



## Take on Board

# Transcript – Anne Wiberg

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the Take on Board Podcast, I'm speaking to Anne Wiberg. about some challenges that not for profit board directors might experience. In particular, we'll explore putting together a skilled board, and she'll also give us some tips and tricks on being a good chair. First, let me tell you about Anne. Anne is the chair of Music SA and has been I think for seven or eight years. I'm looking at you there....seven, lucky Seven excellent, and she's also a board member of Tuttle Arts. She's a former board member of the state government's Dog and Cat Management Board, and the South Australian Living Arts Festival board. After six years as an associate producer with the Adelaide festival and started her own business to continue her work in the music industry and the arts. She's got over 25 years experience in project management festival and event producing and consultancy with clients including the Adelaide Fringe Festival, the Adelaide festival, and Australian independent records. She's currently the head of programming at a new live performance venue in Adelaide, due to open in early 2021, which is now she might tell us a bit more about that soon as well. And is a collaborator, a programmer and mentor and networker, a live music lover and a DJ. So you're gonna really love her microphone work on the podcast today. Welcome to the Take On Board Podcast Anne.

Anne Wiberg 1:19

Thank you. I'm excited.

Helga Svendsen 1:20

It's so awesome to have you here. So we met at a AICD women on boards event thing over a year ago, or about a year ago just over.

Anne Wiberg 1:31

Yeah, yeah. November. It was 19.

Helga Svendsen 1:34

Yeah, it was back when we could be face to face. Yes. Back in those days. And I can't even remember how this came about. But I just thought, Oh, you're interesting. We should try and get together. And

that's almost 18 months ago. And here we are finally getting together. Yeah, beautiful Adelaide. So before we talk about getting on boards, and recruiting skilled members of boards, I'd love to, as always dig a little bit deeper about you say, Can you tell me a story about young Anne that tells us a bit about how you got to where you are today.

Anne Wiberg 2:03

I think one of the significant moments in my life was moving from Finland to Australia as a teenager. So I was 14. But even before I got into sort of schoolwork, I think I was already trying to work out how to make friends. And I couldn't speak English. So I thought, right, I need to just fit in amongst, the girls, particularly girls, but so cut a long story short, I just wasn't very good at sport. And if you're living in the country, side of South Australia, if you don't know how to do sport, if you're not very good at it, especially in lochs, and then the riverland, pretty much you had to come up with another way to mix and be accepted. And this is something totally like sort of the late 70s. So things are very different to now. Anyway, I got right into music and theater and drama and started running events already at age 16. I think I was oh my i don't know how I got into being the captain of a sporting team. I hear it wasn't my ball throwing skills. It was definitely because I just loved organizing other people. So I ran my first event when I was 16, then in year 11. I think it was for the whole school, I had all these performers lined up, I spoke to the director or the principal and convinced him that I should have the lunchtime free to use the whole for this concept that I was putting together. So yeah, I kind of started my event management, like career path at that age.

Helga Svendsen 3:26

What was it? What was the event. Tell us about it.

Anne Wiberg 3:28

It was called a Rock Arena. So I got all my friends to pretend they were superstars or, you know, pop stars of that era. I think I was Olivia Newton John in a couple of songs. And I had some my friends were doing the Bee Gees or in whatever 70s had. Mick Jagger, or ABBA, you know, it was very funny, but I programmed it all we had costumes lighting. I loved it. And I thought I knew that was where I needed to be more. Well, I used to play music a lot. But I was never a musician that had a dream to write my own music or pursue that path. So I knew that it was going to be on the outskirts and kind of organize better people to get on stage and promote and support them. So that's where it all began.

Helga Svendsen 4:10

Amazing. It's so interesting. When I talk to people well, whether it's for this podcast, or for other things, you know as 16 year old selves are often exactly where we end up being so well then it's

probably no surprise that a few years down the track, you're now the chair of Music SA. And in fact I'm thinking even in that role as Chair we on the board before you were the chair?

Anne Wiberg 4:33

Yes for a year.

