

INQUIRY INTO THE MUSIC AND ARTS ECONOMY IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: The Red Rattler Theatre

Date received: 28 February 2018

28th February 2018

Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Planning and Environment
Legislative Council
Via online submission at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au

The Music and Arts Economy in New South Wales

This letter forms the submission of The Red Rattler Theatre to the NSW Parliament's inquiry into the music and arts economy in New South Wales.

'The Rat' is a queer-run creative playground that is ethical, sustainable and community owned. We are not-for-profit and volunteer-driven, ensuring continued inclusive and affordable access for a diverse range of communities and creators including our focus on LGBTIQ and QPOC events. We welcome activist, emerging and experimental arts events and activities. We have over 15,000 attendances at our venue annually and have held over 1,500 community events since opening in 2008.

It is our vision that communities have space to build solidarity, flourish and create arts, activism and queer culture that is inspiring and influential.

Through operating over the past decade, the Red Rattler Theatre board has considerable experience in:

- Building a sustainable, independent, not-for-profit community arts space.
- Creating an artist run space for events that would otherwise take place in underground venues.
- Providing a platform and space for queer, QPOC and other music and arts communities to meet, create and share their work and experiences.

Key facts

- The Red Rattler has run successfully for nine years.
- It is a key goal of the organisation to own its premises by 2019 (a unique one of kind community owned – volunteer run artist run initiative). Ownership by the association is currently 60% and will be 80% in March 2018.
- 'The Rat' hosts 180 events a year on average. Of these:
 - 40% are queer-hosted.
 - Over half are subsidised by The Rat to ensure accessibility.
 - About 50% are music events.

- About 50% are non-music events including film, community fundraisers, special programming events, workshops, photoshoots, and so on.
- In 2017, The Rat received \$60,000 in funding from CreateNSW to support emerging and established QPOC visual artists at The Rat through a program of 25 events.
- In 2017, the Red Rattler won the Arts & Entertainment category in the ACON Honour LGBTI Community Awards for providing an inclusive and affordable performance and events space for a range of communities, and for supporting established and emerging queer talent through diverse, creative and inspiring programming.
- The Rat has a sustainability focus. In the last financial year, The Rat won the Water Wise Saver at the Inner West Sustainability Awards.
- The venue is primarily volunteer-run – all bar staff and board of directors are volunteers (our first paid Bar & Venue Manager role was created in 2017).

Current key challenges

Key challenges for The Rat are primarily centred on ongoing security of its space. This was a motivator in purchasing the Rat building initially (and setting up a fully compliant premises and venue in accordance to the local town planning stipulations) and continues to be of concern.

This includes ongoing threat of gentrification and erasure of ours and other key creative spaces in the inner west and beyond, development of our local precinct into residential, as well as barriers created by town planning and Local Environmental Plans (LEPs). These LEPs are instrumental in shaping the future of communities and so must be carefully considered in the context of supporting music and the arts.

Another key challenge is the limited amount of funding provided to the arts sector. The Rat received CreateNSW funding for the first time last year, but has otherwise existed as an NFP volunteer-run space without support through that time other than smaller grants from Inner West council for which we have been grateful and have helped us support local artists in the space.

These challenges are not isolated to the Red Rattler and impact on existing and future arts and music initiatives. In terms of planning support a vibrant music and arts community in an ongoing way, the government must look at ways to reduce barriers present in current planning and approval processes and consider allowing for non-residential creative hubs in town planning.

‘The Rat’ board would welcome the opportunity to contribute further to this process to inform supportive policy decisions for venues, collectives and artists across NSW.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Henry
On behalf of The Red Rattler Theatre Board of Directors