

**Submission  
No 327**

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

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Thoughts on NSW Music and Arts 2018

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To whom it may concern,

My name is Andrew Barnum, resident of Sydney and Meroo Meadow NSW. I've been an active singer-songwriter/recording artist/performer since 1982, a practitioner in Design and an administrator and lecturer in Creative Education. I'm an Australian/American dual citizen since 2000.

The purpose I'm writing this submission is to address the underlying disconnect between local songwriters/musicians and artists, and their current inability to sustain a livelihood from their practice in Australia.

I'm currently writing a PhD on 'Australian song and songwriters in age of digital music' at UTS. My primary research is from 30+ Australian songwriters, (male & female all genres) alongside my own personal experience as an artist.

The collected data makes up the basis of my thoughts on the Music and Arts economy in NSW. My Masters (by Research) at UTS looked at sustaining practice in the Creative Industry context – a vibrant sector of the Australian economy, and how we might invest in the precarious state of local Artists to generate both cultural and economic benefit.

As part of the pop duo Vitabeats with my wife Lissa Barnum (co-director of the Barnum Group Pty Ltd partnership), we had a national hit with the original song 'Boom Box' from the album 'Spot the Spanner.' Videos and Countdown performances can be found on YouTube <http://bit.ly/2Gtbc1C>. Our performance was recently shown on the ABC's Classic Countdown 1985. <http://iview.abc.net.au/programs/classic-countdown/LE1601V011S00>

Since 1988, I've been fortunate to record 6 solo albums of my original songs with collaborator Boris Hunt at Black Rabbit Studios in Hartley NSW (Lithgow side of the Blue Mountains). My 2018 release is the double album 'Little Phoenix // The City // Country - independently distributed by MGM/Foghorn/John & Jane. My story and songs can be found at <http://www.andrewbarnum.com>

My song/music career has been supported by our Design and Communications practice:  
<https://www.peopleness.com.au> and <http://barnumart.com> I was formerly Head of College at Billy Blue College of Design (2006-12), and Head of the Creative Industry Faculty at Open Colleges (2012-2014). I currently lecture at JMC Academy and Macleay College in Sydney in digital subjects. I also hold an Associate Diploma in Graphic Art (RMIT).

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'I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,  
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,  
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo  
in the machinery of night Alan Ginsberg, Howl

What my PhD research participants, and myself have experienced in our music careers, is a mix of the dizzy highs of success through our recordings, performance and local exposure, and the depths of despair as an Australian artist unable to any garner any local support for our work. Distributing beautiful original work, heartfelt true stories...zero response from local media, tastemakers and gatekeepers.

I'd like to propose a different perspective to re-purpose the fragile thing we know as 'The Industry.' In approaching the problem of sustaining a music/arts career in Australia and growing opportunity, I'd like to step back from the usual reactive, fix-it mindset, and offer what I've found in my research as a responsive approach to the underlying causes of our current cultural crisis.

I'm very happy to present the stories of my research participants to any future forum.

Consequences of change

To date, the conversation around Music & Arts has focused around the crisis of:

- A small market size
- A shift from dependent, reliable work practice, to individual, precarious entrepreneurship

- Technological changes in media, recording, formats, distribution and promotion
- Music streaming and subscription based music distribution
- The shift from print and electronic media to the Internet
- Free downloading and pirating of copyright content
- Unfair treatment and/or payment to musicians and artists
- Decreasing local airplay on community/commercial radio, and zero opportunity on TV
- The Inter-generational change occurring within producers and audiences
- Closing of a range of venues and the end of music inspired 'pub culture'
- Closing of galleries and art sites (commercial and independent)
- Decreasing recognition or support of Australian music artists in commercial media

In my PhD thesis, I'm keen focusing on the deeper, underlying issues Australian artists face, as agreed by my research participants. In the age of digital music (and art), my contention is that the unique voice of Australian artists, songwriters and performers is consistently underaccepted and under-recognized by the Australian field of cultural production, the field of the forces and struggles that artists must operate in. (Bourdieu)

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It's important to underline the value of investment in the context of sustaining the Australian cultural identity process. This is the process by which we discover who we are as Australians, by sharing our civic pride, local stories, language and place.

As part of my hypothesis, I turn to the introduction to the first Federal policy on The Arts in Australia, Creative Nation (1994). Full ext: <http://bit.ly/2BSHTa0>

The overview of the policy makes clear the value of investing in the production of culture and meaning in Australia as a cultural necessity:

'Culture, then, concerns identity - the identity of the nation, communities and individuals.

We seek to preserve our culture because it is fundamental to our understanding of who we are. It is the name we go by, the house in which we live. Culture is that which gives us a

sense of ourselves.’ Creative Nation Australian Government Policy 1994

The Australian Arts consumer

At a glance, the profile of the Australian music and arts consumer suggests:

- An educated taste and discretion, not defined by socio-economic status
- An early adopter, technologically mobile and digitally interactive
- Disposable income for Arts & Culture
- Choice of numerous local and international events and channels
- A discrimination towards high-quality content
- A global citizen, with an ambivalence towards local artists in search of local reception
- A subscriber to the Australian measure of success as promoted through Sport

As first-world Music and Arts consumers, Australians have culturally learned to judge high quality in Music & Arts as something that consistently exists external to Australia, born from a long and reliable history of cultural achievement in centers like LA, NYC, London, Paris etc.

