

Ms Holly Pither
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Submission to the Inquiry into Live Music Events

8 March 2010

To the Committee,

I would like to offer my submission to the Inquiry, as a third-year resident of Canberra and a regular patron of the live music and arts venues, events and festivals the region has to offer.

Over the past two years I have been continually (and I confess, unexpectedly) delighted by the range and diversity of music and culture staged across Canberra throughout the week and year. The Old Canberra Inn in Lyneham oozes foot-stomping heritage atmosphere that perfectly complements the heartfelt blues, rock and acoustic music it is famous, and loved, for nurturing. Transit Bar in the CBD not only supports an amazingly diverse range of local, national and international artists and events on their way through town, it provides a wonderfully accessible environment for their enjoyment by Canberrans. These, with venues mentioned in other submissions, are just some of the expressions of and outlets for Canberra life which have, since moving here, continually provided me with a proud response to the often-encountered ‘but why would you move to *Canberra*?! The place is *dead*!’

Canberra is a city that consistently cops cultural flack from Australia’s larger metropolitan centres for its perceived lack of music, nightlife (read: life) and culture. Yet as the closure of Melbourne’s iconic Tote Hotel – and the 20,000-strong protests that followed – show as only a most recent example, even Melbourne and Sydney are in continual danger of having the very cultural arts diversity which draws people to them put out of business by the returning trend of developer-led city-living, wanting to have its ‘in amongst it all’ cake and eat it too.

A local example of this tension is The Waldorf Hotel in Canberra’s CBD, a well-known source of noise complaints directed at such establishments as Toast Nightclub (respected beyond ACT borders) until its closure, and more recently Transit Bar. I have read with interest the submissions to the Inquiry by Waldorf management, tenants and investment-owners, and while I have sympathy for several of the sentiments expressed, would like to offer a counter to some other points they raise.

I feel that developers who choose to build, and individuals who choose to buy investment properties or to live in buildings, in close proximity to *already established and well known* live music venues or hubs are fairly shaky on their self-appointed moral high-ground in calling for the venues to be held accountable and responsible for how that proximity affects them. The requirement – on the part of developers and potential buyers who should take responsibility for knowing about the environment of the locality they choose to buy into – to soundproof will never stop apartment blocks from going up, new residences from being built, or people choosing to move into them. This indignant outrage is especially galling coming from management which *uses these venues to advertise the apartments*, emphasizing the: “*easy walking distance ... [to] restaurants pubs and bars, ... culture and excitement*” (www.waldorfc Canberra.com.au/location.html, accessed Monday 8 March 2010) on its website, while huffing and puffing in its submission at the ‘culture and excitement’ these pubs and bars emit several times a week. The self-interested short-termism inherent in these

submissions is not consistent with a consideration of the best and diverse interests of wider ACT society, at all.

I absolutely understand and have sympathy for the expressed concern for a good nights' sleep, noted by several Waldorf residents in their submissions. Any further legislative erosion of the economic viability of the ACT's small and independent live music venues is, however, an issue bigger than the occasionally interrupted sleep of a few individuals, and bigger than the fact that some of us also like places to go to enjoy loud live music and the wonderful and life-affirming atmosphere and environment that so often goes with it. It is about the self-sustaining critical mass of the myriad of creative communities in Canberra, and the fact that – like so many things in society – they are much harder to build back up than they are to erase for the convenience of a relatively small number of bad sleepers and developers.

In his article “Arts, culture and the economy – A review of the practice as to how the arts and the economy are understood to interact” in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Arts & Cultural Management**, Barry Burgan talks about the value of arts sectors within communities, “in terms of [their] community feel and quality of life, and the interrelationships with other sectoral elements and the importance of this in terms of ongoing developments” (p.458). He quotes a US National Research Advisory Committee report from 2004 which documents “a tremendous interest in the finding that a region’s cultural and artistic activity or ‘scene’ can be a strong predictor of economic success in apparently unrelated sectors” (p. 456). I include these perspectives on the importance of arts and the nurturing of local music scenes as a part of that importance, as they speak to a broader view on the role of creativity within regions and localities – and the interactions between cultural and creative activity and the wider community context within which they are situated – to the wider benefit of all citizens of that area.

In the current national climate, this is a wonderful opportunity for Canberra to positively differentiate itself once again from what’s happening in the rest of Australia, and be a leader in protecting its local arts and music scene in the midst of an inevitable and ongoing increase in medium-to-high density suburban and city living.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Holly Pither

*Burgan, B. (2009). “Arts, culture and the economy – A review of the practice as to how the arts and the economy are understood to interact”, *Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management*, 6(2): 457-470.