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The Mountaintop: Success without state funding [1]

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This year?s Best New Play winner [3] at the Olivier Awards, *The Mountaintop*, is a remarkable work. Not only has it won near-universal praise for its depiction of Martin Luther King?s final night alive and secured a production run on Broadway, but it has succeeded without any government arts subsidy. What this shows is that state funding is not necessary for the production of great art.

The play was first staged in a 65-seat theatre above a pub in Battersea and, thanks to popular acclaim and commercial success, made its way to the West End. Not a penny from the Arts Council was needed: this was a work of popular art that appealed to critics and theatregoers alike.

That a play like The Mountaintop was able to succeed without state funding vindicates the ASI?s recent report [4] calling for government arts funding to be radically overhauled. Government funding for the arts distorts the market against unfunded but potentially very good plays by allowing bad, government-supported plays to undercut and out-advertise them. The result is that bland, state-approved plays can often outcompete better plays that could not win the Westminster stamp of approval.

Some have claimed [5] that the free market inhibits innovation in the arts, which The Mountaintop?s awards and commercial success disprove. When government bureaucrats, not the theatregoing public, can influence which plays succeed, the art world risks being condemned to mediocrity. Thank god for The Mountaintop, whose critical and commercial success proves that great art can triumph simply by being great.

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