

**Submission
No 370**

**INQUIRY INTO THE MUSIC AND ARTS ECONOMY IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

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preface

The role of music in culture has always been significant. Prior to recorded music, personal performances, and the passing down of songs through generations was normative, whether solo, or ensemble, parent to child, or community based.

With the advent of recorded music, and the adjunct of radio (et al), music reached even wider audiences, and became an even more contributory part of people's lives. "Reproducibility" added a significant element, especially the on-demand element, and music reached into every corner of most people's lives, as it still does. However, "live" music is a different domain.

live performances

The two broadest categories of live music are best described as *concert* environments, usually seated, and the opportunity to experience music in a three dimensional way. The other is *live music* as an adjunct to social activities, such as meeting people in venues where food, drink, and social interactions occur, be this pubs, clubs, music festivals, functions, events, etc.

dance

Music is an inextricable adjunct of most dance forms. Although quite diminished from earlier periods, be this ballroom, the jazz age, rock and roll from the 50's, the 60/70's era, the vital element remains, being the interaction of the musicians and the dancing audience.

composition

Music scores are paramount in film, and just about every media enterprise. Music jingles, theme songs, background music, etc, and of course, in orchestral (and other compositional areas) for performance and interpretation. In the live music sphere, composition is threatened.

social

Music has a number of social elements, including musicians being part of an ensemble, an orchestra or band, an accompanist, etc, and incorporates the "tribal" element of bringing like-minded people together for concerts, parties, dances, etc, and the musician/audience interaction.

These interactions are a different outreach from work, family, business, etc, and have a valuable role in professional, semi professional, and amateur spheres, where music forms a part of people's lives that transport them away from the more usual daily pursuits.

benefits

Music has undeniable psychological and physiological benefits:
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/258383.php>
and this is hardly groundbreaking news.

From using music to soothe babies, to an adjunct for the elderly, there are few stages in life when music doesn't play a vital and significant role.

monetisation

It is difficult to argue for a simplistic model, such as "how much revenue can (live) music generate for the economy?" Whilst modelling and statistics will reveal some direct numbers, from attracting people to large concerts, revenues from transport, accommodation, food and beverages, etc, it is important to take a longitudinal stand (see later in this submission).

In Australia, and elsewhere, it is hard to imagine just how big the live music scene was during the "heyday" periods. Personally, I recall playing at venues such as the UNSW Roundhouse, to crowds of hundreds of people, who came to dance, from perhaps 8pm - midnight. At my chosen university, every Friday and Saturday night saw "dances" also with hundreds of attendees.

Promoters recollect the halcyon days when even mid-week venues would attract huge crowds, and the "pub music" scene in the era of Cold Chisel and Midnight Oil (et al) attests to the power and scale of the live music scene when at full tilt.

Information on monetised returns are available:

http://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2015/05/article_0009.html

This article lists five requisite elements:

- the presence of artists and musicians;
- a thriving music scene;
- available spaces and places for music;
- a receptive and engaged audience;
- and record labels and other music-related businesses.

From that article:

"In Melbourne, Australia, the 2012 census found that the live music sector alone generated over AUD1 billion in spending and supported the equivalent of 116,000 annual full-time jobs."

It would be clear that revenues in the contemporary era do not compare well to the golden days. Nevertheless, in a hard-headed discussion, it is still evident that music, and live music, are capable of being economic contributors, but I would imagine that it is in decline.

the perennial chestnuts

As governments at all levels increase the regulation of everyday lives, the well trodden paths of "noise" and local amenity always dominates the sphere of live music, and mostly those smaller venues in urban areas. Parking becomes another issue.

- This is not going to be the subject of this submission, other than to add my cynical view of those who move close to such venues, then agitate to have them closed down or limited.

For one thing, even a "ruly" crowd existing a venue at closing time, will often be enthusiastic and hopefully somewhat adrenalin fuelled from an exhilarating gig, this is hardly a social ill.

- The association with music and alcohol (and other possible stimulants) may exacerbate the enthusiasm, or indeed foster "unruly" behaviour, and that too is not part of this submission.

longitudinal monetisation

More than the immediate revenue streams, governments must take a much more longitudinal perspective, including these strands:

- *the financial social benefits and savings:* if music is *therapy* then there are savings in social costs, medical costs, other therapeutic modalities, etc, all of which would otherwise factor into taxpayer funded enterprises.

Whilst I am unable to quantify these costs as they relate to music, in the US, it was found that for every dollar spent in pre-schooling, twenty two dollars was saved in later social costs.

