

**Submission  
No 280**

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

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## **Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Enquiry into the NSW Music & Arts Economy**

Hello

Thank you for your interest in this enquiry. As a professional musician / music educator for almost 60 years in NSW, I am submitting some random thoughts from my many years of experience. I hope that they will be helpful in your task of understanding the larger picture of the music industry.

### **My Music Education**

I grew up in a household that enjoyed music and was involved in a church fellowship situation as a teenager. So early listening was with traditional song, hymns and then organ and classical music.

I took piano lessons as a kid and eventually developed a passion in my teenage years. It took some time for the passion to grip me and I think that it was partly fed by gradually getting more competent. I had a typical suburban piano teacher who herself had played for the silent movies at the Roxy Theatre in Parramatta. So as well being led through the typical AMEB structure I had an insight into the emerging role of music in cinema. To this day I remember her saying that when playing for a new release the film was new to her to start with and her piano playing was reactive to the story line. But after a few days, when she knew the story her performance would start to 'anticipate' the action and thus begin to increase the audience sense of anticipation. This is the fundamental role of film music to the present day.

I mention this to note that traditionally it has been the suburban teacher that has played such an important role in inspiring young students. In the digital age short, interesting information / workshops could be delivered to help inspire these teachers and keep them abreast of the ever changing fashion of music making.

I studied music at the Sydney Con in the days when you sort of sat at the feet of the masters. These were often older musicians who had world relevant professional experience. Probably many had no qualifications as such. But you weren't there for their qualifications but for their knowledge and experience.

Eventually as education became a bigger industry the nature of the teacher changed to someone who had studied a formal music course and had paper qualifications but less and less personal experience of the industry. And students were being channelled into formal, recognised and financially structured courses.

Yet if you go into a pub and say you've got a degree the publican will say "yeah but can you pull a crowd?" Finding and supporting the balance is what I believe the music industry needs from the perspective of helping individual workers in the music industry. There are plenty of formal courses in music ed, but quality up to date information and free tutorials are rather ad hoc. And as most musicians are pushed for cash formal studies are out of reach. I also decry the destruction of the community teacher, who, as education has become institutionalised became excluded from teaching opportunities through lack of formal certification. Yet if you want to survive in music in Australia you need street savvy skills that you would learn in an apprenticeship style of mentoring.

Formal studies tend to be prescriptive and linear. In my own case after many years of piano studies I found I had trained myself to play in an 18<sup>th</sup> century church gig. It had little relevance to any potential income earning activity I might have stumbled across.

Little had changed decades later when my son studied for a music degree. What he was passionate about and therefore needed to know was almost impossible to access due to the prescriptive order of studies laid out by the institution.

### **Working in the industry.**

After the shock of realising I was not well equipped to survive in the industry I gave up studies and started to seek out paying jobs. My piano skills got me work in the advertising industry and creating soundtracks in small studios. But most valuable was a kind of mentoring situation where information and knowledge was shared and friends and co-workers watched over your progress

These days access to youtube and the like serves a similar function. However well made and researched videos are hard to find. Again this is an area that could be efficiently and inexpensively funded. For example the local TAFE has very sophisticated digital classrooms, & massive screens where quality production could easily happen. But not, unfortunately, from a common garden variety of backyard musician.

Meanwhile I would drift in and out of high school music teaching when performance work dried up. I was eventually head hunted for a number of experimental Community Arts programs particularly the flexible delivery of community music education in isolated country areas of Victoria and NSW. Here I quickly learnt of the hunger for music that existed in places where there was no access to music teaching.

### **Teaching.**

My first job was at the age of 14 when I took on the neighbour's children for piano lessons and this work has been a major contribution to my income. Philosophically I started to move from a strict step by step program which was more about "you will be grateful for this one day" to a more flexible approach where I tried to find what would inspire the student week by week and work from that premise.

I mention this because these days the mobile phone or tablet has incredible music making and music education potential. At the local school I have been active in helping students discover musical joy & knowledge through screen touch and gesture using non traditional playing techniques. Technically I also have primary aged students exploring music production and film and have held Big Screen festivals at the local cinema featuring the students' music and film making.

I would encourage creative education making more use of such contemporary devices for exploring, performing, composing, film scoring and encourage technically minded music educators. Just as an aside, the devaluing of music as an educational subject in my opinion is a tragic error. I am retired and 73 and as a community member make myself available to assist in music in the local schools. Yet in the local primary schools there is almost no music education happening apart from my infrequent visits, despite many studies which demonstrate the vital contribution to emotional and cognitive growth that a music education can provide.

### **In the local community.**

Music is regarded highly in my small community. Currently I am curating a music festival encouraging local musicians in local venues. There has been very positive feedback from community members, venues and musicians alike as to the desirability of finding ways to rebuild community music making. I recently attended a meeting with reps from the

surrounding region keen to find ways of self funding regular music making. Plans ranged from improved database of musicians for venues to funding options for restaurants and joint venturing between venues and musicians. To me this once again demonstrated the high value placed on music in the community, and the potential to grow the local music industry.

Studies I have read over the years demonstrate the economic importance of the music industry in Australia and the contribution music makes to individual and community wellbeing. It's not an easy task to find ways to help grow and maintain the industry but in my experience more flexibility in the delivery of skills particularly via mobile technology is an effective answer for both teachers and students. It is also a very cost effective way to help stimulate this valuable economy.

Peter Harris