

Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry

Date: 30th April 2024

Re: Submission to the *Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry*

Title: Implementing a Basic Income Pilot to Support the Centrality of the Artist

Terms of Reference Addressed:

- Sustainability and growth of the industry;
- Artist development and career pathways;
- Grants and support programs; AND
- Building sustainability in the industry, domestically and internationally.

Introduction

My name is Olivia Hally and I am an Australian artist and arts researcher based in Naarm, Melbourne. My work has been featured in the New York Times, at Glastonbury (UK) and on NPR's Tiny Desk (USA), and I have played to audiences of up to 7 000 people across the globe as Oh Pep!. I have received significant international industry support over the past decade, and yet, I am all too familiar with the precarity that a career in live music can bring as an Australian artist.

Raised in regional Victoria, my love of song drew me to a career as a published songwriter for Sony/ATV, a recording artist for Dualtone & ATO Records (USA) and Barely Dressed & People Speak (AU), performing on tours with artists like Billy Bragg (UK) and Marta Wainwright (USA) and being employed as a session musician for Angie McMahon (AU) & Liz Stringer (AU).

As is the nature of being an artist, my work has oscillated between large international tours and community music, from indie pop music (career) to classical (tertiary education) to old time appalachian music (community) and with periods employed as an artistic programmer (Melbourne Recital Centre, Woodford Folk Festival) and educator (University of Melbourne, Parkville College).

Equipped with a decade of lived experience, I have turned my focus to research in an attempt to better understand the barriers to arts practice in Australia. This is the basis on which I make my submission to this inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music sector.

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Challenge

Accessing and sustaining a career as an artist in the live music sector is unviable to the majority of Australian musicians.

Income Precarity in Compounding Crises

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) recently released survey findings showing that almost half of Australian musicians earned less than \$AU6000 in 2023, representing a fraction of the income required to meet basic human needs. The decimation of the arts industry during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take effect, compounded by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis (The Guardian, 2024), the collapse of festivals and music venues due to impacts of the climate crisis and increasing insurance fees (Creative Australia, 2024), the prevalence of sexual assault within the music industry (MAPN Consulting, 2022), and the unsurprising subsequent mental health impacts on live music professionals (Support Act, 2024). The onslaught of these obstacles is underpinned by an industry of exploitation (a term which is often written into artist contracts) and includes precarious incomes for artists.

Artists often operate as small business owners and employ booking agents, managers, publicists, lawyers, marketing strategists, tour managers, lighting directors, sound engineers, merchandise sellers, back-line providers, session musicians, other artists, graphic designers, the list goes on. In this structure, artists are the last to be paid. The merchandise sales that once propped up live music tours are now largely undercut by streaming services. Public arts funding has helped, but is incredibly competitive, often resulting in 'art by application' to secure much needed resources for development and execution; excluding many projects that are inherently valuable and live outside the parameters of the application. It is imperative to Australian culture that we redress these issues for the sake of our artist's wellbeing, the strength of our cultural identity, and the health of our democracy by empowering and amplifying a diverse cohort of Australian artists in the live music sector through the implementation of a Basic Income Pilot for the Arts.

Opportunity

Implementing a Basic Income Pilot for the Arts

It is my recommendation that a Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) pilot be considered to mitigate the precarious nature of the live music sector. Australia must take the lead from Ireland's current Basic Income for the Arts pilot where 2000 artists are paid an unconditional basic income of 325 EURO a week for 3 years. A similar program could be implemented in Australia with consideration for our cultural context, ensuring such wage guarantee is adequate for our environment. To qualify for the Irish pilot an artist must fulfil two of three criteria; evidence of a membership from a representative body, proof of income from your practice and proof of engagement within your creative field in the past 5 years (Government of Ireland, 2024). The low barrier to entry vastly increases the breadth of experience and perspectives of artists, removing the historical elitism that can exclude artistic voices. It is not a question of which art is valuable and which is not. Like the Irish pilot exemplifies, it is the inherent value of art that needs to be prioritised.

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What This Would Mean For Australian Artists

Australian artists more often than not work outside their practice to support themselves, something that would be largely unacceptable if employed in another industry as a teacher, dentist or carpenter, for example. In Australia, to recognise that artists are workers, we need to separate the idea of artist support programs from unemployment schemes, because the artist IS employed and the artist IS working.

Providing artists in the live sector with a basic income would mean that there is a larger diversity of voices including artists who are parents, living with chronic health conditions, mid-career and late-career artists, artists of different abilities and varied economic, educational and cultural backgrounds. Supported artists would have the agency to say NO when faced with unsafe working conditions. The centrality of the artist would be prioritised. We would not continue to lose the cohort of Australian artists that we are currently losing (MEAA, 2024).

Why Now

The Australian population is more open to Basic Income than ever before. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic the introduction of JobKeeper gave the population at large a sense of income security in precarious circumstances; income subsidy programs that somewhat excluded artists despite the immense contributions the creative sector makes to the Australian economy (Morrow & Long, 2020).

The community benefits because in our increasingly complex world, artists are sense-makers. They are the workers who distil the human experience and envision what can be. There is ample evidence to suggest how music benefits education, health, community, and the live music sector is a potent vehicle to benefiting from the arts. But we must remedy the toll this takes on our live music professionals. Music might be great for our mental health, but it's not great for the mental health of artists (Musgraves, 2023).

Conclusion

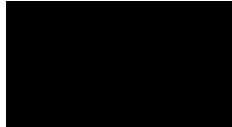
My submission prioritises the centrality of the artist and recognises that the artist is a worker within the live music sector, as aligned with the federal cultural policy, *Revive*. The work of the artist continues to be taken for granted and piloting a BIA to recognise the varied nature of live sector work is a meaningful and impactful step to invest in our cultural identity.

The risk we face in not addressing the income precarity of the live music sector is that we lose more artists due to the unviable nature of working in the arts and, in turn, hear an increasingly homogenised voice, not representative of the Australian population. In this dystopia, the pervasive influence of the arts would function to serve the status quo, something which the arts itself exists to challenge. By implementing a Basic Income pilot for the live music sector we will hear from artists we otherwise would not have heard from.

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the *Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry*.

Sincerely,



Olivia Hally

I recognise that as an artist, I exist in relationship with artists who have come before me; that I work and live on stolen Wurundjeri country in a time of climate crisis; and that climate and arts action must work hand-in-hand to prioritise 60 000+ years of First Nations knowledge.

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