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*SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE EXTENT, BENEFITS AND POTENTIAL
OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS*

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I happily make this submission but, at the same time, have a feeling of frustration as I have been involved in numerous inquiries into music and arts education since the early 1970s! And relatively little has come of any of them – except that governments (state and federal) have been able to say that they ‘investigated’ the issue!

In the early 1970s I was the Chairman of the Music Committee for Victoria of the then Federal Government’s Schools Commission/ Australia Council national study into arts education: *Education and the Arts*, which (in 1977) resulted in 9 separate publications – one for each state and territory, and a national report. Since then there have been many other studies into the arts in general and music in particular.

As recently as last year, 2012, David Forrest and I had an article published in *Professional Educator* journal (Australian College of Educators) where – *inter alia* – we stated the following (bold and underlining added for this submission):

“We have over 50 years of reports into music – and arts education – and, in particular, school music, apparently to little effect. Numerous reports have indicated that the teaching of music in Australia has been inadequate. . . .”

“In the final, *National Report* [of the *Education and the Arts* study] we have four objectives for arts education programs:

“**Access.** A primary goal of the whole arts education program is to ensure that *every young person has access to experiences in the arts. . . .*

Participation. All young people should have opportunities for personal involvement in arts activities provided in ways which foster continuity and growth. . . .

Confidence and commitment. The benefits for an individual of continued involvement in the arts are cumulative. . . . A test of programs therefore is the extent to which young people develop and retain enthusiasm to continue participation and make practice of the arts part of their lives.

Excellence. Two aspects of the concept of excellence are of importance for arts education programs. The more important is that which encourages all to continue participation in the arts. (*National Report, pp. 3-4*)

“Who would want to argue against these objectives? In discussing the training of teachers across the broad arts spectrum, the *Education and the Arts National Report* correctly identified that

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"A high proportion of teachers already in service have little or no feeling for the arts as a result of their own lack of satisfactory grounding. Similarly, a high proportion of those entering training courses, especially training courses for primary teaching, have still not had satisfactory experience while at school; nor have they acquired basic technical skills. . . . Intervention is needed to change this situation" (p. 42)

"Less than ten years after the findings of this study were published, the Commonwealth Government asked the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission to review existing provision for tertiary level arts education and to examine directions for future policy in this area, resulting in the *Review of Arts Education and Training* (1986). This study was undertaken in conjunction with the Australia Council, which had been a major partner in the earlier *Education and the Arts* study. The report observed: ***"the strongly held view of many of those associated with the education and training of artists is that the arts are badly taught in schools"*** (p. 104). Commenting on primary schools, the report said: ***"we are still tinkering with the notion that we can train a teacher to teach well in every subject area in the primary school"*** (p. 105). It added: "it is not only the teachers in our schools that are the cause of concern. In many art forms there are private or studio teachers who while they are invariably sincere and well intentioned, often lack sufficient skill or understanding to have the responsibility for laying the foundations of technique on which further education builds. The licensing of such teachers in a more rigorous way is seen as a matter of urgency by many higher education teachers across all art forms." (p. 105)

"To a large extent this problem still exists today with regard to the teaching of instrumental music in schools. ***Many instrumental teachers do not see their role as educators in the broad sense: rather, they concentrate purely on teaching the skills of the instrument. To a large extent a dual system of 'music education' operates in many schools; classroom music operates in parallel with instrumental music. Sadly, far too often there is little attempt to related these, one to the other, in a whole-school curriculum sense.*** . . .

"1995 saw yet another publication: *Arts Education: Report by the Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee*. The Senate committee found that

"People do acknowledge the value of the arts, in principle – it's just not their business. . . . In teachers (more specifically, primary generalist teachers attempting arts) it seems that a large part of this attitude arises from inadequate teacher training and personal lack of confidence . . . but the same ambivalence arises in the attitudes of administrators. Principals recognise that arts contribute to the 'tone' of the schools but, it seems, the commitment does not carry through to accepting the arts into the mainstream of the school's educational program. (p. 26)

"How many more reports do we need to tell us that training in music and the other arts – especially for primary schools teachers – is inadequate? How many more

reports do we need to tell us that the arts are not fully accepted into the mainstream of a school's educational program: How many more reports do we need to tell us that primary schools teachers' "own students - among whom are the teachers of the future - suffer; and so the vicious cycle is renewed" (p. 49). How many other reports do we need to tell us "that experiences in primary, and particularly early primary, are crucial" (p. 49)? Is it little wonder that this Senate report added: It is intolerable that arts - or any subject - should be taught by teachers who, however well-meaning, know themselves that they cannot do the job properly. It is a betrayal of our children" (p. 60)

"Most recently we have had the Commonwealth sponsored *National Review of School Music Education* (2005) and the *National Review of Visual Education* (2009). While both reviews have informed to some extent the development of the Arts Shape paper for the Australian Curriculum, many of the recommendations have already faded into the collective review memory.

"... one must question to what extent anything of a substantial nature has been enacted with respect to music and the arts as a result of any of the reports discussed (and there were more!). . . ."