Helga Svendsen 4:35

See for a year and now you've been chair for seven years because chairs do a lot of organizing and people wrangling and bringing together which other skills that you've developed over many years from what was it Rock Arena?

Anne Wiberg 4:47

Yeah.

Helga Svendsen 4:52

Fantastic. So, in your role as chair of Music SA or even some of the other boards that you've been on, can you talk about some of your experience in recruiting board members and what some of the challenges have been there or even, what are some of the lessons you've learned from that?

Anne Wiberg 5:07

I've learned a lot of lessons as for sure. One of my ultimate goals, when I first was asked to be the chair, was to just look at the membership, look at the, I guess the skills of that current on board. That was current then. And a lot of the members had been on that board for many, many years, I was the second chair in 16 years. So that was, I think, another challenge, just kind of stepping into somebody as well, who'd been there for a long time and pretty much founded the organization. But then looking at the membership of those people who had been on that board for, in some cases, like eight or 10 years as well, I kind of thought, well, maybe looking into the future of that board, where was it heading, who needed to be brought along, who had perhaps done what they needed to do on that board and needed to move on. So that was my first challenge. And maybe not a popular sort of move at the time, you know, but I think that's what people do, you know, you start a new job, or as a CEO, or in a leadership kind of role, you have to make those tough calls and be a little bit selective about who is happy to come for the ride with you. And so within the first couple of years, the membership changed quite a bit. And for me, it was always not just about skills, it's personalities as well. And I wanted people to be on that board who loved what we did as an organization and who also were able to talk to the rest of the team, and not toe the line at all. I've really enjoyed having

people on the board, who are the antagonists, people who challenge me as the chair, because if everybody kind of just said yes to everything I say, I think I would find it boring, number one. But number two, I think it would be not a development sort of stage. For me in my sort of career as a chair. I think it needs to be about all of us growing with the organization. And it's good to be challenged, it's good to be asking sort of some of the tougher questions and be willing to be open. And I guess that's where the personality comes, no matter how brilliant you are at your job. If you can't listen to other people, I'm sort of not interested in you as a board member. Yeah.

Helga Svendsen 7:13

I mean, you know, boards are there to make decisions. It's actually not just to make decisions, but they're, they're often there to wrestle with complex problems. And if you can't have a robust conversation, when you're wrestling with a complex problem, well, you're probably not going to wrestle with it also well, so I can see how you need the right people there that can have that wrestling, but in the wrestling in a respectful way.

Anne Wiberg 7:35

I totally agree with that. And some of the, I guess, most favorite moments on a board, have been where there's been a real shift in the decision. Light, we started off with the conversation heading one way. And by the end of the meeting, we actually made a decision exactly the opposite to what we had planned. And is really fascinating, then to go back and think about the conversation when how it started and where it ended. And what was that pathway?

Helga Svendsen 7:58

Is there an example in particular that you can think of those favorite moments in the boardroom?  
Yeah, he can share with us?

Anne Wiberg 8:05

Yeah, I'm gonna be a little bit vague about it. But it's kind of been a common topic for many organizations similar to us in the music industry. So kind of the pros and cons of becoming a membership based organization. And, you know, how do we go from running it the way we are now? And what are the pros and cons of changing that way? And we were very close to thinking, no, we need to become a membership organization. And these are all the reasons why. And we had very strong opinions on that board at the time. And then it went all the way around, it came back again to we're just not in that position to become a membership organization. But then the same conversation started again, a couple years later. And we started with kind of the same pros and cons and gone back to saying no, we don't want to be a membership based organization. But for each of those conversations, it was very different. No, it wasn't because it was different people on the on

the board, but I've seen it twice now. Yeah. And that's an interesting, I think, concept for chairs to stay on not just for a year or two, like stay on for some of those conversations that start to repeat themselves. Yeah. And it's not a bad thing. I think it's good to have that history. And there's always a good case to be given to members to kind of be on a bit of a rolling departure. You know, there's always a little bit of consistency with that history and the the IP of the board.

