

This Big Thing Called Music

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2007 Address to the MCA Annual Assembly

We must acknowledge that there are many ways to be musical. Musicians need to be generous to each other. While some like military marches, others like free improvisation. John Cage notes that the history of music is no longer a river with one source flowing down to the same end point. As we reach the end of this river it has opened out and become a delta. To claim that any music nowadays is the mainstream is delusional - it is now a plethora of niches - *Wikipedia* lists thousands of musical genres. Howard Goodall said in his 2005 Music Manifesto speech "[w]e can't halt this change, even if we wanted to. Music's ability to develop with society is an unstoppable force and young people are already to some extent driving that movement forward. The idea that there is a superior form of music and an inferior form of music is to me utterly offensive." Quaintly the entry on "Popular Music" in the recently revised edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, for example, occupies less than 0.08% of its 29 volumes.

It is the inclusion of all these niches that gives us our new music industry, not one based solely on the top 10 selling recordings, but one based upon a vibrant active musical community. This is not a problem for those who have grown up in this new environment, but causes headaches and soul-searching for the previously dominant established and vested interests: ie record companies, educational institutions and those involved in traditional forms and practices. This is massive change. But as with all inevitable change it is those who are flexible enough to adapt who emerge triumphant. In spite of everything people still need music - indeed for teenagers it is up there in the top 3 of most important things in their life. Only yesterday on the train from Kiama I sat next to three teenager girls sharing two iPod headphones and singing at the top of their voices for an hour and a half

What is apparent is that the future belongs to the creative and the innovative. Creativity is the key driver of the 21st century. According to creativeclusters.com, the 'creative economy' is now being treated much less as an alternative to the 'manufacturing' or the 'industrial economy', but rather as the 21st century manifestation of it. Within the last two weeks EMI announced a new approach which would embrace all this mosaic of styles which we call the music industry - to create a structure in which lower selling artists with more niche appeal can still be profitable. This is a survival strategy. At the same convention that EMI announced this Peter Chernin, CEO of News Corporation, said he believes fragmentation is having a positive effect on creativity. "There are huge rewards for those who innovate, and death to those who do not".

The ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation report *How Big is Australia's Creative Capacity?* (Cunningham et al, 2007) indicates how fast and far the Creative Industries have grown in Australia. "Between 1996 and 2001, the average annual growth rate of the creative workforce was 5%, considerably faster than the average annual growth rate of the total workforce (1.9%)". Cunningham explains there are "explicit" and "embedded" Creative Industries

- Explicit: almost 300,000 people were specialising in the production of creative goods and services
- Embedded: an additional 137,000 people worked in creative occupations within other industries (eg acoustic designers in car making).

In the UK a similar trend has happened with the Creative Industries sector in 2006 accounting for 7.9% of the workforce. It is the fastest growing sector in both countries.

Entrepreneurship

What is increasingly apparent is the need for creative musicians to be entrepreneurial in the broadest sense. Fewer musicians are fulltime employees than in the past and "waiting for the

phone to ring" is not the best survival strategy. The celebrated American writer William A. Ward is credited with the quote: "*Opportunities are like sunrises. If you wait too long, you miss them.*" More often than not musicians in the modern-day world have portfolio careers, balancing a range of skills and aptitudes which make them desirable in multiple situations. The 2006 English Government report "*Developing Entrepreneurship for the Creative Industries, The Role of Higher and Further Education*" suggests that, "we have largely lost sense of what 'entrepreneurship' really means.

The report states, "The term 'entrepreneur' has French origins which translated literally indicate that it is about spotting opportunities as well as creating solutions. This means problem *finding* as well as problem solving. Entrepreneurship is not just about making money." The entrepreneur can be described as one who makes things happen, a 'mover-shaker', a creative thinker, a go-getter.

"Entrepreneurialism is an alternative way of viewing the world to the analytical and critical viewpoints that are taught within HE and FE [Higher Education and Further Education] and which enables students to make the transition from academic theory and creative practice to understanding and capitalising on the wider application of their work in society...The most successful economies and societies in the twenty-first century will be creative ones".

On the BBC radio program *Global Business* (May 24th 2007) Russell Ackoff stated that Western education has been imprisoned for centuries by valuing only analytic thought. As a result most people cannot do the "synthetic" thinking that sees an organisation as an intermoving whole. As Sir Ken Robison stated earlier this year "we are focussed on dissection rather than holism".

