

Future Use of the Fitters Workshop, Kingston

Submission by Mr Bill Risby

Dear Mr Snedden,

I have had two acoustic reports on the Fitters' Workshop brought to my attention, and as a consequence I am respectfully writing to you as a musician, to put forward a late submission to the inquiry into the future of the Fitters' Workshop in Canberra.

As a brief introduction, I am a pianist and am an exponent of the hand made Australian Stuart and Sons piano, having recorded all of their demonstration CDs and a number of my own (and others) recordings on this piano. I am also a session recording artist and was the featured pianist on the movie "Australia", amongst others. I have also produced a number of CDs. If interested or necessary, further evidence of my credentials can be found at the link to my web site below. Also on my soundcloud page (link below) there are four tracks which were recorded in the Fitters' Workshop, entitled "Improvisation on Waltzing Matilda", "Mirobill 1", "Mirobill Part 2" and "Mirobill part 3".

After reading the two acoustic reports on the room in question I wish to comment on my experience from performing there and listening as a member of the audience. Both of the acoustic reports were done using the Fitters' Workshop as a bare room, i.e., no furnishings and no people. I would suggest that both the outcomes seem fairly accurate based on these testing methods, but of course at a concert there is (usually) an audience and chairs and furnishings which greatly vary the outcome of the sound — both how it is reflected and absorbed, thus determining whether the room generates a "pleasing" or "cohesive" sound. These opinions are of course subjective, but as an acute and avid listener my opinion is based on the Fitter's Workshop's standing in relation to all the other rooms I've played in, such as the Angel Place Recital Hall in Sydney, and the Sydney Opera House concert hall.

According to the KVDL Acoustic Consultants report the reverb time (the length of time that a sound will continue to sound from one playing) is 10 seconds. This should be considered a GIFT. To find a building with this particular acoustic property is rare, and this report says as much, also pointing out that this building was built in almost double the Volkmann's 2:3:5 proportion — this being considered the perfect proportion for an acoustic concert hall. KVDL also included a comparison to similar sized and high ceilinged buildings (the closest of which could only sustain a reverb time of around half this amount). As for their ALcons test regarding speech comprehension, this is made irrelevant simply based on the fact that in a concert situation all announcements are amplified through use of a microphone.

In real terms for a musician, this translates to a room that doesn't lose its reflective properties when full of people, and maintains musical clarity between the various frequencies of an acoustic musical instrument or voice. A typical reverberant room such as one of the comparison buildings in the KVDL report becomes a dead vacuum for sound after it is filled with sound absorbing humans and seats. This type of dead room suits louder (possibly amplified) music, and music with faster passages, as the notes don't readily blend

into each other. The most common flaw in a room like this is it is impossible to make it *more* reverberant. The Fitter's Workshop on the other hand has seemingly endless beautiful sounding reverb, and still maintains a reverberation time of around 4 seconds when it is full of seats and people.

To further emphasise my description of the Fitters' Workshop as a "gift", it is relatively easy to reduce or minimise reverberation time by utilising many different methods, but anything from heavy drapes against walls and/or windows to soft removable floor coverings will make a dramatic difference to the acoustic properties of the room, as well as the type of seats used, and more complex variations can involve moving panels, art work on canvas, etc., and consequently it is easily possible turn it into one of the most versatile music performance spaces in Canberra.

In the Fitters' Workshop I have heard a concerts of Monteverdi's and Peter Sculthorpe's orchestral music, a choral work with Double Bass and Organ, a solo vocal piece, and of course piano music that both I and others performed in the room, and this music had an intangible magical quality which was no doubt given to us by this performance space. The orchestral piece by Monteverdi being louder, faster and more dense would be improved dramatically if some or all the above simple acoustic treatments suggested in my previous paragraph were put in place.

I would hesitate to throw away such a unique and special performance space that would likely never be replicated any time in the future.

Regards,

William Risby