

# The bands culture in Victoria, Australia: Live music benefits career paths, employment and community

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## Abstract

This study explores the career paths, employment, business opportunities and community contributions made available through the provision and development of the contemporary performance bands' culture in the State of Victoria. It is framed with the support given to live music performers by Arts Victoria, Small Business Victoria and Music Victoria. Central to this study are two foci, first the identification of the issues and challenges of running a successful music business, which in turn leads to a contemporary performing musician being able to build a sustainable career. And second, companion employment and professional opportunities – not specifically aligned with the music industry – that also provide a variety of career paths, and enable the development of successful businesses, whilst supporting musicians' career development. Excellence in musical skills alone is not sufficient for a musician to achieve and sustain financial security from a career in the music industry. This study highlights the success of the government financial activity that supports the contemporary live performance bands' culture in Victoria. In 2009-2010 the live music industry contributed more than \$AUD500 million to the Victorian economy. The Victorian Government has supported a suite of programs such as FReeZA, Contemporary Music and Live Development, *Face the Music* conference, a small business festival and targeted mentoring for musicians playing in bands and their businesses have all played a significant role. These programs have contributed to the development of sustainable practices for performing musicians.

**Key words:** companion careers, contemporary live music, music industry, business skills, employability skills, professional development.

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## Introduction

This paper is a study of live music centred around the performance bands' culture in the State of Victoria, framed with the support given to performers by Arts Victoria (the State Ministry for the Arts), Small Business Victoria (Department of Business and Innovation) and Music Victoria (the contemporary music industry peak body for Victoria). The paper addresses two foci, first

to identify issues and challenges of running a successful music business, which in turn leads to a contemporary performing musician being able to build and maintain a sustainable career. Musical skills alone are not sufficient for a musician to achieve financial security from a career in the music industry. More recently it has been documented (Bennett & Hannan, 2008) that performing musicians recognise the need to be

entrepreneurial, with a professional approach in the promotion of self and associated businesses. And second, companion employment and professional opportunities, not aligned to the music industry, that are essential for sustaining the live music culture. In addition to activities closely associated with the music industry such as lighting, sound and technical production, there are other services identified by Graham (2012b) as the many intermediaries who make a living from the multi-connections of music. In this paper we have chosen to highlight the associated work of the accountant, artist/graphic designer, caterer, event manager, lawyer, publicist, travel agent and venue manager. The operators and employees of these businesses may also be musicians although the services they offer are not classified as part of the music industry. A clear understanding of the career needs of musicians involved in the contemporary bands culture provides a 'winning double' for successful service businesses and sustainable musicians' careers. The interconnectedness of the music industry truly makes it one that 'value-adds' to any economy.

The paper builds on Forrest (1999) in which links between music education and music industry were discussed, and Watson and Forrest (2004) where aspects of Vocational Education and Training (VET) music courses were highlighted. The excellence of contemporary band musicians in creative artistry, vocal and instrumental technique, originality in song writing composition, improvisation and interpretation of covers are particular steps for band members to etch out and sustain a performing career. All band members need a knowledge of business skills, the ability to plan, build and operate a business – and if the need arises to exit a business. These are vital necessities to support the employment of a musician.

For any activity or process to be sustainable, the approaches and systems that guide it need to be constantly adaptable to change, allowing a

focus on maintaining the important aspects and qualities and introducing new growth. Careers in music must be first developed and then sustained. Although a trained level of musical skill and technique is clearly important, the ability to generate an ongoing income level to live, through the demonstration of musical skills has become a critical factor when discussing careers in music. Excepting those who obtain fulltime permanent salaried employment in teaching, orchestras, musical theatre and military bands, many musicians who are able to pursue a career in music, supported by a reliable livable income need to operate a small business. Some will be the sole operator whilst those who are part of the live contemporary music industry and play in a band will be in a business partnership.

The research topics of career development and employment skills training that are focused on the needs of the musician – in the many specialist fields of practice associated with being a musician – have become quite specific. Ongoing research has addressed two broad areas associated with needs of the student musician moving from being a participant in higher education music programs to life as an early career musician, and the needs of those with experience in the workforce as a musician. Writers who have expanded and described these issues in more depth include Beeching (2010), Bennett (2008), Burt-Perkins (2008), Cook (2008), Constable (2005), Huhtanen (2008, 2010), Johnsson and Hager (2006), Triantafyllaki (2010), and Weller (2004, 2008). The contributors to the symposium, *Life in the Real World: Expanding the Purview of Music Careers* (including Beeching, Bennett, Burt-Perkins, Carruthers, Hannan, Huhtanen, Smilde and Weller) addressed the aspects, attributes, challenges and skills of building and supporting a sustainable career as a musician (ISME World Conference, 2010). Graham (2012a) contended that degree-level education for musicians needed to prepare them for careers and circumstances that are currently not easily imagined. He

