

# **SUBMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF THE FITTERS' WORKSHOP**

*From: Cicilia Kemezys, Musician*

## **WHO AM I?**

I'm a jazz-trained flautist, Canberra School of Music Jazz faculty graduate who has forged a career based in Canberra. I've performed at many folk, jazz and world music festivals around the world. Currently I perform mostly jazz/Latin American music, Brazilian Bossa Nova and Cuban Son. Occasionally I like to go busking at the Bus Depot markets. The managers there know me well and love me performing there on a Sunday. Last year in 2011, I organised and performed with visiting Brazilian guitarist Guilherme Vincens in a sell-out concert in the Belconnen Arts Centre Foyer. I also work part-time teaching at home and casually at the CIT contemporary music program at Woden. I've released several CDs. I've composed work for films. I do all my own marketing and promotion.

## **HOW DID I GET INVOLVED IN THE FITTERS' WORKSHOP DEBATE?**

I was hunting for a venue for the concert just mentioned, with some possible guest appearances by a percussionist and another local classical guitarist. I wanted a venue with interesting natural acoustics and a reverberation that wouldn't be swallowed up by a large audience. I also wanted something located in the Inner South where I live and hang out, and that would be easy to get to for all the South American ambassadors I was intending to invite. I also wanted something with atmosphere that could cater for a concert that would cross both classical and jazz styles of music. A venue that could be both classy, formal to reflect the classical elements of the program and yet casual and relaxed enough to reflect the jazz elements. Also, a venue imbued with a kind of contemporary romantic quality. The Fitters' Workshop was pointed out to me by a photographic artist. I knew that it would be perfect and started to investigate it. My friend who had wanted to put on a photographic exhibition in the space had been frustrated by the difficulty in accessing and hiring the Fitters'. More research led me to Pro Musica and the Canberra International Music Festival.

Because it was impossible to hire the Fitters' Workshop, I ended up at the Belconnen Arts Centre and had a successful concert. However, attending the 2011 concerts in the Fitters' Workshop really sparked my muse. I was inspired by the potential of such a great venue in the Inner South. That's how I met up with the other people who want to keep it as a performance space. I performed with a Latin American group in the two 'protest sings' outside the Fitters, helped make signs, collected signatures and talked to passers-by. Several people told me they'd tried to book the space but had been refused. Not everyone wanted it for music. Some talked about using the Fitters' for performance art, a dance performance or a wedding.

## **WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE FITTERS' WORKSHOP?**

Some spaces make you want to play music in them. They are magical. The Fitters Workshop has just that magic. It has made many composers, singers and musicians like myself feel inspired. This city now has at its fingertips a venue that could show off all kinds of music-making at any level or ability without amplification or sound engineering, which aside from anything else is really expensive. Children's choirs, all kinds of other choirs, soloists, small groups, orchestras, and chamber groups could be shown off and enhanced. The Fitters' would be great for the music of John Cage as well as JS Bach. Peter Sculthorpe knows only too well how effectively his music comes alive in this space.

Visually, it's a pleasure to attend a concert in this industrial cathedral-like space with its huge windows and unpretentious charm. The venue is very photogenic and marketable in pictures and photographs. Look at the beautiful *Canberra Times* photograph of cellist David Pereira performing there. Imagine the kinds of images that could be taken of dancers in this venue, or actors, poets and artists. Pity to limit the potential for such a marketable venue for all the arts.

## **MY PERSONAL DREAM ABOUT THE FITTERS' WORKSHOP**

It would make me proud to perform in Canberra at the Fitters' Workshop. I'd like one day record a live CD (a la jazz flautist Paul Horn's recorded improvisations inside the Taj Mahal). Solo flute improvisations inside the Fitters' Workshop – wow!

## ***IT'S GOT SOUL!***

Outsiders despise Canberra for its lack of soul, its soulless architecture. Quite by accident, the Fitters has innate soul. It can compete with Brisbane's Powerhouse. It's different from many contrived, contemporary performance spaces and their nice, colour-co-ordinated, soft sofas and carpet. The Fitters offers something edgy, industrial and rough, and yet at the same time it seems angelic, bright and mystical with all its light, the windows and its awe inspiring reverberation. It's not trying to be a venue. *It is one by accident.* The artist feels freed up in this space. Instead of confined by a certain taste in carpeting, window shades, furniture and foyer décor. it liberates the artist because it's not trying to be nice, or arty, or anything in particular. It has an aesthetic that can take on the classical, high-brow and refined, or it can be something completely casual, unpretentious and community-based. Buskers, children's choirs, and world class musicians can mingle and alternate easily in this one venue. No sets or costuming are required to transform it one way or the other. A tangle of black cables, industrial lights shining in reflected windows, shadows dancing along old rustic walls – at night these are the only props needed.

## ***IT'S AN EVEN BIGGER GALLERY SPACE***

The Fitters' Workshop should be used for all sorts of exhibitions. The Glass Museum lacks gallery space, is claustrophobic and limiting. Imagine an exhibition of glass works in the Fitters' and how that light and space would enhance the glass – glass sculptures awash with light and set off in space beneath soaring ceilings. The Fitters would do justice to the work of Chihuly, the sculptures of Rodin.

Megalo's workshop should be built next to the Fitters. Imagine gigantic prints gracing the walls at a Megalo Print exhibition there. Imagine participating in a life drawing class and the photographs one could take of a life drawing class.

If you fill the Fitters' with all sorts of print-making paraphernalia, a mezzanine and offices, all that vast empty-spaced beauty will be lost. It will become like so many other public service-designer 'creative' spaces. Functional and aesthetically non-threatening. Pleasant but limiting. The creative spirit would be not be liberated to the extent that it is now in the Fitters' present unadorned 'natural' state.

As artists we struggle to show off our work and compete in a world saturated with competing entertainment and events. In Canberra we desperately need a well located mid-size venue with the charm and charisma to make the artist's work and the audiences' experience more extraordinary. It would attract worldwide touristic attention.

## ***REVERBS AIN'T REVERBS!***

Is there something wrong with singing in the bathroom and sounding better because of the reverb? Would it be a crime to enjoying hearing the sound of your instrument playing in the extraordinary reverberation in the Fitters?

In fact, my bathroom doesn't measure up to the crystal reverb of the Fitters'. It is like performing on a badly made instrument.

Of course it doesn't suit every musical combination, but what venue does? There's no such thing as the perfect music venue for every kind of music. Venues are like picture frames and are as varied as there are pictures to place into them.

## ***LIGHT, SOUND AND SPACE***

The fitters' is a space full of light and reverb. By day it connects us with the sky and the sun, by night stars, the moon, shadows, and the reflections of our faces and the inside lights. It's completely different from tasteful designer foyers and the world of fixed and conveniently placed sofas.

## ***PRACTICALITIES***

This magic space should be for the whole community, including Megalo. There will be plenty of volunteers wanting to create an arts hub at the Fitters Workshop, willing to spend their days inside the beautiful venue organising events. Where and when can I sign up?

Could we have a trial 1-2 year period where the Fitters' could be used as a multipurpose building for public hire and see where that leads us?

## ***PLEASE DON'T PASS UP THIS OPPORTUNITY!!!!***

I'm grieving for the loss of this performance space already. Unlike the lucky cellist, many of us have not had the opportunity to play our instruments, sing, recite poetry, or dance in this light-flooded glorious "industrial cathedral".

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