

Dear Committee,

I am a Melbourne/Naarm-based musician. I have been playing live original music nationally and internationally for over 40 years. Depending on the act I am playing in, my genres would be variously considered as contemporary, indie, world music, and comedy cabaret.

The current state of the live music industry is probably the worst I have ever experienced.

Sustainability

The main issue is that there has been a steady decrease in the income a musician can make for playing original music live.

In the past, musicians playing live would derive their income in three ways. (1) We would often receive a reasonable payment from the venue (e.g. \$150 - \$200), or (2) we would get a reasonable payment from the door charges (20 people at \$10 each is \$200). (3) We would sell CDs at gigs, which would often provide an income greater than the door money or the venue pay.

As an example, in the past at a good gig I might sell 15 CDs. At \$25 per CD I would make \$375. Add that to a venue payment or door payment of \$200, then I would make \$575 for a night's work. (Please note that those types of payments would occur maybe every one or two months; you would not make that money if you were gigging 5 nights a week because most people don't go out on Monday – Thursday nights, and if you gig too often you exhaust your fan base quickly and they no longer turn up).

However, much has changed over the years regarding these three main income streams. (1) Venues pay less and less every year for acts. Sometimes I am offered \$40 to play a one-hour set of music. For a highly qualified full-time musician who might get 1 gig a week, this is of course not financially sustainable (and at a personal level, quite an insult).

(2) Punters are now used to not having to pay a door-charge, so it is a barrier to audience numbers if you have a door-charge.

(3) Pretty much nobody buys CDs any more; everybody streams music. However, musicians only make around 0.3 cents per stream. Therefore, while 15 CD sales would have brought me \$375 in the past, now it would take 125,000 streams to make \$375.

So you can see that income from selling recorded music, which was once our biggest income stream, has now become virtually non-existent.

In summary, regarding the three major income streams from playing live music, the reality is nowadays venues pay musicians less, door charges bring in less, and selling recorded music to people who liked watching your gig brings in virtually nothing.

Hence my opening comment that deriving an income from playing gigs is a major issue for those of us playing live original music.

I have given up playing live gigs for the time-being. It takes so much time to organise a gig. Like the vast majority of original musicians, I am not 'famous' so I don't have a manager, or a record company or a booking agent or a publicist – I do it all myself.

The tasks to get a live gig include phoning and/or emailing venues to enquire about playing. Sending them links to materials such as music and photos so they can make a decision (by the way the majority of enquiries are turned down so that time is then wasted). If you get booked you have to read over the contract, make posters for electronic distribution via social media then every couple of days post about the gig on social media (this includes Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others – it is incredibly tedious and time-consuming), take hard-copy posters to the venue a couple of weeks before the gig and put them up, send gig notifications to your emailing list (which requires constant updating), and fill out gig details on at least five online gig-guides. These are just some of the tasks. Then of course you have to write the songs (obviously not different songs for every gig), practise those songs, make sure your guitars and other instruments and gear are all in perfect order so they don't break down during the gig, arrive 2 hours early for set up, play the gig, and then pack down all your gear. If 10 people turned up and paid \$10 each, then I made \$100 for all that time and effort.

It is no wonder that me and most of my musician friends and colleagues have virtually given up playing live original music.

So, playing live music is not sustainable for those who create original music.

Solution: Well, you can't force people to go to gigs and pay money for a door charge, and unfortunately you can't force venues to pay properly because they will always find a way not to, and you can't put the streaming genie back in the bottle. So therefore, musicians need other sources of income in order to play live original music so that they are not reliant on money from playing gigs. Such an alternative income will keep them playing live and building their audiences but they don't rely on live shows to pay their bills.

Related issue

When I was younger, original Australian contemporary music could be heard frequently on the radio, and on highly influential TV programs such as Count Down.

Therefore, if we liked an Australian contemporary band that was played on the radio or TV, we would go and see them at a gig.

However, these days there is less and less Australian music content on Australian mainstream media, so people can't discover a new Australian band and go and see them at a gig.

