

Dear Nicola Derigo,

Like very many Canberra residents I moved to the ACT not by choice but by necessity. Like very many of those same residents I resented Canberra for a long time. I resented many things. I resented that my friends and family weren't here. I resented that every local Canberran seemed to know every other local Canberran. I resented that this wasn't Sydney. But most of all I resented that Canberra seemed to have no genuine cultural life.

And then something happened.

Entirely by accident I was invited to a gig put on by the Canberra Musicians Club and there, for the first time, I saw that Canberra's local music scene was filled with people who were not just talented but who were also deeply original and creating music and performing art that was genuinely ground breaking. Nowhere else had I seen an act that so utterly defied classification as local band (for lack of a better word) *Mr Fibby*. Nowhere else had I come across a band who described themselves as playing 'bloke folk' (*The ellis collective*). Nowhere else had I found that the impenetrable walls that usually separate bands of differing genre were so entirely absent. Nowhere else but Canberra.

And so I fell in love with this town.

In love with her people.

And in love with her sound.

Despite this abundance of talent there is a serious lack of suitable venues for local acts to perform in. Large venues such as the *Convention Centre* or *AIS Arena* may be fine for international and large national acts, but they are useless for the local scene. Smaller venues like *The Phoenix* or *The Front* provide a wonderful and very necessary space for incubation but are not large enough to hold performances of any real size. As several other submissions have pointed out, it is the lack of mid-sized venues that is holding back the development of local bands into important national acts.

And it's certainly not for a lack of demand. For some time *Transit Bar* has not been permitted to hold live gigs because of unreasonable noise complaints from *The Waldorf*. I was at the first live gig they had been permitted to host for a long time on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April. Despite freezing temperatures and heavy rain, the place was packed with people desperate to see two fantastic local bands - *Dub Dub Goose* and *Los Chavos*. Similarly, I have attended many gigs in *MacGregor Hall* a medium sized multi-purpose hall situated on the edge of the ANU where, despite its awkward position and the building's uninviting façade, people have flocked to see amazing local bands play. Unfortunately, *MacGregor Hall* is slated for demolition in the final quarter of this year and *Transit Bar* suffers from the constant threat of noise complaints, a poison that killed both *Toast* and the *Gypsy Bar*.

The importance of venues of this size cannot be overstated. They allow bands to actually earn money from what they are doing. They allow audiences to become familiar with local acts. And they allow local acts to make priceless connections with touring interstate bands. Melbourne is not known as the musical centre of Australia

because of the *Rod Laver Arena* but because it has bars like the *Night Cat* that are able to foster local talent like *The Cat Empire* into nationally and then internationally significant bands.

What is needed in Canberra is not funding for yet another mega-events. What is needed is not another sanitised space like the *Belconnen Arts Centre*. What is needed is not even an increase in bill-postering facilities (as suggested in the interim report - though, of course, some more spaces wouldn't hurt). What is needed is the creation of an environment that is conducive to medium sized venues. Order of occupancy must be taken into consideration in regards to noise complaints. Late night transport from Civic to the other town centres must be provided. And a space to replace the terrible loss of *MacGregor Hall* must be found.

Canberra's national reputation as a city without a soul is undeserved. Fostering the local music scene so that local bands have a real chance of performing on the national stage would go no small way in ameliorating this negative image in the minds of those from interstate. The transformation of Brisbane's reputation from Joe Bjerke backwater to thriving cultural centre was not caused by the *World Expo* or any other mega-events. It was because influential musicians and artists and ideas born in Brisbane forced the rest of Australia to sit up and take notice. If the ACT can provide a platform from which Canberra musicians can take on the nation, we too will reap all the rewards that Brisbane has.

Yours sincerely,  
Robin Shannon.