

# Submission to the Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools.

By Mark Mannock

The general benefits to students of a sound music education have been well documented in a wide variety of literature. In terms of student's academic, social, cognitive and problem solving development there has been much written and many parallels drawn.

In this submission I wish to focus in particular on the inquiry's seventh term of reference '*the extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools*'. This will lead to some extent to discussion of the first two terms of reference (1) '*benefits to society and to individual students wanting to pursue music as a career*' and (2) '*general benefits to students as a result of music education*'. This submission is a personal view based on my own experience and not officially representing any of the organisations for which I have worked.

I write this submission with the dual perspective of an educator and professional musician. I have headed several music departments in both Victoria and Queensland including experience in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in addition to extensive experience in assessing upper secondary students at the Year 12 level on behalf of relevant state authorities. Through this experience I have seen students from contrasting backgrounds respond to a variety of educational approaches in a variety of ways. As a professional recording and performing musician I have been involved with the production of over one hundred albums, over four thousand live performances, numerous soundtracks for television, advertising jingles, theatre and corporate usage in addition to having music released in many of these areas at an international level. I believe I have a strong grasp of the demands of the music industry.

## MUSIC EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

**1. Influencing Factors (*The Perfect Storm*):** There are two overwhelming forces currently having a growing influence on music education. These are :

- **The Music Industry**

The demands of the multimillion dollar contemporary music industry with regard to appropriate training, skill development and career pathways.

- **Student Aspirations**

The tastes, interests and aspirations of Victorian students in the twenty first century.

In addition to these major factors there are three other strong influences on music education:

- **Parents**  
The underlying influence of parental tastes and backgrounds is impacting on student's musical decisions. Where thirty or forty years ago what my generation calls 'rock'n'roll' was an activity assigned to rebellious youth, it is now a family activity where family members of different generations share the common bond of an interest in contemporary music be it on the car stereo or at a concert. There is a commonality here that should be utilized in forming a positive attitude to education in student's and parent's minds.
- **Teachers**  
Teacher experience, skills and training have an enormous effect on what students are taught in schools.
- **Curriculum**  
Curriculum design by relevant educational authorities sets a template for school music educators to follow.

At this point in time these factors are certainly not working with maximum synchronicity.

2. **The Current Model:** The most popular model of music education in Victoria appears to be based on the American band program. This involves training students from a young age (usually Year 4 – Year 7) in playing concert band instruments (brass, woodwind, percussion etc). The band model is frequently run parallel to a classroom program with similar values although there is often a bit more give and take in the classroom program. This model holds merit in a variety of ways. As a 'participation sport' it allows a lot of students to gain the valuable experience of performing together in reasonably large ensembles (often concert bands). This model also provides schools with one or more 'formal' and 'traditional' sounding ensembles for school and community functions. Students learn to read music and work together. Two great dangers inherent to this model are that students tend to be pushed along at a rate which makes the band's sound good for performances but may well skip or gloss over important fundamentals in a student's development in a bid to 'make it sound right on the night'. Accordingly the student's right to a learning pathway that is suited to their own learning approach and goals is often heavily compromised. Experience has demonstrated that the majority of these students give up playing music if not in their senior years most likely after they leave school. Ownership of a lifelong learning experience does not take place in the majority of cases. While an enjoyable experience at the time the music they learned was 'the schools music' not their own.

A second major issue with this type of program is that students do not learn to improvise. Many schools have 'stage' or 'jazz' bands. The sad truth is that in the majority of these cases the young musicians involved are still only reading notes in not learning the most vital skill in jazz and contemporary music...improvisation. The skill of improvisation is vital to the majority of musicians working in an income producing manner in today's industry. In all but a few exceptions (*such as orchestral work and musical theatre-both of which are limited to a select few*) musicians who cannot improvise have limited employment possibilities and frequently end up either giving up playing or occasionally working in unpaid community

bands. If we improve the relevance of skills taught in tertiary music institutions (including improvisation and song writing) potentially successful employment pathways in performance and education open up for these musicians. I have worked frequently with groups of talented and dedicated teachers who are frustrated that they do not have the skills students are looking for in contemporary areas because they were not taught them in their university courses. Improved training and experience could resolve this issue.

