

Help Save Our Venues

Written by P.G Fitzgerald

Originally in the August 2020 Songsmith

I was recently reading through Russell Neal's excellent SongsOnStage newsletter, which has a barrelful of information on it. If you are not yet subscribing I would contact Russell on songsonstage@gmail.com to get on the list. Russell always has the latest gigs and information.

While reading through the newsletter I noticed the "Help Save Our Venues" article which Russell got off an email sent out by the Enmore Theatre. The article says that *"Live music in NSW is under threat. We risk losing 85% of the state's live music venues within the next 12 months and we need your help to save them."* and asks the reader to sign a petition.

So, I investigated further and checked out the website at <https://www.sosnsw.org/> which had a whole bunch of information about



saving NSW venues. This is a site put up to try and get the NSW Government to support the local music venues like other states do. Their explanation is: *"We are a collection of independent music venues from across New South Wales. Our stages welcome artists from across the state, from around the country and from all corners of the globe. We are the places where communities come together for a shared experience, to enjoy music, to dance, to meet friends, to meet new people, to meet lovers, to work. We celebrate our artists and provide them with the space to hone their craft, meet their fans and grow their careers."*

Those who are regular readers of The Songsmith will know I'm a keen advocate of retaining the music venues in Sydney as we've seen quite famous ones like The Three Weeds, The Excelsior, The Sandringham, etc, etc all crumble under developers hands so that Sydney lags way behind other capital cities in its ability to present live music and to support the arts in general. Sydney is losing its soul (John says, "Has lost!") and cosmopolitan feel to the forces of mediocrity and financial greed.

They also have an open letter to the politicians on the site: *"Live music in NSW is under threat. Unless there is immediate government intervention, we risk losing 85% of the state's live music venues within the next 12 months."*

With the biggest music industry in the country, NSW is home to some of Australia's greatest artists and performers, biggest crowds and world-class stages. Our music creates a sense of pride, gives us a voice, introduces us to new ideas, new friends, new hope. Live music is our lifeblood and our lifeline in times of crisis.

But now live music in NSW is on the verge of collapse. From a survey of just 47 music venues, over \$70M in earnings has been lost in just six months, and they are accumulating hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt as restrictions continue to limit their business viability. After six years of lockdown laws, devastating bushfires and now the unprecedented impacts of COVID-19, the venues that have survived through hard work and ingenuity can no longer do it alone.

This is not just about live music – venues build community, boost the economy, improve wellbeing, and drive tourism. And importantly, they provide artists with places to share their music with fans and find new audiences.

Live performance is essential to an artist's career development and makes up around 70% of their music income. Without stages to play on, artistic careers in NSW will become almost impossible to maintain, and an industry which employs 23,000 people and contributes \$3.6B to NSW's economy will crumble.

The Queensland and Victorian Governments have already committed millions of dollars in support to their venues, but the NSW government has yet to act.

We call on the NSW Government to work with MusicNSW and industry representatives to devise a stimulus package that will ensure the ongoing survival of our venues. A package that will support the artists and communities who depend on live music for their existence. A package which will safeguard the future of our industry. A package that will Save Our Stages"

I think this is something we as songwriters should get behind! If you want our music to be played to the public then we need venues to do it at, or have people play our songs at. Too much money has gone into helping developers, like the Eastern Suburbs Light Rail, etc. How about supporting businesses that are involved in the arts for once??



The venues involved in this action are amazing, especially as I'd either played in them, or have gone to see friends play in them. They include: *"Beach Hotel, Byron Bay. Botany View Hotel, Newtown. Gasoline Pony, Marrickville. Lazybones, Marrickville. Manning Bar, Camperdown. New England Hotel, Armidale. North Wollongong Hotel, North Wollongong. Old 505 Theatre, Newtown. Oxford Art Factory, Darlinghurst. Roundhouse, Kensington. The Enmore Theatre, Enmore. The Factory Theatre, Marrickville.*

The Imperial Erskineville. The Lansdowne Hotel, Chippendale. The Marlborough Hotel, Newtown. The Metro Theatre, Sydney. The Newsagency, Camperdown. The Northern, Byron Bay. The Red Rattler, Marrickville. The Town Hall Hotel, Newtown. The Vanguard, Newtown. Valve Bar and Venue, Sydney." To name just a few that are involved. To have all these great venues find that they have next to no government support is an absolute disgrace. We just need our politicians to get their heads out of the trough for a second and listen to the music, or lack of it more like it.

So, yes, I have signed the petition which is on the site and I recommend that you also do this. I'll send a letter to the government in support of these venues as well. It's not just CoVid-19, it's the whole attitude towards local music that's appallingly treated by bureaucratic bungling. However, all people associated with the Music Industry and the punters will pay for it badly in the end. So, this is one worthy cause to support.

Ed: In the almost six years since this article was written the situation in Sydney has stabilised to a degree while I've heard that Melbourne's live scene has gone the same way. "Who cares about live music if there is money to be made!" seems to be the prevailing attitude. As well all the big Music Festivals have gone the way of the dodo, especially the Byron Bluesfest, but that could be the result of poor management. Last year in 2025 Peter Noble said it was going to be the last Byron Bluesfest and the punters made sure of it! There are still places with live music like at Marrickville's venues but the good ol' days of Ozrock are long gone.