Helga Svendsen 9:29

I'll come back to that in a minute. But I just want to check there about, particularly as Chair when those conversations come around again, how do you remind yourself to remain open to the outcomes? Because if you've already had the conversation, we go Nope, that's not the right thing comes up again. How do you stop yourself from rolling your eyes and going Oh, God, we've had this conversation the answers this.

Anne Wiberg 9:48

That's a really good question. And I have to like, just be a little bit careful about what I say. Yeah. Because the immediate response that you want to say is, are we've been here before Let's move on. But no, it's I actually genuinely want I hear from people on the board and maybe circumstances have changed as well. Maybe there are different cases for changing the way we do things. And I think if the conversation is still measured, and if people are still given the opportunity to state their case or whatever, I think that's a good thing. And I hope I've been able to do that. And I think I have I've definitely learned about sort of, it's not about me, absolutely. It's not it has to be about the organization and the benefits to the organization. If I just want to lead and make make changes and rules for myself, then you know, I'm not doing the organization any good. So, yeah, it's been a challenge for sure. And I think the hardest thing is to get the people who don't say much to say a lot more.

Helga Svendsen 10:44

Absolutely. And, of course, the next question is, how do you do that from the chair? How do you really engage everyone in the room in these discussions?

Anne Wiberg 10:53

I'm pretty upfront. So I actually say so and so, I haven't heard from you yet. Yeah, I'd love to hear more about your opinions or your thoughts. So I just tell people to pay attention to that person next. And if there are some serious conversations to be had, I should go around the table. And I include everybody. So before the end of that topic, I want to hear, then make sure that everyone's heard. And if they don't want to say anything, that's absolutely fine, as well. But to be given that opportunity, I think it's important, it's often that really quiet ones that you actually get some gold

out of when you give them the stage, I suppose. Yeah, and acknowledge the fact that they have something really valuable to add to the conversation.

Helga Svendsen 11:34

And if people are used to you then going around the room and calling on everybody, then they know they'll get their chance at some stage.

Anne Wiberg 11:41

Yeah. And I like it when other people also kind of challenged me with that. And if I'm saying too much, I'm happy to be told.

Helga Svendsen 11:49

Do they do that in board meetings? Come on, lately? So it's time to get in board meetings? Actually, we touched on briefly before you touched on the cadence of board members coming on and coming off for your board. What's their terms? Do?

Anne Wiberg 12:10

Is it a three year two years normally, but yeah, with that flexibility of staying on longer if you want to be voted in again. And most of our board members, especially in the last, say two or three years have been on for two to three years. Yes. A couple was one who was on for about six, I think, but already from the previous board. So she was on for quite a long time, actually, eight years, maybe. But I encouraged that kind of two years with the option to continue at least another year, just to kind of keep the rolling. And is there a maximum term that people can be on the board? There isn't in our Constitution, like we haven't said so. And I was tempted to in the early days, because of the history of the board. But it hasn't become an issue, or hasn't been an issue for a while.

Helga Svendsen 12:52

Right? And for the skills that you need around the boardroom table for Music SA, what are the key things that are on your skills matrix for having around the table? things.

Anne Wiberg 13:03

Four key things and everyone would agree with this with every board, so we need an accountant. And up until I think it was about four years ago, we had a treasurer who had accounting experience

that wasn't accountant. So when we finally got an accountant, it just changed everything. Really, it changed our financial management. Just put it on another level. Yeah. So I'm forever grateful for that process. Legal advice, and lawyer. So we have had the lawyer now, we used to have a consultant who was a lawyer, but actually have a lawyer on the board. I think that's really imperative. And interesting in both those roles, and people who have music experience. So they're both artists themselves. All right. Very lucky with that, yes.

Yes another one is, when I say communications, or marketing or PR that can be for all different sectors, I want to say you need a marketing manager, it can be I'd say, a person who has for us anyway, who has some great contacts in the media. So having a really good sort of background in marketing helps, but it's more about the communications and good strategies about how to get our profile out. And I think that's almost key. And the fourth one is industry. For us for sure. Like understanding how the music industry or the arts or both operate and what goals or what key people we need to know and sort of, I guess, understand the processes. Actually, there's a fifth one probably government is another one. Yep. You have a state government is a major funding body for us. So music development office, so understanding what the relationships are and how to nurture those, I suppose. So that's very, very handy for us. And anybody else on top of that is a bonus.

