

Parliamentary Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools

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Background

My earliest encounter with instrument in school was a compulsory primary school recorder class in grade 3. Simply put I excelled and my parents were notified and it was suggested I take up private music lessons, which were run through a company that visited the school, the 'teachers' had no qualifications in either music or teaching. I began piano and then settled upon my current teacher who is fully qualified and is an inspiration to all her students.

I attended Mentone Girls' Secondary College from 7-11 and Glen Waverley Secondary College in Year 12. Neither of these two schools were my local high school, both were 25km away from my place of residence in Skye. I elected to travel each day to a high school so far away because there was a good music and academic program in place. The local high school Carrum Downs Secondary College was and is severely inadequate in the music program as well as academically.

During my time at Mentone the music program was rebuilding itself to its prior status as a 'school with a good music program' with a new Music Director. The program grew and flourished over the five years I attended at the school, with our director fighting for funding and a new building. The ensemble program was average to good, with two concert bands, two jazz ensembles, one to two choirs, one to two string ensembles, a percussion ensemble and a guitar ensemble. Other seasonal events included a House Music Program, a student run competition between the four school houses, each house with an instrumental ensemble and choir open to all students allowing everyone a chance to participate in music activities similar to school swimming and athletics carnivals. There was a change of Music Director mid-year and a sudden decline in the standard of the ensemble and classroom/VCE program. I was given an offer to attend the excellent school of Glen Waverley Secondary College.

Glen Waverley Secondary College is one of the top academic and music state schools. The students range from beginners to highly accomplished and there is tailored instrumental and ensemble program enabling all students to participate in a well-rounded music education, the only thing which could prevent them is the cost. Glen Waverley Secondary College has a leading music department although lacks resources such as a well equipped building with soundproofing. I spent the vast majority of my study-periods and lunchtimes rehearsing in the foyer, as there were no other available rooms. While teachers also spent time converting any available space into teaching areas. Also highly inconvenient is the hall, which is adjacent to the music rooms, which holds all VCE exams twice a year, and the area is a designated 'silent' zone. This was utterly ridiculous and as a VCE music student I suffered from both sides, not only was I unable to practice

but also there were disruptions to exams as the student storeroom is located on the stage of the hall and divided by a single curtain. Teaching space was drastically reduced and teaching was only allowed between exams. Our ensembles, which would normally rehearse in the hall, were required to move all the percussion instruments, amps and digital piano to the drama department, up an incline to the other side of the school. Glen Waverley is a large school with many stairs. There are limited to no trolley facilities to help move large and heavy items and simply put moving your music department is a waste of time for both teachers and students during an exam period.

Benefits to Society and to Individual Students wanting to Pursue Music as a Career

Take a look at the City of Melbourne; we are the home of Arts. We have a world class Symphony Orchestra our facilities are outstanding. We should then ask ourselves ‘is this something we would like to keep? Is it something we are proud of?’

Our teachers and in turn their students are the future performers in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, they are the future performers in Hamer Hall, they will perform in the Melbourne Town Hall, in the Palais Theatre, at Robert Blackwood Hall, at Dizzy’s Jazz Club and Bennett’s Lane Jazz Club. These are the students that will travel to the Sydney Opera House and beyond to Europe, to the Julliard School in New York.

These students can not achieve their potential without exposure to music, without learning an instrument, without opportunities, without having the support and inspiration of accomplished and excellent teachers around them. Many students and parents will not be aware of the child’s musical aptitude unless a teacher notices it.

Funding – A Minimum Standard

From a student perspective music departments need:

Adequate Buildings

- Soundproofed
- Sufficient Instrumental Teaching Spaces/Rehearsal Rooms/Classrooms
- Technology Lab
- Student Storage (Instruments)
- School Storage (Instruments, PA System, Music Library)
- Staff Office
- Performance Spaces

Teachers – High School

Minimum Standard	Ideal Standard
Classroom 7-12	Classroom 7-9
Woodwind	Classroom 10-12
Brass	Flute
Strings	Clarinet and Saxophone
Percussion	Oboe and Bassoon

Voice	Brass (Sometimes excludes French Horn)
	French Horn
	Percussion
	Voice
	Guitar/Electric Bass
	Violin/Viola
	Cello
	Double Bass
	Piano

Without access to teachers specialising in all areas students will be unable to access all instruments, it also allows for balanced ensembles, which is crucial to development of both the school as a group and the individuals.

Playing in an unbalanced ensemble is simply like playing in a sporting team where one team has half the team members missing whilst still competing against a team with all its members.

Many schools cut costs by hiring teachers to cover multiple instruments, this can be detrimental to students as very few teachers specialise in all instruments within their section particularly woodwinds.

Resources

- Instruments (for student hire)
- Instruments (for classroom use, ie. Guitars, keyboards)
- Instruments (for ensemble use ie. Pianos, percussion, amps)
- Instrument Service
- Theory books
- History books
- Teaching resources
- Sheet Music (AMEB books, Ensemble scores, solo works, studies ect.)
- ICT
- Truck hire (for events off campus)

Instrumental Lessons

- To enable access from all socio-economic backgrounds these should be free.

General Comments

Music is just as important and as other subject.

It should be available across all demographics of society.

I was very fortunate to attend these schools, not everyone gets the same opportunity.

Had it not been for the music programs, which I was able to participate in, I would not be attending Monash University.