

Industry leaders: challenge and opportunity ahead for Live Music

They're competitors in the general scheme of things, but at the Live Music Forum held at Song Summit Sydney (^{S3}) on 5 April 2008, representatives from the peak bodies for the hotels, clubs and restaurants industries sat at the same table and spoke amicably and enthusiastically about the common challenges facing their members and the opportunities they see in live music.

They echoed the sentiments of the Hon Peter Garrett AM Minister for the Environment, Heritage & the Arts Government who, in his opening address at the Summit, called for a return of live music to venues. The Minister expressed a commitment to 'developing strategies to encourage the reduction of rules and regulations which are barriers to live music'.

Those rules and regulations were unanimously denounced by the participants in the Live Music Forum panel which included the Australian Hotels Association, Clubs NSW, Restaurant & Catering Australia, the Music Council of Australia and APRA.

Bill Healey (AHA), John Hart (Restaurants & Catering Australia) and Anthony Ball (Clubs NSW), agreed on the revenue opportunities that live music presented to their members. They said venue owners needed to get to know their communities better and to think more strategically about how music could be used in their businesses if they were to get maximum return on their live music investment.

Quoting Roy Morgan research conducted on behalf of Restaurants & Catering Australia, John Hart said there was strong evidence that customers wanted music and entertainment while they dined. He said "Customers don't want to just consume a meal, they want an all-encompassing experience. Our smaller footprint means that we need to consider smaller options – solos, duos, not five or six piece bands – that's going to shape demand into the future."

Anthony Ball, Manager Clubs NSW said Clubs were already key players in the live music arena, putting on more than 115,000 shows a year. "We think there is the potential to grow that," he said. "Young people are flocking to clubs and they want to listen to live music. We're now looking at putting on more original live music and at moving away a bit from cover bands. "

Bill Healey, Director, National Affairs of the Australian Hotels Association, said "The dynamism of the industry will now be about creating venues that attract people because they provide them with a fantastic experience."

He said music creators had to partner with venues to build a live music market for their work: "We are a very valuable retail outlet for music producers, we're the place you can interact with your music community, where people get access to your music. You need to think about how we can help you expose and sell your product. How can we build a partnership that's of mutual benefit to both of us?" he asked.

What next?

The Forum concluded with a passionate debate about strategies for reviving live music in venues. The general agreement amongst participants was that they needed to keep talking. To that end, through the Live Music (R)evolution campaign, APRA and the Music Council of Australia (MCA) will work with the hospitality sector to:

- provide information about liquor and planning regulatory reforms in relation to live music
- lobby state and federal government for resources to help venues present live music
- to provide local workshops about presenting live music
- provide a focal point for the campaign at www.apra.com.au/revolution.

Results of the MCA Live Music Survey

APRA and the MCA recently conducted a survey to find out what venue operators currently think about live music.

The results confirm that many of the issues raised by participants at the Forum are real for venues across the country. Most respondents expressed an interest in offering live music, however many were concerned about the associated costs and felt that the noise regulations or planning laws were prohibitive. APRA will publish the findings of this survey on www.apra.com.au/revolution in the near future.

New Laws support live music in NSW pubs

New liquor laws due to commence from 1 July 2008 in NSW propose changes that support live entertainment. For example, the objectives of the Liquor Act 2007 have been changed so that decision-makers must consider “the interests of live music” when dealing with licence applications, noise complaints or variation of trading hours.

The new noise complaints process stipulates that order of occupancy between the licensed premises and a complainant must be considered when dealing with a noise complaint.

AHA members should note that new planning laws will make important changes to the criteria small venues have to comply with to host live performance. New provisions in draft planning laws propose exempting smaller spaces from requiring Place of Public Entertainment (PoPE) approval, provided conditions are met.

More on www.apra.com.au/revolution.