the company and turn their gift into something magical.”

The pair clearly have a shared passion, vision and drive which is engaging. They have set a target of 41% of total revenue coming from philanthropy and sponsorship for 2014/2015. They have also now invested in a team of five to drive philanthropy.