

**Supplementary
Submission
No 269a**

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

Organisation: Oxford Art Factory

Date received: 28 February 2018

To the Chair,

I am writing this submission to you as an integral team member of the Oxford Art Factory and the live music community in Sydney. Since it was conceived in 2006 and opened the subsequent year, the Oxford Art Factory (OAF) has built a reputation as one of the city's premier live music venues. It is a cornerstone of both the international and national touring circuits for live music and electronic dance music.

What you do, and why you do it

I have been the music booking and marketing manager of the OAF since November 2013. In this role I act as the conduit between bands, promoters, touring agents and the general public. Agents, manager and acts approach me when they deem themselves ready to reach the pinnacle of playing at the Oxford Art Factory. This means that I am in a position where I am able to see the impact of any environmental or political changes to both the professional music community and the wider general public firsthand.

Booking a small-medium sized venue is an everyday challenge. Within the Sydney economy the capacity of 500 is too large for emerging and unknown local acts, and then too small for the more established acts. Often we find ourselves as the first stop for international acts entering the Sydney market. As a venue we are consistently taking on risks, often with mitigating factors outside our control. In order to do this successfully you need a great deal of knowledge about the local and international touring markets, what (or who) is coming next and which artists get people through the door.

I am an avid fan of music and I have an appreciation for performance in all of its forms. I feel that I have a responsibility to future generations to maintain culture within the city. From Mona Vale to Marrickville, Cronulla to Cammeray, Petersham to Penrith, there's no city that is more diverse than Sydney, and its live music community reflects that and deserves to be shared with the general public.

What works, what gives you hope about your local music community

Having worked in live music for close to 10 years, it is in my experience that there has never been a tighter knit community feel and approach to the industry than there is at this moment. The success of the likes of Flume, Gang of Youths, DMA'S and The Rubens (four acts that have all graced the OAF stage on numerous occasions) are shared by the entire community. No longer is there a tall poppy mentality when it comes to emerging music in Sydney.

The next wave of acts emerging are achieving greatness at an unprecedented rate. The likes of Winston Surfshirt, Polish Club and Touch Sensitive continue to build on the successes of those before them and establish their own paths forward. These are merely examples of the success stories coming from the wider Sydney and New South Wales music community, but their successes certainly don't mean that it is easy time to be a music venue in the CBD of Sydney.

What's not working right now / what are the challenges

At times the band or artist isn't enough to sell tickets, a venue such as the OAF relies heavily on outside foot traffic and word of mouth to fill our venue on a weekly basis. Since the introduction of the lockout laws in February 2014, we've seen a steady decrease in the amount of foot traffic to the Darlinghurst and Surry Hills entertainment precincts, which has had an unspeakable impact on the way that the OAF is able to operate. No longer can we afford to have unsuccessful or poorly attended nights. We are now less able to take risks on unestablished bands and emerging artists, which therefore minimises the opportunities we can present to the local scene.

Never deemed a high-risk venue, the OAF was included in the lockout by virtue of its capacity and location, not as a result of any wrongdoing on the venue itself nor the punters who grace the dancefloor within our venue for our 230+ events per year.

Given a partial reprieve from the lockouts in March 2017, the OAF's (along with other venues within the Potts Point and Darlinghurst precincts) lockout was repealed from 1:30AM to 2:00AM and the cease of alcohol service (for those still within the venue) was pushed back from 3:00AM to 3:30AM. This half hour extension of trade is a mere token, having no practical impact on the venue itself nor its wider reach within the community.

What issues concern you/ should be addressed

My concern is the impact that the lock outs have had on the music community as a whole. Important music establishments such as Goodgod Small Club, The Standard, Oxford Circus and FBi Social (at the Kings Cross Hotel) (to name a few) have ceased operation or are no longer operating in the same capacity that they once were. Along with the impending closure of the Brighton Up Bar (come March 2018) the Sydney CBD will only have a total of three small live music venues (under 1000 capacity); the OAF, Hudson Ballroom and The Basement. Live music can only exist when there's a place to play it, and three small venues are not enough to maintain a culture and provide a path for the next generation of bands and artists to emerge.

The OAF trucks along, but the rug is slowly being pulled from under us (if it wasn't already entirely pulled when the lock outs were introduced in 2014 without any community consultation), and one must question how long institutions with a live music centric business model can stay afloat. And while the OAF has the ability to draw a captive audience (on any given night of the week) through live music, this alone is not enough to maintain a healthy model of business.

How they can help – what changes can they introduce to make it easier for you to do what you do

My first suggestion here would be to slash the red tape that surrounds venues that have a culturally significant live music program. Venues such as the OAF and Goodgod should not be tarred with the same brush as a by-the-numbers night club as the clientele, the operators and the atmosphere is very different.

Another suggestion would be to repeal the lock out for live music venues, small bars and pubs on Oxford Street and within the CBD to 3:00AM. This further relaxation of the lock out laws cannot exist within a vacuum, we must extend it to all types of venues, we've seen this with the current reduction in hours. It simply isn't enough to affect change for an entire precinct. I believe that by relaxing the lock out laws we will release the potential to see culture, live music and the arts in the Oxford Street, Darlinghurst and Surry Hills precincts begin to flourish once more.

Another suggestion to increase foot traffic, assist established businesses and help to revitalise Sydney's culture would be to use government money to activate spaces on Oxford Street as a whole. Oxford Street should once more be a jewel in Sydney's crown. It is an arterial road stretching from Bondi Junction, through Paddington to Hyde Park and sections of it are vastly underutilised. Allow restaurateurs from Bondi or Newtown to activate a pop-up restaurant during the Mardi Gras festival in a space that may otherwise be empty. Allow indie record labels and local creatives to display their wares prominently during stretches in underutilised storefronts. Potential spaces to be activated currently exist; in Oxford Square, along Oxford Street in Darlinghurst and Paddington, and on surrounding streets such as Crown Street and Foley Lane. They are sitting empty and underutilised for 95% of the year.

What you're willing and able to do to assist them with change

Any change to policy needs to be grounded in hard evidence and the OAF finds itself in a rarefied position to provide information to the local and state governments and other advocacy groups that would benefit, such as MusicNSW, APRA/PPCA, and the Australia Council.

By providing statistical evidence to the above, our hope would be to not allow rash decisions (such as the one to implement the lock out laws in the first place) to impact on policy decisions and the law-making process moving forward.