Solution: We need laws to ensure a greater amount of original contemporary Australian music is played on Australian media. I would suggest 50%.

Artist Development and Career Paths.

Neither of these things currently exist in any realistic form for the majority of experienced Australian musicians making original music.

It is a 'make it up as you go along' existence.

You may get lucky and get one of the Australia Council grants for established musicians. But there are so few grants and so many musicians that you would probably do better buying a Tatts ticket.

You may get lucky as a 'pretty, young thing' and find management and a record company to back you. But again, that is a rare occurrence, and is not possible for most Australian musicians playing original music because we are not in our twenties.

We just have to 'make it up as we go along' and try to survive, usually doing other work that provides a stable income but does not allow us to have the time and energy to reach our full potential as music creatives. Thus, many musicians just quit being musicians and find an 'easier' life. And that is Australia's loss.

Grant and Support Programs

There are grants such as touring support programs for live gig touring. I have applied many times and had no success despite my credentials.

The problem is there are too few grants and too little money to properly support the Australia's live contemporary original musicians via grants.

Solution: Provide far greater grant money to support for live musicians. This could be via grants that provide:

- Money to musicians so they can have time to write music.
- Money to musicians so they can rehearse for shows.
- Money to the main performer so they can book musicians (a band) to play with them.
- Money to the musician so they can hire a publicist for gigs.
- Money to the musician to hire a booking agent.
- Money to the musician to hire an overall manager who can assist them with their administration and overall career advice and opportunities.
- Money to musicians when they play a show. Provide say \$100 per show per musician playing original music as a contribution to help them survive.

Please note, I have suggested that the money goes to the musicians for them to use as they see fit. This is because in my opinion over the years too much money has been given to 'the industry' and not the musicians, and that model has contributed to the disastrous situation we now see. By 'the industry' I mean venues, record companies, management bodies, media bodies etc.

For example, Music Australia recently announced four new Service Delivery Partners. They are all industry bodies – the music managers body (AAM), the record industry (AIR), music venues, and PUSH. Each of those 4 bodies will receive \$200,000 – 250,000. Yet none of those bodies directly represents musicians. Why did they not partner with a body that represents musicians?

As usual, that money will help ensure that people in 'the industry' get well paid, get annual leave, get sick leave, get superannuation, get holiday pay etc. Yet these are all the things we musicians do not get. It is maddening watching this happen.

The Government supports 'the industry' in the hope that money will 'trickle down' to the musicians. We know 'trickle down' economics does not work, and the music industry is a prime example where those who create the 'the product' do not get a living wage or the basic employment rights and conditions, while those who take that 'product' and make money out of it (i.e., those in the industry) live far more financially secure lives than do the artists. That is why money has to go to musicians, not 'the industry'.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts.

As mentioned, the live music ecosystem is probably in the worst shape I seen in 40 years for the reasons I have given above. I don't see an easy fix given that the three traditional income streams for live musicians (venue pay, door charge pay, and CD sales) can not be easily manipulated by the government.

Therefore, here are my suggested solutions:

- (1) I think the best way to solve this problem is to have a Universal Basic Income (UBI). That way musicians creating original work know that their bills will get paid, and that they can afford to write music, rehearse music and then play live even if there is little income from gigs.
- (2) The next best solution would be a UBI for musicians playing original live contemporary music (and other creatives) for the same reasons as above.

As a side note, many musicians I know, including myself, were rapt with the unexpected financial relief we received during COVID times. We had never been paid better or more regularly before! Essentially we were being paid for being artists without having to spend time and energy trying to make money in other ways to survive. It was actually a wonderful time for many of us. Although we didn't get to play live, which was a big blow, we had the time and energy to create music that we may never have been able to without being paid what was essentially Universal Basic Income.

- (3) Provide much more financial support to musicians via government grants. There are too few grants and too little money provided to properly support Australia's live musicians. Whatever happens, musicians playing live original music need financial support via grants so they can pay their bills. The lack of sustainability in live music will force musicians into other careers and before we know it there will be no live original contemporary music in this country.

Yours,

Peter Vadiveloo.