

From: Oliver Raymond

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To: Committees

Subject: Submission to Inquiry into the future use of the Fitters' Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct

Submission to Inquiry into the future use of the Fitters' Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct

I have been deeply involved both musically and administratively in the musical scene, in particular in choral and vocal music, in Canberra for over forty years.

The extent and quality of musical activity in Canberra are extraordinarily great, involving a substantial proportion of Canberra's population. The many people involved include both professional musicians and amateurs. Standards of performance are high. Music, including in particular choral music, constitutes a large and important segment of the cultural life of the national capital and richly deserves the Government's continual support.

During the Canberra International Music Festivals 2009, 2010 and 2011 the discovery became widely known that the Fitters' Workshop has an acoustic especially well suited to choral and chamber music performance. A great many musicians participating in the 2011 Festival including the noted composer Peter Sculthorpe expressed judgments such that it is without peer in Canberra and probably in Australia. They were supported by enthusiastic comments made by a very large number of Festival audience members. All were dismayed at the prospect, announced to audience members at the 2011 Festival, of the future unavailability of this very special musical space after its extensive modification for the use of the Megalo Print Studio. Earlier this year a petition to the Legislative Assembly supporting these views was signed by well over 1,000 people.

The Government now has a unique opportunity, unexpected at the time of its original decision regarding Megalo and the Fitters' Workshop, to create in Canberra a venue for musical performance with an acoustic unsurpassed in Australia. This would entail the development of the Fitters' Workshop as a usable, accessible venue while preserving its unique acoustic. The use of such a venue need not be confined to musical organisations; a performance, recording and exhibition facility created in the Fitters' Workshop could be used for music and other art forms. There are, of course, other venues in Canberra which can be and are used for musical performances but this observation misses the crucial point that the Fitters' Workshop has the potential to be a uniquely high-quality one.

More widely, the Government has a golden opportunity for Canberra and the nation to create in the national capital a multi-arts activity in a Kingston Cultural Precinct (not just visual arts precinct, too narrow a concept). The activities in such a Precinct of a wide range of cultural organisations would encourage and support collaboration between them in multi-arts endeavours. Such a development would significantly enhance Canberra's standing as an arts capital.

I have no doubt that Megalo should be accommodated. That can be in the Kingston precinct but it would not make sense to attempt to accommodate it in the Fitters' Workshop. I understand that Megalo's needs could not be met by the Fitters' Workshop alone but would require an additional building or extension. Megalo could not be accommodated in this way without risk to heritage values and without loss of the availability of the unique acoustic. Trying to "fit" Megalo into the Fitters' Workshop would be an inefficient, uneconomic approach. Megalo should be accommodated in purpose-built premises, not in the Fitters' Workshop.

In summary:

- The Government now has a unique opportunity for the ACT and perhaps Australia to create an outstanding venue with a rare and fine acoustic for musical performance and recording - in short, to put a jewel in Canberra's musical crown. The Government should now seize this opportunity, revising its early decision on Megalo in the light of new considerations.

- The Government should also seize the opportunity to create a multi-arts Kingston Cultural Precinct, surrounding the Fitters' Workshop, in which a wide variety of cultural organisations could collaborate creatively as never before.

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