"It is so much easier to keep re-inventing the wheel every 10 or 20 years - more reports saying the same thing, and developing curricula that will have a short shelf-life."

(From Martin Comte and David Forrest, "Reform in music and arts education: Will we ever learn?" In *Professional Educator*, Australian College of Educators, Volume 11, Issue 4 / June 2012)

It is the above that, essentially, informs my responses below to the Terms of Reference.

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING MUSIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

A multitude of publications in many forms attest to the benefits of music education in schools. Points made include the following:

- A study of music in schools equips and enriches young people for a lifelong enjoyment of music above what they would have if left only to their own resources.
 - Music can be an excellent - and unique - avenue for creative exploration and self expression.
 - A study of music in school has the potential to introduce children not only to music from their own culture, but also others.
- etc.

I have a problem advocating music in schools on the basis of 'other' benefits such as 'giving children self confidence', 'providing mental and physical discipline', 'developing coordination', 'teaching children to become team players', 'contributing to success in other subject areas, including mathematics, or enriching academic performance in general' . . . My concern is that **music as an art form and creative and performance activity does not need be justified on the basis of these "extra musical" benefits - even though all of them may occur!**

CURRENT PROVISION OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN VICTORIA

As noted, we already have reports detailing the lack of adequate provision for music education at all levels of schooling - from kindergarten and preschool, through the primary and secondary years. I don't believe we need another study to tell us how bad it is!

From an 'anecdotal' perspective, for a period of 12 years I conducted Triennial School Reviews (and subsequently Performance Development Reviews) of State Government primary and secondary schools. Although this focused on the curriculum and management overall, my strong view was that music was not catered for adequately in primary schools in general, and was just as inadequate at the secondary level. Of course, there are 'pockets' of success. But a government is responsible for the education of all children - not just a very small minority!

What saddened me most during my years as a Consultant conducting these reviews of government schools, was that countless school principals (particularly at the primary level) believed that if children had seen or participated in a performance such as the *Musica Viva in Schools* program (and there are others), then that school had met its obligations regarding music teaching for the year. **Attending a performance and engaging in some pre and post activities is no substitute for an ongoing, sequential music program over all years of primary education.** I hasten to add however that such programs have an ongoing role to play as an excellent *supplement* (but not *substitute*) to ongoing, sequential schools music programs.

FUTURE OPTIMUM PROVISION OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

It is my strong belief that music education should commence from the earliest years of schooling. Waiting until the secondary years to commence 'formal' school music lessons is at least 7 years too late! (There is a parallel with second language learning: this and music should commence from the very start of schooling.)

In one sense, there is some cause to regret the demise of what was for decades the Music Branch (responsible mainly for primary schools) and Music Inspectors (in what were the Secondary and Technical Divisions of the Education Department). Whilst I am definitely *not* suggesting a return to this structure, I am stressing the importance of having people

within the government and education department who can speak with authority and conviction on music education – as was the case in the increasingly distant past.

This was brought home to me within the last 20 years when I was engaged to write the Music component of the State's then new arts education curriculum. At that time the person coordinating the writing of the arts curriculum in the then Education Department was not a music person. After I submitted my material I offered to proof-read the final 'write-up' of the Music component. The person replied: "That won't be necessary: a physicist could just as easily proof read it as you!" That explained why errors crept in that in parts *completely* misrepresented what I had written! My use of the word 'composition' was substituted with 'competition'! Where I had written that students (even in the early years) should engage in elementary compositions, it was re-written to suggest that they should engage in competitions! This is an example of a bureaucracy gone completely mad – and arrogant!

All of this is to say that **there should be someone at a senior level within the government/education department who can lead with appropriate resourcing the development of music education at all levels of schooling.**

Another issue is the place of instrumental teaching in schools. I refer to what my colleague and I wrote in the article reproduced above: "Many instrumental teachers do not see their role as educators in the broad sense: rather, they concentrate purely on teaching the skills of the instrument. To a large extent a dual system of 'music education' operates in many schools; classroom music operates in parallel with instrumental music. Sadly, far too often there is little attempt to related these, one to the other, in a whole-school curriculum sense."

In similar vein, I refer to our comments on the importance of adequately training teachers at the early childhood and primary levels to teach music: teacher training is exceedingly inadequate. Generalist teachers at these levels overall lack the confidence to teach music.

In this context I would like to mention the issue of music being one component of an 'Arts' curriculum. It concerns me that we are not also having an inquiry into the *other* components of the Arts as enshrined in the Australian Curriculum. Sadly, we have reached a stage where one arts component is fighting the others for increased curriculum space, funding and resources! This is an unhealthy situation. It would have been far better for the government to have had an inquiry into Arts education *per se*!

Finally, I have no doubt that the Committee will come up with excellent recommendations. But unless the government enables them to be enacted by the provision of appropriate resources (human, financial, administrative, etc.), I fear that this report, like the others, will be nothing more – a report! The starting place for change is the appointment of a music educator who can lead the change.

I wish the Committee every success in its deliberations and recommendations and would be very happy to discuss further this submission.



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