Taking away "the music" would indeed ramp up costs to society, via both financial and personal enrichments.

- *lateral monetisation:* such as the allied services that go towards supporting music, and will include inputs such as the "music backline" services; equipment, lighting, audio, staging, administration, music mixers, etc. Then the adjunct services such as taxi/uber, food and beverage, accommodation, sightseeing and tourism by visitors to music venues, etc.

Whereas these financial and social factors are readily seen, (albeit not always easily financially quantified), there is a much more insidious and deeper threat that will significantly contribute towards the long term decline of music.

Two key factors below need consideration and government support.

performers

The enjoyment and social factor of being a performing musician will survive to a degree, but without a financial remuneration, being a performing musician will become a less desirable pursuit. Diminishing audiences are not helpful. There is a “race to the bottom.”

Very few performing musicians are without significant costs, such as buying instruments, amplifiers, PA, stage clothes, lights, etc, then the potential costs of tuition and learning, sometimes rehearsal costs, then adding the transport costs of vehicle ownership, registration, repairs, and insurances, petrol and tolls, and sometimes accommodation costs.

Being a guitar player in a band will, at very least, probably cost you a minimal \$4,000 in your *own* gear (excluding the other costs cited above). For most gigs, this takes, say, 40 - 50 gigs just to recoup the basic outlay. Very few gigs will be “petrol and toll free” so perhaps add another 10 - 20 gigs to recoup these costs. If you pay for a PA, lights, etc, and tally the expenses, in real terms you may never even recoup costs, let alone “make money.” It usually **costs you to perform.**

In the halcyon days of live music, the top musicians and bands were capable of making a living from music. Personally, in the 1980s, I worked two nights a week at a regular gig, and that paid my rent. I would imagine that this would be a rarity today.

I am frequently paid no more than \$50 - \$100 per gig, for what usually amounts to a 5 hour enterprise, resulting in an hourly remuneration rate of \$10 - \$20, *before costs.*

The key factor here is *that being a professional, or semi professional musician is really no longer valued as a career, or is a financially viable pursuit.* That is not a fair position, particularly accounting for the social benefits that a musician can bestow.

songwriting as a career

My view is that the most insidious factor in the decline of music, particularly live music, is ***the inevitable decline of songwriting.***

Whether as a **covers** band, or an **originals band,** the songs are the pivot. Without new songs, music is singularly reliant on old material, and that is not a healthy or desirable position.

Pretty much the entire audience of a live concert has come to hear favoured songwriters/artists *performing their original music* (clearly less so in classical spheres). If there are no new original artists/bands, then the live concert industry will atrophy.

There is no doubt that many artists are compelled to compose and perform, even without the prospect of financial returns, and sometimes with limited career opportunities. The rise of the “bedroom musician” is positive by way of opening up opportunities, but also negative in the lack of the “old filters” of record companies, A+ R departments, music producers, and radio playlists.

The on-line music pool is awash with songs, but little in favour with filters and monetisation.

An increasing trend is the solo artist, as the viability of steering a band down this career path is far more challenging. Another downward spiral is the use of technology and social media, where the “cult of personality” and visual musical genres favours *form over substance.*

Many newer songwriters (and certainly not all) have quite limited “musicality” and we would argue that even in this vastly oversupplied technological age, musicianship and musical production in the traditional sense is severely diminished compared to the prior eras in music.

The solo artist also misses out on the collaborative benefits of being in a band, or indeed, working with music producers.

Even a well received on-line song earns the composer/performer just a few cents based on download remuneration.

reality bites

Take this scenario: you wish to become a doctor. In lieu of six (or more) years of intensive education, training, and interaction with peers, you are told: just study medicine part time, say, on weekends for a few hours at a time, and during the rest of the week, get a job “flipping burgers” (etc) to keep yourself financially viable.

Being a musician (composer, performer) is an art honed over many years, and indeed a lifetime. Yet someone wanting to pursue music as a career today is inevitably more aligned with the scenario above. “Do something else to make a living, pay the rent, and do your music in your spare time.” And the cost of living does not give a lot of latitude for *spare time.*

If you are in today’s situation, and you are also paying for a musical education as a career choice, you have the added costs of the tuition, as well as your existence costs. A difficult position.

In previous eras, you could indeed make a more considered choice, work at your craft (music) for very long hours, even days, and with just a small amount of part time work, meet your expenses. As previously quoted, you could even play a few nights a week to meet your fixed costs, leaving time to work at your musical craft, rehearsing and writing with a band, recording, promoting, etc.