Still, for many Australians, real culture is only accessed from outside Australia.

Even though these consumers are fundamentally inspired by the great American model of musical evolution from blues and folk, to jazz and rock n roll, in the twentieth century, and then to world media domination in music and cinema in the digital age. They are consistently unable to consider a similar sort of evolution for their own artists. Many still see our local story as a pale, or ‘try-hard’ version. For a large number, Australia is slowly learning and ‘improving,’ but still has a long way to go. This is the patronizing cultural cringe at work.

From my perspective this is a tragic national pathology that must be cured.

Australians lovingly prefer, an idealized, or remote view towards the local artistic struggle, keeping their distance, insistent on the ‘long way to the top’ gauntlet stereotype. This local view is mediated through the lens of a comfortable, Australian way of quiet, pain free,

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egalitarian achievement. They easily empathize with the long struggle of American artists on a

superficial, idealized level as the preferred model. The reality of the American struggle to accept and recognize their own identity in Music & Arts, remains more glamorous, authentic, and superior to anything being produced in Australia. When in truth, it was their own struggle to overcome adversity, discrimination and indifference that remains so inspiring to Australians.

I believe, in the Australian field of cultural production, these sorts of ingrained, cultural 'black spots and gaps' persist as a handbrake to our own cultural prosperity.

#### Question

So, as Australians, the real question we must ask ourselves now is:

How do we grow acceptance and recognition for the 'voice' of Australian song and art in the digital age? Especially within Australia, by local audiences, and by doing so, stimulate personal, cultural, and national renewal.

#### Self-esteem and confidence

The local cultural systems that still operate here (eg. Tall poppy, cultural cringe and strut, learned-off (Horne), mimicry (Rose) and black-face (Lott), conspire to institutionalise low self-esteem, and low self-confidence. These conditions sustain poor reception locally, and consistently force our most talented and ambitious artists to seek any reception of their Australian production off-shore. Consistently, cultural acceptance locally is only guaranteed by external acceptance.

'Unless we investigate and value our own extraordinary musical culture, the dreaded cultural cringe will continue to define what constitutes the practice of music on this continent.' (Rose 2013, p6)

People consistently point to the demise of venues, lack of local-airplay, apathy of audiences, pokies in pubs, and a general shrinking of opportunity and livelihood as the key problems to address.

But the underlying issue at the root of these problems is that some of the most talented and gifted Australian artists of this generation, (especially since 2000), who are by birth-right

committed to expressing their own 'voice of Australia' in their song, music and art, are turned away by their country's cultural gatekeepers and tastemakers.

Australia is in urgent need of coming clean about local reception of locally produced original work. No amount of quotas, commercial success, artistic outcry, or the local work of

Associations and Industry groups has made measureable impact on this issue since 2000. We  
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remain bound to our inability to put our own productions anywhere near first, and remain silent about our low self-esteem towards our own artists and their content. As D.H. Lawrence noted as far back as 1929 in his book 'Kangaroo':

'Each one knows in silence, reciprocates in silence, and the talk just babbles on, on the surface. Each individual seems to feel himself pledged to put himself aside, to keep himself at least half out of the count.' (Lawrence, D, H, 1929, p43)

Purpose seeks Recognition

I believe any new initiative towards investment in Music & Arts in NSW must start with a sincere appreciation of the why of Australian artists' motivation. What is the driver of purpose that lives within Australian artists, and the value they attach to the local reception of their production?

Not only the usual 'quick-wins' approach of leaping to the most convenient how to paper-over problems, or the operational resources focused on what. Any new initiative for investment in the future of Australian Music & Arts must recognize the broken cultural connections between identity, artifact and change, and adopt a deeper problem-solving process to get to the heart of our crisis of confidence in Australia.

The fact is, there is no shortage of high-quality, internationally respected product generated by artists within Australia, mostly at the independent, entrepreneurial level, which is the hallmark of the digital age. The key problem to address in Australia is poor reception.

If we're going to propose a sincerely valuable and effective strategic approach to improving

conditions, we must understand and invest in creating new relationships between our excellent local production and great local reception. Call out the disconnect in our society that deflects this initiative with silence. This is the most effective way to construct a rigorous and robust investment plan to address the future growth of opportunity and prosperity for Musicians & Artists in NSW.

A recent initiative in France shows that labels and streaming services can co-operate to address modern shifts in Music and Arts to strengthen both culture and commerce:

<https://www.ft.com/content/43c5bae0-1331-11e8-8cb6-b9ccc4c4dbbb>

‘The result is also a triumph for l’exception culturelle — the French notion that culture should be treated differently from other commercial products in order to protect and promote French cultural industries.’ Financial Times Feb 2018

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Campaign

A campaign around the dire state of local reception is where any new initiative has to start. As we all remember there was a fully functioning (and prosperous) local Industry operating prior to the full shift to digital music. Since then, in our urgent need to adapt to changes in media delivery and adaptation, we’ve let slide the effective local focus that was once the key to the success of the 70s-90s era. Commercial media channels have abandoned the local independent Australian voice as inferior, in preference for the homogenised, mediocre version of mimicry and simulation.