The document *Developing Entrepreneurship for the Creative Industries* went on to state that:

"Some studies (eg. Ropke,1998. *The Entrepreneurial University: Innovation, academic knowledge creation and regional development in a globalised economy*) have suggested that higher education can actually make graduates less entrepreneurial by developing the analytical and theoretical skills to the detriment of more lateral thinking abilities. It is often reported that students on arts and creative programmes are generally more practical, 'right brain', lateral thinkers than many of their peers and as such, these students already have many of the latent competencies that are needed for entrepreneurship and it is important that they are allowed to continue to develop these fully. (p20)."

I think most musicians would intuitively believe this to be true.

And this is the main thing that I want to talk about today. In a world of downloads and Web 2.0 it would seem to be of utmost importance that any musician should be aware of the importance of creativity and that the entrepreneurial aspects of being an artist in the 21st century are fully explored.

There is a great opportunity staring us in the face. Beyond the resources boom we are going to have to live more on our wits. This will need creative thinking - and music is one of the best ways to get there. If we don't start by being creative, when the time comes to be so, we will not have the appropriate skills to call on.

The technologies which have enabled us to access any music at any time anywhere - which have effectively shrunk the lines of geography and history, have also enabled small musical niches to become viable through a vastly increased potential audience pool. So now the lover of obscure comedy records from the 1950s can find fellow fans aggregated all over the world. Or the early music aficionado can access a community of like minds.

There is no reason why our industry would not act like other industries; ie Increased activity = increased revenue = increased competition = increased opportunities. The downside is that these opportunities mean there are no safe places. To thrive we have to be innovative and entrepreneurial. Robert Dew, an Australian business consultant, has proposed ways of measuring degrees of innovation. In short he suggested innovation has to be original, useful, practical and wanted.

Unfortunately by and large, schools still emphasise the skills of traditional musical literacy not composition, reading not writing, analysis rather than synthesis, and adherence to rules and established ways rather than experimentation. I often encounter prospective students at audition who coyly admit that they have written a song, or bits of a song, or even some poetry. Rarely, I have to say, they have not done much of this at school. Rarely are their creative acts acknowledged and almost never as being the main game. But I'd suggest that the main game now in our industry is exactly that, which means that perhaps the students are not always learning the right things. Sir Ken Robinson argues that because we've been educated to become good workers, rather than creative thinkers. "We are educating people out of their creativity". No list of skills is set in stone. After all Bill Gates became the richest man in the world by being successful in an industry that did not *exist* when he was at school. This industry now permeates every aspect of our lives, including music.

The word 'play' needs unpacking - unpredictability is important in play - like sport - like improvisation - like a great evening with friends. You make rules, you test the rules, you push the rules.

The word 'creative' also needs unpacking. I want to get from A to B to discuss matters with a friend. I can walk - I know how to. But I could be creative. I could hop, I could take a short cut, I could drive, I could get a piggy-back, I could fly, I could go there virtually, I could just phone them. How many of these solutions could I have taken 200 years ago? Would I have been able to conceive of all these ways of reaching my friend then?

Not all creative ideas are good ideas - many of the wacky avant-garde pieces of the 60s were creative. But in retrospect how good were most of them? This is not to negate the value of such experiments, but in the end many were of passing interest. The inadvertent damage that much of the serialist and post-serialist music did was to besmirch the image of experimentation, because it created the idea that good experimental music = small audience, which led to the erroneous logic that therefore a small audience necessarily = good music. But scientists undertake experimental activity which leads to life-saving solutions. So let's learn to discriminate between different creative acts. Innovative music-making sits in a tension between the entirely new and the entirely familiar.

Creative Industries

So where do we start? Well some already have. A good example is the *Music Play for Life* campaign. If we can truly ensure that playing for life means playfulness for life we are on the right track. And if big lumbering institutions cannot cope, it will happen outside their walls, as it increasingly doing. If there is a block in the road, creative musicians will find ways around it. But if we truly want to encourage entrepreneurship - developing problem finding strategies as well as problem solving, we have to find strategies to encourage it in those early years. Creativity is not magic, nor a soft option. It is an important rigorous skill to develop - not as an add-on, but as the core to our practice. This is the 'Creative Industries' approach.

The British Government defined the Creative Industries as:

"[t]hose industries that are based on individual creativity, skill and talent. They are also those that have the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing intellectual property."