suggested a degree that prepared graduates for a profession in music with the course outline under the headings of musicianship, technology, business and entrepreneurship, law, and communication. Graham argued that the content – other than that of musicianship – is specific to a wide variety of music jobs and needs to be taught in the music context rather than through other faculties in a university. Referring directly to musicians who have established a successful career, Comte (2010) posed the question “What advice would you give a pianist who wants to embark on a performance career?” to pianists interviewed for a book on aspects of pianism (p. 11). Each of the 36 pianists interviewed provided a different response, many acknowledging that career pathways are varied and uncertain. Similarly, with a focus on the musician in the workforce, the Music Career wiki (developed by the Music Council of Australia) has gathered a range of information about careers in music. The professional development section presents information grouped under three headings: know your business, manage your business, and the musical marketplace.

### **Qualifications in music industry**

The Australian Qualifications Framework (2011) is the umbrella under which courses are available to students, varying in level of difficulty (and accomplishment) from level 1 (middle secondary school) to level 10 (doctoral study). Under the National Music Training Package, the four qualification options are Certificate III in Music Business, Certificate IV in Music Business, Diploma of Music Business and Advanced Diploma of Music Business. The core units of these courses centre on occupational health and safety procedures, implementing copyright arrangements, working effectively in the music industry, developing and implementing a business plan including legal, risk and financial management requirements, and planning a career in the creative arts industry incorporating

applying music knowledge and artistic judgement. (Australian Government, 2011).

The documentation for each of the VET Music Business packages commences with an employability skills qualification summary table describing the employability skills required by the music industry for each qualification. This process is a requirement for all courses in the Australian Qualifications Framework. In Australia the employability skills (also known as general capabilities, generic or transferable skills) have been defined as:

1. Communication skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers;
2. Teamwork skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes;
3. Problem-solving skills that contribute to productive outcomes;
4. Initiative and enterprise skills that contribute to innovative outcomes;
5. Planning and organising skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning;
6. Self-management skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth;
7. Learning skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes; and
8. Technology skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks.

(Matters & Curtis, 2008, p. 5)

Higher Education providers offer a number of degree courses that link business and industry skills, arts management skills and the creativity of individual disciplines constituted as arts industries. One example is the Australian College of the Arts, which from 2012 offers a Bachelor of Arts (Creative Industries Management)

Music Business degree designed to “develop technical skills in organisational and financial management, entertainment law and human resources and creative elements such as marketing and communications, public relations and entrepreneurship”. Students complete the qualification with professional studies strongly tied to the entertainment industry and a number of industry projects with different foci (Australian College of the Arts, 2011).

### **Victorian Government support programs**

A number of opportunities funded by the Victorian Government are available to contemporary bands to support career development and the operation of small businesses. Access to these programs allows musicians, as both sole business operators and in business partnerships to manage sustainable careers, to benefit from and contribute to the cultural activity and economic return. The programs contribute to the ongoing education of the professional musician and provide them with tailored professional development. In addition, companion businesses and professions also benefit.

1. FReeZA, funded through the Victorian Government Office of Youth, was established in 1997. It is a program that provides young people between the ages of 12 and 25 opportunities to attend affordable music and cultural events. The youth members of each local organising committee develop decision-making and leadership skills, and experience the option to explore education employment pathways in the music industry. The events that they organise provide performance opportunities for local musicians and emerging artists (Welcome to FReeZA).

2. Arts Victoria's contemporary music funding program *Contemporary Music and Live Development* (formerly Victoria Rocks) offers grants to emerging and established artists in

three categories: career building, touring and sector development. The program “aims to support the creative growth and viability of the Victorian music industry”. Career building has two streams with funding priority given where there is evidence of a career progression. The two streams are recording (demo and master recordings), and presentation (including CD manufacture, marketing, website development, digital and social media initiatives). Music touring has two streams: touring projects for established artists to tour in regions, interstate or internationally, and professional travel for managers or musicians to attend music conferences and business meetings outside Victoria. Sector development has a key focus to provide access, education and innovation for musicians to further their careers. Typical funded activities include access for emerging musicians to professional skills, mentoring and performance skills, regional touring and performance opportunities, and adopting new technologies (Arts Victoria Contemporary and Live Music Development, 2011).

