

**Submission  
No 63**

**INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium

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To The Select Committee - Inquiry into Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales

I write as the newly appointed Artistic Director of the Coffs Harbour Conservatorium of Music.

The Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium of Music (CHRC) is a not-for-profit community based organisation, and a founding member of the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums, one of a network of 17 across New South Wales. This year CHRC celebrates its 40th year of operations and a proud history of providing broad-based individual and ensemble music tuition and community music services such as concerts, workshops and cultural events in Coffs Harbour and the surrounding region. Consequently, it is highly engaged with State and Local Government, regional community and arts groups, schools, other educational bodies and individual educators, artists and performers.

The Conservatorium welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the inquiry. There will, I'm sure, be submissions focusing on the benefits of music and music education to individuals and communities and the committee is probably well aware of the plethora of serious studies that add great detail and weight to these assertions. Other's submissions may rightly focus on the desperate need for appropriate funding levels or details of curriculum and delivery. I have instead chosen to provide some observations around a couple of my own and CHRC's specific cultural vision goals and hopefully through these local and personal references provide some useful information that may be able to be applied more generally by the inquiry.

The following observations and comments hopefully explicate a few of my own key operating axioms as a music creator, maker and educator. These axioms underpin much of my professional work and I am consequently convinced that supporting groups, individuals and institutions that create a culture of exchange and interaction are best placed to forge a positive pathway in music education.

- Good music education is about demonstrating the interconnectedness of all music styles and cultures - often while training high level skills in the specifics of one.
- Theory should nearly always have demonstrable and enticing practical and creative applications.
- Musicians often produce amazing results working alone but when working with others the result is almost always greater than the sum of the parts.
- You can be technically average but musically good. You can also be technically good but musically average.

Coffs Con has operated very successfully for 40 years as a provider of quality individual and group music lessons and ensemble classes. Further to this it has provided a range of workshops concerts, festivals, tours and school-based programs. Nevertheless, the scope of the operation has tended to focus on the more traditional forms of music, music training and cultural expression. The Con is now looking to broaden its outreach and service to the community by introducing programs in various methods of innovative music education that address emerging needs in the community. These approaches rely on both existing and new technologies but are designed to specifically open opportunities for aspiring musicians to learn in ways that are more effective and appropriate for their particular learning requirements.

What might almost be called “underground” community music making and music creation has had a major paradigm shift over the last few decades and it is clear that to a large extent our institutions and events have not fully kept pace with this. For too long music education and cultural facilities have been, somewhat understandably viewed as repositories of more elite or traditional forms of music making and training. Even in the so called “contemporary” music space, artists and their product are often engaged with through outdated educational and professional systems.

To ensure ongoing relevance music education bodies and programs will need to rapidly establish a meaningful engagement with the vast range of new and emerging art forms in the music field. This is particularly important as many of these art forms are being increasingly and successfully utilised for musical expression by regional and remote practitioners and those from cultural groups that have not readily engaged with more traditional music making and education. These artists creatively utilise many of the advantages of digital music creation and connectivity to both individually and collectively construct and disseminate their music and so have found new ways to have their voices heard.

There are immense advantages to fostering organic partnerships between hitherto more traditional institutions and these “new music” makers. The experience base of institutions like CHRC are a resource of great value that can transcend stylistic boundaries. Many of the teachers have continuing careers in professional practice and these often span a wide range of musical approaches. Such resources can greatly aid young and emerging artists with career and professional assistance but also ensure their own artistic development as they are exposed to a fuller gamut of musical expression. Interactions between these groups have great potential to reinvigorate approaches to regional music education and participation and provide the infrastructure and human resources to enable a meaningful and ongoing focus on more inclusive and wide reaching artistic collaboration and innovation.

One of the ongoing difficulties facing regional music educators is the ability to engage with distance and/or isolated students and staff in a way that is aesthetically meaningful and appropriate to the unique demands of musical interaction across digital communication platforms. While this was illuminated by the Covid pandemic and the associated health responses it was and is still an ongoing issue. Until recently the capacity for musicians to interact in any meaningful way over any publicly accessible internet or digital platforms was severely limited by bandwidth, sample rate and latency of the available systems. While still not perfect, the massive improvement in these areas and the relative affordability of such systems has enabled connectivity of musicians in education, recording and even performance scenarios in ways not previously possible. Educators and music institutions need to be at least equipped at a basic level to provide service in this area. Further, for digital natives to engage meaningfully they require platforms and spaces within our organisations and institutions that confirm their relevance in the academy.

Where they exist, such spaces and platforms are invariably hives of creative and innovative energy, bringing together musicians of diverse backgrounds in shared endeavours. As well as engaging positively with the community these endeavours often involve collaboration with other artists from other medias and technical support people in the wider community. These groups represent a greater percentage of the overall numbers of community music makers and disseminators than is often recognised by more traditional institutions and understandings of music making. Bridging the gap between the music creation and performance practices of “traditional” music students and independent learners and digital natives brings mutual appreciation, admiration and fresh ideas for musical expression.