Arts funding changes draw mixed reviews

By ROBERT MACKLIN
Arts Editor

A big change to the ACT Government's spending priorities in arts, announced yesterday, prompted reactions ranging from anger to puzzlement and delight.

The change derives from recommendations by the ACT Cultural Council which were accepted in total by Arts Minister Bill Wood.

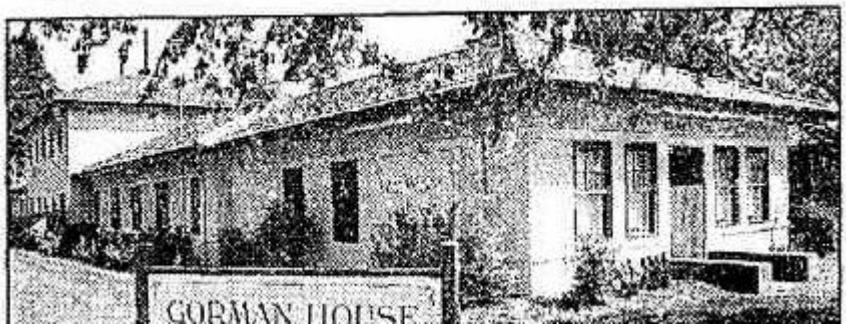
They include:

- A cut in funding to the Canberra Repertory from $20,000 in 1994 to zero by 1997.
- A similar cut for Gorman House Arts Centre from $43,470 in 1994 to zero in 1997.
- Withholding more than $74,000 from the Canberra Festival until it is prepared to work "constructively and in partnership" with the council's festival working group.
- Total rejection of the Eureka! Theatre Company's application for annual funds.

On the positive side, organisations such as the vis-a-vis Dance Canberra ($150,000), the Splinters theatre group ($30,000) and Skylark Theatre Company ($80,000) received substantial funding increases and a new theatre company, WBK, received an initial $55,000.

Mr Wood said, "These grants — totalling $1.8 million — represent the first stage in meeting the Government's new policies for cultural development in the ACT."

"The organisations which have been funded for 1994 will provide the basic infrastructure for arts and cultural events activity in the ACT for 1994 and beyond."





Gorman house yesterday.

The ACT Crafts Council ($71,300), which had been "on notice" that funding would be cut unless it lifted its game, had the notice removed and additional funding offered. The crafts council is now seen by the Cultural Council as developing into "the peak industry body for the visual arts and crafts in the ACT".

Crafts council executive director Joy Grove said she was very gratified with the result. "It is a reflection of the tremendous work the management committee and staff put into the council over the last 18 months," she said. "We agree totally with their assessment that we will be the peak industry body. In fact, it is in our long-term plan."

Splinters' David Branson was also delighted with the funding decision. "They are making an effort to support things that are worthy," he said.

However, Stephanie Hayes, manager of Canberra Rep, said the news was "an obvious blow".

"It is disappointing that we were not given the opportunity to discuss our immediate and long term plans," she said.

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"We find [the decision] difficult to comprehend in the light of their comment that the Cultural Council acknowledges and applauds Repertory's demonstrated resourcefulness and the important contribution it makes to the cultural life of the ACT."

Gorman House director Mark Ferguson said, "It shows what an innovative organisation the Cultural Council is. Not many people would think to cut a group's funding because they were doing such a good job. That requires a special skill."

Cultural Council chair David Williams said Gorman House had "demonstrated its resourcefulness and the important contribution it makes to the cultural life of the ACT."

"However [the council] believes that the organisation is well equipped to reduce its reliance on ACT Government funding."

Of Eureka!, Mr Williams said, "The council did not consider the application worthy of support under the annual pro-

worthy of support under the annual program category."

"The council was concerned that the high level of funds being requested for administration costs reflected an imbalance in the organisation's priorities which should be focused more intently on artistic outcomes. Eureka! has been invited to submit in one-off activities over $10,000."

Eureka! President Camilla Blunden said she was "disappointed and puzzled" by Mr Williams' remarks. "We were going for $99,000 for three projects next year. We keep our administration costs to a low level so that the money can go to the artists."

The full funding program is:

Arts Council of the ACT Inc $115,050; Ausdance (ACT) Inc. $50,395; Australian Chamber Orchestra $19,500; Canberra City Band Inc. $14,000; Canberra Contemporary Art Space Inc. $100,000; Canberra Festival Inc $392,700; Canberra Repertory Society $20,000; Canberra Symphony Orchestra Inc. $165,000; Canberra Youth Orchestra Society $47,000; Canberra Youth Theatre Company Inc. $85,865; Crafts Council of the ACT Inc. $74,176; Gaudeamus Inc. $30,700; Gorman House Arts Centre Inc. $43,470; Leichhardt Street Studios Inc. $34,390; Megalo Access Arts Inc. $47,600; Muse Inc. $35,480; PhotoAccess Inc. $48,330; Skylark Theatre Company Assoc Inc. $80,000; Splinters Inc. $30,000; Stage Coach Theatre School Inc. $45,080; The Stagemaster Inc. $60,000; Studio One Inc. $53,850; Tuggeranong Community Arts Association Inc. $63,380; vis-a-vis Dance Canberra Inc. $150,000; Woodrow, Barone and Kelly Theatre Inc. $55,000.