3. **The Music Industry:** Skills to survive in the competitive Australian and increasingly international music industry are numerous. Musicians are well equipped for potential success or at the very least survival if they have developed the following skills:

- Strong production and control of sound of their instrument
- A clear understanding of the structures of the genres of music which they perform
- The ability to freely improvise
- The ability to create musical parts either by ear or notation (by ear is the most common form within the music industry)
- Experience in recording techniques (not just technology)
- Ability to read musical notation
- Strong aural skills which may or may not relate to conventional notation
- A confidence of creativity
- Some song writing experience
- Ability to work well in teams and assume a leadership role as required
- The ability to read musical trends and adapt their own playing as required

One of the great advantages of the contemporary music industry is that it is no longer an all or nothing affair. If musicians are not able to work full time there is an abundance of part time paid work opportunities available ranging from playing at pubs to weddings, soundtrack work and more. Musicians do however need a strong grasp of many of the above mentioned to make the most of these work opportunities.

A layperson may easily believe that the reading of music is a vital skill to a professional musician. Without a doubt it is of great benefit. The bottom line however is that the clear majority of music created over the last fifty years has been through utilising recording technology rather than notation. Contemporary musicians tend to make up a song (or piece of music), then either share it with colleagues aurally and then record it or just record it themselves. Soundtracks, advertising jingles and corporate music are generally created in this same way. There are of course many exceptions to this but it is important to acknowledge standard industry practices. High profile musicians such as Tommy Emmanuel, Irving Berlin, Prince, Barbara Streisand, and Eric Clapton could not fluently read music. Even teachers of jazz legend Dave Brubeck only found out that he could not read music at the end of the final year of his music degree (he later went on to learn to read notation). The point I want to make clearly here is that while every music program that I have developed has a

heavy reading of musical notation component (as I view it to be a clear advantage) the bottom line is that unless you are a classical music enthusiast most of the music that the reader of this submission has listened to has never been written down, and if it was it was most likely not written down by its creator/major income earner! This is why so many of the skills I have listed above are needed by young musicians but are not adequately addressed by schools. At what point do we realise that we are not producing enough students with an employable skill set?

4. **The Great Disconnect:** Here we see that we face a major issue with regard to the future of music education in Victoria. On one side we have a population of young people often disenchanted with school (but with *mp3 players attached semi-permanently to their ears*) who live and breathe music as part of their daily lives. Their attitude so often seems to be '***I love music, I just don't like school music***'. Frequently these students end up having music lessons in the back of music shops where real practising musicians who may not be qualified to teach in a school environment teach them what they want to learn. On the other side we have a group of extremely dedicated music educators who although prepared to put in long hours above and beyond the normal call of duty to involve young people in music may not have the skills that today's young musicians are seeking. In the back ground we have parents who support and delight in their sons and daughters performing music genres that both generations relate to. I frequently hear the comment '*it used to be torture going to my kid's school concerts but now at last I enjoy going because I actually know the songs*'. If we are looking for parent support in music education we need look no further. In addition to this we see a music industry making it abundantly clear that **the skills they require are actually the one that young people are dying to learn** but are often not taught. Appropriate music education can also have a strong effect on school retention figures. Students who feel that their school relates to their own world are more likely to stay involved in education. A few years ago I taught a student who was a school refuser. He was often absent and showed no interest at all in his education. After twelve months in a music course that was relevant to him and giving him the skills he was looking for he not only improved his attendance but decided to repeat Year 12 just so he could continue his music education. Not only did that student become a better musician he also 'learned to learn', going on to complete a successful apprenticeship.
5. **The Re-Connect:** While understanding that problems are easier to identify than resolve and worthwhile change is a long term project I respectfully urge the Parliamentary Inquiry to consider the following suggestions:
  1. **Look closely at how music teachers are educated and trained.** Traditional skills should be balanced with high level contemporary skills as outlined in item 3 above. Give these teachers the skill and confidence to teach students what they want to know and the industry wants them to learn. Some industry experience is certainly an enormous help. A while ago I was talking to a colleague from a well-respected 'music specialist' school with a strong reputation. I asked her what the contemporary music education program was like at her school. She responded

