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Australia has achieved remarkable success in the music arts yet very few professional musicians earn a living wage. This clearly needs to be remedied if we are to continue exporting music and, more importantly, fostering music that represents our cultural identity.

I speak as a cultural historian, broadcaster on ABC radio for nigh on 50 years, performer, author of 30 books related to music, and record producer of over 800 albums. I established the pioneer Larrikin Label (1974) and currently co-own Undercover Music, an independent label group with over 150 albums representing artists like Eric Bogle, CODA and numerous indigenous productions. My work in music has been recognised with Australia's highest award for lifetime achievement in music, The Don Banks Music Award, the Australian Sound Recording association's Lifetime Achievement Award, The Prime Minister's Centennial Medal, The Advance Australia Award, and the Order of Australia.

As a record producer I am aware of the necessity to record and promote emerging and professional artists, particularly those who are not covered by what is loosely referred to as 'popular music'. This group includes songwriters, performers of traditional material, world musicians, documentary sounds and genres loosely covered by, for want of a better word, 'folk music'. I would suggest that this group represents the largest non-pop sector of the industry and, although well-represented by the some 75 folk festivals staged annually, the individual bands and musicians mostly struggle to earn a living.

There are several factors contributing to the depressed financial condition of these artists. The main problems being:

Lack of airplay on ABC radio. Recording artists need airplay to promote their craft and employment. Despite its charter the ABC does not provide programming for folk music. Its metropolitan and regional radio formats are strictly controlled and favour middle of the road pop music and its digital stations favour classical and jazz. SBS does not provide programming either. Eric Bogle, considered by many to be one of Australia's finest songwriters, is a prime example of an artist well represented by some 30 albums yet hardly ever heard on ABC radio because 'his music doesn't exactly fit the format'. This is bewildering to artists and many listeners. Consideration should be given by the ABC to invest in a new station to program folk and alternative music.

Lack of live music venues. Australia, particularly NSW, has seen a dramatic fall in the number of live music venues available. Sydney's infamous lockout laws, recently extended, have had a serious impact on live music venues. There is also the age-old problem of moving artists around the country - it is hugely expensive and, apart from a few grants for regional touring, the average professional musician finds it nearly impossible to execute a national tour. Programs to support more touring should be considered. Monies should also be made available, possibly as matching grants, to regional councils to enable them to run more effective music programming - this would be an incentive for more artist touring and creative projects.

Arts funding focus. I believe the arts generally deserve a larger budget and the Australia Council for the Arts, being the key administrator, should be directed to invest less in large arts companies and more on grassroots arts programs. I would also make the point that the majority of state and Australia Council for the Arts funding appears to preference 'youth' and 'emerging' over accomplished professional artists, especially seasoned artists.

Taxation incentive. Australia should investigate and possibly follow the Irish government's policy of zero tax for acknowledged artists.

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