Helga Svendsen 14:51

How many are on your board?

Anne Wiberg 14:52

We've got seven in total, including me,

Helga Svendsen 14:54

Okay, so that's a good size to get some of those different skills on and you know, mix and match as you need.

Anne Wiberg 15:00

Yeah, and gender balance as well. Yes. Have you got had as much like 60-40.

Helga Svendsen 15:10

And on the board for her chairing skills, not her accounting, clearly. So, and in finding those people like you talked about the treasurer that you've got now and the person on the board who's got legal

qualifications, it may have been in recruiting them, or just more generally, one of the lessons that you've learned in recruiting people to a board?

Anne Wiberg 15:33

You have to be really happy to be talking to a lot of people. I, I'm just always talking to...Yeah, absolutely. And networking. You know, I know networking is kind of one of those almost cliché things that people talk about. But like, pretty much half of the board members that I've had, over the last few years have come from people that I've met somewhere. And I've mentioned that way of recruiting or might have even not been that person I've met, but someone they know, that's interested. And I always meet with people face to face, and sometimes more than once, just to kind of get a bit of an idea for how that person fits the board. And I've had a couple people who've I know, got amazing skills, and might have been lawyers or accountants or whatever, I just knew that didn't fit as a personality thing. Yeah. And I didn't want to recruit somebody that I would have to spend a lot of time with, once they started and have to kind of do a lot of initiating or orientating them to the way the board works or whatever, just kind of, I guess I'm always mindful of how people can straightaway slot in and start on the job. Yes, I wish I had more time. But I just Yeah, I don't have the extra hours, it takes seven years of volunteering. It's already been pretty.

Helga Svendsen 16:52

What what's your estimate on how much time you put into this role?

Anne Wiberg 16:55

Oh, my God, I think I might get a little bit depressed if it's a really good question, though. Because in all the program work that I do, I've always said we need to quantify volunteer hours, yes, to make it sound like this is the real time that it takes to put on this event. A lot of people don't do it. And I think it's a real shame because we lose, or people get a different perspective. They don't realize that there's all this other work that gets done by volunteers. So okay, I guess, you know, thinking about the hourly rate as well, like, you know, don't think about that. It's 1000s. It's definitely over seven years, I've done 1000s of hours. Absolutely.

Helga Svendsen 17:32

Yeah. I mean, my guesstimate would be I often say to people for any board, whether it's a not for profit board, whatever organization, private sector, government, whatever it may be, generally, you know, my rule of thumb is it's about 15 hours a month for any board role. But for the chair, my guesstimate is it's double that most chairs of organizations I know are spending half a day to a day a week in the role.



Anne Wiberg 17:54

I think it changes when there are different things happening on the board. Or if we're going into like a funding round, or our need to recruit members, or we're going through strategic planning, which is what we're doing right now. Actually, we had a session last week. So I think then they're sort of the peaks and troughs, and we've had some situations before with staffing, or just those things are really difficult, and they can take more time, and almost feel a bit nervous. And when I don't hear from my CIO, or the general manager for a while, yes, what's going on? It's like, you know, the kid says, naughty when they're noisy,

Helga Svendsen 18:30

I can't hear anything, something's going wrong. Yeah, exactly.

Anne Wiberg 18:32

So I'm kind of like being on top of things. And because it's ultimately my job to look after the CEO, his appointment or the General Manager's appointment, I kind of keep an eye on things a little bit. I'm not one of those chairs that kind of sits on the shoulder of, of the top management at all, like I really trust the staff are doing all the right things. But I think it's just being there as a support person as well for the senior person on their staff. That's that's important, too.

Helga Svendsen 18:59

So I was interested before when you again, when you were talking about the person you've got with accounting skills, and the people person with lower skills that they're both museums as well. Which means that everybody who's on your board has some industry, creative experience. For we know that diversity in the boardroom makes for strong decision making. And I would love to see the day when there's more creatives, I use the term broadly like whether it's music or dance or art or whatever it may be, but more creative people in corporate boardrooms and not just corporate Australia coming to creative organization saying Oh, let me help you out and share on my wisdom that the other way around, where creatives are included, valued invited to corporate Australia's boardrooms? What are your thoughts around that? And once you've experienced around that?