that *'the kids kind of worked that out for themselves'*, when I pushed her to elaborate she admitted that the students actually knew more about contemporary music skills than the teachers so they left that area alone. While I commended that teacher's honesty I know that that school is sadly not alone in its approach. The people missing out here are the students not receiving guidance in the appropriate skills and the teachers who have not been trained to deliver them. At Atherton State High School in Queensland our enrolment in music subject rose by an amazing 1000% over six years. This was not because our team was a bunch of genius teachers but rather because we had the ability and training to facilitate students learning the skills they wanted and needed to know. Many of our students went on to tertiary education, many more continued playing music in one form or another in later life. When a school of only a thousand students can fill three year 12 music classes something is clearly going right. At the moment it appears that tertiary institutions are either very traditional, jazz based or TAFE orientated. What is needed is the culture of the TAFE style courses combined with the academic rigour of the more traditional courses. One of my main current sources of instrumental music teachers are jazz orientated degree courses. These courses produce very capable musicians with a flair for creativity. There is certainly however a need for these courses to cover some more widely used skills within the music industry such as recording techniques, the art of underplaying and song writing. Unless graduates of these courses have had experience in the 'real world' of music they tend not to have a command of these skills. I am fortunate enough to work with several of these graduates who do have this skill and experience. At one point when I owned a commercial working recording studio I mentioned to a colleague who was a lecturer at a leading jazz course that we had been forced to re-train some of his graduates in skills required in the studio. When I asked him why students were not taught these skills as part of their course he replied that they hadn't thought of doing that and anyway they were *'just into jazz'*. One can't help but wonder why yet again employability skills were again being ignored.

- II. **Assess the value of the educational 'end game' for secondary students.** There is much to applaud with regard to the current VCE course and there is a great team of people involved in its development. The course's values however seem to be somewhat confused between the old and the new. Contemporary musicians are still heavily penalised if they lack some traditional skills that may not be relevant to their world and professional musical future. I would suggest that Queensland has the most progressive senior curriculum particularly if a school can offer only one music subject. Musicians who have worked for years in their field need to have a greater influence on course content. Working with educators who have a strong understanding of curriculum design and implementation, practising musicians can steer courses to reflect what the industry needs. The end game is that young musicians are more likely to be gainfully employed. For too long people who have not really 'played the game' are 'making the rules'. I constantly worry that one day a parent is going to take a school/educational body to court

for the amount of time and money spent on music lessons when the relevant employability skills were not developed. How could a school respond? *We just taught the student what we were taught and what we know, not what they needed to know!* The implications of accountability here are frightening.

III. **Don't throw out the baby with the bath water.** The American based concert band program often used in Victorian schools has a lot going for it. The problem is that in the twenty first century it is not an effective enough program on its own. It should form part of a whole school broad based program that develops and equally values skills for all musical genres. There are several examples of this sort of program around the county and the world. In my own teaching and strategic development of music courses I have generally adhered to this philosophy of a broad based program where all genres of music are respected equally. Results of this approach have included:

- A small school of five hundred students winning the Queensland Recording Associations 'School Recording of the Year' over many city based large private schools
- A Governors' award for a 'Showcase of Excellence' for our music program
- The same small school be listed in 'The Australian's 'Top Ten Schools' in Australia for its music program
- Increased music enrolments in every school where I have run a broad based program with relevant industry skills and demanding academic rigour (*this at a time when music enrolments are under threat and decline elsewhere*)
- Enormous support of parent and community for these music programs including a local council 'Australia Day Award'
- Strong relationships with tertiary institutions creating clear pathways for students

IV. **Find a way to fast track professional musicians into schools.** Australia has many fine experienced musicians with contemporary skills that would benefit students. The majority of them do not have teaching qualifications to enable VIT registration. We must look at ways to grant a level of recognition of prior learning to shorten teaching courses for these musicians. There are decades of skill and experience going to waste. I know from my own experience that 70-80% of the skills I use in the classroom were developed on stage and in the recording studio not at university. Students respond to teachers' 'real world' experiences. One of the most important things a young musician looks for from their teachers is credibility.

V. **Maintain the high end musicians.** There should always be secondary and tertiary courses for students wanting to acquire traditional 'classical' music skills.

Although not dominant in our industry these skills and musicians are certainly a vibrant part of it. In many cases I have found that traditional musicians ( be they professionals, teacher or students) working with musicians with other skill sets results in a creative exchange that is to the benefit of all the musicians involved *and* the creative process. A few years ago I produced a project with a cellist from the London Philharmonic Orchestra, a didgeridoo player from North Queensland and myself performing. The diversity of skills was enormous and our approaches to music making extremely contrasting. Many of the resulting recordings were a great success not only musically but to our own development as artists. To me a strong music department with true respect for each other's skills reflect this inter-change of ideas and accordingly the students benefit.

