

To Ms. Amanda Bresnan
Chair, Standing Committee on Education , Training and Youth Affairs
Legislative Assembly of the ACT

Dear Ms. Bresnan,

Please accept the following as a response to the call for submissions into the use of the Fitters Workshop.

I apologise for the e-mail format but we are in the busiest weeks of the Academic Year and this is my only method of getting my views to the committee on time.

I will also try to keep my comments brief as I am aware of the mass of material that the committee will have to address.

The Terms of reference are sectioned and I will use the ABCD headings to make this as succinct as possible.

A) Best use.....taking into account the acoustic qualities ...etc.

It seems to me that the crux of this matter revolves around the notion of the building's acoustic properties.

First of all it seems very strange to me that a suggestion has been made to "test " the acoustic properties of the building as it stands.

Any renovation of the building will completely change these findings.

Acoustics is very subjective area and what may be considered good by some is described as atrocious by others.

The nonsense surrounding the media on this matter has been palpably offensive to say the least.

My first knowledge of the furore was on ABC Radio/ TV when it was claimed that my fellow composer Peter Sculthorpe had been quoted as describing the acoustic as the finest in the Southern Hemisphere, it was not long however (a matter of hours in fact) before the ABC was retracting this and quoting Peter as having said that it was nice but nowhere near the extravagant claims that had been made in his name. Sadly his misquotation has become entrenched as "fact " in the debate and his real opinion has been sidelined.

I have discussed the acoustics with many of my colleagues at the School of Music and there are as many ratings as there are respondents. While it may be seen as a fine acoustic by choral groups the weight of opinion expressed to me by instrumentalists who had performed there was that it was an extremely difficult acoustic space in which to work. My Emeritus Professor, Larry Sitsky, when asked the question began his response with the words "it's a barn!"

I have experienced the difficulties of working with Acoustic Consultants in an architectural context as I was appointed staff representative on the construction of the Karmel building. Despite employing the "finest" firm in the country, the University is still bring in workers to address OHS issues in the teaching studios and there is still as much discussion around the quality of the performance spaces as there is in this matter.

The acoustic space that is required by choral groups was dealt with in the Middle Ages, the spaces are called Cathedrals or Churches and it is these spaces that Canberra's community of singers performed in my student days to great effect.

I will leave it to other more enlighten folk to offer advice on heritage value.

I would caution, however, that cost will invariably be far more and without sure results if refurbishment is entered into with acoustic concerns being at the top of the list. I would also suggest that the community demand for such a space would not be as large as is being suggested in some quarters.

B) Options for use by a range of community music groups.

I suggest that the diversity of acoustic requirements by community music groups is already catered for in the number of venues already available. Wesley, The Larry Sitsky Room to name only two. Perhaps the inquiry could investigate and list all spaces available.

It seems to me that the older and more politically savvy constituency has quite enough, the real need in this city is a purpose built space for young people and their musical requirements which are completely different and somehow never seem to generate the interest that we see in this matter.

C) Alternatives for Megalo.

Again I leave this to more informed comment than mine.

D) Any other matter.

First and foremost I would urge you to allow the original decision to stand and to allow Megalo to continue the consistently high standard of work for which it has become so well known both here and internationally.

Secondly I am appalled by the way that some of the players in this matter have sought to create a schism in the Arts community by portraying this as a fight between visual and musical artists. As someone who has a lifetime history as a working composer (prior to my comparatively late arrival into academia) I can attest to the difficulty of surviving. We do not need these childish divisions to fragment the artistic community.

I also have some distaste for some of the political shenanigans that have gone on throughout this debate but I shall pursue these issues in another forum .

Thank you for your time in reading this.

Regards, Jim Cotter. Composer.