

Ms Mary Porter AM MLA  
Chair, Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works,  
And Territory and Municipal Services  
Civic Square  
London Circuit  
Canberra ACT 2600

## **Inquiry into Live Community Events**

Dear Ms Porter,

As a founding member of the Canberra Musicians Club I would like to make the following submission to the inquiry:

The Canberra Musicians Club was formed on the basis that there are many excellent original contemporary musicians in Canberra that struggle to reach an audience and frequently are forced to leave to pursue a career. Canberra is of a size and has the demographics to support a vibrant and viable contemporary music scene, and yet it demonstrably does not. There are many factors involved. Artists need to be fostered and retained within a structure that provides:

- good training in music, business and audio/technical
- a range of quality performance spaces
- decently paid performance opportunities
- good recording facilities
- effective communication networks
- affordable rehearsal spaces
- government support of artists/venues/festivals

I acknowledge the government's input in training (CIT's Music Industry Centre) and ArtsACT funding support, both of which are valuable additions. But there are numerous missing links in the local music industry and the Club has been actively pursuing solutions to some of them. Some problems, however, are insurmountable for an organisation like ours, and require government support or legislative intervention. The issues so identified come under the following headings:

- Noise issues
- Public Liability Insurance
- Lack of Venues/Low Quality Presentation

### **Noise Issues**

The noise pollution laws as they stand are a major impediment to the presentation of live music in Canberra. The Canberra Musicians Club has been active in seeking alternative venues for music that reduce opportunities for complaint and has been an advocate of no p.a. and low p.a. events, also to limit complaints. Yet our activities have been curtailed. In one case, regarding Corroboree Park Hall, complaints against another hirer resulted in us facing the threat of a large fine if there was a single complaint against us.

The current noise limits, particularly after 10 or 11 pm, are set so low that they are transgressed by cars driving past on the street or an animated conversation. It is time

to review these limits and to whom they apply. The ACT Government frequently exempts itself from the application of noise limits. We think community organisations putting on live musical events should be able to apply for exemption.

We also support the introduction of order of occupancy legislation, as well as a planning code that identifies 'entertainment zones' in city centres.

### **Public Liability Insurance**

The requirement to hold public liability insurance is frequently a deal breaker for grassroots organisations attempting to put on their own shows. Many venues for hire, including those owned by the government (Albert Hall, Gorman House etc.), require hirers to have their own insurance, a crippling cost for a single event. The Canberra Musicians Club has acquired annual p/l insurance for the last two years which insures all our own events and can be extended to other parties at vastly reduced rates. We have thus been instrumental in the production of many performances that otherwise wouldn't have gone ahead. If a grass roots organisation with no government funding can achieve this, perhaps the government could do something similar?

The ACT should extend its p/l insurance to live community event hirers of its facilities.

### **Lack of Quality Venues/Low Quality Presentation**

A vibrant contemporary music scene in Canberra requires a wide variety of venues, including private bars, cafes, outdoor venues, halls for hire, festivals and government financed public venues.

To an extent the contemporary music sector is a victim of its own success. Because it is popularly received and has formed a symbiotic relationship with purveyors of alcohol, it has often been overlooked as a repository of government funding. The government funds art galleries, theatres, symphony orchestras, dance companies, most of which fail to fire the public's imagination, but has no public venue for the presentation of contemporary music.

While it has created the impression of self-sustainability, the presentation of music in pubs and clubs is frequently far from ideal. Publicans are rarely culturally motivated. Payment of artists is frequently negligible. Venues are frequently poorly designed for concert acoustics. P.A. systems are frequently inadequate and/or poorly operated. Good quality sound reinforcement is integral to good contemporary music presentation as white walls and lighting are essential for an art gallery.

Nevertheless, pubs and clubs should remain an important part of the sector, but Canberra needs venues of higher quality for the presentation of the best of the great talent that is here. We also need a number of major festivals as showcases.

The ACT should immediately begin planning for purpose built, community run, contemporary music venues in all town centres. Alternatively existing facilities could be identified for retrofit/sound proofing. Such facilities could include provision for rehearsal space and other activities (recording, classes, training, meetings).

It should be noted that an excellent facility, McGregor Hall in Acton, which has been identified and greatly utilised by the Canberra Musicians Club in the last year, is to be demolished within months.

The ACT should continue to fund current festivals (Corinbank) and initiate another major festival of contemporary music/arts.

Thank you for this opportunity to have input into an area about which we are very passionate.

Nigel McRae  
Entertainment Coordinator  
Canberra Musicians Club