**VI. Do not cheapen contemporary music education by allocating it a role as a poor cousin to traditional music education.** The VET music programs in schools are vital, engaging and relevant. They are however often relegated to the back room as the subject for the non-academic students. There should be a level of contemporary music education that is academically challenging but still delivering the relevant skills for the industry and for the students. Very often VET programs get students through the door so teachers can start working on their skill development. I recall a student of mine whose passion in life was heavy metal. We worked together on a variety of skills that I thought would enhance his playing *and* employment prospects. At his final school concert he performed a medley on the classical guitar that left many of my more conservative colleagues lost for words. They were emphatic in their praise for this student's discovery of classical music. He had in fact just performed a beautiful classical style medley of Metallica songs! Music is music, it often seems that only in schools do we put wall up between genres.

**VII. Recognise the dedication of music educators.** I have worked in a variety of leadership roles in secondary schools. There is none that I find more demanding than running and teaching in a music department. School concerts, school events, community concerts, musical productions, recording sessions all take up vast amounts of time over and above allocated teaching time. The dedicated professionals giving up their own and their family's time at out of school hours should be supported and rewarded. Good music teachers have a way of making it all seem like fun. Do not forget for a second that hard work that goes into creating that fun.

## **SUMMARY:**

At the end of the day there are some simple observations that may cover the extent of challenges facing music education in Victoria. The music that is the sound track to Australian society has changed dramatically over the last forty years. The music that reflected our society then is not the same as it is now. The way that music is created has also changed dramatically. The crux of the

problem is that the way we teach music and train teachers to teach music has generally not changed very much at all. Traditional methods are not engaging young students and numbers of students pursuing traditional music education is dwindling. If schools won't teach kids what they want to know they'll find what they want at the back of music shops or on YouTube. Parents know the problem and are frustrated by it. Principals of schools often know the problem but not the solution. The music industry knows the problem. At our disposal we have a way of speaking directly to the hearts and minds of young people...through the music they love. We can use this channel to support them in their dreams, to engage them, to help them feel positive about education and to be strong contributors to society. It is time Victoria stopped playing 'catch up' and got on the front foot as regards music education!

Mark Mannock

...brief CV

## **Mark Mannock-Brief Curriculum Vitae**

Mark Mannock has been involved in the recording of over one hundred albums worldwide and countless advertising jingles. He has recorded with, written for, performed with or supported artists such as **Irene Cara, Tina Turner, Joni Mitchell, Tommy Emmanuel, Shane Howard, David Hudson, Jimmy Little, Rolf Harris, Seaman Dan, Kev Carmody, The Sonic World Orchestra, The Eurythmics, The Moody Blues, Mick Pealing, Billy Miller** and the **Tjapukai Dance Theatre**. As a composer/song writer/producer he has won several awards for his work. These include **Queensland Recording Association** awards for **'Song of the Year', 'Best Adult Contemporary Song'** and **'Best Schools Album'**. He was also part of the **ARIA** award winning team for **Seaman Dan's 'Best World Music Album'** award in 2004. His compositions have included music for the stage for actress/playwright **Diane Cilento** and **'Sleuth'** playwright **Anthony Schafer** in addition to numerous pieces for national and international television including the USA's **Nip Tuck**, and contributions to the American **'Survivor Outback'** series. His **'Primal Elegance'** series of compositions were the basis for a new piece of work that debuted for the **Queensland National Ballet** in 2008. Mark Mannock's work with new age artist Lia Scallin reached the number 5 position in new age/world music airplay charts in the U.S.A. and was short listed for a Grammy award. He is one of the few songwriters to have the lyrics to one of his songs published in **Hansard**, the public record of the Australian Federal Parliament.

As a music educator Mannock has been commissioned to rebuild several secondary school music departments that were perceived to be in need of updating. In all cases student numbers increased and standards were raised. Along the way he has received two awards for **'Outstanding Services to Education'** from Education Queensland, a governor's **'Showcase of Excellence Award'**, has had a school listed in the Australian newspapers list of **'Australia's Top Ten Schools'** for its music program and helped countless young musicians find their own musical pathway. His underlying philosophy of a diverse broad based music program equally valuing all genres of music has been the underpinning factor in his success. He has also worked as an assessor and equivalent roles in both the Queensland and Victorian educational systems.

Mark Mannock has delivered professional development to many music teachers focusing on the utilization of contemporary music as a substantial tool in music education. He has also worked with music teachers updating their skills to encompass current industry demands.