Again referring to the prescience of the Creative Nation policy from 1994:

‘The lesson is that, so long as we are assured about the value of our own heritage and talents, we have nothing to fear from being open to other cultural influences. Yet many Australians say that just now Australian culture is under unprecedented threat. And they have good cause for saying it. The revolution in information technology and the wave of global mass culture potentially threatens that which is distinctly our own. In doing so it



threatens our identity and the opportunities this and future generations will have for intellectual and artistic growth and self-expression. The measures we have taken in this cultural policy are substantially designed to meet this challenge, and ensure that what used to be called a cultural desert does not become a sea of globalised and homogenised mediocrity.' (Creative Nation Australian Government Policy 1994)

#### Cultural model

A good example of cultural enterprise to consider, does happen to come from the cradle of American Folk and Blues. The father and son team of John and Alan Lomax in the USA in the 1940s began the birth of what we listen to today as 'the American tradition.'

Their dedication from within The Academy, and The Library of Congress led to the acceptance and recognition by Americans of the roots of authentic American experience through song and music. Their collection of artists, field recordings, tours, performances, books and artefacts, and the influence that flowed to the following generations of artists remains as the guiding light of localised music culture. Australia desperately needs such a concerted enterprise to shine a light on the large number of artists working within the field of cultural and commercial recognition.

This work still motivates the renewal expressed by contemporary American artists, and provides lasting evidence of the success of the Lomax's process. American music looks no further than its own story as a generator of renewable local cultural and civic pride.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_folk\\_music\\_revival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_folk_music_revival)

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Such an enterprise is always possible in Australia, a policy of collecting, documenting and revealing local artists that express the local voice of Australia as part of an education project and also a treasury of inspiration for future music and arts generations. Clinton Walker's 'Buried Country' is a fine example regarding the story of aboriginal country music. A truly inspiring story, that remains at the fringes of local acceptance and recognition.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buried\\_Country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buried_Country)

Festivals of the local

It would be worth considering promoting a networking-style festival like South by Southwest (SXSW), where a showcase of local-only song/music and related visual arts (video, games, animation etc) would present and perform short sets of original material, within a networked marketplace of venues and locations.

Vivid: Ideas is a good example to follow as a Creativity Networking event in NSW. The song/music event (SXNSW?) could start small, use existing or abandoned spaces around NSW, even connect with the Tamworth Festival and others. More like the WOMAD worldmusic model, but localized towards the diverse range of Australian music and connected art forms. The festival would focus on the production and promotion of local value and meaning, self-esteem and confidence, and therefore the Australian Identity process.

The mission would be to kick-start a local buzz, seeking to attract local artists Australia wide and international cultural enthusiasts and tourists to explore the Australian song/music and Arts landscape in NSW. In short, creating an annual festival/network event to accept, recognize, and document local artists work as the future champions of the ever evolving Australian identity process.

Conclusion

In the radical shift to digital, it's now much easier to force-feed local audiences with the predigested, production line of globalised digital music culture. We have far too quickly surrendered our local voice, and attached our cultural ambition to the ubiquitous global version. This is not new in Australia, but remains destructive to local confidence seeking opportunity.

Australia, in its 'tyranny of distance' mindset has consistently followed the commercial imperative of conforming to external trends as the basis of local culture. Australia defaults to the masquerade of a 'greener pastures' view, and assumes that work done elsewhere is of a 'better' quality. This is the dead-end of opportunity we are now suffering in the digital age in

Australia.

How do we shift to MORE local acceptance, higher local quotas, standing up for more local recognition and prosperity, and a culture of confidence and local achievement within

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Australian Music and Arts? We've had it before 2000, we MUST invest in ourselves to have it gain momentum again.

The future of our youth's self-esteem and confidence in the Arts as a bona-fide career pathway depends on a shift away from our own 'determinate absence' (Macheray) to one of sincere Australian self-recognition, critical curiosity, learning, performance, and as a result greater opportunity and prosperity for Music and Arts practitioners in NSW and Australia.

It's well past time for all Australians to wake up to the fact that we silently, and collectively harbour a persistent disdain for our own Artists' outputs, because of the true stories they tell about our experience here. If we don't confront this festering silence, nothing changes for our culture and our artists.

In our ambivalence and indifference towards this crisis, we reveal an ugly and dismissive view towards the talented messengers of our Identity to ourselves, and to the world. We sadly reveal an alarming lack of civic pride and generosity towards our fellow citizen Artists.

We must invest in the real why behind the motivation our own artists, and we'll have a much better chance of solving the how, and what that flows out of this honest discovery. If we want real prosperity in Music and Arts, we only have to be exactly who we are, speak from within our own skins in our own voice, and drop the masquerade of silence that sustains our weakened cultural pulse.

Andrew Barnum