

Public Submission: Future Use of the Fitters' Workshop, Kingston Arts Precinct from:

Richard Murray and Janet Elisabeth Aitken
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IN SUPPORT OF THE ACT GOVERNMENT'S ORIGINAL DECISION TO REHOUSE A REINVIGORATED MEGALO PRINT STUDIO AND GALLERY AT THE FITTERS' WORKSHOP IN THE KINGSTON ARTS PRECINCT, ACT.

In addition to the many reasons for supporting the ACT Government's previous and undoubtedly correct decision to relocate Megalo to a refurbished Fitters' Workshop in the Kingston Arts Precinct, we would like to bring to your attention two significant points that appear to have been little canvassed in the many letters to the editor of the Canberra Times published earlier this year on this topic. Furthermore, until recently, these points had been largely omitted from the news/comment articles on the same subject, also published in the Canberra Times.

1. The Fitters' Workshop would be used as Megalo's home by its staff and visiting artists from 7.30am to 10.30pm every day of every week of every year, while Canberra residents and tourists would be welcome to visit Megalo and participate in appropriate activities for 5 days a week throughout the year.

By comparison the Fitters' Workshop, if dedicated to music and the performing arts, would most likely only be used spasmodically, while at other times it would no doubt remain closed to the general public and thus under utilised.

2. While Canberra offers many other venues, large and small, for music performances we have not seen mentioned the Llewellyn Hall at the centrally situated Canberra School of Music. This is a fine, comfortable concert hall purpose-built for many different types of musical performance. It has excellent acoustics, a large seating capacity and a generous stage. In addition, Llewellyn Hall offers smaller spaces for solo and chamber recitals. Its foyers at two levels are spacious and welcoming, there are adequate dedicated rehearsal rooms, a green room, conveniently located rest rooms and a booking office. An added bonus is the fact that the Music School's library, open to the public as well as for use by music scholars, staff and students, is easily accessed via the lower level foyer. The Llewellyn Hall is directly served by public transport and there is ample free car parking space adjacent to the venue,

Additional reasons supporting Megalo's relocation to the Fitters' Workshop include:

- Megalo's present premises, apart from a very small gallery area, are dingy and cramped, largely inaccessible to the public and in a remote, out of the way, location. A new home is imperative and the Kingston Foreshore has been designated as a visual arts precinct since 2003. With adequate funds allocated for the refurbishment of the Fitters' Workshop for Megalo's tenancy the project was assumed to be under way with

architects' concept designs and working drawings completed, a scale model prepared and costings obtained and approved – all sanctioned by the ACT Government.

- Megalo's respect for the heritage status of the Fitters' Workshop building has been in the forefront of the design team's thinking from day one. - as evidenced by the aforementioned architects' plans and their model. Sensitive building execution is assured. Moreover, substantial money has already been spent on these essential preliminaries which also indicate how the building's beauty, volume and light will be enhanced, without compromise.
- Megalo's purpose- built studio and gallery space at the Fitters' Workshop would not only attract many more Canberra-based artists and visitors than can be accommodated at Megalo's present premises but also larger numbers of artists from across Australia and overseas. An enhanced public program, especially one enabling a greater number of young people to train as artists, would also be possible and the new gallery would enable artwork to be exhibited to its best advantage.
- Should Megalo be denied its previously agreed new home and the Fitters' Workshop be redesignated as a concert hall, the costs of providing Megalo with a completely new building and refurbishing the Fitters Workshop as a fully equipped and functioning music/performing arts venue (as mooted by many proponents of such a scheme) would be astronomical and no doubt further delay, by some years even, the provision of new homes for both. This would be a wasteful outcome as an additional music/performing arts venue in Canberra is totally unnecessary given the city's present population and its generous supply of such facilities.
- At present Megalo is housed at considerable distance from its natural partners: the National Gallery of Australia, the National Portrait Gallery and the Canberra Glassworks, with whom it regularly and closely collaborates at many levels. By bringing Megalo into the Kingston Arts Precinct, already occupied by these institutions and the Fitters' Workshop, a natural synergy would be achieved and easy public access to all venues in the precinct is considerably enhanced. For example, Megalo's weekend 'Print Big' exhibition and public hands-on workshop, held at the Fitters' Workshop in October 2010, attracted over 1500 visitors.

It is as keen music, theatre and visual arts enthusiasts, who have lived in Canberra since the 1970s, that we are writing in support of the ACT Government's earlier decision to relocate Megalo to the Fitters' Workshop. Notwithstanding the question of the fine acoustics of the Fitters' Workshop, which we have learned is only suited to a limited range of musical types and styles, Canberra is already well endowed with music venues, mostly with similarly splendid sound quality. Among them are the aforementioned Llewellyn Hall, the Albert Hall, the Wesley Music Centre and numerous other venues often used for concerts. These include the National Museum of Australia, the National Gallery of Australia's newly built Gandel Hall and the National Portrait Gallery.

It should be noted that a recent survey revealed that, including those music venues mentioned above, Canberra has a total of 10 dedicated performance venues, 4 frequently used acoustic music performance venues and 12 occasionally used music performance venues. Surely, this reinforces the argument that Canberra is admirably supplied with venues for a wide range of musical types and styles. Another such venue seems to us an unnecessary extravagance.

Finally, Megalo Print Studio and Gallery's need for a new home at the Fitters' Workshop in the Kingston Arts Precinct is beyond doubt and should be allowed to proceed forthwith. This is especially so considering the ACT Government had already taken the decision for the move to proceed prior to the present enquiry, and had committed funds for the project in its 2011/2012 budget.