

**Submission  
No 405**

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

**Name:** Ms Leanne Paris

**Date received:** 20 March 2018

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Attn: Hon Paul Green MLC, Committee Chair. Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Planning and Environment

Dear Mr Green,

My name is Leanne Paris I am a 40 year old Pianist/singer/songwriter/ booking agent.

My music career started after the tragic death of my brother. I found playing the piano helped me get through the grieving process and so I started to teach myself how to play and before I knew it I was the hot shot at my high school and represented my area as the “token musician” - performing at many official engagements for politicians and people of power. This was the mid 90’s and I was extremely passionate about everything music.

When I turned 18 I sprinted out of the racing blocks like pharlap to experience as much live music as possible. There were some great venues around at the time in my chosen genre of jazz/blues/funk. And it was at these venues that I learned the art of performing – primarily understanding your audience, reading the room, working the room and mastering the art of actually engaging the audience. During this time I gained invaluable skills that have shaped me into the performer I am today.

So I put a band together and we started performing. We were fresh and keen as mustard. We accepted the rates of pay that were being offered as we knew there was no alternative. So we all took day jobs to allow us to survive. This was manageable as a young person, as sleep was overrated.

We were fortunate enough to get a few residencies some lasting many years. And it was through these residencies that we as a group of musicians mastered the art of using our ears, playing together being tight as a band by being able to read each other on the fly and entertain and engage the crowd at the same time. Had we not got these residencies we as musicians would never of matured or been able to become as good as the rest of them around the world.

Sadly throughout the late 90’s and early 2000’s it became very apparent that the live scene was struggling. Venues were here today and gone tomorrow which meant they never had a chance to become solid. Consistency is the key for a venues survival.

Then in addition to that every pub/venue seemed to be refurbishing for the benefit of a Pokie room. The next thing you knew you were playing your heart out whilst the TAB horse racing was being displayed in a flat screen above your head. So the inevitable outcome was now because venues were only putting on a music as a token gesture and “half arsed” the quality of the experience for the punters diminished, and hence the start of the demise.

How can a singer be expected to express themselves and engage with an audience if the audience are glaring straight past them to the TAB or footy being displayed on a screen above their heads? Also how can the real music loving punters who are the back bone of the survival of the industry be expected to support a venue when they see performers being treated like 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens and hearing them through a crappy sound system with the added background noise of someone winning on a pokie machine.. The whole thing was plummeting down and down.

Then you hear about the poor pub/music venues who are trying to be sincere and support the music industry properly only to find that the local council is tearing strips on them for “non-Compliance” to the most pathetic compliance laws ever to hit our town “POPE” licences..

It was obvious to many, that venues were being targeted by Licencing police pre 2008. That is a fact and can be proven many times over.

It was at this stage that most musicians resorted to playing in duos with a backing machine in the bistro of a club to make ends meet. So the net outcome is you have potential world class performers unable to “master the craft” as there is no breeding ground for them to do so.. It is the vibrant breeding ground of the 50’s to 80’s that allowed Australia to produce many world class acts. This would never of happened had they experienced the pokies and POPE licenses of later years. Bands like Cold Chisel, ACDC, INXS just to name a few would not exist – period! These great Aussie bands/acts only exist because there was a healthy hub of “PROPER” live music venues for them to master their craft at.

2008 saw the overturning of the POPE licence in NSW and that certainly gave us all a glimmer of hope.. So much so for me, that I walked away from my performing at my peak to focus on helping pubs become dedicated live music venues again. I started Laneway Entertainment. Within 6 months I had created 18 nights a week of entertainment in the city of Sydney council area. With an average of 4-5 musicians per night this created 72-90 performing employment opportunities every week. To ensure that the musicians were paid as much as possible through the initial set up stage I took myself out of employment – went on the dole for 1 week so I was eligible to do the NEIS scheme. This allowed me to be co-funded by the federal government and meant more money in the hands of the musicians. It was a great success immediately and things were looking great. I ensured there was consistency with quality , I used my contacts to ensure the sound systems were as best as possible with a tiny budget and that we reduced the spill of noise to local residents by installing sound reductions products like double thick curtains etc. Sadly my efforts were met with enemies from local council.. I believe they missed the POPE licensing laws and consequently resorted to enforcing the noise pollution.

Ever since the venues have been closing down at rapid rates. It is clear they are not performing well from a business point of view it is a shame because there is a proven formula that we all know works. At the end of the day if you are going to establish a live music venue you have to do it properly or not at all. Unless it is being treated like a proper venue then it just won’t work. Some of the areas that bring a venue unstuck are:

- Lack of consistency for bookings
  - Solution - focusing on a particular genre, booking great quality bands on the same day/time every week (I,e. not cancelling a gig for a footy match). It can’t be confusing. Punters need to know.. “hey it is Friday lets go to Venue A because Venue A always has something great on)
- Lack of consistency for production
  - Solution - Venues to invest in sound/lighting that is suited to their venue to the best of their ability. The quality of the production can be the difference of a great and a crap night from a punters point of view. If you want them to come back. Make it a no brainer.
- Lack of promotion

- Some venues put 100% of the onus for attendance onto the bands. Putting bums on chairs is an equal responsibility of the band and venue. We are in a changing world regarding promotion and advertising and gone are the days of cheap ad in a street rag. Therefore an understanding of digital marketing must be understood.
- Location
  - Public transport is crucial not only for local residents in regards to drink driving but also our overseas travellers.
  - Venue location not surrounded by private residents.

I should also mention the responsibility of the musicians/bands is to promote and ensure the quality of the performances is always to the best it can possibly be.

It is without a doubt that urgent measures are required immediately to save the live arts. Two generations have since passed since the demise of the industry and it will only ever get harder to revive it if it goes any longer.

Clearly there is a conflict of interested regarding potential developers if the Sydenham hub was to go ahead. However the developers are doing quite well already in this town.. I think it is now time for Sydney to redeem itself form the embarrassment it now faces as a city severely lacking in the area of live performing.

I believe that if there was a "HUB" it would flourish in a natural healthy way and be a win for all. Government would also be able to promote the area to the tourism market which would no doubt have a positive flow on effect.

And finally I conclude on two points..

1. Musicians need a breeding ground to master the craft. For us to have export quality bands again we need a "Hub" to generate the quality in the first place (let's face it, another 10 years and the legends bands of yesteryear will be gone – we need to start working on new ones now..)
2. Music is noise. You can't have silent gigs. It is clear with the overdevelopment of Sydney that being considerate for noise spill and what is acceptable is a key factor to the success. That is why an entertainment hub in the middle of an industrial zone under the flight path is the most logical solution.

Please support the entertainment hub, without it we will be having the same argumentative debates in 20 years.

Thank you

Regards,

Leanne Paris,