The Creative Industries ethos inevitably means having a greater awareness of who your audience is.

Time and Space Redefined

The internet has collapsed the concept of musical geography and with it the necessity to isolate and conserve style and genre. The iPod was an icon for this change. Now with the proliferation of interactive websites with tag clouds and intelligent databases, anyone can (and does) put up their music on the web for anyone anywhere in the world to hear and critique - a year ago MySpace was up to up to 3 million musicians signed up. Musical communities can be built on geographically dispersed, but culturally connected clusters. This new generation of online facilities is known as

"Web 2.0".

Occasionally an act or even just a song catches the imagination of a big enough audience, made up of people all over the world and the music takes off in a mass way. These are the big sellers. But as Chris Anderson states in his book *The Long Tail* (2006) the sales of the top five albums between 2001 and 2005 fell by half, whereas the *total* album sales fell by only a quarter. And this latter figure probably underestimates the thousands of one-off sales of privately released songs on the web. Anderson was one of the first to observe that we are now in a world of niches not blockbusters. This profoundly changes the music industry business models. Value is thus judged not by an amorphous consensus, but by clustered groups of peers, geographically dispersed but sometimes aggregated into a large number. What was formerly unviable professional practice in the old mass-media environment can now be possible in the 'global village' by bringing creators all over the world into closer relationships with each other and their audience.

Impact and Quality

Judgement by such a geographically dispersed yet unified group is often referred to as "The Wisdom of the Crowds" as opposed to the more traditional academic or expert-based "Wisdom of the Tribe". The judgement of the self-selecting crowd is often referred to as *impact*, whereas the judgement of the elite tribe is deemed to be *quality*.

Thus the tribe is more like a club with entry rules and codes of behaviour, exclusive and the home of the expert. Music, and new musical ideas, which do not conform to these rules are deemed by definition to have little quality. The crowd, on the other hand, being self-selecting, can be remarkably accurate in its judgements, providing the group formed is large enough for its critical views to have 'critical mass'.

Julian Knowles expresses this in his *Survey of Web 2.0 Music Trends and Some Implications for Tertiary Music Communities* (2007) where he states "In simple terms, Web 2.0 is problematising the traditional notion of the expert and the wisdom of the crowd has now risen to become a major force alongside the wisdom of the expert within the knowledge economy."

The crowd wisdom is understandably seen as a threat by the tribe. Vested interests are threatened. But as the *Wikipedia* has shown, the crowd, when big enough can be wiser than a small group. The lessons of King Canute should be born in mind.

The Funding Pyramid

Public music funding in Australia is an inverted pyramid with about ten times more funding going to the major arts organizations (orchestras and opera companies) than to the rest. Funding for micro-businesses and sole traders is less than 5% of the total available, with the small to medium performing arts sector mopping up around another 10%. This means that the taxpayer could be said to be substantially propping up the unviable rather than investing in the roots of our future of our music industries. This could be called quaint if it weren't so tragic for our aspiring musicians. Maybe this could be included as one of our Prime Minister's aspirational goals.

Until recently Australian music had not had good conditions for global growth. Long distances between population centres and a history of imported culture meant that the US and UK dominated our media with prescriptive playlists - they still do in the broadcast area. This ensured that we remained net importers of music. However the fragmentation of distribution sources through online connections may be particularly good for the entrepreneurial in Australian music. Hopefully it is the start of a newly found confidence leading, in the first instance, to real growth of people actually making music for play and enjoyment.

The Creative Industries approach inverts the traditional pyramid, giving it stability and true sustainability by respecting the audience as an important component in the creative process. It also emphasises the economic importance of new knowledge and innovative products. Thus the emphasis moves from supporting unviable industries to investing in ones with the potential for growth. This approach is inevitably a challenge for more traditional areas where in many cases the work is a reiteration of what has gone before, and contains little that is significantly original,

meaning that much of it can be copied anywhere in the world - and is. Eastern Europe is the current beneficiary of the globalisation of the classical repertoire leading to commercial recordings being secured by the lowest bidder.

The artist, ie the 'producer', services those who consume and who pay for their wares. In Mozart's day this may have been a wealthy patron. More recently this may have been the state. But as public funding is itself diminishing, and has become more vulnerable to the whims of its constituents (voters), the audience member has effectively had a greater say in what is wanted and what is not. The traditional elites understandably see this as a retrograde step, popularism and dumbing down according to their traditions. But apart from holding on to some unprovable sense of absolute value it is hard to justify not changing. After all, in this new economic landscape most minorities can survive as niches. And here I include classical music with less than 5% of the market.

