



# **Introduction – A musical revolution**

**“The purpose of art is washing the  
dust of daily life off our souls.”**

*Pablo Picasso*

I don't know about you, but I think the music industry is broken.

In a time and place where technology has enabled us to be so much more flexible with how and when we listen to music, and with social media giving us the ability to easily connect with our fans, it's a little ironic, isn't it?

However, these technological developments seem to have come at a cost, and the industry that is meant to provide the soundtrack of our lives has become disconnected from the actual music. If any industry was ripe for more disruption then this is it!

I grew up in the 80s, and was in high school from 1981 to 1986 (to the mathematically minded among us, you now know my age. Let's just keep that between us) – and I believe that what was good

about the 80s is what is broken in the music industry today. In the 80s the music was diverse, and every musical taste could be satisfied (and if you had wide-ranging tastes like me, then it was a smorgasbord of variety and abundance). You could see amazing bands pretty much anywhere, from city bars and clubs to country pubs.

Now safe, homogenised music is everywhere and these artists have massive exposure, but little talent. The music industry is taking safe bets and has been feeding us the same boring music for years. The only way we can discover new artists is if they have already had some commercial success, which is required if they ever want to make it to mainstream radio. And, on the occasion when something truly different emerges, it literally gets flogged until we can't stand it anymore. Even as consumers we prefer international artists<sup>1</sup>, is that because we don't see as many Australian artists?

Instead the stuff that seems to gain attention is more nudity and crazy stunts that make the performer stand out. (I am reluctant to give them the moniker of 'musician' as they really feel more like they are sampling music, or even performing monkeys, rather than creating something new and unique.)

And, finally, live music<sup>2</sup> is on the way out. Bands play very irregularly, as there are no longer many venues that host bands, and those that do are expected to pack the joint out, so the major Australian artists get those venues, costing us yet another opportunity to discover new music.

So what can we do about it?

- 
- 1 Our market favours international acts, with just 16 Australian artists making the Top 100 singles in ARIAs End of Decade Singles (2000–2009).
  - 2 Even though in 2009/10 \$1.2 billion was spent on live music in Australia. <http://artfacts.australiacouncil.gov.au>. It is unclear from the report where this money was spent; international artists, classical?

You're at the forefront of a revolution – the revolution of entrepreneurship. And, as a musician, it's time to think like an entrepreneur. While it might seem strange, entrepreneurs and musicians actually have a lot in common.

I have already revealed that I grew up in the 80s, and I believe that this was when Australia's (and the world's) music industry was at its richest and most diverse. We still had the 70s influence of the Sex Pistols, Queen, David Bowie, and even disco. Then in Australia we had the emergence of INXS, Midnight Oil, Spy vs. Spy and a proliferation of unusual and grungy music. Regardless of your background or preferences – new romantic, punk, ska, rock, metal or folk music – your tastes were covered. You could walk into any music store to hear new stuff and pick up the next offering by your current favourite, or five (I remember forgoing clothing, and sometimes food, to get my hands on a new album).

You could also see many of these bands live, both in the city and the country, as they would often play at local universities. While many of your friends gravitated to the same type of music, others often had different tastes, so you could share different artists and expand your musical understanding. Even now, my musical tastes range from High Kings to Huxton Creepers, The Waifs to Mozart, and Rufus to U2.

When I grew up, musicians were rock stars in the true sense of the word. We read about them in papers and magazines, they were followed by the paparazzi and photographed everywhere. We knew about every slip and scandal, and we knew about every success and achievement as well. Thanks to *Countdown*<sup>3</sup>, we also got exposed to a lot of different musicians and felt like we knew them. We thought there was something magical that made them produce such great

---

3 A Music show from the 18th Nov 1974 to 19th July 1987 hosted by Molly Meldrum. Existing and new artists were showcased, with Molly saying “do yourself a favour” about purchasing the latest artist