3. Victoria's Small Business Festival is an annual small business month comprising an extensive program of free and charged events aimed at providing the inspiration, ideas and information to start and grow a business. The Victorian Government coordinates the festival, through Small Business Victoria, and collaborates with industry groups, businesses and agencies across the three levels of government to deliver the events. The workshops are open to all registered businesses in Victoria and the theme for 2011 was ‘add one more skill’ (Small Business Victoria, 2011). In 2012, over 100 events were organised during the month-long festival, and presented in metropolitan and country locations. They were grouped under the headings of business development, business planning, employing and managing people, exporting and importing, financial management, franchising, green business, managing risk, marketing and social media, networking, online business, starting a

business, training and skills development, and workplace health and safety. A specific event for musicians, 'networking for musicians & music businesses' was included (Small Business Victoria, 2012).

4. In March 2011, Music Victoria in conjunction with Small Business Victoria developed a project to provide business skills support relevant to musicians and music businesses and specifically for musicians playing in bands, through seminars/workshops/mentoring programs. A web-based survey was used to invite interest from the contemporary music industry. Among the information sought was the role of participation in the music industry (musician/performer, music management, promoter/booker, record label, music venue owner/manager, media/publicity, other role); interest in a music business mentoring session; workshop topics (starting business, business planning basics, marketing basics, market for growth, understanding financial statements, budgeting and forecasting, networking, business planning, get your business organised, your online business – optimising your potential, getting and keeping the right staff, improving cash flow and profitability, financing your business, what bankers want, exiting your business successfully, other topics) (Music Victoria survey).

5. Music Victoria hosts the annual two-day *Face the Music* conference and music industry summit which provides the Victorian music community with a platform for professional and creative career development through presentations, discussions, networking and practical workshops. The executive director of the Association of Artists Managers states, "attending panelists, discussion topics and artist presentations enable the earliest beginner and the seasoned veteran to re-think and re-discover their love for the business of music" (Nicole B-Z, *Face the Music*, 2011). In association with Melbourne Music Week (MMW), *Face the Music* conference in 2012 delivered panel

sessions on building and sustaining a career, tips for touring, engaging with audiences in the crowded festival market, expanding into overseas markets, and a Mentor Lounge project to small group networking. Additional free MMW activities for 2012 included workshops with a media arts lawyer and music-making in the ecologically minded age (City of Melbourne, 2012).

6. The Off the Beaten Track tour organised by Music Victoria is an activity that emerged in 2012 and has a focus that encourages education – and possibly the development of companion careers, together with the promotion of small businesses and community wellbeing, in addition to live music performances in regional settings. In conjunction with the anti-binge drinking campaign Live Solution, the Off the Beaten Track tour presents "live music with free workshops on booking and promoting live shows, working with budgets, merchandise and other tips for staging a successful live gig". Live music is available for small communities with limited access and performances are staged in "unique, intimate environments" (Boulton, 2012).

### ***Companion employment and professional opportunities***

Musicians involved in the bands culture require the services and professional expertise of others although the services they offer are not closely aligned with the music industry. The companion career examples presented in this paper are in the context of the necessary support they make to the live bands culture, noting, however they are intermediaries for all types of musician's careers, and through their connectedness add value to an economy. The companion employment and professional opportunities focus on services offered by the accountant, artist/graphic designer, caterer, event manager, lawyer, publicist, travel agent and venue manager.

### **Accountant**

Over time the Australian tax laws have become complicated and are ever changing. The introduction of a Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2000 significantly increased the work of accountants and a support GST industry sprung into life to cater for the tax needs of businesses. Besides budgeting, paying employees and various insurances, music businesses need to pay correct tax or face substantial fines. Accountants have become important professional support for musicians.

### **Artist/graphic designer**

The skill of the artist/graphic designer contributes to the communication avenue that the bands culture needs to sell their recordings and promote their performances through visual advertising. A skillful artist can develop and promote the brand of a contemporary band through recording covers, posters and flyers. Their creative productions form a communication dialogue directly with the fan-base. The graphic design business is specialised and although the band may have ideas around artwork they need a professional to develop and refine concepts.

### **Caterer**

Students needing to work to pay for living expenses and finance higher education study operate hot dog stands from the back of a car, often in breach of health regulations. This activity is associated with the live bands culture playing in small hotels and clubs. Established owner-operated coffee carts and catering vans have regular bookings associated with live music and travel the roads and highways pulling up on the side of festival arenas to provide food and drink provisions for audiences.