These circumstances are the realities facing aspiring musicians.

I believe that the greatest damage is being done in the *original songwriting sphere*, especially for bands, where the needs of multiple individuals becomes even more limiting than the needs of an individual.

Australia has traditionally “punched above its weight” via music, with proportionally more talented solo artists and bands per population percentage than many other countries. Not all were directly financially successful, but the entire spectrum of original music had a very high profile.

A part of that success was the ability of musicians (songwriters and performers) to make a living from music, and this included the widespread network of live music venues, and the promotional aspects of radio, and then tv.

loud music

Two factors co-exist.

1. For many, *just being able to hear a musical form that they dislike*, is enough to generate complaint. I did an experiment at university that suggested that this is an important bias in “perceived loudness.” If you hear an accordion, and you have a dislike for accordion music, you will probably dislike hearing one at *any* level. This concept has repercussions for live music venues.

Many forms of music (including classical) do have a loudness threshold which is quite important in the appreciation of the performance. Classical music often has a wide dynamic range, and the contrast between the loud and soft passages an important part of the presentation.

Clearly, rock has the highest decibel quotient, and in particular, the visceral appeal of the “bottom end” which is usually the bass guitar and the bass drum. Rock is felt as well as heard.

2. Without a *certain level of power* in these frequencies, you can effectively argue that this defeats the best experience of live “rock music.” Personally, I agree that many concerts are too loud, and unbalanced in terms of the dispersed audio spectrum, but I stick by the principle that there is a need for a minimum degree of loudness for live rock to express its power and attraction, particularly the “bottom end.”

Attenuation via soundproofing is quite effective in limiting transmission, (mostly external transmission) but the principle outlined in (1) above needs consideration.

The sound waft from live music concerts in outdoor settings is another difficult area to address, but it would be imprudent to impose any sort of blanket ban on these events.

role of government

Bringing the discussion back to the NSW (and other) government involvements, my submission is summarised as follows:

1. The genesis of a long term healthy music industry is songwriting.

I believe that government has to recognise songwriting as a vital social and cultural element.

This brings monetisation via performances, and by longitudinal social benefits. Songwriting needs to be elevated to the same status as other professions. Implementation strategies might include scholarships, subsidies, provision of amenities, public awareness and perhaps tax (or other) concessions, allowing musicians to flourish.

2. Live music must be supported.

This is frequently the domain of state and local governments, allied to licensing, noise laws, zonings, etc, and a vital underpinning of the entire music industry.

Recent, and current generations, are significantly disinterested in live rock music, and the reasons include:

- stay-home entertainment options (Nexflix, etc, on the couch is easier than going out.)
- music is easily obtained via electronics
- never attending a live rock gig and having the experience
- the music being promoted is less band-based, and more “feature and cult” driven, meaning that the more likely concert going activity will be an arena type show from a touring performer, or a music festival.
- the entire spectrum of going down to a local venue to see live music is largely generationally divided.

The unfortunate reality is that many younger people have not experienced the exhilaration of music via a live rock show. I do not believe that today’s teenagers would not be lifted and engaged by the kinds of musical experiences that were well known to their parents and grandparents. Both as “listening” and “dancing” experiences.

Dancing is a great mind and body tonic.

Whether this is now a bygone part of history remains to be seen, but it would be a significant cultural loss to know that, perhaps, for the first time, a very long history of live popular music (in its varied forms) will no longer be a part of our society.

I would imagine that smaller acts (solo, duo, backing tracks) will still survive in the pubs and clubs, but *without new songs, and without the larger band formats, this is largely a shadow of the optimal performance situations.* Jazz seems to have a small but dedicated following (and venues that still support the format), and classical music will also continue down a traditional path (but my experience is more in the rock sphere, so I leave that to those with better knowledge).

Our urban environments are invariably noisy. This requires compromise. Many new buildings are generating long and tiresome noise elements during construction periods. Traffic noise can be debilitating. We live in close proximity to our neighbours.

The sound of children playing can be both welcomed and unwelcomed.

Music should not be diminished because it is perceived as “urban noise,” in fact, it should be afforded higher status and importance, as AC-DC postulated, *“rock and roll ain’t noise pollution.”*

Less parochially, music must be supported by governments, and be considered as worthy of potential subsidising and promotion. Short term benefits may, or may not be monetising, but the long term survival and thriving of music is essential, and must also be seen through the prism of longitudinal benefits to society and culture. It is on precarious ground right now.