

*What are the opportunities and threats that you consider significant in the live music space from your home country and would be interested in researching?*

Australia's music industry has faced many challenges over the past two decades, including the Sydney lock-out laws (BBC, 2019) and COVID-19 pandemic (Nelligan & Nelligan, 2021). Although these issues are firmly in the past, their effects linger, leaving Australia's live music scene in a critical state with more than 1,300 live music venues permanently closing and numerous high-profile festivals cancelled since 2020 (Condon, et al., 2023). Further threatening Australia's live music scene is the declining interest from young Australians in attending local events, which is arguably due to the increasing power and influence of social media. However, post-pandemic government investment may offer the industry an opportunity to develop new and exciting experiences to attract broader, younger audiences.

The rise of new digital platforms promoting new music and social media's prominence amongst young people is threatening Australia's local live music scene. Since 2020, attendance at local live music events among 18–24-year-olds has declined compared to the past and to those aged 24-30 (Creative Australia, 2024). Underpinning this trend is the fact that 52% of young Australians discover new music mainly through social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube (The Push, 2024). These platforms promote trending and popular artists such as Taylor Swift and major brands like Coachella and Boiler Room. In contrast, Australia's local live music scene, with its smaller presence and budget, is less promoted on the same platforms, leading to young Australians being more likely to attend a music event featuring an international artist than an Australian artist and becoming less interested in attending home-grown live music in general (The Push, 2024). Ironically, while these platforms were initially

expected to democratize the music industry, they have instead led to further centralization and consolidation around a few major players (Hodgson, 2021).

Simultaneously, the rise of the creator economy has significantly influenced younger audiences' perspectives on live music. As more young people vie to produce engaging content, they gravitate towards experiences that are visually appealing and large in scale, which can be captured on video and effectively played back as an Instagram story (Kinnunen, et al., 2020). Events such as the Eras Tour or Boiler Rooms World Tour provide such experiences. In contrast, local live music events held in smaller, often dimly lit venues, do not offer the same level of visual engagement or social media prestige for younger audiences.

This disparity has ultimately led to younger audiences' lack of awareness and/or rising disinterest in original Australian music, with a correspondingly negative impact on the viability and diversity of Australian live music spaces. An interesting project would be to conduct empirical research exploring what motivates young people to attend live music events.

Investment and partnerships into arts and culture by Australian state governments provides the live music space the opportunity to attract broader audiences by utilizing funding to offer more unique experiences. In NSW alone, \$45 million has been allocated to the live music industry to support local artists and venues for 2024-25 (NSW Government, 2024). Previous investment has already led to the creation of unique, multi-functional venues that provide spaces for several sectors of

the arts industry. An example of this is Machine Hall in Sydney, where the local government, in partnership with the private sector, re-purposed an industrial space into a dynamic hub that provides audiences an architecturally unique experience in tandem with performances and activations (Machine Hall, 2023).

Nightlife hubs such as Berlin and Amsterdam have long embraced a similar model, with venues such as Berghain and De School pioneering similar ideas. These venues not only provide spaces for artists to perform, but are immersive environments that merge architecture, sound, food and art to provide a uniquely holistic experience to the point where audiences attend not only for the performances but to experience the aesthetic of the venues as well.

Australia is well positioned to follow a similar model and continue building on the likes of Machine Hall. Using the incoming investment, venues can be created/renovated to serve as cultural hubs, combining live music, art, food and community engagement, cultivating a new sense of identity for the local live music scene. Nurturing these types of spaces will become important for Australia to support local upcoming talent and to stimulate revenue by having venues become attractions in their own right.

This investment, if used effectively, could allow the Australian live music scene to provide audiences with the unique experiences they seek and lay the foundations for long-term success and sustainability. To achieve this, creative practitioners and policy makers alike would also benefit from more sophisticated analysis of how various

European governments' approaches to stimulating their nighttime economies can be adapted to the scale of the Australian economy and population, or what a modern, successful business model looks like for the local live music industry that reduces reliance on Government grants.

## References

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