### **Event manager**

The event manager with well-honed managerial and human relation skills is crucial to music

festival organisation. The large festivals in metropolitan and country venues and conferences where contemporary bands perform in a workshop/professional learning environment need a level of management that a band can not provide for itself. A myriad of pieces go together to assemble and promote festivals and in turn promote the brand of the performing groups. Continuing the communication dialogue with audiences is part of event management. Music festival and associated performances in regional venues are now securely linked with tourism as the population of country towns declines.

### **Lawyer**

Lawyers with expertise in arts law, media and copyright are also significant figures for the live music industry. These professionals contribute to the learning of students in higher degree courses and provide their expertise free of charge or through a conference fee in workshops offered by the *Face the Music* conference and Victoria's Small Business Festival. Graham (2012a) identified the changing and complicated risks of varied contracts, liabilities and copyright-publishing issues that require a specialist – whose job it is – to be fully conversant with the relevant aspects of the law.

### **Publicist**

The publicist also contributes to the direct communication with a band's audience with a focus on written and spoken media. The role of this professional is to also promote a brand of a contemporary band through the traditional media avenues and by the use of blogs, changing web tools, for example 'Facebook' and websites. The graphic designer has a concurrent role with the publicist in the development and promotion of band through digital media.

### **Travel agent**

Linked with need to find new and different performance venues to continue to promote their brand, a contemporary band needs to travel further afield than where they can safely drive themselves in a hired truck. Any touring program needs the knowledge of the travel agent to deal with airline bookings and luggage restrictions, travel insurance, appropriate accommodation and knitting together the bands' itinerary.

### **Venue manager**

The community outcry that resulted when 'The Tote' Hotel in Collingwood Victoria closed because of changes to liquor licensing laws (Salmon, 2011) is an example of a venue managed by an owner-operator who welcomed live music. There was no violent behaviour at The Tote, many bands played on Saturday and Sunday afternoon for no cover charge. The supportive local (and not so local) community and musicians protested and The Tote was re-opened. This is one venue where young band members were learning to be professional musicians, performing contemporary music in a live band and building a fan-base, within a community that valued social connectedness. The venue manager plays an important role in providing a performance space for individual bands on a systemic and ongoing basis.

### **The live contemporary music industry: A summary of issues**

Not all musicians are financially able, or have the time or consider it relevant to complete a music business course of study but they continue to play live music in bands, on a full or part time basis, and contribute to the financial and cultural base of the economy. For those who do complete qualifications they are often participating as an individual, although enrolment in VET business courses, industry placements and projects provide contact with the real world and

networking opportunities. The modules of each training package are carefully structured and provide one avenue for a musician to gain career-building skills.

Musicians who take the opportunity to build their career with the support of government funded activities are most likely participating as a band, with people who have the same values and interests. Those who are members of volunteer FReeZA committees are often full time school and tertiary students, with more than one member of a band being part of each committee. As individuals they build positive self-esteem, communication skills, and engagement with their local communities. As a group they develop team-building skills and receive training in band bookings, lighting and production, and promotions and publicity. Together they gain the benefits as event organisers and develop skills and knowledge associated with event management and areas of the music industry such as rehearsals, playing live, CD manufacturing, providing a taster for a career in these areas. FReeZA committee's organise local band performances mostly for their peers providing opportunities to network with local performers and encourage and nurture talent.

The activities provided and promoted by Arts Victoria, Music Victoria and Small Business Victoria contribute to supporting the creative and career development of the musician performing in the contemporary music industry. And it is significant that diverse government departments cooperate to advance this aspect of cultural growth. The number, breadth and specificity of the events presented in the annual Small Business Festival are clearly designed to support a myriad of businesses, including those of musicians. The *Face the Music* conference provides an opportunity for developing musicians to meet industry experts and discover working life in the music industry. An advertising email promotes it as:

*presentations, discussions, artist development workshops, networking, live music, practical*

*workshops and the hottest tips and tools to give your music career the edge. Sessions explore topics like: songwriting, self-management, audience development, touring, release management, recording, stagecraft, international festival opportunities, booking agents, independent releases and labels, distribution, licensing and publishing, funding opportunities, career models and much more. (Face The Music, 18th and 19th November, 2011 @ The Arts Centre)*

Music Victoria runs regular professional development workshops, provides support for metropolitan and regional venues to host live music, has initiated critical research into underage performances (school student performances in adult venues) addressed preventative hearing health, and processes to access Centrelink benefits when musicians are unemployed. Music Victoria's first ever membership drive in early 2012, *Jump on the Bandwagon*, was successful in that members have access to increased airline excess baggage allowances with Qantas and Virgin Australia.

