

27 April 2024

Cover sheet

**Submission to the House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry**

This submission is being presented on behalf of the following authors:

Associate Professor Catherine Strong works in the Music Industry programme at RMIT University and specialises in popular music studies. She has close connections to industry, and has worked on projects relating to working conditions in music, gender inequalities in music making, popular music as history and heritage, and live music and climate impacts.

Associate Professor Shelley Brunt is the Programme Manager of the Bachelor of Arts (Music Industry) degree at RMIT University. As a popular music ethnomusicologist, she uses ethnographic approaches to understand the challenges faced by parents who work in the music industry. Her recent book is *Popular Music and Parenting* (Routledge).

Dr Fabian Cannizzo is a Research Fellow at RMIT University and Monash University. His research experience focuses on career development of creative and intellectual workers, such as musicians and higher education staff. His recent work addresses inequities in career development across those domains.

Contact:



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**Submission to the House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry**

Dear Chair and Committee members,

Thank you for considering this submission to the House of Representatives' Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry.

We are academics from RMIT University's Music Industry programme and members of the Music Industry Research Collective based at this institution. We have expertise in music workplaces and inequalities in access to music making and music work, particularly as related to gender. We have worked with industry bodies such as the Victorian Music Development Office, APRA AMCOS and the Australian Music Centre on these issues.

Our research, and that of others working in this area, has pointed to continued entrenched gender-based inequalities in live music in Australia. Specifically in response to the Terms of Reference for the House of Representatives' Inquiry, gender based inequality impacts upon:

- sustainability and growth of the industry
- artist development and career pathways
- barriers to growing the Australian industry, both domestically and internationally, and
- building sustainability in the industry, domestically and internationally.

We note in particular the following four sources of inequality for women:

1. DISCRIMINATION FOR MOTHERS

Industry practices create serious barriers for parents and carers who work in the live music sector, in particular, mothers.¹ For example:

- Many live performances are held at times that are outside normal working hours, making childcare arrangements for artists more difficult than for other types of work;
- Live music venues are rarely set up to accommodate workers who are parents, especially breastfeeding mothers;
- The precarious nature of music work is incompatible with parenthood, in terms of having insecure and inconsistent employment.

¹ See Cannizzo, F., Strong, C. and Brunt, S. (2023) [Career reconstruction: mid-career transformations in the Australian music industries](#), *Creative Industries Journal*, published online 15 June 2023; Strong, C., Brunt, S. and Cannizzo, F. (2023) [Encore Project Final Report](#), National Careers Institute & RMIT University; Brunt, S. (2023) [Towards a Parent-Friendly Music Industry: Insights from Workers during the COVID Pandemic](#), in Brunt, S. and Giuffre, L. *Popular Music and Parenting*, Routledge.

2. HARRASSMENT & VIOLENCE

Live music spaces can be unsafe for women both as performers and audience members. Experiences of sexual harassment and gender-based violence can destroy women's music careers and discourage women from attending live performances.²

3. SEXISM

Many women encounter sexism and exclusion from the industry 'boys' club' which limits their ability to book live music gigs or make connections to build careers.³

4. GENDERED EXPECTATIONS

The type of live performance that women can participate in remains limited by gendered expectations around what genres they 'should' perform or what instruments they 'should' play (for example, electronic dance music is dominated by men, and women drummers are still regarded as a novelty).⁴

The implications of this inequality:

The challenges that block women's full participation in music-making represent a limitation on the sustainability and size of the live music industry. Talented and skilled women are abandoning music careers (both as performers and as behind-the-scenes contributors) or not starting in the industry to begin with because of the factors listed above.⁵

Increasing the diversity of voices being heard in live Australian music has the potential to expand markets and increase the overall health of the sector. The music industry thrives on having a large pool of innovative ideas and creativity to draw from. The contributions that women could make if access to music making was made easier, and if they were actively encouraged to move into this area, would be of benefit to all Australians, as well as to these women themselves. This includes participating as creative artists, music business managers, technical and backstage crew, and as audience members.

Progress:

Significant work has been done to try to increase gender equality in the Australian music industry. This includes the documentation of women's experiences of sexual harm, sexual harassment and systemic discrimination through the *Raising Their Voices*⁶ report, which also included recommendations for industry reforms, and the establishment of Creative Workplaces, in addition to the numerous grassroots and local women-led initiatives that have attempted to carve out more space for women in live music. Our own Encore training package⁷ – developed with funding from the National Careers Institute and focused on how women navigate career breaks – represents another such initiative. There are, however, concerns that many of these initiatives still

² See MAPN Consulting (2022) *Raising Their Voices*. Online at <https://musicindustryreview.com.au/>; Fileborn, B., Wadds, P. and Barnes, A. (2019) [Setting the stage for sexual assault: the dynamics of gender, culture, space and sexual violence at live music events](#), in Strong, C. and Raine, S. (eds) *Towards Gender Equality in the Music Industry*, Bloomsbury.

³ See Cannizzo, F. and Strong, C. (2020) ['Put some balls on that woman': Gendered repertoires of inequality in screen composers' careers](#), *Gender, Work and Organisations*, 27(6): 1346-1360.

⁴ Werner, A., Gadir, T. and de Boise, S. (2021) [Broadening research in gender and music practice](#), *Popular Music*, 39(3-4): 636-651.

⁵ Strong, C., Cannizzo, F. and Brunt, S. (2023) ['You are left flailing to try and look after yourself': the music industry still constrains mothers' careers](#), *The Conversation* [online], 4 September 2023.

⁶ MAPN Consulting (2022) *Raising Their Voices*. Online at <https://musicindustryreview.com.au/>

⁷ <https://www.encoremusiccareers.org/>

put too much onus on women to improve equality in the live music sector, and that wider structural changes in the industry continue to happen only very slowly.

Recommendations:

In light of these ongoing concerns, we recommend that:

- all government funding aimed at the live music sector be accompanied by requirements that the activities funded are representative of the diversity of Australian society;
- longitudinal research focused on women's participation in live music be commissioned and used to track changes resulting from such funding;
- research be commissioned to understand and transform the behaviour of men in live music spaces in relation to gender issues. Little work has been done on what might motivate men – often industry gatekeepers – to work to dismantle gendered barriers;
- more focus be placed on retaining women in music, including keeping their careers on track or restarting careers after a break. Training packages such as Encore also help women plan for successful careers in music and should be supported;
- strategies be developed to improve the ability of parents and carers to participate more fully in live music work.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further information on this topic to the Committee, in person or in writing. To facilitate this, please contact Catherine Strong (email supplied).

Yours sincerely,

Assoc Prof Catherine Strong,
Assoc Prof Shelley Brunt
Dr. Fabian Cannizzo