In reality the pyramid is being turned on its side, allowing a greater flow and engagement between the audience and the producer. A successful musician needs to be *of* their time, not too far ahead or behind. Their focus needs to align with the zeitgeist. This is the basis of an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant I have almost completed together with Jennifer Radbourne and Darren Clark, investigating new models for the 21st century orchestra.

The industrial revolution spawned the industrial economy and mass production. The dot com crash partly masked the fact that the digital revolution spawned a new economy which could be subdivided into the knowledge economy, the service economy, the experiential economy and the transformational economy. Applying definitions for these:

- * Knowledge economy - the use of *knowledge* to produce economic benefits.
- * Service economy - where focus is on *activities* that are charged for.
- * Experience economy - where the focus is on the *experience and engagement* of the customer when interacting with organisations.
- * Transformation economy - where that experience is *customised*.

To be fully effective as a working artist it is important to understand this new economy. Paradoxically, when anyone can access music for free at any time, one of the main things which differentiates the successful from the rest is the ability to engage better with audiences, both digitally and live. This means giving your audience a better experience, sometimes even assisting in their transformation. Dick Leahy, a UK music industry guru, who discovered many pop acts in the 60s and 70s, was a strong advocate of opposing music piracy not through legislation, but by creating a product that their audience wanted to own. A copy would not suffice for a true fan. The genuine article had what Walter Benjamin called the "aura".

Music as a Discipline

Traditionally music institutions' approach to music-making has been a set of dos and don'ts, of rules and regulations that are all combined into what has aptly been called a discipline - manifested through terms such as 'the rules of harmony', 'obeying the wishes of the composer' etc. This rigidity is an encumbrance in a fast-moving world where people's musical tastes are as fickle as a share portfolio in a nervous market. A new approach to skill acquisition is needed, one that returns to basics, though not the basics of a read-only culture, but even more basic - the play ethic, the starting point for true discovery. Playing inspires enthusiasm, initially recreationally, but for those who take it further for creating the most important financial thing a professional musician can have these days - valuable copyright. Thus this starting point encourages a more successfully musical nation at all levels, diminishing the role of set repertoire whilst augmenting the role of new work. Of course there are pitfalls in this approach, but as a toolbox for the 21st century it appears to be the best solution yet.

Multi-skilling

The evidence all around us shows that there are many ways to be a musician and there is no

hierarchy of goodness in this. It is significant that the UK's richest person in 2001 was Sir Paul McCartney, a man whose inability to read traditionally written music would bar him from most music institutions in this country, and yet he is a musician whose compositions are now studied on secondary music syllabi in England. So it seems there is a need to have a broader definition of what musicianship and music literacy is.

This is not however a world where classical music is doomed, nor popular music blessed. As Manuel Castells stated, globalisation is highly selective. It proceeds by linking up all that, according to dominant interests, has value anywhere in the planet, and discarding anything which has no value or becomes devalued. In a globalised environment, cults can flourish, provided you are well networked to seek out the individuals from around the world. In a networked world however, you cannot assume to be the spokesperson of a dominant culture.

There is a greater hunger than ever to consume, but there is also a greater desire too to throw away. A creator has to be on the right side of this equation. We need to remain indispensable if we want to make a career in music. We need to understand this new world and respond to the demands it makes on us. In the 21st century there *are* no safe places except in those still skewed by subsidies. There are strong arguments to say that the disproportionately large handouts to a few traditional artistic but largely uncreative music performing bodies, is a barrier to entry for the more innovative younger companies and individuals. It could be even claimed that this barrier to the new and innovative works in opposition to the principals of free trade.

It cannot be underestimated how hard change can be. But as Gen. Eric Shinseki, a previous Chief of Staff U.S. Army is reputed to have said, "If you don't like change you're going to like irrelevance even less". How long before we start to invert the pyramid? If we make the pie bigger, is there not more room for more activity for more musicians? And, to mix the metaphor, how long before we invest more in growth and innovation at the grass roots rather than mostly prop up sacred cows? How long before we invest more in music's future as well as its past? These are questions we should ask our governments, or prospective governments. Because this big thing called 'music' is immense, and so important in many, many aspects of our various lives.

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