Patrick Donovan, the chief executive of Music Victoria, discussed the value of the alternative venues used in the *Off the Beaten Track* tour during a radio interview. He identified that traditional venues such as licensed pubs and clubs were linked to an atmosphere where inebriated patrons harassed musicians. Bands playing in non-traditional venues performed in surroundings where the audiences were more appreciative and listened to the music. The community of country towns come together and always 'bring a plate' for supper, and mingle with band members after the show (*Bush Telegraph*, 1 October 2012). In addition, Boulton (2012) reported that in one small Victorian country town, a taco van did their first night of business at a live band performance.

On the economic side, in 2009-2010, the live music industry's annual economic contribution to Victoria was \$AUD501 million, resulting from an outlay through Contemporary Live Music

Development program grants to musicians totalling \$AUD757, 951 (Rood, 2011). The report in which these figures were published was commissioned by Arts Victoria "to analyse the economic, social and cultural contribution of the venue-based live music industry in Victoria" (Deloitte, 2011, p. 1). This financial return to the Victorian economy was considered an endorsement of the outputs of contemporary live music, although experienced industry musicians such as Graham (2012b) and Salmon (2011) expressed concern that venue-based musicians still earn less than the poverty line. In monetary terms, contemporary live music has been a provider of employment and income for musicians, managers, technicians, recording manufacturers, venue owners, security and bar staff, advertising, merchandising and booking agents. Headline bands playing in regional country towns support the local business through accommodation, meals, local produce and tourist attractions. Community wellbeing has benefited from the strong social and cultural values brought by contemporary live music. Developed social networks and connectedness leading to a reduction in anti-social behaviour, benefits performers, patrons and the general community. The *Off the Beaten Track* tour highlights many of these aspects.

The recommendations of the report (Deloitte, 2011) confirmed issues and challenges of current programs goals supported with government funding, addressed in this paper. Although credentialed qualifications are one avenue of gaining knowledge, workplace professional development and mentoring are more practical and immediate processes that tailor learning opportunities and offer a more flexible approach.

In conjunction with the live music industry, developing and promoting to performers and managers a common regional touring circuit, provides additional venues for performers outside the crowded metropolitan area. This in turn invites larger audiences to hear live music

resulting in increased door takings and greater financial reward for the performers and the venue. Community wellbeing is also a major beneficiary (Deloitte, 2011, pp. 47-48).

Improving the quality of live performers, in that their performances will generate a sizeable and returning audience (their fan base) accompanied by a more rewarding financial return. The report recommends, "the increased provision of mentoring and guidance on performance career development, from appropriately experienced and motivated persons or parties, to ensure the timely and strategic development of Victorian live performers" (Deloitte, 2011, p. 49).

## Conclusion

This study has explored the career paths, employment, business opportunities and community contributions made available through the provision and development of the contemporary performance bands' culture in the State of Victoria. It has highlighted the professional development opportunities that are available through Victorian Government departments and monetary grants, the endorsement of these activities by the Deloitte (2011) report and the music business courses offered under the National Music Training Package. The \$AUD501 million contribution made to the Victorian economy by the contemporary live music industry has clearly made an impact, compared with the actual financial input. Continual promotion of organised workplace professional development and mentoring services that involve an ongoing conversation with the participants, where the experienced support the early career performers, is an approach that will benefit the career development of musicians and associated members of the live music industry.

In addition to education and skill development opportunities for local communities and individuals that initiate directly from live music performances, an example being the *Off the*

*Beaten Track* tour, other career paths together with their associated businesses, are vital to the success of sustainable careers for musicians. Contemporary musicians operate in a complex workplace with many intermediaries such as agents, promoters, managers, hoteliers, publishers, marketing and public relations consultants, equipment hire, commissions, and rights on the production of their 'product'. There are the music-related activities directly associated with the music industry and the professional expertise and services that are necessary support for the music maker and make a direct input to the Australian economy.

There is a need for the industry to develop an education process to promote an understanding among performers of successful ways to generate the demand for live performances that will yield a financial return. The market place has become saturated with contemporary live bands seeking an opportunity to perform and many early careers bands provide free performances. Although they are gaining experience, it has been observed that performers are not developing at a satisfactory pace to be considered to be progressing in a career. Accordingly, the Deloitte report recommends, "a need for increased professional development courses and mentoring from suitable parties, where performers are taught to better manage their own success and improve career trajectory" and "that performers are in many ways a business, and that any business requires a minimum level of management skill" (Deloitte, 2011, p. 50).

Currently the wages that contemporary band musicians receive are not governed by Australian federal awards – entitlements for sick pay, superannuation, annual leave – all designed to keep the Australian worker from poverty. If contemporary band musicians are to be able to work for the legislated guarantee of a living wage, we need to change the hierarchy of values in our culture.

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