Anne Wiberg 19:50

I was actually invited to join the board a few years ago, which is very corporate state government board and I was invited to join because of my creative sort of background and my, that is so good to hear. Yeah, it was, it was really daunting to me coming from not for profit sort of organizations, and having always worked in the arts and being in a room full of scientists Actually, yeah. And people

who were very academic, and from very different backgrounds, to me, it took a lot of courage. And I think a lot of must have, what's the word, being quite trying to be more confident than what I normally wouldn't need to be, if that makes sense. And really having the, I guess, the, definitely the confidence to speak up as well. And I learned so much about how state government board functions and how different that environment is. And I learned a lot about the fact that I actually have a lot of skills in working on a board. And I hadn't really thought about until I joined that board, because it changed my perspective in lots of ways. And I was super keen to make all these changes with Music SA. And as you do like, same as when you do training, you're going to change everything, because you've learnt all these things. And then you get back into the, you know, the reality, the reality of it, and the lack of time and everything else. But probably the biggest thing for me was the respect that I had to earn as well. Like, I had to really pick and choose the moments when I wanted to contribute to the conversation. And I didn't want to sound like the artsy person like, I wanted to come up with, hopefully, some contributions that made sense and made sense to people who hadn't really spoken to a person like me before.

Helga Svendsen 21:33

Absolutely. Well, you want to be an equal member of the board and not inverted commas, just the arts person, you know, which is a two way street, really, it's pushing through the confidence so that you can say what's on your mind. But it's also those others around the boardroom table, really valuing those contributions as well, for the difference for the diversity that that brings to the table.

Anne Wiberg 21:54

Another key thing, it's okay to ask questions. Yes. Because I asked a lot of questions, not straightaway. But as I was getting more familiar with the way the board papers were laid out, even on some of the content, because there's so much that has been done before I joined, some of the board members have been on it for a long time. So they knew how to work. Yes. For me, it was so new and it was quite confronting, actually and quite overwhelming. Yes. And the board meetings went for four to five hours. So it was half a day. So it was a lot at first, having the courage to actually sort of ask the questions, and I got over that. Once I got into a bit of a patent of it. I felt like people were also happy to tell me things because I just asked to me some simple questions. But maybe things hadn't been discussed for a while or Yes, make sense to most people, but not everybody, because there's somebody else that was new as well. So

Helga Svendsen 22:46

Sometimes the stupid question is an incredibly valuable question to us. Yeah,

Anne Wiberg 22:51

Definitely. So that was a good thing to learn that it's okay to ask questions, and it's fine to listen. Yes. Well, you don't have to be speaking all the time you learn a lot.

Helga Svendsen 23:00

Oh, so many wonderful things from our conversation today. What are the key things you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Anne Wiberg 23:08

I think be open minded about people who might like to join your board. Definitely creative people have a lot to add to any board, I'd say. And maybe having this sort of opportunity for all sorts of backgrounds and skilled people to come together is a great thing. You know, it doesn't have to be a lawyer with music background, it can be a lawyer that's just curious and really supportive and passionate about what the organization does. But if you can find those people who are then on top of that, a little bit skilled in that creative field that your organization's about, like in our case, music, bought a bonus. Yes, that is in fact we've got half of us are kind of from the music industry with music industry background, but the rest of the not at all. So fantastic. Yeah, it's really good to mix it up. That actually, that's the key, mix it up. I think that is totally the key.

Helga Svendsen 24:05

Oh, thank you so much. It's been fabulous to reconnect with you after so long to actually be able to see people face to face which is exciting for those of us from Melbourne. That thank you so much for sharing all of those tips with their take on board community today. It's been fabulous to have you on.

Anne Wiberg 24:19

I love talking about it. Excellent topic.

Helga Svendsen 24:21

Thank you