

# National Cultural Policy Submission

## **Australian Institute of Music**

Submitted: On behalf of an organisation with arts-components (e.g. community organisation, tourism, venue, health, education etc)

### **Introduction**

The board, management and academic staff of the Australian Institute of Music (AIM) believe passionately in the power of music – along with its social and cultural importance, its power to unite, heal and inspire, and of course it's economic and commercial value.

Just as importantly, we believe in the importance of music education. As Australia's only independent higher education provider dedicated exclusively to music, we're at the frontline of teaching each generation of songwriters, musicians, producers and music workers. We provide expert training in the art, craft and business of music – and we see the results when students are provided with the opportunity to put their education into practice. We believe that industry-relevant and academically rigorous tertiary education is an indispensable building block of a thriving, globally-competitive music industry.

Many AIM graduates go on to enjoy fulfilling creative careers. They acquire cultural competence and transferable skills which can be deployed in interesting and exciting ways. We're very proud of our alumni, but it concerns us that this standard of quality tertiary education is not as accessible or affordable as it should be. We envisage a future in which high quality music education is available not only to the people who can afford it, but to the people who deserve it. We imagine a future where creative musicians are afforded access to education, training and mentorship – enabling a true flourishing of our creative potential.

We envisage a future in which Federal and State governments put meaningful support behind the development of a globally competitive contemporary music industry.

Our specific proposal for consideration is a Federally funded program designed to identify, educate, mentor and support future generations of Australian contemporary musicians and music professionals – including a specific First Nations development program.

### **First Nations**

We believe that the music of First Nations people plays a critical role in the expression of a contemporary Australian identity. We recognise that First Nations voices and stories have been muted or ignored for far too long. We're delighted to see the recent interest in a new generation of indigenous artists.

But we cannot expect First Nations voices to succeed creatively or commercially without support or care. We believe that First Nations music should be pro-actively nurtured, supported and developed, and we see music education playing a key role in this process. We would like to see the development of a Federally-funded higher education program for First Nations music workers, co-designed by First Nations songwriters and musicians.

### **A Place for Every Story**

Popular music is theoretically a reflection of audience tastes – and as such, it should reflect the diversity of society. In practice, our industry is still governed by so-called gatekeepers, and those gatekeepers still display a bias towards white, male, mainstream tastes. To reflect the true diversity of our stories and voices, we must ensure equal access to education opportunities.

### **The Centrality of the Artist**

The artist plays an undeniably central role in the creation of all great music. Whether artists work entirely alone, or in collaboration with other creative artists, will be dependent on the work, the artist and the circumstances. The skills required by artists – songwriting, musicianship, vocal technique, arranging, programming, production, live performance and so on – can be self-taught, but we believe that excellence can be achieved more quickly, and more completely, by studying music at a tertiary level. Just as Australia has invested in development programs for our most gifted young sports people, so we should be developing our music talent.

### **Strong Institutions**

Contemporary music artists are required to battle for attention in the so-called free market – competing for radio airplay, media attention, clicks, likes and streams in a brutal commercial marketplace that spares little thought for artistic development. To the extent that any government considers this issue at all, there appears to be a view that individual artists, or music more generally, will succeed or fail on its merits.

Much the same can be said for our music professionals. Many of our young artist managers and entrepreneurs are thrown into a highly competitive global market with little or no skills, training or support.

Needless to say, this is a flawed approach. Many wonderful artists and story tellers do not thrive and flourish in the commercial market place when left to fend for themselves. Many talented creative voices, denied access to appropriate education and support, are never heard at all. Notwithstanding the important work of organisations such as APRA/AMCOS and Creative Victoria, there are no ‘strong institutions’ supporting the contemporary music industry at either a government or philanthropic level. There is no government support for higher education institutions working in the contemporary music space. There is only minimal support for young entrepreneurs working in the field of music technology innovation.

We argue that Australian contemporary music would benefit from the creation of a centralised peak body that provides education, financial support and mentoring for future generations of musicians and music workers.

### **Reaching the Audience**

The past decade has seen enormous change in the way artists gain a profile and find an audience. While new technology platforms have made it easier for any artist to access a potential global market, it’s harder than ever to find actual fans, and to generate sufficient interest to make a viable living.

Every creative career is different, so it can be hard to make generalisations, but it can be agreed that the approaches that worked in the analogue era are simply not applicable any more.

Contemporary artists are now expected to be skilled at far more than songwriting and performing – they are now expected to be skilled promoters of their own brand. They must combine the skills of a small business owner with a raft of entrepreneurial and marketing activities. Today’s successful artist must learn to curate a portfolio of creative activities – and that’s an approach that requires a dedicated education.